

# Footsteps

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## HIGH CONCEPT

*Footsteps is an isometric, action-roleplaying game for the PC and major consoles, in which players follow the captivating tale of a young prince and his mentor, journeying across a mysterious, magical world. Unlike many other roleplaying games, Footsteps examines the various decisions that shape individuals as they mature, and explores a curious theme of progressive impairment.*

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## High Concept

Footsteps is an isometric, action-roleplaying game for the PC and major consoles, in which players follow the captivating tale of a young prince and his mentor, journeying across a mysterious, magical world. Unlike many other roleplaying games, Footsteps examines the various decisions that shape individuals as they mature, and explores a curious theme of progressive impairment.

## Genre

Footsteps falls under the Action, Adventure and Fantasy genres, by incorporating climactic scenes into a larger narrative of a young prince and his mentor as they undergo betrayal and experience the true meaning of friendship on their journey home through a mystical world of magic and spirits.

From a gameplay and graphical perspective, Footsteps draws heavily on the pseudo-realistic style found in games such as *Diablo III* and *Dota 2* with an emphasis on having both highly-detailed characters and environments, as well as particle effects in order to highlight the elemental nature of the setting. Gameplay involves a similar mechanism for selecting skills and items in a limited range of combinations.

Another notable comparison can be drawn with other escort-style games, such as *The Last of Us* and *BioShock Infinite*. Gameplay in Footsteps involves protecting, teaching, and learning from your partner – an important distinction is that your escort is not just a mere sidekick, but rather: an integral part of the experience.

The narrative is delivered through a variety of means, but the overall architecture is similar to the previously listed games, and also similar to games such as *Dragon Age* and *Mass Effect*. In Footsteps, narrative occurs in a traditional, act-by-act style, in which players are given relatively free rein to progress throughout each stage of the game. Their actions and interactions with characters throughout the course of the game ultimately drive the central narrative towards different, final outcomes.

While not coming specifically from a video game, the setting in Footsteps draws inspiration from other East-Asian settings that feature prominently in tabletop roleplaying games. For example: the Dungeons & Dragons module *Oriental Adventures*, featuring the land of *Rokugan*, from the *Legend of the Five Rings*. If anything, the overall setting reflects a land not unlike that of *Vvardenfell* district, in *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*.

## Setting

### Classification

Footsteps takes place in a fictional, East-Asian style setting resembling feudal Japan. While many elements are drawn from traditional mythology and other, similar influences, the world in Footsteps leans much more towards low-fantasy.

### Geography

To create a sense of scale, Footsteps takes place on a small, landlocked portion of the continent, with limited land and resources. Water is typically confined to lakes and rivers, with the farthest reaches of the map left unexplored. The general reasoning behind a continuous landmass is to create the feeling that faraway lands are exotic, and too dangerous to attempt conquest for fear of treachery by a neighboring, local kingdom. Travel is primarily restricted to walking, and when circumstances permit, horses are also a potential option.

The landscape is primarily a mix of rugged tundra, boreal forests, and treacherous ravines separating mountains. Given the nature of the terrain, military strategy is dictated by elevation, with more powerful kingdoms protected behind mountain passes, while less fortunate nations squabble over what little lowland plains remain.

### Inhabitants

Given the low-magic classification, it is generally assumed that humans are the dominant species inhabiting all known reaches of the world. Hardy peoples, humans in Footsteps represent a diverse mix of farmers, merchants, thieves, petty nobles and powerful nobles, assassins and foot soldiers, and any typical professions that might be found in a traditional, feudal society.

Particular distinction is given towards craftsmen and practitioners of magic. Regarded as masters of an art or divine gift, those entering these two professions are highly respected. Craftsmen are often rewarded through a patronage system not unlike that of Renaissance Italy. Those that work the ways of magic often walk the path of wisdom – it would be foolish of any ruler to not heed their advice.

While humans may be the dominant species, and 99% of creatures are mindless beasts, the remaining 1% is comprised of a variety of mythical creatures. Most prominent of these creatures are the *Kami* – divine spirits that represent various elements in nature, or sometimes abstract concepts, such as honor or bravery. To the uneducated, these spirits appear to be mundane manifestations of nature, but to the enlightened, *Kami* are the source from and through which all magic flows.

## Factions

While there are many factions scattered across the land, the primary political entities are organized into Clans – essentially monarchies, but with a more flexible inheritance structure. Chief among clans is the Wolf clan, which over the course of the past fifty years has conquered nearly every other Clan that sought to challenge their dominion over the mountain passes.

