Legacy of Draconis

The Eldar Insurrection

Story Citadel - Game Design
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Content List

Initial Story Concept

The Initial Story concept begin with the idea of letting the players choose what they wanted to become and be powerful beings that were relied upon by the normal people of the world.

I began to draw out a reasoning for why such powerful characters would end up being in the same area and would be given a 'Quest'. Why would the characters be called upon if they were a regular part of the world?

As I searched for inspiration I came across of the solution of making them mercenaries, hands-for-hire that would be hired by the regular folk to provide support through battle, investigation and in-general adventuring.

I began to play into the natural instinct of people wanting to adventure as that is why people romanticize pirates, look to role playing games for this sense of power and ability to roam and to overcome hurdles in the attempt to solve a problem and become heroes in their own right.

I started writing out a world that such people could exist and realized the necessity for underlying tensions and darkness to add a bit of depth thus creating the idea of ancient powers and kings wanting to return to the ages of their former glories.

As I started to build the narrative from these core concepts I realized that players would lose freedom if they were hand held through a linear story of my telling so I began to create multiple accessbile cities each with a problem and a solution that can be arrived at using any of the skills. As the end solution would be the same I decided to form my narrative as a sort improvised play along that would somehow lead to the end goal as the players would be set up with a problem entering a location and were tasked with finding a solution

Core

- Players are powerful mercenaries
- There is a deeper darkness than merely the monsters faced
- The players can choose their paths to solve the problem and the narrative would build itself toward that end
- The story and game should feed into a sense of adventuring and freedom to battle or run or impose will provided to the players
- Game would use the simple version of the D20 table top RPG system (Roleplaying 101)

Note: Player Character will be regarded to as PC in this document.

Inspiration

Note: Some of the art work for this game was taken from Bravely Default (chracter sheets) and the other art from Dungeons and Dragons (Encounter). The World map is inspired by the world of .hack//SIGN yet is not a replica of the inspiration. The insignias are from steampunk pintrests that I follow.

World Map

Character Sheets

Methusalah Mercenary

Health : 20

Physical Skills:

Skill	Base	Total
Unarmed Combat	8	
Melee Combat	8	
Long Range Combat - Bow and Magic	5	
Combat Defense	7	
Stealth	8	

Mental Skills:

Skill	Base	Total
Investigation	5	
Medicinal	2	

Social Skills:

Skill	Base	Total
Interrogate	5	
Leadership	5	
Movement	4	
Infiltrate	5	
Persuasion	1	

Inventory:

Alcohol	10
Medicinal Herbs	2
Arrows	5
Scrolls	2

Character Sheets

Eldar Noble

Health : 20

Physical Skills:

Skill	Base	Total
Unarmed Combat	2	
Melee Combat	5	
Long Range Combat - Magic	8	
Combat Defense	6	
Stealth	2	

Mental Skills:

Skill	Base	Total
Investigation	5	
Medicinal	8	

Social Skills:

Skill	Base	Total
Interrogate	4	
Leadership	8	
Movement	6	
Infiltrate	4	
Persuasion	6	

Inventory:

Scrolls	10
Medicinal Herbs	8

Character Sheets

Terran Adventurer

Health : 20

Physical Skills:

Skill	Base	Total
Unarmed Combat	4	
Melee Combat	8	
Long Range Combat - Bow	4	
Combat Defense	10	
Stealth	4	

Mental Skills:

Skill	Base	Total
Investigation	2	
Medicinal	6	

Social Skills:

Skill	Base	Total
Interrogate	2	
Leadership	2	
Movement	8	
Infiltrate	6	
Persuasion	8	

Inventory:

Alcohol	4
Medicinal Herbs	6
Arrows	5

Character Sheets

Draconian Warrior

Health : 20

Physical Skills:

Skill	Base	Total
Unarmed Combat	10	
Melee Combat	10	
Long Range Combat - Magic	6	
Combat Defense	2	
Stealth	2	

Mental Skills:

Skill	Base	Total
Investigation	8	
Medicinal	1	

Social Skills:

Skill	Base	Total
Interrogate	8	
Leadership	6	
Movement	6	
Infiltrate	2	
Persuasion	2	

Inventory:

Medicinal Herbs	1
Scrolls	5

Monster Emporium

Bison

Health 15 - Attack 4 – P.Defense 6 – M. Defense 2

Serpents

Health 20 – Attack 6 – P.Defense 2 – M.Defense 5

Trolls

Health 25 – Attack 6 – P.Defense 6 – M.Defence 1

Eagles

Health 15 - Attack 4 – P.Defense 6 – M. Defense 2

Wolves

Health 20 – Attack 6 – P.Defense 2 – M.Defense 5

Forest Guardians

Health 25 – Attack 6 – P.Defense 6 – M.Defence 1

Shrooms

Health 15 - Attack 4 – P.Defense 6 – M. Defense 2

Summoned Beast

Health 20 – Attack 6 – P.Defense 2 – M.Defense 5

River Guardians

Health 25 – Attack 6 – P.Defense 6 – M.Defence 1

Dragonic Minions

Health 15 – Attack 8 - Defense 4 - M.Defense 4

Champion

Health 30 – Attack 10 - Defense 10 - M.Defense 10

Encounter Codex - Puzzle #1

Puzzle Type: Investigative Puzzle

Location: City of the Sun Temple

Puzzle Description:

