THE IMAGINARY FRIEND

80 MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA 2023
Venice Immersive

SXSW FILM & TV FESTIVAL 2024
OFFICIAL SELECTION

AN IMMERSIVE VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCE

PRESSKIT

BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL OFFICIAL SELECTION 2023

BEYOND THE FRAME FESTIVAL WINNER XR Story Award

MEDIALAB AWARD CHILDREN'S JURY JEUGD@FILM FESTIVAL ANTWERPEN 2024

GOLDEN CALF NOMINEE 2023 NETHERLANDS FILM FESTIVAL

STUDIOBIARRITZNL

studio BIARRITZ   THEIMAGINARYFRIEND.NL

IMAGINE BEING IMAGAINARY

LOGLINE

Become an Imaginary Friend!
A grieving child struggles to separate reality from fantasy. He creates YOU—his (imaginary) friend—to fight the monsters in his mind.
Although you have fun together, he starts to grow disconnected from his surroundings... Are you helping, or just making things worse?

SYNOPSIS

The Imaginary Friend invites you to take part in the vivid imagination of Daniel, a grieving eight-year-old struggling with the line between reality and fantasy.

Become Daniel's imaginary friend and let him share his world with you. Discover his joys and anxieties, even help him fight his demons head-on. However, as you spend time together, Daniel's surroundings don't quite understand. Why is he talking to himself? Is he crazy? When his father intends to fix him, Daniel needs to figure out his feelings before disconnecting from reality completely...

With its unique point of view in storytelling and the latest technical developments in VR, The Imaginary Friend presents an intimate experience unmatched in the VR landscape. Daniel sees, talks and interacts with you, allowing you to form a deeply personal bond with the boy. Through interactive gameplay, you don't only push the story forward but also actively participate in Daniel's life.
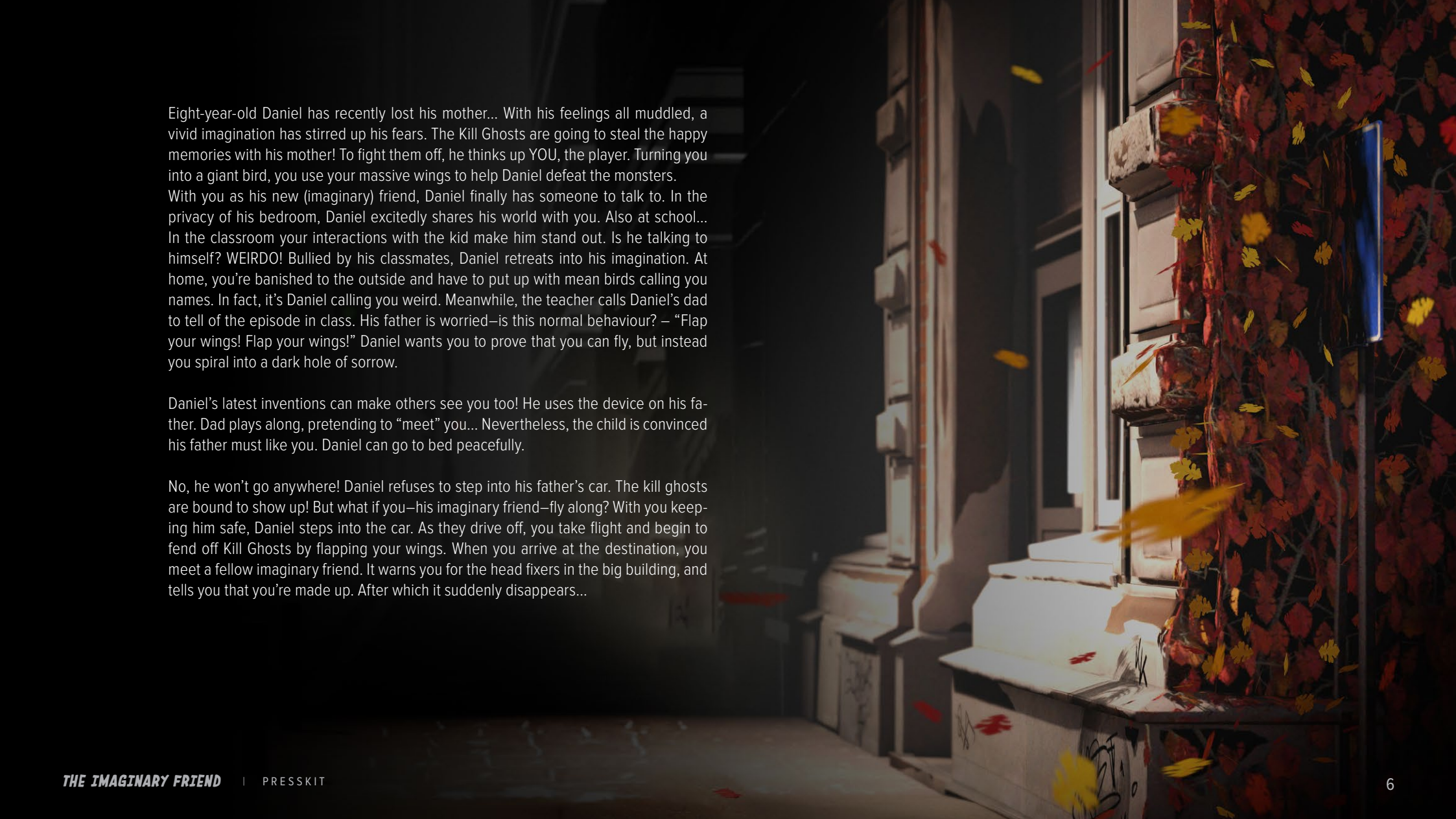
STORY

