

DESIGN DOCUMENT FOR
PROJECT TRICKY NINJA

The art of the shadows

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Version # 1.00

Game Overview

Philosophy

Spiritual Successor

This game is a spiritual successor to the classic Ninja Spirit title. The pace and goal of the game will be similar to its predecessor, but the graphics will be updated to take advantage of the power available today.

Added Scope

Game play will also be expanded to encompass up to four simultaneous players to promote team play and offer interesting interaction between players.

Modernization

The main goal of the game is to breathe new life into a classic and popular title to both celebrate what the original game was while taking it that next logical step toward modernization.

Backstory

Project Tricky Ninja sees a martial warrior joined by three spirit warriors to defend his world from a demonic invasion. The world he knows is in danger due to several powerful Oni that have ripped a hole into his world from the spirit world. The warrior attempts to use the Onis' power against them by calling on spirit warrior allies to help him vanquish the demons from his world.

Core Fun

The core fun of the game will revolve around the use of the shadow warriors by the player to gain access to different weapon types, and extra health pools. From a multiplayer standpoint, the interaction of the players controlling spirits as the corporeal player will make for tense moments as well as interesting emergent gameplay. The main point of contention with the game comes through the management health resources due to the fact that the players each only have one life. The corporeal player may swap with a spirit at any time, making that spirit corporeal while he becomes a spirit and thus immune to damage. The new active player must then manage his own health pool as there is no healing in the game. Careful swapping may be employed to prevent damage to players as well as give the players another way to attack as the "swap" will attack anything in the path between swapping players. Using this mechanic to defeat enemies and bosses, each with their own strengths and weaknesses will add to the foundation of fun.

Common Questions

What is the game?

Project Tricky Ninja is a fixed camera side scrolling action game featuring 3D characters and environments. The player(s) take on the role of an ancient warrior and his spirit companions. To assist the warrior in overcoming enemies in his path, he is accompanied by three warrior spirits with whom he may swap places, making one of the spirits corporeal while he steps into the spirit realm. The swap allows the warrior to tap into the health pool of the spirit warriors as well as gain access to new weapons.

Why create this game?

Project Tricky Ninja fills a nostalgia gap that is prevalent in today's gaming culture. There have been many instances of fans funding games that are either reboots or spiritual successors of retro titles. The change that is happening with the publishing model for games works well in this case where a major publisher may not pick up this title for production, but we have other options for the funding of a project like this. Tying into retro hype is a proven track for success and Project Tricky Ninja intends to leverage that concept to its benefit.

Where does the game take place?

Project Tricky Ninja is set in a world that draws heavily on ancient Asian cultures of Japan and China to create a tapestry of Ninjas, Samurai, Ronin, Oni, and demons.

What do I control?

The player will control a feudal warrior armed with a katana and shadowed by three spirit warriors. Up to three additional players may take on the roles of the spirit warriors to create a cooperative experience.

How do I control my character?

The player controls their characters with a standard Xbox or PlayStation controller. The player movements are controlled by thumb stick, while attacks and jumps are triggered with the face buttons. Character swaps are controlled by the shoulder buttons.

What is the main focus?

The player goal in Project Tricky Ninja is to stop the demon invasion of the world. They will face Oni, tainted humans, and fully corporeal demons trying to gain a foothold in the land. The only way to do that is to defeat the powerful Oni that are acting as a bridge between the human and demon realms.

What's different?

Project Tricky Ninja, while on the surface a side scrolling action game, brings asymmetrical game play to the forefront of its design. The cooperative experience of the game is heightened by requiring players to spread damage across all of their health pools to mitigate player death and advance in the story. Access to weapon types is also tied to the corporeal player. To swap weapons, the player must make the player with access to that weapon corporeal.

Feature Set

General Features

- Lavish 3D environments
- Exciting 3D characters and enemies
- Asymmetrical game play

Multiplayer Features

- Up to 4 player local co-op

Gameplay

- Generous pace that prevents the player from visual fatigue
- Side scrolling environments that allow for dynamic jumping and combat
- Varied enemies with their own strengths and weaknesses
- Multiple weapon types allow for different types of attacks and defense
- Moment to moment decision about how to overcome obstacles by swapping spirit and corporeal players
- Emergent gameplay centering on defense by swap or attack by swap
- Enormous bosses to face every level
- Mini bosses to punctuate beats in every level
- Melee weapons and ranged weapons available to players and enemies

Art Style

The Art style for the game will be influenced by anime over the top action, clothing and weapons accurate to the time periods of Japan and Chinese medieval times, creature design from Asian myth as well as properties like Legend of the Five Rings and Okko. The models for the game will all be 3D assets for characters and environments, utilizing render layers and lighting effects to add mood to the world.

