



GAME CONCEPT

A Brief Overview of the Hero's Path Project and Game Design

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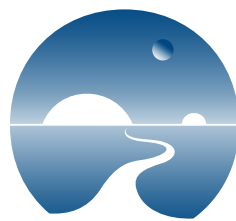




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The Tangled Ouroboros

The Ouroboros is a serpent eating it's own tail. Different versions of this symbol can be found repeated in much of the artwork for Hero's Path.

For more information on the Ouroboros, significance to the mythology, and other artwork; refer to the Treatment Document mentioned below in the Preface.



PREFACE

The few, the proud, the people who actually read a preface...

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to introduce the concepts and motivations of the Hero's Path project. I'll tell you what kind of game the Hero's Path demo is, and what makes it unique.

Origin

Hero's Path is an idea I had several years ago, and I've been tinkering with it ever since. It is not based on, or developed for, any company or university. For me, this project is a challenging hobby through which I can explore software engineering, user interface design, graphic art, and game design. In addition, the Hero's Path project allows me to explore some of my own theories on emergent and chaotic software systems.

Warning

Hero's Path is not another monotonous click & kill action game, or another tedious Orc vs. Elf saga. This is a unique, single player, computer role-playing game (CRPG), with content and play action unlike any other. So, if you don't have the interest or the attention span, then Hero's Path may not be for you.

Further Reading

For more specific information on the game design, refer to the *Treatment* document. It describes how the game will be played in more detail, including screenshots, game rules, storylines, and even the mythology. Find it online at:

<http://www.herospath.com/doc/Treatment.pdf>

For more specific information on the technical aspects of the project, including the D3 Engine, refer to the *Technical Concept* document. It includes a brief description of the software design, and discussions on emergent and chaotic behavior. Find it online at:

<http://www.herospath.com/doc/TechnicalConcept.pdf>

All other information about Hero's Path can be found on the web site:

<http://www.herospath.com>

Feedback

Please feel free to contact me, no matter what your interest may be. I always encourage questions, comments, and criticisms:

askme@herospath.com

Thanks for reading,
Ziesche Til Newman
Owner, Lead Developer





I GAME CONCEPT

Here you will find the goals and ideas behind the Hero's Path game.

Introduction

Hero's Path is a 2D computer role-playing game (CRPG), set in a fictional medieval world rich with myths and magic. Players create a character and lead them through adventures using their combined wits and abilities.

Bored? I sure am. So many of these games sound the same.

However, Hero's Path is not like all those other RPG's that rehash the same old "Orcs vs. Elves casting lightning bolt spells". The world of Ithryn is unique with new stories, creatures, weapons, and magic.

Hero's Path is also a demonstration of D3, a new kind of game engine and user interface. The D3 software simulates the game world, instead of scripting it, to provide next-level realism and creative play action.

So along with a refreshing take on the medieval genre, Hero's Path demonstrates a new interactive technology; providing an unbelievably detailed virtual world, and an unprecedented new level of freedom to explore it.


Goal

The Hero's Path project goal is to complete a demo of the game. The purpose of the demo will be (1) to prove the game design entertaining, and (2) prove the game engine (D3) feasible.

My goal is not to put Hero's Path on the rack of every game store in the country, but to release a free demo with groundbreaking emergent play action, stunning visuals, and lots of fun. In essence: Proving the concept, and paving the way for this new style of interactive entertainment.

Motivation

Before Hero's Path was a game, it was a technical endeavor to explore human-computer interaction using a new kind of software simulator (D3). The motivation for making the D3 Engine into the Hero's Path game is two fold:



First, the game provides a perfect test platform for the D3 Engine's many subsystems. This is why the Hero's Path game is based in an ancient medieval genre, because the materials and physics involved are simplified.

Secondly, RPGs were originally played for a creative storytelling experience bound together by a common vision of medieval adventure. Unfortunately, modern CRPGs have strayed from that kind of entertainment, and become focused on visuals and repetition. I think CRPGs are ready for the transition away from visual innovation, and towards interactive innovation.

This is exactly what the D3 Engine can deliver. In fact, this is also where the codename D3 comes from: The opposite of 3D, D3 trades visual realism for playable realism. This is why the demo's target audience will be focused on game developers rather than players.

Innovation

This section describes some key features of the Hero's Path demo that make it unique.

A World of Detail

-Here is what I meant by "an unbelievably detailed virtual world"

This short list of examples highlights the level of detail maintained by the D3 Engine:

- ❖ Individual teeth, eyes, patches of hair, even fingers and toes on creatures.
- ❖ Every leaf on every tree, even morning dewdrops.
- ❖ The individual pieces of objects, such as arrowheads and guide feathers on arrows.
- ❖ *The list goes on and on...*

A World of Possibilities

-and here is what I meant by "an unprecedented new level of freedom to explore it"

You can interact with all the details of the game world, including all those mentioned above, and more. This means you can reach out and touch, pickup, attack, cast a spell on, and in all other ways *work with* everything! For example, you could pick the individual leaves from trees, or aim your arrow at the single eye of a Cyclops.