Eight-year-old Daniel has recently lost his mother... With his feelings all muddled, he is deeply afraid that the Kill Ghosts are out to get his happy memories of her! To fight them off, he thinks up YOU, the player. Finally having someone to talk to, he excitedly begins to share his world with you. However, the more Daniel engages with you, the more the world around begins to question his sanity. Is he talking to himself? Bullied by his classmates, Daniel retreats further into his imagination. A worried father tries to intervene, taking Daniel to the 'head-fixers'!

After the visit to the hospital Daniel isn't quite sure any more about what's real and what's imagined. He forcefully attempts to remove you from his mind. However, as soon as the Kill Ghosts attack again, you return. When the monsters get the upper hand, you and Daniel take flight. The words of Daniel's mother give strength, helping Daniel realise he himself is in control of his imagination.

Eight-year-old Daniel has recently lost his mother… With his feelings all muddled, a vivid imagination has stirred up his fears. The Kill Ghosts are going to steal the happy memories with his mother! To fight them off, he thinks up YOU, the player. Turning you into a giant bird, you use your massive wings to help Daniel defeat the monsters.
With you as his new (imaginary) friend, Daniel finally has someone to talk to. In the privacy of his bedroom, Daniel excitedly shares his world with you. Also at school… In the classroom your interactions with the kid make him stand out. Is he talking to himself? WEIRDO! Bullied by his classmates, Daniel retreats into his imagination. At home, you're banished to the outside and have to put up with mean birds calling you names. In fact, it's Daniel calling you weird. Meanwhile, the teacher calls Daniel's dad to tell of the episode in class. His father is worried–is this normal behaviour? – "Flap your wings! Flap your wings!" Daniel wants you to prove that you can fly, but instead you spiral into a dark hole of sorrow.

Daniel's latest inventions can make others see you too! He uses the device on his father. Dad plays along, pretending to "meet" you… Nevertheless, the child is convinced his father must like you. Daniel can go to bed peacefully.

No, he won't go anywhere! Daniel refuses to step into his father's car. The kill ghosts are bound to show up! But what if you–his imaginary friend–fly along? With you keeping him safe, Daniel steps into the car. As they drive off, you take flight and begin to fend off Kill Ghosts by flapping your wings. When you arrive at the destination, you meet a fellow imaginary friend. It warns you for the head fixers in the big building, and tells you that you're made up. After which it suddenly disappears…

Dressed up like a doctor, Daniel examines you. Are you real or are you not real? Echoing the words of his doctors, he concludes that you need special treatment. With a mighty push you're propelled backwards, away from Daniel's room, into the darkness. Everything fades away.

Come back! You are real! All of a sudden, you return to Daniel's room. The Kill Ghosts are back and Daniel needs your help to fight them. Struggling to defeat the monsters however, Daniel calls the retreat. He turns into a beautiful bird, and together you take flight, towards the clouds. A brief moment of bliss is quickly swapped for a threatening noise. The monsters are in pursuit. Yet, in the distance, a beautiful female voice grows louder and louder. Mom?! The voice tells Daniel not to be afraid. And though he can't quite shake his fear at first, with the encouragement of his mother Daniel finds strength. The two of you say it aloud: I AM NOT AFRAID! After repeating it several times, Daniel and you return to the bedroom.

Daniel finally gets it. He claps his hands to make you disappear, and then claps again to make you return. Daniel can think of you, whenever he likes. He is in control of his imagination.