Upon reaching the intersection the PC find that the passageway to the left is merely an alcove in which a large, lime-stained statue of a four armed gargoyle stands. Dried blood and pieces of broken stone lie strewn about along the wall opposite the gargoyle. Close inspection of the detritus reveals that it is the shattered remains of petrified mercenaries—arms, legs, shoulders, torsos, and one complete head...
When mercenaries enter the gargoyle's line of sight, it speaks in a guttural voice: "Only the hallowed dead may pass their hand through the maw of teeth and gain the half of the key from where I breathe."

At this juncture the PC may choose to
- Investigate the bodies
- Attempt to speak to the Gargoyle and deceive it into thinking the PCs are dead
- Sneak past the Gargoyle
- Run Away

Note - While not a formal Puzzle. This involves smart use of the abilities within the Mental abilities of the PC along with their ability to weave their own story.

Encounter Codex - Puzzle #2

Puzzle Type: Truth Table - Product Identity

Location: City of the Moon Temple

Puzzle Description:

In the hallway sneaking in the shadows is a male elf named Valeron. He greets the PCs in a jovial albeit raspy voice, not so eager to strike up conversation.

If asked, he reveals himself to be a fellow mercenary who was asked to investigate this temple. He was initially accompanied by two companions—a human fighter, Brunt, and a halfling thief, Slik, who were killed in the temple of the City of the Sun.

If the mercenaries are friendly, he will disclose to them a pair of rumors he learned of during his travels. One of the rumors, Valeron asserts, is true, while the other is false. He does not recall which is which:

First rumor—There is half of a false wand key in this dungeon to trap thieves; the real wand key is hidden somewhere else.

Second rumor—The half of wand key is guarded by a four-armed gargoyle in this dungeon.

At this juncture the PC may choose to
- Figure out which of the two statements is true
- Kill Valeron
- Investigate Valeron
- Persuade Valeron

Note - While this a more formal Puzzle than the previous, the PC as mentioned above can choose not to solve the puzzle and instead attack Valeron in combat and kill him which breaks away from a puzzle game, but still prgresses the story.
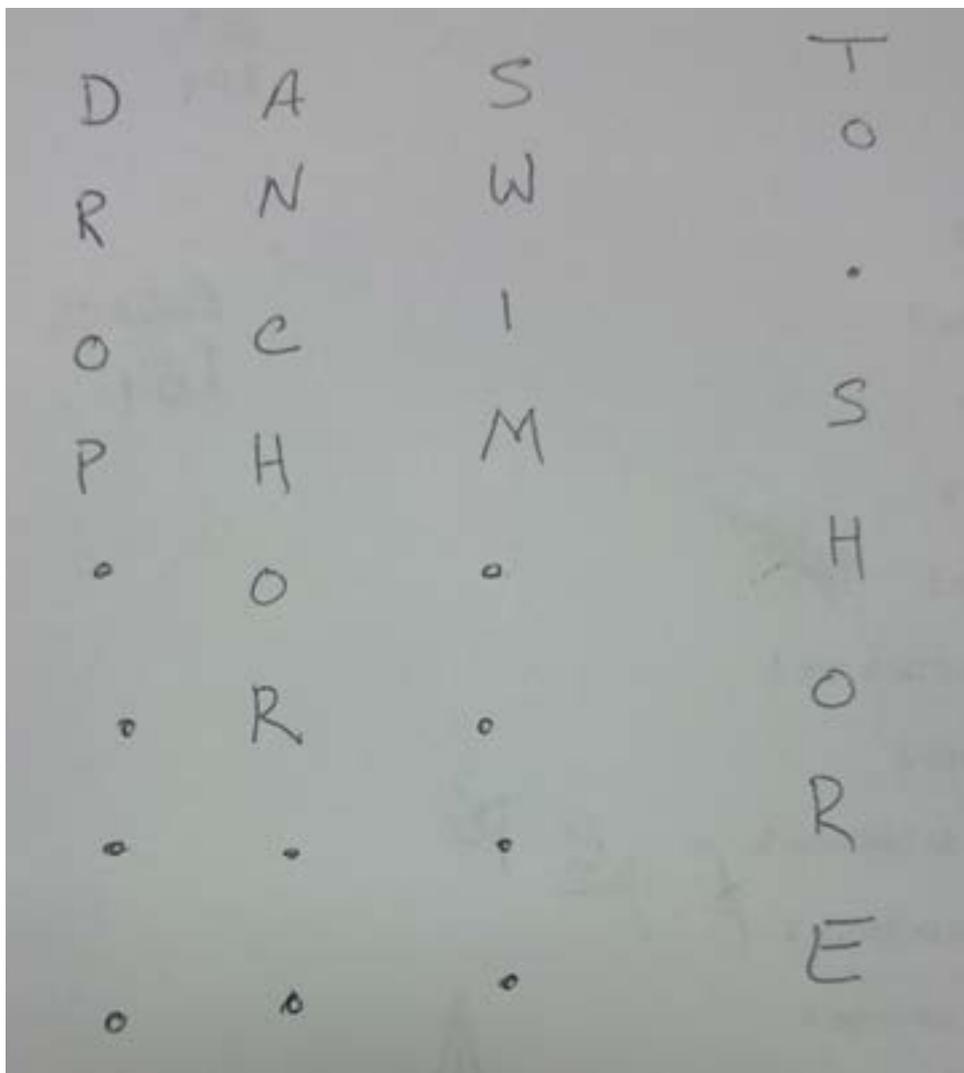
Encounter Codex - Puzzle #3

