

= Ni no Kuni =

Ni no Kuni (Japanese : ???) is a series of role @-@ playing games developed by Level @-@ 5 . The first games in the series chiefly follow the young Oliver , and his journey to another world to save his mother and stop the beckoning evil . An upcoming game will follow Evan Pettibon , a boy king who is usurped from his castle , and sets out to reclaim his kingdom . The games utilize several magic elements , allowing players to use magical abilities during gameplay , as well as creatures known as imajinn / familiars , which can be tamed for suitability during battle .

Conceived as a project for Level @-@ 5 's tenth anniversary , Ni no Kuni : Dominion of the Dark Djinn was released in December 2010 for the Nintendo DS . An enhanced version of the game for the PlayStation 3 , Ni no Kuni : Wrath of the White Witch , was released in Japan in November 2011 . The games were developed separately , retaining similar stories , but featuring significant artwork , graphics and specification changes . A localized version of the game was published in Western regions by Namco Bandai Games in January 2013 . A sequel , Ni no Kuni II : Revenant Kingdom , was announced in December 2015 for the PlayStation 4 . Two mobile games have also been released : Hotroit Stories in December 2010 through the Roid service , and Daibouken Monsters in May 2012 through the GREE service . The former follows the story of Oliver and Mark as they try to find parts for a car , and the latter is a social card game in which players collect cards featuring imajinn .

The animated sequences for Dominion of the Dark Djinn and Wrath of the White Witch were produced by Studio Ghibli , and the original score was composed by Joe Hisaishi and Rei Kondoh . The artwork was also greatly inspired by Studio Ghibli 's other productions . The character development ? particularly that of Oliver and his friends ? was a large focus of development , and was intended to make children empathize with the characters and for adults to relive their adolescence . The developers chose to initially develop for the Nintendo DS due to its suitability for gameplay , and later used the power of the PlayStation 3 to its full potential to render the world with great detail .

Games in the series have been praised as being among the best modern role @-@ playing games . Reviewers mostly aimed their praise at particular elements of the games : visual design , and its resemblance to Studio Ghibli 's previous work ; characters and story , for their believability and complexity ; the soundtrack , and Hisaishi 's ability to capture the essence of the game world ; and the unique gameplay , particularly for its ability to blend formulas from other role @-@ playing game franchises . The games also won awards from several gaming publications . In March 2014 , Bandai Namco reported that the series had sold more than 1 @.@ 7 million copies worldwide .

= = Games = =

Ni no Kuni : Dominion of the Dark Djinn was released in Japan on December 9 , 2010 , for the Nintendo DS . After his mother dies , Oliver sets out on a journey to another world to save her . Alongside the fairy Shizuku , Oliver meets Maru and Jairo on the way , who assist him on journey . After retrieving three magical stones to complete a wand to defeat Jabou , Oliver discovers that he cannot save his mother , but vows to protect the world regardless . He defeats Jabou , who uses his power to ensure that Oliver does not die as well .

Ni no Kuni : Hotroit Stories was released in Japan on December 9 , 2010 , for mobile devices through the Roid service . It follows the story of Oliver and his friend , who create a custom car by finding parts around Hotroit , eventually making their way to an abandoned factory and encountering creatures .

Ni no Kuni : Wrath of the White Witch was released for the PlayStation 3 in Japan on November 17 , 2011 , and published in Western regions by Namco Bandai Games in January 2013 . The game is an enhanced version of Dominion of the Dark Djinn ; the plot is almost identical , featuring an extended ending . Some character names were also changed ; Shizuku was changed to Drippy , Maru to Esther , Jairo to Swaine , Lars to Marcassin , and Jabou to Shadar , among others . After Shadar is defeated , the White Witch appears and casts a spell that turns the citizens into undead

@-@ like creatures . When Oliver and his friends reverse the spell , they discover that the White Witch was once a young queen called Cassiopeia who had noble intentions , but was manipulated into wanting the destruction of the world . After Oliver defeats the White Witch , she is restored to her former self , and declares to dedicate her life to making amends for her actions . Oliver then returns to his old life in Motorville .

Ni no Kuni : Daibouken Monsters was released in Japan on May 11 , 2012 , for mobile devices through the GREE service . Players travel to another world and collect cards featuring imajinn . An occupant of the other world is trapped in every card ; by flipping the card , players have the ability to use the occupant 's abilities during battles .

Ni no Kuni II : Revenant Kingdom was announced at PlayStation Experience in December 2015 , in development for the PlayStation 4 . The story follows King Evan Pettiwhisker Tildrum , who is usurped from his castle , and sets out to reclaim his kingdom . He is aided by Roland , a visitor from another world .

