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An Analysis of the Game Dreamscape

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Abstract. Dreamscape is a third-person puzzle-adventure game concept, which set inside a group of unstable dreams. The players wake up and find themselves trapped in their own subconscious and need to collect the Memory Fragments to find their lost memories and return to reality. Through a literature review, this paper explores how flow, the magic circle, player agency, environmental storytelling, emotional attachment, and puzzle difficulty support the game concept and apply them to the Floating City, the Endless Hallway, and the Disordered Childhood Home. The paper finds that the game works best when it meets these conditions. First, dream changes follow understandable hidden rules and players can discover and solve the game. Second, each game level gives the player a clear short-term goal. Third, mistakes lead to new possibilities instead of only ending the game. Dreamscape shows how dreams connect exploration, mystery, and background narrative in a puzzle-adventrue game for players.

Keywords: puzzle-adventrue game, unstable dream, flow, magic cirle

1. Introduction

This paper is about a third-person adventure puzzle game called Dreamscape. The game takes place inside a series of unstable dreams. The player is trapped in their own subconscious after falling asleep. To wake up, they need to travel through dream worlds, find lost memories, and look for the real path back to reality.

This paper uses a dream setting because dreams can change in strange and unexpected ways. In many adventure games, the world stays fixed and predictable. In Dreamscape, the worlds can change based on the player's actions and the clues they find. However, the changes are not meaningless. Players can slowly understand the hidden rules of the dream worlds. This gives the game mystery, but it also gives players a reason to keep observing and solving puzzles, which is important because the game should feel mysterious without becoming unfair. Chen explains that flow is supported when challenge and player ability are balanced and when players have clear goals, feedback, and a sense of control [1]. Csikszentmihalyi similarly describes flow as deep involvement in a challenging activity that matches a person's skills [2].

The main goal is to collect enough Memory Fragments from different worlds. Using a literature review, this paper explores how flow, the magic circle, player agency, environmental storytelling, emotional attachment, and puzzle difficulty can support this game concept, especially in the Floating City, the Endless Hallway, and the Disordered Childhood Home.

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The game also uses the idea of the magic circle: a separate play space where special rules and meanings apply [3]. In Dreamscape, each dream world has its own logic. This helps create meaningful play through rules and player action [4]. By connecting dream-world settings with narrative, exploration, and gameplay rules, this paper offers a possible reference for future puzzle-adventure games that use surreal environments to create meaningful player experiences.

2. Game concept and main mechanics

Dreamscape is a puzzle-adventure game. Players explore surreal places, notice unusual details, solve environmental puzzles, and complete missions. They use simple third-person controls to move, look around, interact with objects, examine clues, and choose doors or routes. Each dream world has its own rules and its own mission.

Using the MDA framework, the connections between worlds, limited chances, and Memory Fragments are mechanics; the player's exploration, observation, and route choices create dynamics; together, they are intended to create curiosity, tension, and discovery as aesthetics [5].

The main mechanic is the connection between dream worlds. The game does not have one fixed path. A door, a street, or a failed puzzle attempt can send the player to a different dream world. This can be surprising, but the changes follow hidden rules. Malone identifies challenge, fantasy, and curiosity as important sources of intrinsic motivation [6]. In Dreamscape, impossible dream spaces provide fantasy, hidden rules create curiosity, and environmental puzzles provide challenge. The player cannot always know where they will go next, but they can learn more about the dream system while playing. When players make useful choices, the game gives clear feedback: an object may glow, a sound may play, the environment may change, or a new path may open [7].

Players also have limited chances in some worlds. If they make too many mistakes, they may be sent to another random dream world. After entering a different world, they cannot return to the previous one right away. They need to wait until later or find another path back. Because of this, players need to pay attention instead of choosing randomly. An incorrect choice can also reveal a small clue, so failure gives the player feedback instead of only punishment.

Completing missions gives the player Memory Fragments. The fragments are important because they show progress toward the final goal. The player must collect enough fragments, uncover the lost memories, and find the path back to reality. A notebook and Memory Fragment screen record the current objective, discovered clues, and collected fragments, helping players track both puzzle progress and overall progress.

3. World design

There are three main dream worlds in this game: the Floating City, the Endless Hallway, and the Disordered Childhood Home. To strengthen the atmosphere of the dream world, Dreamscape uses a realistic and picture-book style.

The Floating City is an unstable city with another city floating upside down above it. Players explore the streets and look for hidden paths. Some places lead to the upside-down city, while other places send the player to a random dream world. Players can collect Memory Fragments after completing certain missions in the city. The Floating City uses cold blue and purple as main colors, with light yellow used to show significant objects.

The Endless Hallway is a silent corridor that seems to have no end. The player needs to find the pattern behind the room numbers and escape the loop. They only have three chances to open a door. One door contains a Memory Fragment, while the other doors send the player to a different dream

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world. This world is about looking closely at details and finding the right pattern. It uses gray and light brown with cold white light to show a sense of emptiness.