Puzzle Type: Word Formation

Location: Outside South Central Shrine

Puzzle Description:
Select a tile from each column to open the way into the Shrine and Pass through.
A tile contains a single character

D	A	S	T
R	N	W	O
O	C	I	.
P	H	M	S
.	O	.	H
.	R	.	O
.	.	.	R
.	.	.	E
o	o	o	

Encounter Codex - Puzzle #4

Puzzle Type: Investigative

Location: Inside the South Central Shrine

Puzzle Description:

In the middle of the room is an Orb, the very Eye of the Seeker that the mercenaries are searching for as the Eye will reveal the truth about the increasing number of monsters that are attacking Trade City.

However the Orb appears to be fixed by a certain mechanism. A switch needs to be triggered to release the Eye of the Seeker.
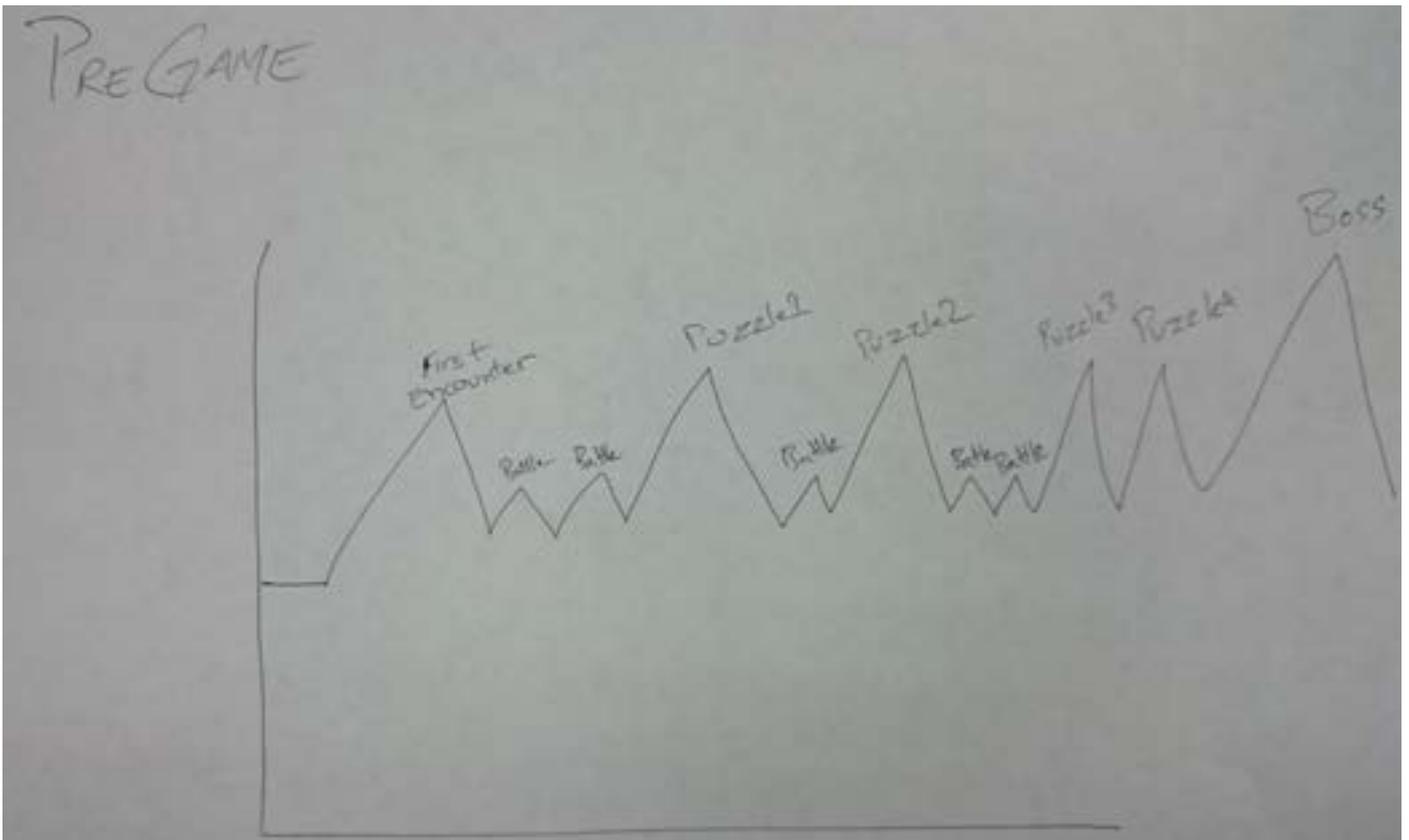
All that is present in the room are 4 Sarcophagi each one with its own mural.