ABOUT VR AND ITS UNIQUE STORYTELLING POSSIBILITIES/ EXPLANATION OF TECHNICAL ADVANCEMENTS

One of the great possibilities of VR is its power to directly include a player in its storytelling and allow them to be (almost) entirely present in the story world. The Imaginary Friend boldly seeks to push player involvement, setting out to create a personal experience where the player can actively engage with its lead character. With this unique challenge in interactive storytelling, the project utilises an exciting development in the field of VR: Volumtetric video.
Volumetric video is a new technology that captures live performers in 3D, allowing our team to move real actors freely in the virtual space of the project. All the while, ensuring that the expressions and emotions of the performances are preserved. The team also pushes this technology further by making it interactive. Something no other Volumetric video project has done on this scale and with similar dramatic impact. Pioneering a technique called 'head retargeting', the team was able to subtly turn the actors head in the direction of the player. This contributes to the player feeling like they're acknowledged by the lead character, greatly enhancing the connection you make during the experience.

To top things off, the boy's imagination is populated with animated 3D elements that have the charm of children's drawings and that overlay the very realistic 3d surroundings created by Koen Koopman that blend beautifully with the look and feel of the volumetrically captured actors and helps with distinguishing reality from fantasy.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I have always been fascinated by how people have different perceptions of reality. As our greatest tool, our imagination is really a double edged sword. Letting us understand the world and each other, but also making us imagine things that are simply not true. It can lead to misunderstandings or can be the cause of unnecessary suffering.

Daniel is a boy with a very vivid imagination. He finds it hard to distinguish between what is real and what is not, which in turn amplifies his fears. His mother died in a car accident. As children have their own way of mourning, so does Daniel. He isn't aware of his own feelings of sadness, but goes through a process of understanding them. At the start of the story, he creates an imaginary friend that helps him overcome his (imagined) fears. Unfortunately, the rest of the world worries that he is going crazy, because he is talking to something no one can see...

The player will experience the whole story through the eyes of the Imaginary friend. This role is a psychological lens of how the boy sees the world. This gives the player a very natural place in the story world, providing a psychological dream-like trip through a magical realistic story-world. The intimate relationship between Daniel and his imaginary Friend is at the heart of the experience. Although he made his imaginary friend up, Daniel doesn't fully control him, just like no one really controls their subconscious-

ness. The imaginary friend is Daniels' way of dealing with his situation. The player goes from a good happy friend to someone that might have a bad influence on him. From someone he desperately needs, to someone that he is ready to let go of. Daniel practises friendship, grows and eventually learns to trust himself.

This is what I believe imagination is for: to solve our problems. Any bright future can only be built on our imagination, the imagination that helps us conquer our fears.

CREATIVE TEAM

STEYE HALLEMA - DIRECTOR

As the son of a magician, Steye too tries to create magic and wonder. He loves to use immersive technologies for their ability to make the audience part of the magic. He creatively leads the critically acclaimed Smartphone Orchestra project: An orchestra consisting out of the phones from the audience members with which he creates fun but profound group experiences

Steye has won several awards and nominations with his innovative storytelling projects and showcased his work world-wide on A-list festivals SXSW, Tribeca, IDFA Doclab and Bifan. At this moment Steye also works as creative director at the 4DR Studios - a full volumetric video Capture studio in the Netherlands. He previously worked as Creative Director for the Disney backed XR start up Jaunt XR and as creative lead for the MediaLab of Dutch broadcaster The VPRO..

STUDIO BIARRITZ - CORINE MEIJERS - PRODUCTION COMPANY

Founded by Corine Meijers in 2019, Studio Biarritz is now an established production house that specializes in audiovisual projects that cross borders. Studio Biarritz develops its own projects, but we also love collaborating with filmmakers, artists and partners from all over the world to produce stories with a lot of heart that are relevant for our trying times. We cross borders in 1) form, technology and subject matter, in 2) collaboration with filmmakers, artists & partners and 3) in audience reach, distributed on multiple platforms. As a creative producer at Studio Biarritz, Corine Meijers is also involved as a (script) coach for several VR and immersive projects at the Flemish Audiovisual Fund as well as the Film Fund in The Netherlands. She is a mentor at the Playgrounds NEXT talent development program in Brabant (NL), the Immersive & Interactive I media training for scientists, at the Silbersalz Institute (DE) and was involved as a mentor at the immersive section of the Venice College Biennale and European Creators Lab in 2024.

www.studiobiarritz.nl

RECENT PROJECTS

Symbiosis, by Polymorf (a multi-user, multi-sensory VR Installation) by Marcel van Brakel and Mark Meeuwenoord.
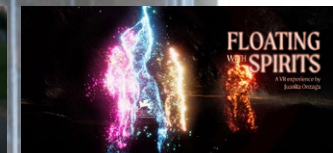www.Symbiosis.show

Ik ben een bastaard, by Ahmet Polat (a 55 min. linear documentary), in coproduction with NTR/Het Uur van de Wolf (I am a bastard).
www.wijzijnbastaard.nl

Floating with Spirits (cinematic hybrid VR) by Juanita Onzaga (shot in Mexico) a production of timescapes (BE), in coproduction with Studio Biarritz (NL) and Tarantula (LUX).
www.FloatingWithSpirits.com

SUBMARINE CHANNEL - CO-PRODUCER

SubmarineChannel is an international distribution and production platform for creative and innovative projects, exploring the narrative potential of formats like virtual reality, augmented reality, interactive documentaries, motion comics and video games.