Both the protagonist and the player-character hail from the Phoenix clan, which is an impoverished nation clinging to life, sandwiched between the mountains of the Wolf clan, and the marshes of the Snake clan. The Phoenix clan is most notable for their supremely gifted craftsmen and warriors, but limited resources and an honor-focused outlook have mostly held back any potential plans for world conquest.

The Snake clan possesses the most gifted of spellcasters, with sorcery, wizardry, and witchcraft all frequently used tools in the Snake clan arsenal. Masters of intrigue and strategic assassinations, the Snake clan represents the other major power on the continent (besides the Wolf clan), though they hold this position through political maneuvering rather than outright military strength.

In addition to clans, there are a variety of other notable organizations. Most craftsmen have organized guilds, which in turn led to the rise of a sprawling commercial banking and trading network, known as the Merchant's Guild. Where rich merchants move about, a shadowy crime syndicate is sure to follow, although not much is known about them.

In these desperate times, more and more bandits are being sighted along major trade routes, with attacks becoming more brazen by the day. Mercenary bands and other sellswords may be found in taverns and inns, though sometimes the distinction between mercenary and bandit is often a thin line. One day a bandit, the next, a mercenary.

## Magic

As detailed earlier, magic is primarily elemental in nature, drawing on various spirits to accomplish tasks. To provide some scope on what magic *can actually do* in the world: magic is predicated on the rule that all magic is equal an opposite. To cure a poison, spellcasters must take on the poison themselves. To light a fire, spellcasters experience all the heat of the flame, distributed in some way throughout their body. Thus, magic can just as easily harm as it can help.

Limited amounts of magical feedback are offloaded onto a *Kami*, who acts as a conduit, and in turn translates the energy back into nature. Thus, while magic itself is 1:1 and the net distribution must remain 1:1, the application of magic focuses nearly entirely on mitigating the feedback of magic use onto the spellcaster. Note that there are other means of redirecting magic beyond *Kami*, described later.

## Characters

### Hinotori Seiji – Protagonist

The protagonist of Footsteps, Crown prince of the Phoenix clan, Hinotori Seiji is the young heir to the throne of the Phoenix clan. The first of three children, doted upon by his father, the king, Seiji is a headstrong and spoiled brat accustomed to bullying others to get what he wants. Most in court consider him unready for the challenges of leading a clan surrounded by enemies.

Roughly aged twelve, Seiji is still somewhat of a boy, with tied-back, jet-black hair standing about 4' tall, and is a tad overweight, perhaps 140 pounds – at the very least, pudgy, if not rotund. Outstanding physical characteristics include a long nose, olive-brown eyes, and the pale skin of a prince who has never had to work a day in his life. Typical clothing might include an embroidered, royal robe, though this quickly changes following certain events in the story.

Depending on various choices made throughout the course of the game, Seiji eventually develops from a pathetic child into a number of possibilities, including a cunning, strategic, military leader, a noble and suave, pacifist diplomat, a sullen, weary wanderer, and more.

### Hinotori Kenji – Antagonist

The wise, second brother to the king, and fifth in line to the throne, Hinotori Kenji is the primary antagonist in Footsteps. Having recognized that the crown prince Seiji is unfit to rule the Phoenix clan, Kenji takes matters into his own hands. With a propensity for scheming and complex machinations, Kenji's greatest desire is to become king, yes, but not because he seeks power, but because of the waste, mismanagement, and squandered potential under the current system.

Kenji is an excellent, manipulative diplomat with an impressive intellect. Resembling an older, more fit version of Seiji, standing approximately 5'8" at about 130 pounds, Kenji is a competent, able-bodied warrior, though given the choice, he'd prefer to watch the fight from afar. One distinguishing characteristic is a neatly trimmed beard – an uncommon feature in a court dominated by long bearded "scholars" and "scribes," or clean-shaven soldiers.

Very much an "ends justify the means" bordering on "well-intentioned extremist" character, Kenji maintains a singular, unbreakable devotion to his cause, even if it means compromising his morals. Throughout the course of the game, Kenji's initial beliefs are put to the test, potentially culminating in a downward spiral of corruption and evil, depending on actions taken by Seiji throughout the game.

## Hamada Itsuki – Player Character

The player takes the role of Hamada Itsuki, an observer and mentor to the crown prince, Seiji. Originally a blacksmith in the service of a minor baron, Itsuki was conscripted into the Phoenix clan army, under Hinotori Seiji's grandfather. For many years, Itsuki patrolled the countryside, all the while perfecting his mastery over the blade, always walking the way of the warrior, yet still learning the path of wisdom from the people he protected.

