

## THE STORY OF

# Wishing Stars

A new type of GPS-based game you play at the Disney Parks!

**A white paper by Greg Maletic  
August 17, 2009**

What if there were a secret world lurking underneath Disneyland? A world that's been there all along, hidden, only now to be uncovered by you, using a special device that discovers clues to long-forgotten treasure? That's the inspiration behind *Wishing Stars*, a new GPS-enabled game you play at Disneyland with your iPhone. *Wishing Stars*, a product of San Francisco design firm The Future of Pinball, will be introduced on August 24th, 2009 via the iTunes App Store.

My name is Greg Maletic, and I'm the designer behind *Wishing Stars*. My background is as a software developer, illustrator, and game designer. I've also spent the past couple of years doing consulting work for the theme park industry. One more not-unimportant fact about me: I'm a huge Disneyland fan. When I started learning iPhone programming a year ago, my first thought: how can I do something to make a visit to Disneyland even more fun?

## DEVELOPING THE GAME

---

*Wishing Stars* started out not as a game, but as an app that would let Disneyland visitors automatically send Twitter and Facebook updates to friends, letting them know what they were doing at the park: riding "Pirates of the Caribbean," attending the



fireworks show, and so on. I got pretty far with that concept but was sidetracked by what was supposed to be a minor aspect of the app: "unlockable" features. Just like a video game, if certain special goals were met, the app would gain new abilities. I started devising little quests you'd have to go on to enable these new features in the app. But it wasn't long before these quests seemed more interesting to me than the app itself. So the concept changed: I was now working on a game, one that utilized the GPS in the iPhone to let users uncover hidden treasure at Disneyland.

For inspiration I took a look at other GPS-based games for the iPhone. Most are sprawling, open-ended, city-based adventures like FourSquare and GoWalla. In these games, a "game player" sets a GPS tag for a geographic location like a restaurant or dance club; other game players visit that location later and get a virtual award, typically points or badges. Calling these "games" isn't quite accurate: though they employ game concepts, they're far more open-ended and abstract than any traditional video game. What I envisioned was tighter; more focused. Like "Super Mario World," I wanted there to be a beginning, middle, and end to the game. Like "Myst," I wanted the game to have a puzzle or mystery feel, something beyond "go to this spot and earn points." I wanted a narrative, albeit a simple one; I wanted people to feel that they'd stumbled onto something remarkable lurking just below the surface of a place they'd been to many times before.

After many visits to Disneyland, coding and testing while lugging around my laptop and iPhone, the first beta version of the game was completed in June 2009. In line with that "mystery adventure" feeling, the game didn't present much context. You'd go to the park, the app would give you a clue...and that was it. That first clue would lead to another clue, and another...until a story was revealed bit by bit. I loved this idea: the whole experience would seem very "real" in that you didn't know where it was going and when it would be over.



But there was a problem. When people come to Disneyland, they're coming to ride rides, meet Mickey, and watch parades. No matter how great *Wishing Stars* would be, my game would be secondary. (In the battle between what my game was telling a guest to do and what their 5-year-old was telling them to do, I knew my game was going to lose out.) I couldn't distract from a guest's day at Disneyland; I had to supplement it. For similar reasons, the game had to be scalable. My original plan required gamers to play *Wishing Stars* for hours; now, if a guest only had time for a 15-minute experience, the game would need to provide that guest with a 15-minute experience. Instead of being one massive Quest to uncover a hidden Wishing Star, the game became a dozen or so tinier Quests, each at a skill level ranging from "Easy" to "Ultimate."

Beyond the gameplay, the other critical piece of the puzzle was the user experience. Since the target audience for the game was much broader than traditional video game players, the game had to be drop-dead simple to operate. And since Disneyland guests are used to highly-themed experiences, the game had to feel like an authentic Disney experience (though not to the point where there's any confusion about where the game comes from—it's not a Disney product, after all.) The graphics were perhaps the easier to problem to solve, by going with a faux-medieval look that reads "fairy tale" without being explicitly "Disney." Making the user experience as simple as possible was a continual challenge, but the model I used was Nintendo. Their "Super Mario World" games offer intricate experiences tailored to a broad audience. Asking myself, "what would Nintendo do?" in any predicament offered up a good solution.

So now, after dozens of development cycles and the help of many beta testers, *Wishing Stars* is due to release on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Based on feedback received so far, *Wishing Stars* is both fun and exciting...and no doubt the experience will improve



over time as we learn more about this new gaming format.

One of the most encouraging signs: I was at a party recently and was talking to a fellow guest about *Wishing Stars*. "I hate Disneyland," she said. "But this makes me want to go."

#### WHAT'S NEXT FOR WISHING STARS?

---

**More Quests.** The modular nature of *Wishing Stars* makes it easy to add new Quests that can be purchased via iPhone's in-app-purchasing architecture.

**More Disney locations.** A version of the game for Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida is coming in Fall 2009.

**Non-Disney locations.** Zoos, museums, parks, shopping malls...they're all suitable candidates for location-based games like *Wishing Stars*.

**Social, multi-player gaming.** Multiple people can play with or against each other today in *Wishing Stars*, but the game doesn't offer functionality to facilitate this experience. That will change...

**Adding new technology** to make the experience more sophisticated. Better GPS, better networking, and better real-time graphics all point towards new and exciting enhancements to the *Wishing Stars* concept.

**Integration with the venue.** The *Wishing Stars* concept becomes even more powerful if integrated with the venue, be it a theme park, museum, or shopping mall. Guests can be dynamically directed to under-utilized assets...interaction is possible between the game and the physical environment...there's no shortage of remarkable things that can be accomplished.



**Making the game narrative more sophisticated and engaging. And fun.** This is probably the most important thing: as we learn what works and what doesn't in this style of game, the games will get better and more immersive.

#### ABOUT THE DESIGNER

---

Prior to developing *Wishing Stars*, designer Greg Maletic performed creative services for high-profile clients in the theme park industry. He is also a veteran of the high-tech industry as CTO and co-founder of Java tools vendor Zero G Software, VP of Product Design at Bunchball, a social gaming design firm, and is a former Product Marketing Manager at Apple Computer. Maletic is also the creator of *TILT: The Battle to Save Pinball*, ([www.Tilt-Movie.com](http://www.Tilt-Movie.com)) a documentary about the closure of the world's largest pinball manufacturer, available on DVD, iTunes, and Netflix.

#### FIND OUT MORE

---

Find out more about *Wishing Stars* by visiting the official web site at <http://Wishing-Stars.com>, or following Wishing Stars on Twitter at [http://twitter.com/wishing\\_stars](http://twitter.com/wishing_stars).

"Wishing Stars" is a trademark of The Future of Pinball, LLC.

