

INFSCI 1090 - Game Design - Raid 1

THE ASCENT

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Name: The Ascent

Overview - Vision

Our vision is to create a game that uses Japanese ideas of Shinto Gods that are responsible for the health and fertility of land in order to create a very unique and colorful experience for players. The importance of this game is in the experience of exploring the world and in the game forcing the player to experience the story through the eyes of the non-human deity in a way that uses visuals to tell the story rather through dialogue or text. The mountain deity can also possess other animals temporarily, letting the player and mountain god perform other actions that they otherwise wouldn't be able to due to limitations of abilities and physical constraints, while also allowing them to gather more information based on what they see or experience during this time period.

Because the theme is based on spiritual ideas, the environment and characters are also represented in ways that deviate from being entirely realistic, adding to the unique aspect of the experience. The mountain plant life should be colorful and feel somewhat spiritual and awe-inspiring due to the mountain god's presence and protection which allowed the mountain to thrive for centuries. However, the destroyed land and animals should also be strikingly impressive while still having an an apparent dark and corrupted appearance.

Although the mountain god is a deity, it should share the ability to choose, just as the player has the ability to. Therefore, the mountain deity should be able to partake in actions that have an effect on the story and an immediate effect on the mountain deity so the player sees their actions have consequences, and are therefore more cautious about their actions and feel more emotionally attached to the story.

Engagement:



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The mountain has been a peaceful and beautiful home to many creatures for centuries... until now. Something at the top of the mountain is spreading death and destruction. The Mountain God, is summoned to reach the peak and restore peace.

Audience - Platform - Marketing

Single-player adventure-puzzle game (exploration/solution) similar to The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess. Although it is similar in story where the antagonist is threatening to destroy life, it focuses on pushing the player to use their head to solve problems rather than fighting. The protagonist and NPCs are all animals and do not communicate with each other and the protagonist can take over uncorrupted NPCs to get through each level's puzzles.

Systems could include PlayStation, Xbox, or PC, preferably with use of a controller. The targeted audience is all ages of game players of any gender, although it is slightly dark and less suited to younger children.

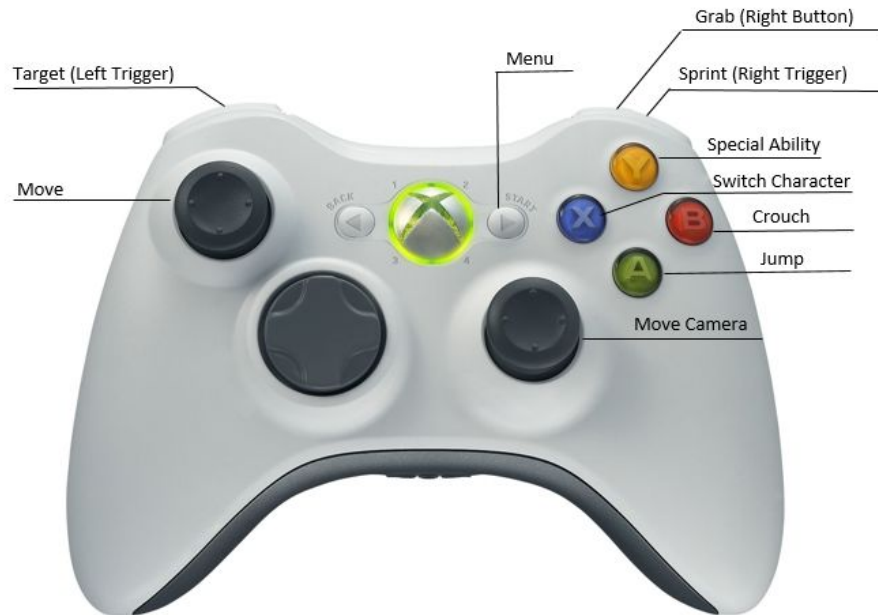
¹ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2011_Oct_02_Iao_Valley_Mountainside_Panorama_crop.jpg

Story

The mountain has suddenly been overcome with an unknown plague which is causing the mountain to die. Animals are getting sick, dying, and some are turning into grotesque creatures who wreak havoc within the mountain. The cause of the plague lies at the top of the mountain; a powerful beast that became spiritually corrupt and seemingly cursed in that all around it - environment and animal life - dies or becomes a mirror, reflecting its corruption.