At this point the PCs must choose how to approach this room as a misstep may release in awakening the dead, who are never happy about waking up after such a long slumber.

Hint : The Murals of the sarcophagi may provide insight regarding the specifics of this room.
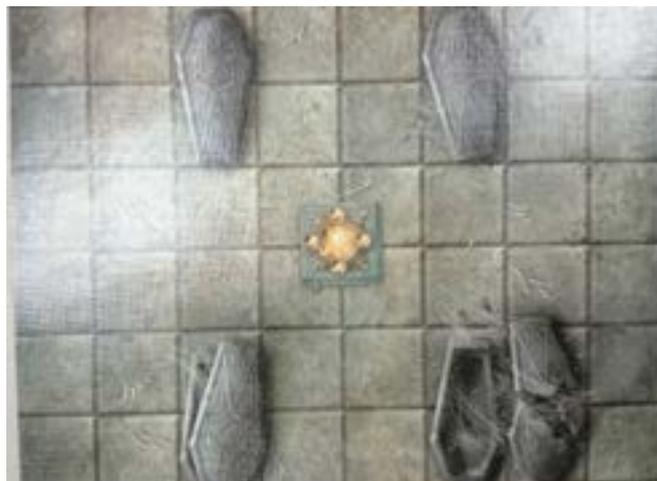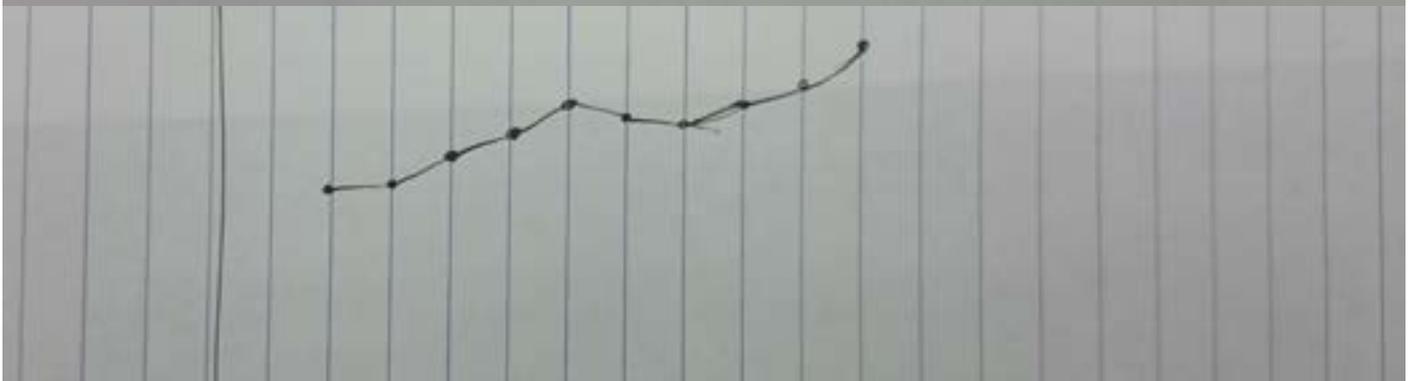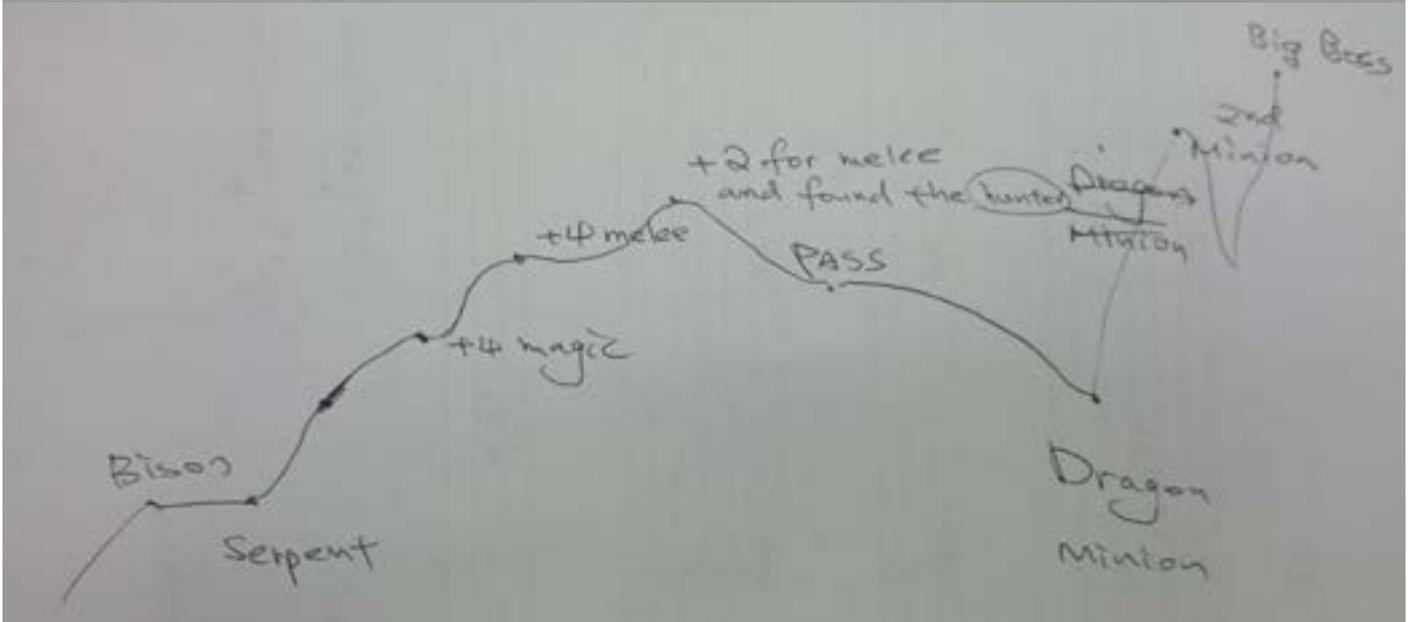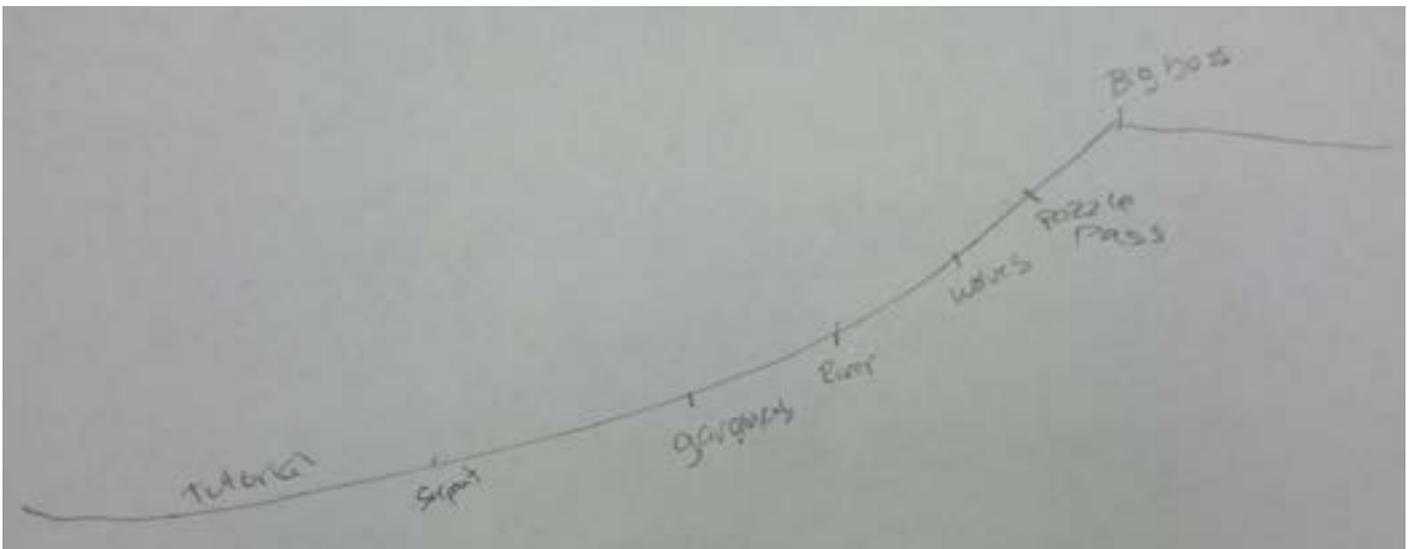
Expected Interest Curve

