Ascend
Game Concept Document

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PREMISE

Ascend is a high fantasy, third-person action adventure with Eastern Philosophy from the Dao De Ching. The player takes on the role of the Lone Knight, trying to ascend the fabled Shadow Tower, a massive structure that is rumored to hold untold wisdom. As the Knight ascends he will encounter denizens of the tower, other adventurers, and other beings, who will guide him along his way, and whom he must help in return.

DESCRIPTION

The Lone Knight has travelled long and far to reach the Shadow Tower. Somewhere along the way he broke his sword and chipped his shield. He must go on though, for the shadow tower may hold all the answers he is seeking…

The Lone Knight is older, he has been travelling for a long time, and he is worn and tired. When he set out, he was looking for a way to prove himself, and to set right the wrongs of his kingdom. But years later, now that he has reached his destination, the Lone Knight doesn't really know what he is searching for. His sword is shattered and his shield is battered. What awaits the knight in the Shadow Tower may be a much different challenge than he realizes, and he may find more than he expects.

The Shadow Tower is ancient and ageless, a massive dark spire, violently pushing itself up out of the depths of the earth. The Tower is several miles in diameter, and the inside is hollowed out. Within the Tower are whole forests, grasslands, and even some small mountains clinging to the sides of the stone. A river winds down through the tower from it's peak, flowing through the different environments and settling in a deep pond at the center of the base of the tower. Looking up, the player can see a small patch of sky, and a brilliant light, shining at the very top of the tower.

The game will be split into several levels, with each level representing a new area of the Tower that the Lone Knight has reached. The player is always looking to ascend, and each level has a walkway or staircase leading to the next major area of the Tower. Each level will introduce the Knight to an NPC inhabitant of the Tower. This NPC will follow the knight around and help advise him about the tower. The NPC will also make conversation, and the player will learn about their lives, their misfortunes, and their desires. The real goal of the game is to help these NPCs with a point of contention in their lives. If the player correctly interprets through dialogue, what this NPC truly needs, and helps the NPC achieve it before leaving the level, the player is awarded a bonus, and is closer to completing this true goal of the game.

The NPC characters exist on a separate screen (mobile device or WiiU Pad) and "watch" the player as he goes about the level. If the player is struggling, or comes upon an area that the NPC is familiar with, the NPC will actively speak up and offer to "help" the player. This help can come in a number of forms, usually involving the player using screen scanning or real life AR. The player "shows" the NPC what they need to see and the NPC will help the player solve the problem from a different perspective. By helping the NPCs, the player learns how to view other perspectives, lessons about the Dao, and about how to live a better life. Ignoring the NPCs will allow the player to progress, but they won't learn the lessons of the level, and many challenges may be far more difficult or frustrating. At the end of the game they will have to apply these lessons and perspectives to a final level, and if they cannot, they will struggle immensely.

The gameplay is basic 3D third person movement with some platforming and basic problem solving elements. The major obstacles in the game are environmental ones. The player has two major actions. They hit a shield button to use their shield to defend, allowing them to deflect projectiles, guard against traps, and defend the NPC character. The player can use their broken sword as an action button, as well as a climbing tool. When facing a soft wall, the player can stick the sword in the wall as a boost to reach a higher area. As an action button, the sword is used depending on the environment. (As an example you see a hole in the wall that you realize is a keyhole to open a nearby door. The player moves to the hole, and hits the action button. The character animates

and sticks the broken sword in the hole and turns, causing the gate to open). The player uses the mobile gamepad camera to scan the game environment and world around them to help NPCs solve tough obstacles. This is prompted by the NPC characters as they try to help the player, and this help may require the player to do a variety of different things with the mobile gamepad.

The major platform for the game will be WiiU. Most puzzles and environmental problems are trigger and location based. The NPC's will have the only major AI, and this will be focused on the dialogue this character has with the player. The player will be able to see the NPC's face consistently on the WiiU gamepad, and their expressions will change as the player progresses through the level. The NPC will feel very real, and will react in realistic ways. If the player does something unfavorable, the NPC will frown, or make a look of disgust. If the player is behaving according to the NPCs wishes, the NPC will appear happy and contented. Reading the NPCs facial expressions and listening to their dialogue is key to uncovering their secret desires. Doing favorable actions with NPCs and taking the time to learn their story will make them actively help the player with struggles in the game. They will ask the player to allow them to "view" the scene, which prompts the player to lift the mobile game pad and scan the environment with it until the NPC sees what he is looking for.

If the player succeeds in fostering a relationship with this NPC. they will give the player a highlighted dialogue hint at the end of the level. At the top of the tower is a series of impossible challenges. A player who hasn't helped the NPCs will get no hints and struggle to beat this section. If the player has helped NPCs as they ascend, the highlighted dialogue hint after helping each NPC will reappear and help the player solve the impossible challenges. (As an example, there is a gap and a huge jump. The NPC hint is that, "With steady effort, and unwavering determination, a huge gap becomes a single step." If the player walks slowly across the gap with their head held high, they will cross without falling).

The game mood is ultimately hopeful, but teetering on the edge of despair. Characters are friendly and helpful, but they harbor secret grievances and have their own problems on their mind. The Lone Knight himself is a man on the verge of existential despair. He barely knows why he is seeking the tower out anymore, and he has lost his way. His outlook will either help or hurt the moods of the NPCs. The player should associate with that existential uncertainty, but also be thoughtful about it. NPcs will ask thought-provoking questions and make the player think about the game on a deeper level. The atmosphere is somewhat dark, but with bright overtones. The people are worn and small and grey, but the world itself is vibrant and rich. The tower walls provide a stark background to the green trees, winding river, and beautiful landscape climbing up to the top.