Player Characters

The players will take control of the warrior or one of his spirit teammates. Each of the characters allows access to a particular weapon type and swapping to that character equips every player with that weapon. These will be weapons like a katana (a balanced weapon for standard offensive and defensive moves), Naginata (bladed reach weapon stronger in offense than defense, but allowing for reach), Kunai (a thrown blade that allows attacks at great range but minimal defense), and Kusara Kama (one handed sythe with chain allowing for great swinging arc attacks that are weaker on offense but offers great defensive protection). When swapping to a spirit, the whole team is armed with their weapon of choice. The added benefit is that the corporeal player does more damage to enemies than the spirit players will. On the flip side, the spirit players may help defend the corporeal player as they can block enemy attacks with their weapons, but must be careful not to miss their block as their bodies do not provide any shielding for the corporeal player.

Player switching will be controlled by the player pressing one of the trigger or shoulder buttons on the controller, each one mapped to one of the four player characters. If there are fewer than four players in the game, any NPC spirits that are switched to will come under control of the player that initiated the switch. In that sense, on a single player game, the player will control all of the player characters as needed, or in a game with fewer than four players the players will swap with AI player characters as needed.

Non-Player Characters

Non-player characters range from tainted humans to powerful Oni. Each NPC type will have a specific attack type that the players will need to learn. The silhouettes of the enemies will help the players identify which type of attack they will be facing and how to defeat them. These enemies may carry weapon types similar to the player characters, but may also have organic attacks made available to them by their demonic form. These could include teleport attacks, energy attacks, psychic attacks, and many more as suggested by the final forms of each enemy.

Game Player Statistics

The game utilizes only a few player statistics that need to be tracked by the player. The most important one is the health of each character. Being that there is only one pool of health for each player and no healing in game, this takes the place of multiple lives that was seen in the original Ninja Spirit. There are no weapons to find in game, they are tied to each spirit and are either balanced for offense and defense, or tilted toward one end of the scale. They can also offer other benefits like reach or range to act as utility power. The other statistic that players will realize, but not be able to change, is that the spirit players will do less damage to enemies than the corporeal player. This is due to their tenuous grip on this plane of existence, so swapping to be the active player will show an immediate power boost.

GUI Example

Below is a mock-up of the GUI for the game. This GUI is subject to change as development progresses.



Menu System and Example

Below is a mock-up of the menu system the game. This menu is subject to change as development progresses.

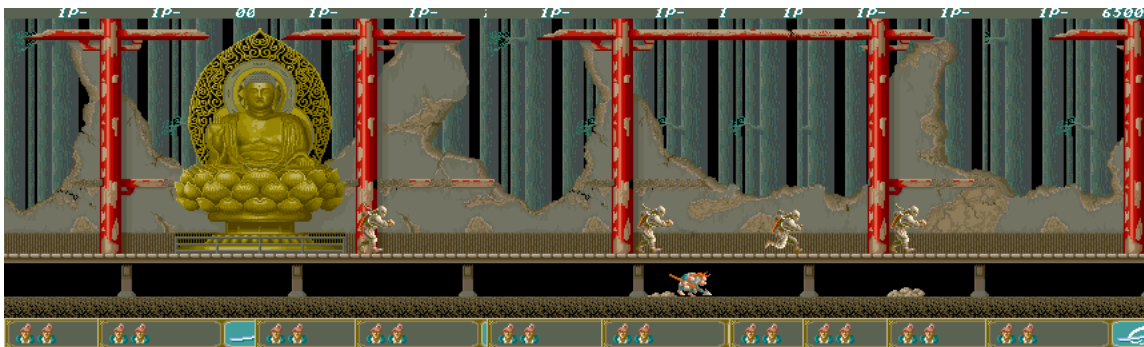


Environment

The environment will be set in a fixed camera side scroll, but the assets will all be in 3D. The render layers, lighting effects, and shaders will be similar to their use in Trine, as seen in the example below. Actual game environment will come at a later date.



The original environment from Ninja Spirit is shown below.



Weapons

The weapons in Project Tricky Ninja are as follows:

Katana – Balanced offensive and defensive weapon. The standard weapon for the player.

