

TALE OF RONIN

UI/UX Design Case Study

A Samurai Narrative RPG Experience

Designer	Jaikar Pothula
Project Type	Game UI/UX Design
Engine	Unreal Engine 5
Tools	Figma, Photoshop, Illustration
Focus	Japanese Aesthetics & User Experience

1 — EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study documents the comprehensive UI/UX design for *Tale of Ronin*, an unannounced samurai-themed narrative RPG. The project explored stylized interface design rooted in traditional Japanese sumi-e ink painting aesthetics while maintaining modern usability standards. By synthesizing historical design principles with contemporary game interface patterns, the result is a cohesive, atmospheric experience that reinforces the game's themes of honor, freedom, and redemption.

Key Achievements

- Developed a complete visual design system inspired by Edo-period aesthetics
- Created 15+ interface screens maintaining consistent handcrafted feel
- Designed dynamic brush-stroke reveal animations for menu interactions
- Implemented a restrained color palette reflecting traditional Japanese materials
- Integrated audio direction using traditional Japanese instruments
- Established comprehensive design documentation for production

2 — DESIGN CHALLENGE

Objective: Create an immersive game interface that honors traditional Japanese visual culture while delivering clear, functional game mechanics and navigation.

Core Challenge: Balance aesthetic authenticity with modern usability. The interface needed to feel hand-painted and atmospheric without sacrificing readability, response time, or intuitive player interaction. Every UI element had to reinforce the game's narrative tone while remaining functionally transparent during gameplay.

Design Constraints

- **Cultural Authenticity:** Reflect genuine Edo-period design principles without pastiche or superficial appropriation
- **Performance:** Animations and effects must remain performant in-engine within UMG framework
- **Readability:** All text must remain legible despite organic, brushed UI elements
- **Consistency:** Maintain unified visual language across 15+ unique screens and subsystems

3 — RESEARCH & VISUAL INSPIRATION

The design direction was grounded in historical research of Japanese visual culture, emphasizing sumi-e ink painting techniques and Edo-period architectural design. The project drew inspiration from:

Sumi-e Brushwork: Minimalist ink painting emphasizing simplicity, impermanence, and the essence of form

Wabi-sabi Principles: Beauty found in imperfection, natural textures, and the passage of time

Torii Gates & Temples: Architectural geometry and sacred spatial hierarchies

Traditional Inks & Papers: Authentic material textures informing color and surface treatment

Japanese Typography: Calligraphic traditions blended with modern sans-serif legibility

4 — VISUAL DIRECTION & DESIGN SYSTEM

Art Style Logic: The interface employs sumi-e brushwork combined with muted color tones to emphasize simplicity and impermanence—core principles of traditional Japanese visual culture. Natural motifs (bamboo, fog, sun silhouettes) reinforce the historical atmosphere while keeping the UI visually coherent with the game world.

Color Palette

Color	Hex Code	Purpose	Cultural Significance
Ink Black	#010101	Primary text, strokes	Traditional sumi ink
Sumi Charcoal	#2A2A2A	Secondary hierarchy	Aged charcoal pigment
Parchment Beige	#D4C3A3	Backgrounds, containers	Washi paper texture
Washed Crimson	#B02322	Accents, focus states	Faded natural dyes
Warm Sand	#F6D9C0	Atmospheric layers	Sunlit paper tones

5 — TYPOGRAPHY SYSTEM

Typography balances historical authenticity with modern readability. The system employs a curated hierarchy of fonts selected for their ability to convey narrative immersion while maintaining functional clarity.

Role	Font	Size	Usage
Title	AB-Taro (Calligraphic)	48-64px	Main menu, screen titles
Subtitle/UI Header	Seiko (Modern Japanese)	16-20px	Menu sections, item categories
Body Text	Source Han Sans / Noto Sans JP	11-14px	Dialogue, descriptions, flavor text
Japanese Accents	Kozuka Gothic, Mincho Pro	12-24px	Japanese seals, philosophical terms

This hierarchical system ensures that calligraphic elegance appears in moments of narrative significance (titles, key choices) while functional information remains legible through clean, modern typefaces. Japanese accent typography provides cultural grounding without compromising usability.

6 — UI VISUAL ELEMENTS & INTERACTIONS

Interface components follow handcrafted design principles, emphasizing organic shapes and natural textures over geometric precision.