FEATURES

- 3D Action with Environmental and Character Problem Solving.
    - This includes point and click type puzzles, time-based traps, and platforming obstacles.
    - Very little combat in the game, most obstacles are solved through problem solving
    - Building dialouges with NPCs will push them to assisting the player with problems in real time
    - NPCs actively ask the player to let them assist and provide a special perspective or ability to solve challenges.
- Daoist Philosophical Underpinnings in High Fantasy
    - A high fantasy setting, but with the tone and morals matching the teachings of the Dao.
    - Learn about the philosophies and sayings of the Dao De Ching to help live better.
    - Use the lessons you've learned to help solve problems for other characters and progress through the game.
- Complex Emotional Characters that Communicate and Interact With the World and Player
    - NPCs have detailed backstories and rich personalities
    - React to the players actions in real time and provide feedback based on player choices.
    - Requires communication and understanding to properly understand NPCs and help them with what they need most.
    - NPCs can look at the world through a mobile screen game pad and can solve problems within the game and in reality.

GENRE

The game is a third person, action adventure, environmental puzzle solving game with elements of AI dialogue simulations. The character progresses through a 3D environment as they ascend. Different obstacles and puzzles will block the path forward and must be overcome. Speaking to NPCs and learning about them will inspire them to actively help the player with challenges in the environment, will push the player's progression, and serve to reveal and deepen the game narrative.

PLATFORM

The primary platform is WiiU. The WiiU Gamepad is a perfect tool for the NPC character to appear on and talk to the player from. The gamepad has screen tracking for pad over the TV based puzzles. The other major controls are fairly simple, and the aesthetics will be stylized so as to not require heavy graphical power.

ESRB RATING

The game will aim to be a T for teen rating. There is no major combat, and with the stylized aesthetic there will be no major need for excessive visual violence. Dialogue is more advanced and may talk about more mature themes.

TARGET MARKET

The target audience is action adventure players between the ages of 15 and 35. During these age ranges people tend to suffer from more existential angst than later in life. As a result, they tend to be more open to new ideas and philosophies. The lessons in this game can help this age group see the world and people differently, and will appeal to their sense of learning.

MARKETING POSITION

The unique aspect of the game is the underlining Eastern philosophies the game presents and the deep character interaction. NPCs will feel alive and have distinct personalities and goals. It will feel like meeting a stranger and talking with them for a short time about their life. They will offer real time help and guidance and fostering a relationship with these characters is often instrumental to progressing through the game. The game gives players a new perspective on people and the world around them.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

The Legend of Zelda: This series has a very similar style of action adventure gameplay. The player uses items and mechanics to solve environmental puzzles and challenges. This series is incredibly popular and almost defined the genre in a way. Our game will pull a lot of inspiration from these titles to create interesting levels and obstacles.

Dark Souls: This series has fantastic environmental storytelling and a similar aesthetic feel. The setting of Dark Souls is a High Fantasy world, and very little is outright explained to the player. The player progresses and learns about the world by observing the environment and finding context clues in items and objects scattered around the world.

Dragon Age: This series does a great job with creating relationships between NPCs and the player. NPCs in this game have deep backstories and varied personalities. It requires an understanding of the characters and their goals to interact with them in a positive way. Ascend will use similar styles of character development to create

relationships with the NPCs in the game and better communicate the game's themes.

BACKSTORY

The Lone Knight's kingdom is in decline. People are poor and there is general discontent. The King realizes the danger, and calls for his greatest knight. In the distance of this world, the Shadow Tower is always visible, usually as a thin dark ribbon, stretching into the heavens. It is rumored that any who can climb the tower will be bestowed with great wisdom, and will have the knowledge to solve any problem. The King asks his loyal knight to climb the tower and return with the wisdom to bring the kingdom back to prosperity. No one from the kingdom has ever set foot in the Shadow Tower, so the King does not know how long the journey will take or what the Knight may face. The Knight sets off, confident and ready… and for three years he follows the tower to it's base, losing hope for his kingdom and his faith in himself. He finally reaches the tower, but what challenges await him. And is his Kingdom still even alive to be saved?

RISK ANALYSIS

The major risks are in the delivery of the game's messages. It will be difficult to design the narrative and mechanics to support the moral lessons of the game and it will be difficult to really get players to understand and apply these lessons to the game. The NPC dialogue is also very important to the theming of the game, and will be difficult to implement in a way that makes them feel like real characters. They have to react to a lot of player actions and have mental states based on what is currently going on in the game. The complexities required to get this across may be to difficult to make in game.

Supplemental Solution:
http://www.microsoft.com/en-gb/developers/articles/week02feb15/making-your-game-stand-out-with-cortana

SUMMARY

Ascend is a game that pulls the player upwards with it. The Lone Knight has lost his resolve and purpose, and can not see his path anymore. This happens to a lot of people in life. We question our choices and we doubt where we are headed. The journey to the top of the Shadow Tower will help the knight and the player rediscover their purpose and help them forge a new path and a new destiny for themselves. Through the people the player meets, the player learns that if you take the time to help a new acquaintance they can help you in kind. Through helping others and learning about the different people of the world, the knight and player learn the wisdom to lead better lives and stay true to themselves.