= = Common elements = =

The series consists of four role @-@ playing games and one social card game . Each game typically features a third @-@ person camera . The player controls the player character in a combination of combat and puzzle game elements to achieve goals and complete the story . Hotroit Stories is the only installment to feature an overhead perspective , while Daibouken Monsters is played as a card game , with no character movement . All games in the series feature a battle mode . During battles , player command a single human ally . To fight enemies in the main game , players use magical abilities or familiars ; in Hotroit Stories , players attack using items such as dry ice for similar effects , while Daibouken Monsters limits players to using familiars only . The battle mode in Wrath of the White Witch is on an open battlefield , allowing players to freely roam around the area , while Dominion of the Dark Djinn employs a grid layout , whereby players can create formations to avoid attacks .

The main games in the series use a third @-@ person perspective . Players complete quests ? linear scenarios with set objectives ? to progress through the story . Outside of quests , players can freely roam the open world . Players explore towns , villages , dungeons and dangerous places scattered throughout the world . One of the core aspects of the games is the ability to travel between worlds ; the majority of the games take place in a magical world , often referred to as the " other world " , while part of the games take place in Oliver 's hometown . Upon leaving a location , players enter the World Map , which can be navigated , or used to select a destination . The world may be fully explored from the beginning of the game without restrictions , although story progress unlocks more gameplay content and forms of transport to navigate the world . In the main games , players initially run to navigate the world , though later gain the ability to travel by boat ; Wrath of the White Witch adds the ability to ride on the back of a dragon .

Familiars , known as imajinn (???) in the Japanese version of the games , are creatures that wander throughout the game world . They can be found in different shapes and forms , and can be obtained after being defeated in battle . They can then be tamed , in order to be suitable to send out in battle to fight for players . Players command familiars , who generally have a range of magic and physical attacks . Familiars level up and evolve alongside the human characters ; each have unique statistics and capabilities , and can be guided through their upgrades with treats and equipped with items .

= = Development = =

Conceived as a project for Level @-@ 5 's tenth anniversary , Ni no Kuni : The Another World was announced in the September 2008 issue of Famitsu , as a title for the Nintendo DS . In June 2010 , Level @-@ 5 announced that the game would also be released for the PlayStation 3 , with significant differences ; the DS version was renamed Ni no Kuni : Dominion of the Dark Djinn , while the PlayStation 3 version was given the title Ni no Kuni : Wrath of the White Witch . Both versions

were revealed to be in development separately , only retaining the same " story axle " , while features such as artwork , graphics and specifications all received significant changes . Journalists noted that the game 's announcement ignited widespread anticipation within the gaming industry .

Level @-@ 5 collaborated with Studio Ghibli to produce the game 's animated sequences , and the game features graphics and visuals replicating the traditional animation style of Studio Ghibli films . The collaboration began when musician Naoya Fujimaki , who had previously worked with both companies , introduced Level @-@ 5 president Akihiro Hino to Studio Ghibli president Toshio Suzuki . At the time , Studio Ghibli had completed work on Ponyo (2008) , and the animation team had no ongoing projects , which influenced Suzuki 's decision to collaborate with Level @-@ 5 . Another influencing factor of the collaboration was witnessing Hino 's passion for the project . Studio Ghibli approached the production process in the same way that they would create an animated film . Work on the animation began in July 2008 , and took much longer than the predicted three months .

For Dominion of the Dark Djinn , the development team found that the Nintendo DS was best suited to the game 's development . Alongside the launch of Dominion of the Dark Djinn on December 9 , 2010 , Level @-@ 5 also launched the first chapter of Hotroit Stories , titled " Oliver and Mark " (?1? ? ?????????) , for mobile devices via the Roid service . Wrath of the White Witch was developed for the PlayStation 3 . The team planned to bring the game to the console from the beginning of development , but opted to work on the DS version of the game beforehand due to the larger number of DS users in Japan at the time . The team found they could render the game world with great detail , using the hardware to its full potential to present the animation , world and music . Hino felt that the PlayStation 3 version allowed the game 's music to accompany the imagery , which was not possible on the DS version .

Following the Japanese launch of Wrath of the White Witch on November 17 , 2011 , Level @-@ 5 developed Daibouken Monsters . The development of the game is the result of a comprehensive partnership between Level @-@ 5 and GREE , which resulted in the former developing three titles for the latter . Early registrations for the game began on March 21 , 2012 , and it launched for mobile devices through the GREE service on May 11 , 2012 .

Level @-@ 5 worked with localization company Shloc to translate Wrath of the White Witch for Western regions ; the two studios collaborated for many weeks . The team found great difficulty when localizing the game for Western regions , particularly due to the large amounts of text and audio that required translation . Other minor changes to the artwork and animation also occurred , such as making Oliver bow in a Western manner . By December 12 , 2012 , development on the localized version of Wrath of the White Witch stopped as the game was submitted for manufacturing . It was released in North America on January 22 , 2013 , in Australia on January 31 , and in Europe on February 1 .

Ni no Kuni II : Revenant Kingdom was announced at PlayStation Experience on December 5 , 2015 . It will be released for the PlayStation 4 on an unannounced date , and may later release on other platforms . Studio Ghibli will not have direct involvement with the game . Hino said that the game would better fulfill the ambitions of the original game , with deeper stories and improved visuals .