Naginata – A bladed reach weapon that is strong in offense and weak in defense.

Kunai – A thrown blade that offers great range and moderate attack power but almost no defense.

Kusara Kama – A one handed sythe with attached chain that allows for great swinging arc attacks with weak attack power but strong defense.

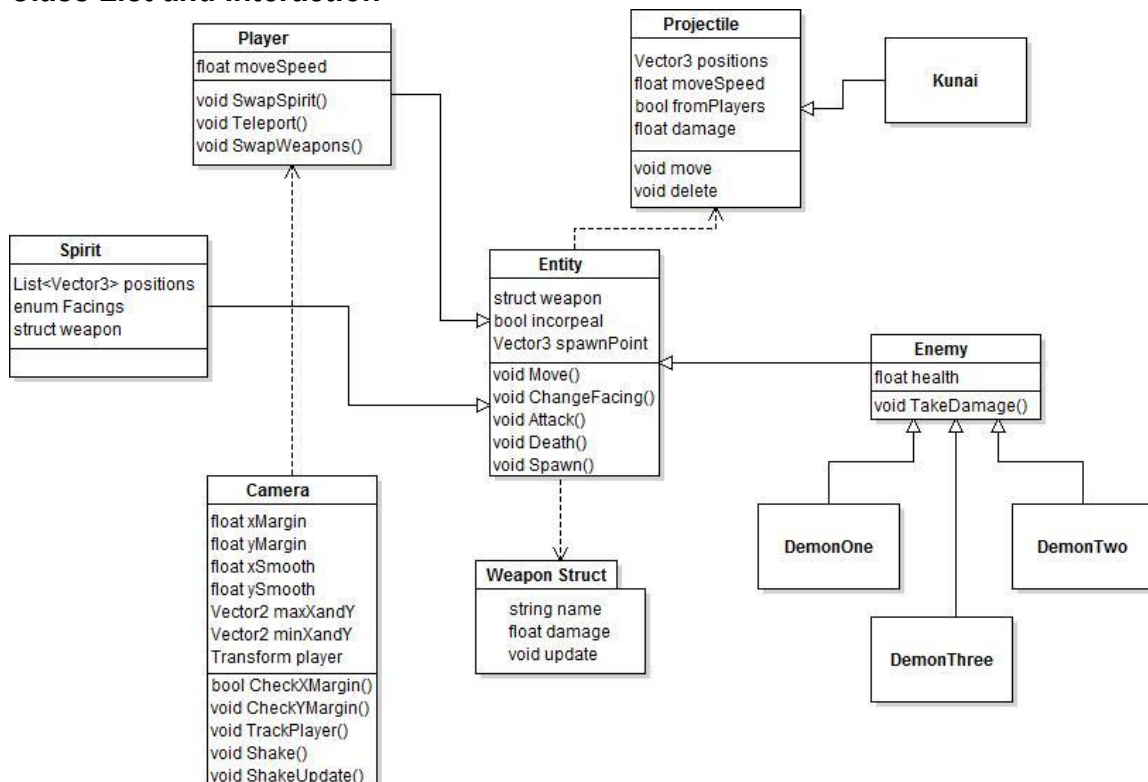
Timeline and Milestones

Phase Start	Phase	Phase End
1 FEB 2014	Concept Phase	19 FEB 2014
7 FEB 2014	Preliminary Prototype	14 FEB 2014
12 FEB 2014	Block Out	5 MAR 2014
19 FEB 2014	Mass Out	28 MAR 2014
19 FEB 2014	Music and Sound	16 APR 2014
5 MAR 2014	Functional Prototype	12 MAR 2014
12 MAR 2014	Graphical Effects	28 MAR 2014
28 MAR 2014	Finished Art and Programming Tweaks	1 MAY 2014
1 MAY 2014	Polish	23 MAY 2014
23 MAY 2014	Ship Date - Assessment	

Player View and Camera

The player's view is fixed to the side of the character to create a side scrolling action game. The camera will prioritize the corporeal player while shadow players will be moved back onto camera if they fall behind the camera through a graphical effect similar to phasing back into the physical world. While the player does not directly control the camera, the player is able to affect the camera through their actions such as a particularly powerful attack shaking the camera. When the corporeal player swaps with a spirit player, the graphic animation of the switch (such as a bolt of energy traveling between the two players which simulates the swap) becomes the focus of the camera until the transition reaches the spirit player making them corporeal and now the focus of the camera.