The Disordered Childhood Home is a chaotic house where objects change places over time. The player follows a riddle in a notebook and tries to put the room back into its original state. The player can make three mistakes. If they make a fourth mistake, they are sent to another random dream world. When they finish the task, they receive a Memory Fragment. It mainly uses cyan and red colors to create a vintage feel.

These three worlds have different environments and puzzles, but they are connected by the same dream system. Their spaces, objects, and visual details also communicate story and emotion through environmental storytelling [8]. The Disordered Childhood Home also uses familiar objects and recovered memories to suggest the protagonist's past. This may encourage players to care about the protagonist; Bopp et al. identify concern for a character's well-being as one form of emotional attachment [9]. Each world uses contrasting colors to show the optical center and lead players to clues, providing visual feedback that supports player concentration [10].

4. Flow in games

Chen's discussion of flow is directly useful for Dreamscape [1]. The game has a clear long-term goal —collect Memory Fragments and return to reality—and each world has a clear short-term goal. The game also gives feedback through changes in the environment, successful puzzle progress, and transitions to other worlds. The challenge should increase gradually: early clues can be easier to notice, while later puzzles can combine more than one rule.

This is also connected to cognitive challenge. If too many rules, objects, or clues appear at the same time, players may feel confused instead of focused. Therefore, each world should introduce one main puzzle rule first, then add more difficulty only after the player understands the earlier rule [7].

Failure should also be designed as feedback rather than only as punishment. The clarity of these failure states should be tested and improved through playtesting [11]. Sweetser and Wyeth's GameFlow model also emphasizes concentration, challenge, player skills, control, clear goals, feedback, immersion, and social interaction as parts of player enjoyment [10]. Dreamscape especially uses concentration, challenge, control, goals, feedback, and immersion. Because this is a single-player concept, social interaction is not a central mechanic. The important point is that a player should understand what they are trying to do, even if the dream world itself remains strange.

The magic-circle reading is useful because Dreamscape asks players to enter a temporary space with different rules [3]. The player crosses into this space when the protagonist falls asleep. Within it, unusual events have meaning: a repeated hallway is a puzzle, moving furniture is a clue, and a world transition is a consequence. Clear patterns help maintain trust between the game and the player. The dream world can be unreal, but it should still be internally consistent.

This also connects to spatial narrative. Jenkins explains that game spaces can communicate story through their layout, objects, and visual details [8]. In Dreamscape, the upside-down Floating City suggests instability, the Endless Hallway creates the feeling of being trapped in a loop, and the Disordered Childhood Home uses misplaced familiar objects to suggest damaged or incomplete memories. The player can learn about the protagonist's emotions and past by exploring the spaces, not only through dialogue or cutscenes.

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5. Discussion

The current design has several advantages. However, this paper presents a game concept rather than results from a player study. It cannot show whether players can understand the hidden rules, enjoy the transitions between the worlds, or consider whether this mechanism is fair. Future studies should test the world and make adjustments by following the feedback of the players. They could explain what they think the rules are, where they feel confused, or whether the clues felt sufficient.

The final design must balance mystery with clarity. For example, after an incorrect door in the Endless Hallway, the next dream world could contain a small visual hint related to the correct number pattern. This would make failure part of learning instead of only a setback. Fullerton describes playtesting and iteration as central parts of game design [11]. Player feedback could help improve puzzle clarity and adjust the number of allowed mistakes.

Schell argues that game designers should examine a game through multiple lenses, including player experience, mechanics, and story [12]. A surprising transition may look interesting, but it can weaken the experience if players cannot understand its cause. Dreamscape should feel strange on the surface but understandable through careful play.

6. Conclusion

This report examined how game-design ideas can support Dreamscape, a third-person puzzle-adventure game about exploring unstable dreams and recovering lost memories. Flow, the magic circle, environmental storytelling, and carefully designed puzzle feedback all support the project's central goal. The design works most clearly when players have both a long-term reason to continue and smaller goals within each world.

This report contributes to existing game-design discussions by showing how flow, the magic circle, environmental storytelling, and puzzle feedback can be connected in one dream-based puzzle-adventure concept. Dreamscape is a conceptual example of a dream-based puzzle game in which changing worlds are connected by rules rather than used only for surprise. This study also has practical significance for puzzle-adventure game design because it offers designers a way to consider player experience, mechanics, and story together.

This study is limited by its conceptual design and the lack of a playable prototype or player-test data, which may affect how confidently the design can be evaluated. Future work should build and test a small prototype, beginning with one puzzle world. Testing can examine whether players notice clues, understand the consequences of mistakes, and remain interested after a world transition. Overall, when its internal rules, puzzles, and memory-based story work together, Dreamscape can create a focused and meaningful adventure experience.

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