= = = Music = = =

When Studio Ghibli agreed to produce the animated sequences of Ni no Kuni , they contacted Joe Hisaishi to work on the game 's music . Hisaishi , who previously worked with Studio Ghibli on films such as Princess Mononoke (1997) and Spirited Away (2001) , met with Level @-@ 5 producer and writer Akihiro Hino . After witnessing Hino 's passion for the project , Hisaishi agreed to work on the game 's soundtrack . Rei Kondoh also created background music for the score , and all in @-@ game music was performed by the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra . " Kokoro no Kakera " , the theme song for Dominion of the Dark Djinn and Wrath of the White Witch , was written by Hisaishi ; his daughter Mai Fujisawa performed the song in Japanese , while chorister Archie Buchanan performed the English version . The team found great difficulty in selecting a performer for the English version , though ultimately settled upon Buchanan due to his ability to convey the " vulnerability and innocence " of the game 's characters in a " moving and powerful performance " .

For the orchestral music to fit onto the Nintendo DS at a high quality , Ni no Kuni : Dominion of the Dark Djinn was shipped on a 4 @-@ gigabit game card . Hisaishi also worked on the score for Ni no Kuni II : Revenant Kingdom .

Two Ni no Kuni soundtracks were commercially released . An album titled Ni no Kuni : Shikkoku no Madoushi Original Soundtrack was released in Japan on February 9 , 2011 , featuring music from Dominion of the Dark Djinn . A two @-@ disc soundtrack was later released on March 28 , 2013 ; the first disc is a re @-@ release of the Japanese soundtrack , while the second disc contains additional tracks from Wrath of the White Witch .

= = Reception = =

The first two main games were very well received , with praise particularly directed at the visual design , characters and story , soundtrack , and unique gameplay . Dominion of the Dark Djinn scored 38 / 40 from Japanese publication Famitsu , who felt that the game 's elements are effectively utilized to maintain excitement . Michael Baker of RPGamer named it the " best overall game " at the time , and Janelle Hindman of RPGLand wrote that the game is " a reminder of why people used to flock to the JRPG genre in the first place " . Nintendo Gamer 's Matthew Castle called it " one of the best experiences on DS " . Wrath of the White Witch also received critical acclaim . It received 85 out of 100 from Metacritic , indicating " generally favorable reviews " , and 86 % from GameRankings . Colin Moriarty of IGN named it " one of the best RPGs " , and among the best PlayStation 3 exclusives , and Kevin VanOrd of GameSpot wrote that it joins the " hallmark of the greatest RPGs " .

The artistic design of Dominion of the Dark Djinn and Wrath of the White Witch received acclaim , being favorably compared to Studio Ghibli 's previous work ; Stephanie Bendixsen of Good Game called the art " vibrant and exciting " , noting that it " brings the game to life in the most beautiful way " . The story and characters were also well received , with IGN 's Moriarty naming them among the game 's standout features and Edge praising the believable and complex characters . Critics considered the games ' music to be appropriate for gameplay ; Jim Sterling of Destructoid compared the soundtrack favorably to Dragon Quest VIII , and RPGLand 's Hindman lauded the music as " gorgeously crafted " . The gameplay and combat system polarized reviews ; some reviewers found it a refreshing mix of styles from other role @-@ playing games , with Joystiq 's Sinan Kubba calling it a " triumph " , while others noted its difficulty , and similarity to similar games .

The game 's received multiple nominations and awards from several gaming publications . Dominion of the Dark Djinn won the award for Future Division from the Japan Game Awards in 2009 and 2010 , and the Excellence Award in 2011 , and also awarded the Rookie Award from Famitsu in 2011 . Wrath of the White Witch appeared on several year @-@ end lists of the best role @-@ playing games of 2013 , receiving wins from Destructoid , Game Revolution , GameTrailers , IGN , the 18th Satellite Awards and the Spike VGX 2013 Awards . It also received Best Game from The Huffington Post , Best Sound from Cheat Code Central , and Excellence in Animation at the SXSW Gaming Awards . At the 13th National Academy of Video Game Trade Reviewers Awards , it received multiple wins , including awards for Animation , Art Direction , Original Light Mix Score , Original Family Game , as well as Original / Adapted Song for " Kokoro no Kakera " .

In March 2014 , Namco Bandai reported that the two main games had collectively sold more than 1 @.@ 7 million copies worldwide , with Wrath of the White Witch selling over 1 @.@ 1 million copies alone . By the end of 2011 , it was reported that Dominion of the Dark Djinn sold over 560 @,@ 000 units ; it was the 33rd best @-@ selling game in Japan in 2010 , and the 45th best @-@ selling in 2011 . Following the release of Wrath of the White Witch in the United Kingdom , it topped the charts , selling out in many stores across the region .