Key Visual Features

Brush-Stroke Button Reveals: Menu options appear through dynamic sumi-e brush animation sequences, maintaining visual cohesion while signaling interactivity

Fog Drift & Atmospheric Layers: Translucent layered fog creates depth and reinforces impermanence—a core wabi-sabi principle

Sun Glow Pulse Animation: A subtle ambient glow effect on prominent interface elements (sun symbol, important choices) maintains atmospheric presence without distraction

Ink Splash Transitions: Dynamic ink bleed effects between screens create organic scene transitions that feel natural rather than mechanical

Minimal Borders & Organic Shapes: UI containers use soft, layered organic boundaries instead of rigid rectangles, creating visual harmony with the painted aesthetic

7 — ANIMATION & MOTION DESIGN

Subtle environmental animations maintain atmosphere without overwhelming focus. All motion follows natural, observational pacing—inspired by wind rustling leaves and ink gradually settling on paper.

- Brush stroke reveals use a *sumi-e paint sequence* with dynamic fog particle trails, progressively uncovering UI text as the brush passes
- Slow fog drift in background scenes creates parallax movement across translucent layers, suggesting depth and atmospheric flow
- Sun glow pulsation (ambient loop) provides a meditative, breathing quality to key visual elements
- Ink splash scene transitions feature dynamic bleed effects that feel organic and uncontrolled—never mechanical
- All transitions favor easing curves that reflect natural motion: acceleration/deceleration rather than linear progression

These effects enhance mood while preserving a calm, focused interface experience. They reinforce the game's meditative, contemplative tone.

8 — AUDIO & SONIC BRANDING

The sound design draws from traditional Japanese instruments, creating a cohesive multisensory experience that reinforces cultural authenticity and narrative tone.

Bamboo Wind Ambience: Soft, natural wind sound through bamboo stalks creates a living, breathing environment

Shakuhachi Flute Tones: Meditative bamboo flute passages accompany key narrative moments and menu transitions

Taiko Drum Accents: Subtle, distant drum hits punctuate important selections or revelations without jarring the player

Distant Temple Bells: Reverberant bell tones echo across scenes, suggesting vast landscape and spiritual space

9 — KEY INTERFACE SCREENS

Main Menu: Features prominent red sun (cultural symbol) and samurai silhouette. Menu options (Play, Settings, Quit) are revealed through brush-stroke animation on hover/selection. The interface maintains visual balance between calligraphic title text and functional button elements.

Inventory System: Equipment, armor, and items are displayed in organized grids with organic container shapes. Item descriptions use a layered paper card design with Japanese accent typography for thematic items. Each item slot includes subtle brushed selection highlight states.

Dialogue Interface: Character portraits appear in circular frames (inspired by sumi-e composition). Dialogue text uses a clean sans-serif for readability while choice buttons employ the brush-reveal animation. Background features a soft fog drift to maintain narrative presence.

10 — DESIGN PROCESS & TOOLS

Workflow: The design process began with mood board creation and cultural research, progressing through iterative wireframing and visual exploration before finalizing high-fidelity mockups.

Figma: Primary tool for UI wireframing, component design, and interactive prototyping. Figma's layer organization and auto-layout features accommodated the complex hierarchies of Japanese text and organic shape arrangements.

Photoshop: Used for creating hand-painted textures, brush strokes, and custom sumi-e effect treatments. Layer blend modes and digital brush tools simulated traditional ink painting techniques.

Illustration (Adobe/Procreate): Concept sketching, mood board creation, and hand-drawn UI element design. Illustration established the foundational aesthetic and ensured organic, handcrafted visual language.

Unreal Engine UMG: Implementation of final UI systems, animation blueprints, and canvas-based interface rendering within the game engine.

11 — CONCLUSION

Tale of Ronin's UI/UX design successfully merges historical Japanese aesthetic principles with modern game interface design. By grounding the interface in sumi-e painting techniques, wabi-sabi philosophy, and authentic cultural references, the result feels both immersive and respectful. The design system accommodates dynamic animations, functional clarity, and narrative depth without sacrificing any dimension.

The restraint shown in color palette, typography hierarchy, and animation timing ensures that players remain focused on the core narrative experience. Every design choice—from the brush-stroke reveal mechanics to the fog drift effects—reinforces themes of honor, impermanence, and spiritual transcendence.

This design serves as a proof-of-concept for culturally authentic game interface design that honors its inspirations while remaining accessible and functional to modern audiences.

Case Study by **Jaikar Pothula**
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