Step-By-Step Narrative

1. PCs are hired by Trade City to fight raiding monsters coming in from the Land of Sands and Time

2. First Battle: Introduction to Battle: Bison
   +exp,+skill

3. Now Trade City requests the PCs to find out the cause of the raiding

4. Successfully travel to the kingdom of Mad King Byakuya

5. Successfully persuade guards and the Mad King into revealing that they had nothing to do with the matter, nut there may be a prophet who may be able to help

6. Get thrown out of the Mad King's kingdom

7. Make their way to the Land of Sands and Time, but due to bad navigation roll they must fight serpants.
   +exp,+skill

8. They meet the Sand King who introduces them to the Prophet

9. Tasked to find the truth by the Prophet, the Sand King says the Eye of the Seeker Orb may be able to help.

10. Travel with no losses to Central via Plains, where they find out about the two halves of the key.

11. Attacked by River Gaurdians while on their way to City of Sun Temple
    +exp, +skill

12. Go to City of Sun Temple where they solve the Gargoyle encounter and gain 1/2 a key, also find out that two of the statues were recently stabbed before statue-fication

13. Go back to Central and heal.

14. Go to City of Moon Temple

15. Choose to Negotiate with Valeron, and successfully get him to admit to killing his comrades and that he is working for a higher power, recover other 1/2 of key

16. [Random Encounter] As they half both halves of the key they are attacked by Dragonic Knights serving the higher power.
    +exp,+skill

17. Make way back to Prophet (Not Sand King), who tells them that ancient ruins have arisen to the west across the mountains

18. Attacked by wolves in the mountains
    +exp, +skill

19. Successfully make it to ruins and investigate them for location of the shrine to the Eye of the Seeker Orb, which is on the island South of Central

20. First city on the island Silia is incorrect

21 Attacked by another Dragonic Knight on way to South Central City
    +exp (not enough for skill change)

22. Arrive at South CenWtral City and solve both Encounter 3 and 4.

23. Having gained the Orb called Eye of the Seeker, it reveals to them the Sand King was the perpatrator, wanting to regain the power of his ancestors he colluded with the denizens of the forbidden continent. He has now taken the Prophet captive.

24 [Boss Battle] PCs fight and defeat the Champion to save the prophet but the Sand King escapes to the Forbidden Continent