This beast, which happens to be the most powerful species on the mountain - an extremely large bear - reached the mountain's God, who was unprepared for such an attack. Before being killed or taken over by the same thing that plagued the bear, it forced itself into death, forcing another animal on the mountain to take over its duty and giving the mountain another chance at survival. However, the animal's spirit is reborn and thrown into a statue in a shrine at the bottom of the mountain. The mountain god doesn't remember its existence without context or clue about itself, its role, or the conflict revolving around the mountain. Unfortunately, the other animals cannot communicate with the Mountain God in any way, therefore, the Mountain God must explore and find the answers about itself and the mountain by witnessing and experiencing things on its own.

Gameplay



Introduction / Tutorial Puzzle Writeup:

A cutscene shows corruption flowing down the mountain and killing life. It is a translucent black tinted oily matter that moves like a shadow, sucking the life from everything it encounters. The matter envelopes a group of wildflowers outside of a small shrine at the bottom of the mountain. When it does, they wilt and die, turning a dark grey. The corruption begins to envelope the outside of the shrine.

Inside the shrine, a small black cricket jumps onto a statue that is the Mountain God that sits in the center of the small shrine. Its feet and legs glow a faint blue light. An image of the left trigger instructs the player to press the left trigger (thereby targeting the cricket). When this happens, the whole cricket glows blue (the color of the Switch Character Button). This is where the player starts and will learn the basic controls in order to escape from the shrine. The player can hear the walls of the shrine corroding from the corruption, slowly splintering and break; creating a sense that the place will collapse and getting out is a good idea.

Level Description:

Small shrine with 4 walls and one window. Player has to reach the window to escape. There are small ledges along the wall and a spider in a web in one corner. There is also a toad sitting in the windowsill. There is one other cricket in the shrine doing wall-jumps.

1. Target: As a statue, the player can't do anything except target the cricket that sits atop.
2. Switch: Player must press X to switch from the statue and possess the cricket.
3. Look: Now the player can look around and take in their surroundings..
4. Action 1: Player can jump straight up or in a direction using the control pad. Crickets can also wall jump.
5. Move: Player moves around shrine.
6. Run: Player needs to sprint up a steep ramp to get to a platform. There will be times when the player must move slowly or quickly in the game.
7. Action 2: As a cricket, the player can make cricket sounds. Doesn't seem that useful but I guess we'll see.

Level Paths:

- A. As the cricket, the player can hop between the wall, statue, and ledges. If they try to approach the window, the frog eats them. The player cannot transfer if they are eaten. Instead, they start from the last place they transferred, meaning back to the top of the statue.
- B. The player hops from one ledge to another and gets caught in the spider's web. The spider crawls over to the player and it seems like game-over. The spider begins to wind the cricket in web and as it makes contact, the spider's feet glows a faint blue.
 - a. If the player does nothing, they are eaten.
 - b. Or the player can lock onto the spider and transfer to the spider. Now the player as the spider can crawl the walls and swing from webbing.
 - i. The player can now sneak by the frog or drop onto the frog's head and possess it.
 - ii. From there, the player crawls/hops towards the windowsill ledge and we show a cutscene of the corruption flowing from the top of the peak; establishing the overall objective that the player must reach the top, see what's causing the corruption, and hopefully stop it.

Sound Design:

Outside of cutscenes and intense parts, there's only the sound of the environment (birds singing/chirping, crickets/cicadas chirping, running water if a stream is nearby, and other sounds associated with animal activities). During intense scenes or timed levels, the music should be made up of intense instrumentals (possibly with more traditional Japanese instruments) to increase the feeling of being rushed as well as the level of danger the player is in.

Characters:

Beast: A bear whose soul became corrupted from circumstances unknown to the player. It is also not revealed to the player that it is also a mountain god, which is the reason its spiritual corruption causes so much destruction, unlike other corrupted animals.

Mountain God: The protector of the mountain the game takes place within. When not taking over other animals or portrayed as its true spiritual wispy form, it takes on the appearance of a fox. The current mountain god is born as the game begins, and is therefore unaware of its being and role of a mountain god, as well as anything about the mountain or the events that are happening within it.

Mountain animals: Along with rats, crickets, cicada, foxes, rabbits, snakes, birds, owls, goats, weasels, and wolves, the mountain also contains animals native to Japan. This includes Ezo momonga (flying squirrel), Tanuki (Japanese Raccoon Dog), giant salamanders, Shima Enaga (a type of bird native to Hokkaido), Asian Black Bears, Japanese macaques (monkeys), and Red Panda to name a few. These animals are all fairly intelligent as they are in the real world, however, they're also oblivious to meanings and reasons behind what they know as dangerous.

