The Dirt Game System

Game Balance or How to Create an Interesting Zone

"What is it that walks on four legs in the morning, two legs during the day and three legs during the evening?"

The Puzzles

A zone without puzzles would be pretty boring for the runners. A zone with fun and well thought out puzzles is a gem to treasure for any mud.

If you don't have code access you can make it much easier for the person that will try to code your zone by writing an additional file containing all the puzzles. This file should contain detailed explanations of how the puzzle should work, what would trigger it, and **all** messages that would have to be sent to the player, the room, the "victim" of what the puzzle does and, for some puzzles, the message that should reach everyone on the game.

What Makes an Zone Interesting?

First of all, for each and every object you create, give it an examine field. There is nothing more boring than a zone filled with objects that only gives you the standard *"You see nothing special."* text. Everything from doors to weapons should have examine texts. The examine texts are also great places to hide hints for how to solve the puzzles.

You should also write some objects whose only purpose is to be examineable and to give atmosphere. If there is a huge tree in a room in your zone, create a *NoGet* (see the <u>Zone formats</u> file) item called "tree" for that room, that people will be able to examine.

Another good idea is to leave some easy to find small treasures around for no other purpose than that the low level players should have something to find and pit.

A good thing is to have a certain amount of randomness and surprises in the zone. This lends atmosphere and makes it more interesting. (See for example the ice that might hit you in your head if you walk below the glacier in the iceage zone.) Small puzzles and interesting things to do that aren't nessesary for solving the main puzzle are also good. An generous dose of humour will not hurt.

The zone should be exiting and a little dangerous. Or at least be able to give you a small scare at some point... ;)

The ideal main puzzle in a zone should be solveable in several different ways, and none of the solutions should be dependant on eachother.

Try not to mix in modern day things in your zones unless you have a way to "transform" them when the player returns to the main parts of the mud. I know this might be difficult to achieve when you are filled with enthusiasm for the zone you are writing, but try non the less. The game is set in a fairly medieval/magical setting, and explaining a hero running around with a kevlar armor and handgrenades is difficult.

Game Balance

"You mean I can't keep my damage 45 godslayer sword?"

What happens when the game balance is off?

An important factor to keep in mind while writing a zone is game balance. Many aspiring zone builders have failed to keep this in mind and wanted to create the best armors, the best weapon, the most valuable items and the most dangerous mobiles.

Doing this leads to an serious inflation in the game. This can be conquered by increasing the requirements to gain wizardhood, but it isn't something to aspire after. In addition the inflation leads to the game becoming more difficult for the new players, those with little or no experience. It is much better to aim at tricky puzzles than at having the most high stat mobiles.

As a matter of fact, what most muds need are more zones aimed at low or medium level players. This is quite logical since there are more lowlevel players around than it is high level players.

Creating a well balanced zone

Mobiles

A mobile with strength 120 and damage 10 can be seen as an average mobile, whereas a tough one would be around strength 300 and damage 20. If your mobile is going to be humanoid and have a high damage, you should consider letting it wield a weapon of some sort, and lower the damage for the mobile with half of what the damage of the weapon is. (Mobiles only get 1/2 of the weapon's damage added to the damage they do in fights.)

A good rule of thumb is to make mobiles in zones that are aimed at lower level players no more dangerous than the ones in the base zones of the game (see for example the Piper) and with none or very low aggression. Also try to make sure that no treasures in low level zones have a base value above 50 points, unless the player have to solve some puzzle to get it.

You should also keep in mind that on dirt based muds, aggressive mobiles will not wait for the mobile fighting the player to die before they attack. This means that groups of low level mobiles can be very lethal to even high level players with maxed armor and the best weapon in the game. Keep these aggressive mobiles at a very low damage and strength level. Also spell casting mobiles should have lower damage and strength than a corresponding non−spellcasting mobile.

Objects

Setting values on objects can also be tricky. Try not to give the treasures in your zone too high values. Useful objects like keys, food and light sources should have a pretty low value to keep them from being pitted too fast. A valuable treasure should not give much more than 600 points, and if you have lots of treasures in your zone, you should consider lowering the value of them all so that the total gain of pitting them doesn't get too high.

Remember that you shouldn't put too many valuable things in your zone. It is preferable to have many objects where each has a low base value, than a few with a very high value. This will also make the zone more interesting for those lower level players that are taking a look around in the zone for the first time.

If you must have a special object as the reward of solving your zone, try to make it an useful object instead of a super weapon and/or super armor. There are already more zones of this type around than anyone would care to count.

Weapons and armor is a difficult subject, I suggest that you try reading the file about this so that you'll get an idea of whitin what range you can put their damage and armor class. This text also explains some of the more basic types of weapons.

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aber@ludd.luth.se