Despite owing allegiance to none other than Hinotori Kenji through relation and territorial standing, after demonstrating his courage and honor in the heat of battle, Itsuki was rewarded with the position of protecting crown prince Seiji, the king hoping that he might instill some measure of humility and honor in the boy.

Standing approximately 5'10" and weighing about 145 pounds, Itsuki is incredibly fit for a man of 72 years. Itsuki is clean-shaven and close-cut black hair, the very image of a model soldier. In past years, Itsuki might have worn the traditional leather and scale armor of a foot soldier, though in recent years, he wears only a simple robe and a soldier's boots.

One significant aspect of Footsteps revolves around the unique dynamic shared by Seiji and Itsuki. For instance, Itsuki refers to Seiji as "Senpai" – reflecting that he, as a peasant, is subservient to Seiji, the future king, and must accede to every demand. On the other hand, Seiji refers to Itsuki initially as "Rōnin," a samurai without a master, and later as "Sensei" reflecting that despite his superior social status, he is still a student of the martial arts, studying under Itsuki.

## Story

The central narrative in Footsteps is delivered through a three act progression. The first act introduces the player to the cast, and sets the tone for the rest of the game. Beginning in the court of the Wolf clan, Itsuki is training Seiji in fundamental swordsmanship and dueling etiquette when they are interrupted by a group of assassins. After successfully defending Seiji, the two rush to the throne room, where they discover the king and Seiji's younger siblings have all been murdered. In their place stands Kenji, who has struck a deal with the Wolf clan for support in ascending to the throne of the Phoenix clan, in exchange for becoming a vassal.

Escaping from the Wolf clan castle, Seiji and Itsuki begin a desperate race home, pursued relentlessly by Wolf clan assassins and Kenji's men. In traveling back to Phoenix clan lands, Itsuki presents various philosophies and skills to a curious Seiji. Throughout the course of the second act, the conversation choices and skill training selections (part of gameplay) serve to motivate and convince Seiji of various abstract concepts, guiding him towards an ultimate end state. For instance, avoiding

combat and negotiating extensively with others might drive Seiji towards becoming a brilliant diplomat, while pursuing combat as a means to an end will turn Seiji into a gifted military strategist. Should Itsuki fail to instill morality though, Seiji may very well apply his tactical insight towards becoming a barbarous warlord ...

If by the conclusion of the second, no clear conclusion can be drawn about what path Seiji takes, he instead chooses the way of the wanderer. Itsuki's actions have convinced him that no one true path is correct, and that the only way to win is to not participate in the system.

The third act traces the outcomes determined by the second act. However, the player is not necessarily locked in. It is still possible to deviate from a specific path under the right conditions. Various outcomes are described below:

In the final act, should Seiji elect to follow the way of the warrior, he will move to defeat his rival uncle Kenji for control of the Phoenix clan in a bloody civil war. If he lacks strong morality and honor, his eye turns towards conquest, culminating in a final battle at the siege of the Wolf clan castle where it all started ...

Should the player encourage Seiji to follow the path of the diplomat, Seiji will move to peacefully resolve the dispute with his uncle and surrounding nations, demonstrating that he has, in fact, become a better leader. However, if he fails to recognize the stealthy influence of the Snake clan, he may find himself falling under their manipulative domains ...

Should the player follow no path at all, (i.e. the wanderer), Seiji gives up his life of nobility in exchange for one in which he travels the land, either helping the populace, or conspiring against them, becoming a feared mercenary, based again on the choices and morality instilled by Itsuki.

Ever faithful to his master, Itsuki remains by Seiji's side throughout the entire game – his dialogue adapting to the maturing Itsuki.



## Gameplay

As noted in previous sections, *Footsteps* is an isometric, action-roleplaying game in the style of *Diablo* or *Torchlight*. Players progress throughout the story, beginning with a simple sword. As they level up, Itsuki, believing Seiji is ready for the next level, teaches Seiji a new skill, which the player may choose from a variety of options. In doing so, Itsuki also “teaches” the player, thus allowing them to use the skill here on after. Additional skill points may be unlocked by visiting or completing context-sensitive objectives. For instance, visiting the smithy unlocks crafting by allowing Itsuki to show Seiji how to create new items at a forge.

The traversable world is a zone-limited open-world sandbox, in which time-progression is persistent across the zone, though a day/night cycle does exist. While running around, players will encounter enemies that may be avoided, or fought, as in *Diablo* or *Torchlight*. The technical combat details aren’t particularly unique. Where *Footsteps* shines is in the skill system.