The UI also includes a special generalized command set that allows for creative combinations of tasks and objects. The "coat" command, for example, is used to cover or smear a liquid onto an object. It could be used to *coat* your arrowheads in poison before battle. It could also be used to smear healing ointment on a wound. The possibilities that arise from this single command seem countless when the game world is full of playable details. -And this is just one of a dozen similar commands.

*The possibilities are limited only by your imagination,
and your character's abilities.*



A World of Realism

-and here is the kind of realism that you can expect

No matter how you interact with any of those details, the D3 engine is running in the background maintaining realistic cause and effects relationships. The result is a game system that lets you think up clever tricks.

For example, if you did shoot an arrow into the single eye of a Cyclops, then he would really be blind. Unlike most games that simply remove "hit-points", Hero's Path will prevent the Cyclops from effectively doing anything that requires his eye. Watch out though, because the same goes for you and your eyes, and legs, and hands...

The point is not that Hero's Path has some realistic features, it's that all of the Hero's Path game world will react realistically. This means that every obstacle intrinsically has multiple solutions, allowing Players the creative freedom to find them their own way.

A World of Magic

With all of this detail and realism, I didn't forget the fantastic.

Playing with magic is a big part of the Hero's Path game. Spells can be learned and cast in ways familiar to RPG fans, but Hero's Path extends this concept with Spell Weaving.

Spell Weaving allows you to pick the amount of power, target(s), damage vs. healing, and even the form that a spell takes. This not only allows you to change existing spells, but to make new ones from your imagination. The Spell Weaving screen lets you make all these adjustments visually by dragging and dropping, all while watching the magic swirl in response to your actions.

Spells can also be used to enchant items. For example, you could take a fire spell that burns an enemy, weave it to last for the whole day, and then cast it on your sword. Eventually, you can reach a skill level that allows your spells to last forever, and craft your own unique enchanted items!

In addition, the Hero's Path magic system is based on all the detail and realism described above. For example, if you cast that burning spell on a helmet worn by some creature, then his head will start burning! If he takes that helmet off with his hands, then not only will he have to drop his weapon first, but his hands will burn taking it off! This in turn might prevent him from picking that weapon back up again...

One last magic system innovation to mention, is the ability to specify an action for spells to perform. Your character has huge lists of all the possible actions he/she can perform, like the 'Coat' command mentioned above. Each of these can be dragged & dropped onto the spell-weaving screen. So for example, you could weave a spell that builds a fire, or swings your sword, or applies a healing powder to a wound automatically!



Bulleted Summary

Design Guidelines

- i. Play action more akin to creative adventure and storytelling, rather than repetitive fighting.
- ii. Unique medieval fantasy based on archetypes, not stereotypes.
- iii. An immersing non-linear story, that is never pushy or forced.

Key Features

- i. Next-level freedom of action, rather than a short list of buttons.
- ii. A world of unprecedented *playable* detail, rather than simply visual detail.
- iii. An intuitive drag & drop UI, allowing easy interactions with the game world.
- iv. Realistic cause & effect play action, allowing Players to think up their own solutions.
- v. A more surprising and *magical* magic system, allowing Players to alter existing spells, weave their own unique spells, and create interacting combinations of enchantments.
- vi. A map system that changes the game world based on the Players actions, bringing relevance and weight to their decisions.
- vii. A dynamic plot system, continually creating new and unique quests that emerge from the world as the Player shapes it, and allowing games to last as long as your character lives.
- viii. A combat system based on skill sets, that is customizable and nail biting.
- ix. A sound effects engine that dynamically creates unique sounds based on the collision information provided by D3's physics simulations.
- x. Attributes ("stats") that reflect and change with your character's bodily condition.

Vision

If you get it, *if you really get it*, then you will see that Hero's Path is not about the handful of examples listed here, but about the world of possibilities that could never be listed.

It's not about any one particular feature; It's about creating a game system so realistic, that Players are free to try their own ideas.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Those who contributed to the Hero's Path game, listed alphabetically by last name.

Angela Diegel - *Graphic Art, Web Design*

Angela designed and hand drew the runes that give shape to the Hero's Path mythology and user interface. (*Note the intricate patterns at the top and bottom of these pages.*) In addition, Angela has been a great talent to lean on when designing web pages.

Find Angela, and more of her work at: <http://www.angelanewman.com>

Brandon Eckert - *Game Design, Programming*

Brandon was the first person that joined me in developing Hero's Path. Specifically, Brandon helped scrutinize and plan the game design, and authored the first versions of the developer toolsets and databases.

Special thanks to Brandon for sharing his creative gift, his technical expertise, and his love of games. Brandon is truly Sam Gangee of the path.

Eric Faller - *Programming*

Eric Faller wrote a powerful and versatile 2D graphics platform called Isis. Isis is a fully functional graphics platform with text rendering, drag & drop, and even special effects such as fading.

You can occasionally catch Eric at: <http://www.munition.org>

David Alvillar - *Musical Composition and Recording*

Dave is an amazing musician, composer, and Studio Technician. Using all of these skills, he has composed a musical score for the Hero's Path, and intro movie.

Paul Massison

Paul is an artist whose enormous talent with the pen is evident in all of the Hero's Path creature and character drawings. In addition, Paul provided some great storyboards, canvas paintings, and digital manipulations.