Note - The game was played out on the world map

Interest Curves from Players

Interest Curve Perceived
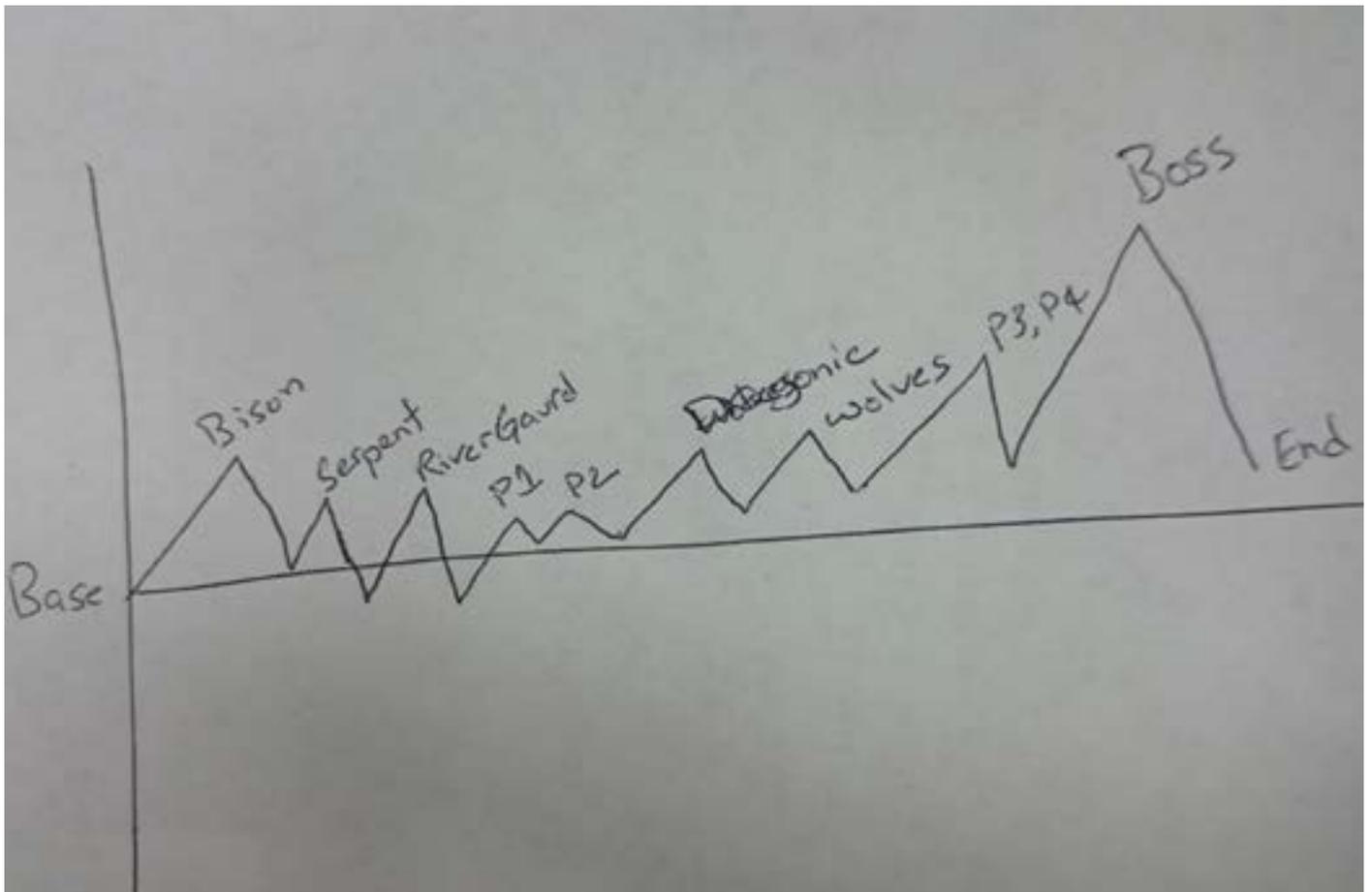
Analysis

Game Narrative - Player Story - Improvisation

My understanding of the game narrative and player story, along with how this experience played out, got me to believe that the flow of game narrative being enhanced by a synchronized player story. While it was clear to me having played table top RPGs when I was younger that forcing the players into a corridor like structure would not be 'fun', I did have some initial trouble with letting go of control of how the story progresses. As I ran the game initially I already had an idea as to how to start off with a small goal and then turn it into a larger goal for the PCs. However I was not in control of where they went or how they attempted to go about completing that goal. I found myself coming up with ways to ensure that the players' story aligned with the overall epic narrative of the game that did not lead them into some sort of a sub quest loop.

At this point I discovered the importance of properly setting a goal, the epic quest directive that immerses the players. I found that properly worded goals aligned the player story and the game narrative well. My encounters were made to have the players control how they went about solving the problem ahead of them leading them to work for the information of the piece that would unlock the next door. I also found that badly worded goals lead to too much freedom which prevented the player's story from aligning with the game's narrative. For example at the start when I was still trying to get used to telling my story I found that the third objective which was the first time the players were not on a tutorial-like mission was too openly worded which made them want to do other things, like go to the Mad King Byakuya's Kingdom, which was not initially part of my narrative plan/structure, I had thought that as the monsters/beasts were coming from the Land of Sand and Time they would go there as an obvious choice but I was mistaken.

It was through this and many other similar instances in battles and in investigative/explorative sequences that I found Improvisation to be my best friend. I began to somehow use their success or failure in the attempt of doing something outside of my narrative box, to bridge their player stories back into the game narrative. If they failed to perform an action it was because they had not done an essential objective within the narrative that would give them a sense of direction in their own player's progression. Other instances was when the players rolled exceptionally well with the D20 die or exceptionally bad with the die, I would improvise and make up a tale of a critical hit to the monster to feed to their sense of luck and power. Other times I would make choices that would lead the players to discover new abilities or new ways to use their characters rather than simply finishing them off and making them feel bad at playing the game. I found that not only did this enhance the immersion of the players but the players began to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the PCs more, making them better players.

Once aligned the players themselves take control of the games narrative they clearly see how the story is flowing and what they should next without much suggestion. They also begin using their skills in ways that enhance their game play and make them feel like powerful characters in a fantastical world rather than normal people struggling to play a game because it is too complicated. I found this removed some of the burden of bringing the players back to the story, allowing me to setup the game leading up to the major plot points that I had created a narrative structure around. This made some of the ending plot points impactful and meaningful to the players and they had fun and were immersed at that point.

Analysis

Puzzles in Narrative - Escaping The Bioshock [Mini-game] Syndrome

The next space I found myself spending time in is the design of a/the puzzle for this game. While I ended up going down the route of dungeon encounters, with an overhead system of gather the pieces to unlock the door, I found puzzles to be detracting from the whole Narrative Experience. I personally call it the BioShock syndrome, aptly because the puzzle especially in that game seem to remove the Player from their immersion in the game at hand and place them in a completely new space. Even if I had a really good puzzle, I felt it was pointless if the puzzle did not have much to do with the game, even if the puzzle was well 'themed'.