Corrupted: These are animals which have survived the corruption, which transformed not only their appearance, but also their behaviors which have turned to be extremely aggressive and hostile towards anything and everything.

Goals & Objectives:

Uncover and stop the source of whatever is destroying life on the mountain. To do this, players must advance from the bottom to the top level of the mountain - each level with different obstacles to overcome, requiring different skills and approaches to find clues and uncover the truth behind the mystery.

Rules & Procedures:

Obstacles range from blocked pathways, secret pathways, creatures needing help, corrupted areas the player needs to avoid, and corrupt creatures set on destroying the player that the player must elude or defeat. Each different form of obstacle is ultimately a puzzle that the player must solve to continue up the mountain, finding pieces to put the story together along the way. These pieces can be either information gained through experiences or physical objects. The player can get by obstacles using jumping, running, sneaking, and body switching between animals that have different physical attributes and skills. At the end of each level, the animals used to solve the puzzle gather in front of the player where the player can choose to either release the animal or absorb its life force to gain strength (though it's not said explicitly).

Resources:

Resources vary from level to level:

- Some levels require a player to switch to other animals.
- Some levels have objects that need to be found, moved, manipulated.
- Some levels have other characters and animals to interact, avoid, or confront.
- Some levels or parts are timed.

Outcomes:

Story resolutions:

- Pure: The Mountain God cures the Beast at the top of the mountain and restores peace and life to the mountain.
- Evil: The Mountain God gains enough power from taking life force from animals along the way to the top of the mountain to fight the corrupted beast. After defeating it, the Mountain God feels relieved however, it ends up unexpectedly taking on the same role of the corrupted beast; the Mountain God's evil presence corrupts the rest of the mountain's life and forces it to move elsewhere, destroying everything in its path.

Level resolutions:

- Players are encouraged to try and fail until they solve the puzzle. Losing means starting from earlier in the level at key checkpoints.
- If a player fails a puzzle or dies, the failing scene/death fades to black and the mountain god wakes up from the "dream" at the beginning of the level.

Feedback:

If the player decides to sacrifice animals to gain power, the Mountain God's appearance becomes dark and ominous, becoming black in appearance, emitting shadowy tendrils, growing an extended spiked spine, and the glow of its heart becomes visible, turning from red to dark purple and eventually its glow dies out as it becomes more tainted.

At the end of each level where the player makes their decision regarding the fate of the animals that contributed to solving the puzzle, the decision results in a change in the Mountain God's appearance immediately. If the player decides to release the animals free of harm, the Mountain God turns a shade lighter towards white and is embraced in an angelic glow. Eventually light blue designs appear on its fur as it becomes more pure. If the player chooses to sacrifice an animal, a wispy ball of energy is ripped from the body of the animal as it goes lifeless and is absorbed into the Mountain God's own body, which causes the image of the Mountain God to pulse and results in a change of appearance.



(Art by Sam Bowen, who drew the different appearances for our cause.)

Game World

The mountain exists in Japan, away from civilization. Therefore there are no interactions with society or any culture aside from the Shinto shrine dedicated to the Mountain God that has been abandoned for centuries. There are only "levels" which exist in certain altitudes of the mountain (for example, the first level exists at the bottom part of the mountain and as the levels go on, the altitude the mountain god explores gets higher). Time is controlled by each level. Certain levels occur during nighttime and others in daylight, but physics work as they do in the real world.

Interface

Interface is kept to a minimum. When being prompted to press buttons during the tutorial, a transparent image of the button ghosts onto screen. The options that appear after pressing “start” include: general options (audio, video, gameplay, controls), the options to save, quit, and restart the level, and credits.

Touchstones:

The idea of a mountain god comes from Japanese Shintoism. It is believed that the gods usually care for land, fertility, health, and wealth, among other things. Mushishi (a Japanese animation) had an interesting take of this and had an episode where the god took on the form of a tortoise with moss and mushrooms growing on its shell. Although in this context, the mountain god would usually live for long periods of time, mountain gods could die but before then, they would often choose a soul to take over their position after their death but if they didn't, it would be random. The sacrificed soul could be either of human or animal nature.

The environmental puzzles are somewhat like the puzzles in the Legend of Zelda games, more closely to Twilight Princess but instead of using different items to solve them, different animals are used.

Prototype

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