Descent to the Underworld: Game Play

Background
In seeking to interpret the ancient "Descent" myth, I started by as asking myself how people today react when someone they love is lost. In the 21st century, the answer is that people jump in their car and go off looking. So, that's where I started to start this game – in a car. The car travels across multiple terrains, some of which are high speed roads, some which are smaller, back roads.

Most people also travel with mobile phones and use them to IM, whenever a call cannot be made. So, clues arrive via IM on the player's in-game phone.

Eventually, the player has to enter the underworld. Technically I guess this could be done by car, but I chose to have the player exit the car and go into the earth – a confrontation, if you will, between man and his inner (more primal?) self. Thus, the player negotiates the underworld on foot.

When the player enters the Underworld, it is dusk, going on evening. When the player exits the Underworld, it is morning.

Game Play Flow
The player assumes the hero's perspective and the lost or kidnapped person is known as the "Virtual Partner" or VP. When the game begins, the player is asked to enter a screen name for him/herself and also for the VP. *The hero, VP and Leader of the Underworld are all identified by specific colors and these colors must be reflected in the film clips, whether your characters are DV, Flash or anime.*

As the play begins, the player learns that the VP has been kidnapped by the Leader of the Underworld (or Queen). This information is delivered via IM to the player's cell phone icon on the screen. The IM contains information on how to find the VP and clues on how to get to the underworld. It also sets a time limit for the play. SEE FILM CLIP A.

The player gets into the car or chase vehicle and begins the chase. There are several different roads the player can follow, and actions result from the choices the player makes. In addition, following the clues helps the player move faster. SEE FILM CLIPS B and C.

At the end of the chase is the River or boundary which must be crossed to get to the entrance to the Underworld. There is a mini-game at this point to determine the success of the player in crossing the boundary. If the player loses, the game is over. If the player succeeds, the game continues. SEE FILM CLIPS D and E.

Once the player succeeds in crossing the boundary, s/he must abandon the car and begin the journey on foot. The first challenge involves getting past the guard, who stands at the entrance to the Underworld. SEE FILM CLIP F. Again, this is a mini-game. Once the player gets past the guard, the terrain changes. The entrance is like a downward labyrinth and some of the paths lead nowhere. Again, the player must follow clues to find the correct path to the bottom of the Underworld. SEE FILM CLIP G.

Upon arrival, the player must do battle with the Leader of the Underworld. This is another mini-game. If the player loses, the game play ceases. If the player wins, the player wins possession of the VP. SEE FILM CLIP H, I, J.

As the player and the VP ascend back aboveground, they are chased by soldiers of the Underworld Leader, who wants the VP back. The player must quickly and safely navigate out. If the player is caught, the game ends; if the player escapes, the game continues. SEE FILM CLIP K and L.

Once outside the player must find the abandoned car. If the clues are followed correctly, the player gets the car and the play continues. If not, the game ends. SEE FILM CLIP M.

In the car, and with the VP, the player crosses back over the boundary separating the Underworld from the rest of the world. The game is over. SEE FILM CLIP N.

Once the game is finished, the player clicks and the film clips from the database are compiled into one short film and that film is opened on the player's screen.

Notes on the Game Construction
The game itself is being built in Flash MX. Druid Media is building the game, and your students are creating the film clips that get integrated into the game. Those film clips (or media files) will actually be stored in a database which underlies the game. Your students can create these media files be in any source format.

The database will serve up the film clips as the player lands on the appropriate spot. Each spot will have it's own mini-database of 3 clips, one from each of the three teams. This means that when a player lands on the mini-database, one of several different clips can be served. As such, there are certain requirements for the film clips so that the formats are standard. Those requirements are noted on the Film Clips section.

Notes for the Teams:

Each team is now comprised of two universities. There are four teams; one team is working on the audio and soundtrack and the other 3 teams are working on the narrative. So there will be three different movie versions of the narrative. When the game is played, the user can opt to only view the film clips from one team, or opt to have the computer randomly generate one of the 3 versions.

As far as how to divide up the production between your 2 schools, I would suggest that you all first discuss how you're going to interpret the narrative - is it set in the 21st, 20th or 19th century? Is it going to be all animation or a mix of DV and CGI? Is the hero a male of female? Is it set in India, China, Seattle or some unknown place?

Then I would suggest you divide up the pre-production and production; do you need to write a script? (Please note, this needs to be done as a silent film! No dialogue because of the number of

different languages involved). Should you storyboard? Will one team shoot and one team edit or rotoscope? How will you file share? WIKI's will be up on Monday - but where will you send film clips in between for viewing?

It's important to spend time on developing your work flow guidelines, because there are only 9 weeks to produce and 20 film clips (attached here).

Finally, regarding the color coding: the King of the Underworld is purple, the hero or heroine is blue and the VP is gold.