I did a lot of research into what a codex was and how these were used by Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) game masters while running their games. At the same time I had to warp the encounter codex archetypes into something that would suit my game as I had simplified a lot of the D&D game play system so as to make it more free flowing. It was at this point that I started to ponder upon the idea that while there would be puzzles; players could choose to find different ways to solve them within the realm of the game's world and mechanics. For example instead of figuring out the truth in the second dungeon encounter a player could simply attack Valeron and kill him without caring for the puzzle, and I will have to react to continue progress as that too is a viable solution to the problem (maybe not the puzzle but definitely the problem) at hand for the player.

Which got me thinking about how puzzles fit into this in the first place, would the best puzzle for a game like this be one which fits into the norms of the world of the RPG a tricky problem with a simplistic solution yet at the same time could be solved through other means that may not have been thought of, much like a lot of the puzzles we find in our way in reality. When we are puzzled by something we look for a new perspective or someone with a different perspective brings that to the fray and it sometimes gets solved, perhaps the puzzle is not meant to bring interest or mind boggling challenge for the players but is something that is used to further the players' immersion into the games world and the perspectives found there.

Taking these thoughts into consideration I crafted my puzzles to be more of a process of forcing the players to imagine the world I created, a way to immerse them into the story, to become invested in their PCs and to make them view the problems through a perspective of my world. However in the interest of not being too full of myslef and this new perception of puzzles in narrative games I also added in the puzzle to enter the shrine of the Eye of the Seeker Orb which is a common word scramble.

Analysis

The Power of Player Character Growth

Something I wanted in my game was the feature that after a battle players got experience and this experience could help the players grow. In the case of my game I made it so that depending in what monster was killed and how it was killed the players would get some skill points that they could add to their characters skill points to gained permanent boost. I wanted this because I felt that not only would it immerse the player through the act of investing in their character but would also help increase their sense of power which is something that I wanted the players to have, the feeling that by playing the game they could grow and be more powerful.

In some ways this system was really good, during the play through the players started investing in order to prepare for upcoming battles, improve on weaknesses or increase their strengths depending on how the player felt that the character should go. This imparted some of the players' personality on the characters and drove the immersion of the game. At the same time it helped make the players feeling of power

At the same time other things stated to break down. One of the characters became really strong and while in order to keep the fun going I kept allowing that character to stockpile strength disregarding defense, I myself was not being a smart 'AI' for the enemies distributing the damage amongst the team so as not to kill them off without finishing the tale, but in truth I perhaps should have forced the curtailing of such an action by dealing some damage or creating some random encounters. While this does show my naivety in running a table top RPG it also goes to show that providing players the ability to increase stats is a double edged sword especially if not properly prepared for it from the side of the game master.

I believe the best way is to understand how each player is playing the game and give a certain type of stat enhancement based on whether the GM wants to slow down or speed up the growth of the player. Another way to solve this would be to use the reward system of items that can increase stats when equipped, creating the situation where the players have to decide who to give the item to. However I feel growth of characters is more powerful than merely equipping items.

Analysis

On-the-Fly Prototyping, Testing & Balancing

One of the big takeaways from running a table top RPG was the ease at which ideas could be tested and balanced. For me especially towards the later stages as the players got stronger than I had expected I began tweaking variables on my monsters to make them more difficult. I all of a sudden gave them the ability to call up an ally if they were on the verge of death and the players couldn't finish it of due to a bad roll. I also increased the defense of my last boss to counter the increased attack of the player characters.

I changed the way some of the movement checks and defense checks were occurring and the players did not realize much of this as they were immersed in their characters growth and accomplishing the goals. I was happy and excited at the fact that I had been able to create a good level of immersion into this world of mine yet at the same time I realized that I had not balanced the game properly so this impro-vised testing and balancing really came to my aid and prevented the game from breaking down quickly. At the same time some of the initial balance attempts made the enemies that came out really skewed towards either the very easy or the very hard. I would like to think I did well with the serpent battle though.

I found that this testing and balancing could be applied to the various loactions and dungeons as well. Realizing that the game running too smoothly for the players courtesy of a few lucky high num-ber rolls, I added in a random encounter to hit them with a battle and give them something to do while I sorted my notes and narrative structure out for the quick pace of the players. I also added in the territory of the ancient ruins into my game having realized that the players had completely skipped a section of the story by travelling to a different place than the two places I had expected them to go to with the information that had previously gotten.

While it is hard to keep track of the changes of this on the fly rapid prototyping, the process was very useful in ensuring the smooth running of the game along with improving it while playing it so that the current players enjoyed the improved content and wouldn't have to wait for the next playtest to do so. It also put me in a position of constantly flexing the design muscles while running the game.