*Diablo* has skill runes, and *Path of Exile* has skill gems, and *Footsteps* uses *Kami* to represent skill progression. As every *Kami* represents a specific aspect of life, in learning a skill, Seiji is actually spiritbonding with a particular *Kami*, learning to direct his spiritual flow into whatever task is at hand. This enables him to perform great feats such as charging at an enemy and leaving a path of flames in his wake without incinerating himself. Referring back to context-sensitive objectives, to truly unlock every ability in *Footsteps*, Seiji and Itsuki must seek out the various *Kami* residing across the world.

## Features

The key feature in *Footsteps* is the deterministic narrative outcome. Unlike certain major roleplaying games with a binary good/evil scale, the end state is determined by a variety of contributing factors over the course of the game. Pursuing one role in conversation extensively certainly encourages Seiji to follow that role, but if the player ends up hacking and slashing their way through every creature in sight, that may encourage Seiji to choose another direction entirely. This is computed through a number of hidden metrics that contribute “points” towards each of the potential end states. Certain actions may contribute to one or more possible end states, while others can even subtract points from other states. In essence, the outcome determination is a much more subtle and in-depth reimagining of the *Dragon Age* companions system.

Since *Footsteps* focuses on multiple narrative outcomes, the emphasis is shifted from repeatedly farming levels for good loot to repeatedly completing the game for different narrative outcomes, and to discover new or secret *Kami*, in a way, almost replicating the “Gotta Catch ‘Em All” experience found in *Pokémon*.

## Audience

Footsteps is targeted primarily at players who enjoyed playing other action-roleplaying games (typically 18-24 year old males), such as *Diablo* or *Torchlight*, but are seeking an alternative to the repetitive grind for gear and numerically scaled difficulty. Instead, Footsteps goes after the players who enjoy exploring a vast number of different paths towards achieving certain outcomes.

## Hardware Platforms

Footsteps is designed with the PC and major consoles in mind. This includes primarily the new Xbox One and PlayStation 4. To generate many of the special effects requires hardware that is found only on the PC and next-generation consoles, and the fast-paced action requires a degree of control input and precision not afforded by mobile devices.

Also, limiting Footsteps to these specific platforms simplifies distribution, as each platform has its own widely used digital distribution hubs, in the form of Steam, Xbox Live Arcade, and the PlayStation Network.

## Competitive Analysis

Footsteps is primarily competing against other action-roleplaying games, such as *Diablo III* and *Torchlight*. Of particular note is the free-to-play *Path of Exile*. All of these have performed exceptionally. Despite being competitors, given the success and relatively limited replayability of this style of game, the market remains remarkably fresh and open to new games in this segment – especially one focused on narrative, rather than a gear treadmill.

To elaborate more on the narrative differences, competitors follow a strictly linear progression through the story, with increasing difficulties requiring additional playthroughs of the same storyline, again and again. Footsteps sets up a central narrative, but presents entirely different directions for players to choose.

Furthermore, very few video games take place in a feudal East-Asian setting. The only recent game to do this is in the Total War series (*Shogun 2*), representing a totally unexplored concept setting.

## Risk Analysis

The primary risk in Footsteps is in developing such a complex narrative. While three main outcomes have been outlined, it's ultimately the journey that matters. Creating enough engaging, alternative routes to each outcome is perhaps the most immense difficulty in terms of not only writing all the dialogue, but also in determining the various triggers for each end state. As this forms the underlying framework for the rest of the game, minimizing risks emerging from narrative design mainly involve judicious control of scope.

Another potential liability comes in the form of the setting. Feudal East-Asian has really only been done by one game in recent years, as noted before. While Shogun 2 has performed well, the few games done in this market, even by Japanese publisher Square Enix suggests a possible lack of interest in the setting. Minimizing risk here could involve changing the setting to a more western look and feel, with aggressive feedback from alpha testers helping to make this decision.

The third and final risk is that the game mechanics of this market segment are stale, with little left to differentiate successive games. Another risk is that unlike the other games in this segment, there is no multiplayer component. While this allows us to focus more on making a quality single player experience, many do expect a multiplayer component. To that end, the central narrative and game mechanics would need to be modified if the inclusion of multiplayer becomes necessary.

## Summary

Footsteps is an isometric, action-roleplaying game for all major platforms, including the PC, Xbox, and PlayStation. Follow the paths of two unlikely exiles Hinotori Seiji and Hamada Itsuki in a remarkable character study, as they cross a rugged landscape in a coming of age tale of friendship. The fate of the world rests in your hands as you shape the philosophies and morals of a young prince. Will you walk the way of the warrior and rule by the sword, or perhaps choose another path? Regardless of your choice, Footsteps is sure to delight.