Class List and Interaction

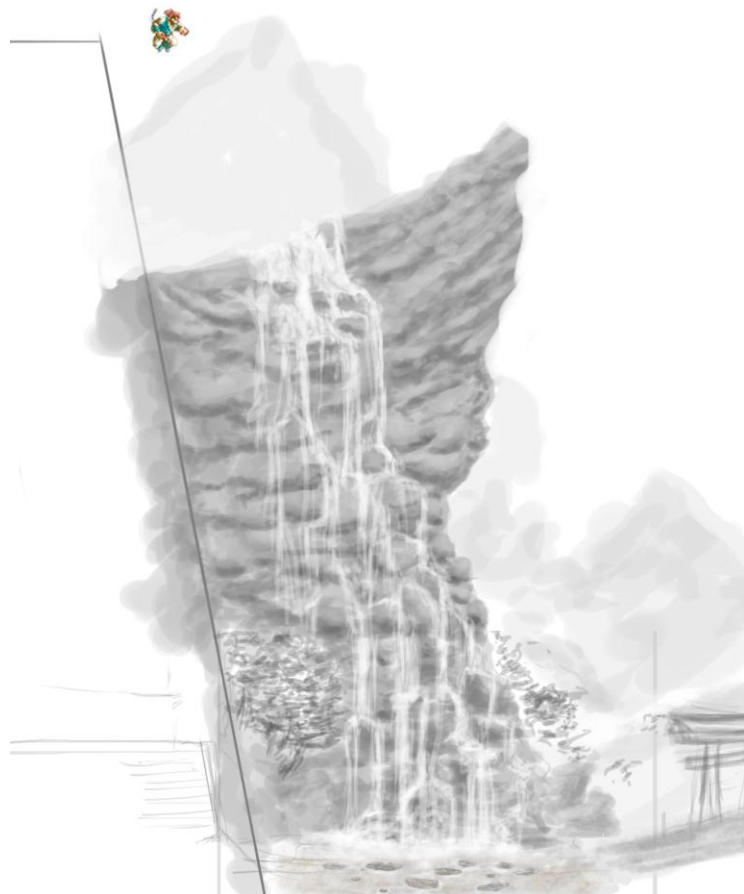


Level Details

The player's movement in the level will primarily be limited to the ground plane. There will be enemies attacking from the sides of the player as well as from below and above, but other than the ability to jump, this level won't have verticality in a platforming sense. See example below.



Players can leap almost the height of the screen but will not be able to access the area below the floor plane which is reserved for enemies attacking the player. The player may attack in any direction to defeat enemies, but will not be able to move into the same areas as all enemies. There is one feature in the second beat of the level, a waterfall, which will transition the player from the first to the second level. This feature will either serve as a mini game in the level where the players defeat enemies as they fall or as a short animatic where the warrior and spirits perform DragonBall Z type teleports to transition through the jump off phase one into phase two of the level. See mock up to the right.



Menu Details

The menu for Project Tricky Ninja will be very simplistic as there is no in-game inventory or RPG elements. The start screen menu must give options for the multiplayer as well as a single player start option. The multiplayer options should show the four character options and have controller icons showing player number able to move beneath the character they want. If the players choose only spirit characters, one of them at random will be chosen to be the corporeal player when the game starts. There should also be an options menu to allow customization of the controller, and volume of the game sounds/music.

Art Requirements

The art requirements for Project Tricky Ninja include four player character models, textures, and animations as well as up to ten enemy models, textures and animations. One of the enemy types will be a boss for the end of the level that will be many times the size of the player characters to give the sensation of filling the screen. Beyond characters and their weapons will be art for any projectiles, graphical effects such as swing blurs or particle effects tied to attacks, and graphical effects for character swapping and teleporting back on screen.

Environments will be broken into depth zones to facilitate render layers for lighting and visual effects. The player depth zone will require art for the path to be set apart through color and texture from the foreground and background elements. The foreground zone will include vegetation, man-made structures, or rock formations that give a sense of foreground without blocking the path from player view. The background zone will show either the structures that the players are moving through or natural landscaping appropriate to the time and technology level.

Sound Requirements

Sound requirements will encompass music for the level which will be created through layering of audio stems that change based on the input of the players. The music for the level should change with the corporeal players vector input so that moving deeper into the level will increase tension in the music while moving backwards toward the start relaxes that tension. Beyond the music stems, the game will also require audio effects for attacks, hits, deaths, movement, collisions, and environmental ambience.