Since its inception in 2001, Submarine Channel has been navigating the uncharted waters of forward-looking storytelling. Over the years, we always strived to use these emerging formats to investigate topics of societal relevance, from the Dutch drug industry (The Industry, 2018) to the issue of piracy off the coast of Somalia (The Last Hijack, Emmy® Award) and the daily life in a Syrian refugee camp (Refugee Republic).

CASSETTE FOR TIMESCAPES - EMMY OOST & AN OOST - CO-PRODUCERS

Cassette for timescapes produces films and XR projects that combine innovative vision and social or political engagement. It is one of the leading production companies for documentary and VR in Belgium. It has successfully co-produced with the US, UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands and aims at distributing its films worldwide. Cassette for timescapes is a team of women. They are part of the Doc Society Impact Producers, EAVE, Eurodoc and ACE Producers Networks. Producer Emmy Oost received the Flanders Cultural Prize for Film in 2016. In 2019 she started Filmpact, a field buidling organization that implements impact producing in Flanders. Specialised in digital storytelling and XR production, producer An Oost has taken projects to VR Days, NewImages XR Development Market, IFFR Pro CineMart, IFFR WIP DARKROOM and the Venice Gap Financing Market.

LINKS AND DOWNLOADS

WEBSITE

https://theimaginaryfriend.nl/

SOCIAL MEDIA

www.instagram.com/studiobiarritznl/

MAKING OF / TRAILER

1. Theme (trailer)
https://vimeo.com/857172747

2. Volumetric video
https://vimeo.com/867720713

3. Animation and development
https://vimeo.com/867724255

4. Acting
https://vimeo.com/867726334

5. Sound & music
https://vimeo.com/867727320

Download 5/5 videos
https://we.tl/t-JMpdoV1Adr

STILLS & ARTWORK

Keyart / poster
https://we.tl/t-HPdgPiCPxq

Stills
https://we.tl/t-KlqSJproS4

LOGOS

Logo wings The Imaginary Friend
https://we.tl/t-KylTWtpfnn

Studio Biarritz logo
https://we.tl/t-1s697wCNMo

CREDITS

Written and directed by	STEYE HALLEMA
Produced by	CORINE MEIJERS
	STUDIO BIARRITZ
Co-produced by	BRUNO FELIX & FEMKE WOLTING
	SUBMARINE CHANNEL
	EMMY OOST & AN OOST
	CASSETTE FOR TIMESCAPES

Cast

Daniel	DENI WELZIJN
Father	JOSE MONTOYA
Kids in school	FEDY BAKKER
	SILVESTER KETELAARS
	LENA GOSLINGA
Mother (voice) & additional vocals	SHANA BOSSMANN
2nd Imaginary Friend (voice)	THOMAS DUDKIEWICZ

Crew

Lead designer	KOEN KOOPMAN
Lead developer	FRANK BOSMA
Creative developer	PAUL STARING
Composer	JENS BOUTTERY
Child casting and acting coach	MYRNA VERSTEEG
Volumetric capture studio founder	NATASJA PAULSSEN
Volumetric capture producer	LISA GEURTS
Volumetric capture technology	RENE RIBENS
Volumetric capture camera	MATHIJS VAN DER PALEN
	TWAN VAN DER HEIJDEN

Animators	DEMIAN ALBERS
	INES FERNANDES
Audio director	FRANCOIS FRIPIAT
Audio lead	WALTER FIORINI
Technical sound design	FLORIAN HEYNEN
Audio programming	TITI-LOLA KUKU
	PABLO SCHWILDEN DIAZ
Script consultants	CLEMENCE MADELEINE − PERDRILLAT
	STEWART PRINGLE
	FABIE HULSEBOS
Character design development phase	FONS SCHIEDON
Creative technologist development phase	AVINASH CHANGA
Props	MAROUSHA LEVI
Production support	NIKI GOLOB
Additional design	STIJN WINDIG
	NINA KAY
Clarinets	JOACHIM BADENHORST
Behind the scenes director	REM BERGER
Copywriter	MILO CREMER EINDHOVEN
Digital strategist	NIENKE HUITENGA
Additional design marketing & promotion	CHRISTIAAN DE ROOIJ

BREDA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCE − BUAS, 4DVIEWS, CHRONOSPHERE, FILMFORWARD / VRIJPLAATS, STRP

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Corine Meijers - Studio Biarritz (producer)

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