

Detritus

A not quite successful exercise By Will Wright

Preliminary design and 1st draft on an Alphasmart 3000 <http://www.alphasmart.com> which is a wonderful tool for game designers or writers of any kind. Refinement and organization done in TextPad on a PC running WindowsXP. Layout in Adobe InDesign 2.0. Arial 12pt used for the body with 18pt and 48pt titles. Pitiful graphics created desperately at the last moment in MS Paint.

Undone by 1 Break to watch an episode of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, a 4 hour nap, a 2 hour nap, poor organization skills, bad timing ignoring that the last 4 hours of the 24hr period were already spoken for.

Forward

Detritus is my first attempt at a 24hr game.

The idea behind this exercise (based on Scott McCloud's 24hr comic) is to complete a 24 page RPG in 24 hours (although the 24 page rule, like chivalry, seems to be more of a vague ideal than a reality for most designers) for more info see <http://www.24hourrpg.com> or <http://1km1kt.net/forum/viewforum.php?f=12>

When I began I decided that I wanted to play with a few themes that keep recurring in my ideas; micro-epic scale, light-hearted fun, and gestalt play. Micro-epic was a word coined by a friend of mine to describe shows such as Hercules and Xena. Where kingdoms often seemed to consist of a few hundred people at most and entirely different cultures always seemed a few days walk away. I added some inspiration from the comics Gear by Doug Tennapel and Tales of the Bean-world by Larry Marder that have been rattling around in my subconscious for years looking for an exit and also the "Beer & Pretzels" fun of Ninja Burger and Kobolds ate my baby by 9th Level Games. Halfway through I also realized that two other strong inspirations were forcing their way in, one in the form of the painfully addictive web game Kingdom of Loathing (www.kingdomofloathing.com), and the other from Creeks and Crawdads a beloved game of my youth (and the first I was aware of to use the beer & pretzels label).

I took all these sources, dumped them into the blender of sleep deprivation and procrastination, and here you see the results. I consider this draft of the game a failure. While it could technically be called a game it is missing a lot of what I wanted to put in it and the remainder is clunky and inelegant. Several pages were deleted in a fit of annoyance at how little they resembled what was forming in my head, that entire aspect of the game (my favorite) will have to be reworked and rewritten.

I do not however consider the exercise a failure. Poor time management and procrastination were my primary enemies and having fought them under these stresses I feel that I have gained a better understanding of these weaknesses and in the future will be more prepared to deal with them. Also several good ideas were given a voice (albeit a muffled voice, possibly in Esperanto) and I think I have a pretty darned good game in it's embryonic state. This was fun and challenging and frustrating and I can't wait to do it again!

Introduction

“Listen to me children! Detritus is a used up land. We squeezed the last drops of life from her a long long time ago. Wait, sit down, I’m not done yet! Tonight I will tell you of what we have lost that you will value and protect that which we have left.” The old Gnome sighs and rubs his hands through his thinning hair.

“You, Goblin, stop hitting that rock, it’s harmless! Once there were many cities, lovely to behold, a days walk in any direction, now there are only mountains of rubble where they once stood, birthplace of the Gremlins.” A sweep of his hands encompasses the Gremlins in the group. He points at one particularly hyper example.

“Yes, you too, all gremlins, now sit down! Once the factories produced many things that were useful and good to look at, hard tools to work with and soft clothes to wear, now they are all broken and lay silent, the birthplace of the Gnomes.” The Gremlins lose interest and begin looking for some rocks to stack.

“Hey, come back here, there is more! Once the lands between towns were safe to travel, the roads were clear and one could walk safely for days in any direction. Now the wilds are full of danger, the birthplace of the Goblins.” The assembled Goblins let out a cheer and several small fights break out. One young Gnome looks confused and starts counting on his fingers.

“No, I didn’t forget a race, no I covered the Gremlins with the cities! Our three peoples were born from the fall and all that we have of the old world are a few treasured artifacts **and the Protector that defends our town.” The old Gnome sighs.

“You know, that great big hulking thing in the middle of town, yes that one, with the armor and the spikes!

Anyway,** I tell you these things as we are approaching a time of hardship. There are other towns to the north, south, east, and west that grow restless. They see our town, with our few remaining trees and clear-cool well, defended only by our single aging Protector. They see us and they want what we have.” For the moment the old Gnome has all eyes on him.

“War is coming, as sure as the rains, and you are the chosen who, with the help of our Protector, will save us from this coming storm. No, not an actual storm, a metaphorical one, ok never mind the storm, forget the storm, we are going to be attacked and it’s up to you to save us! Yes, you can go now.”

Detritus is a fast and furious game of co-operation among beings with the attention span of a drunk kitten. The players are a group of their towns most gifted and promising citizens (not that this is saying a whole lot) who have been charged with defending their town from foreign invasion.

Creating your character.

The 6 Stats

Each character has three main stats; Thinking, Crafting, and Hitting. Each of these Stats starts out at 1 die but the player gets to add a die to one stat of their choice to make it 2 dice.

Thinking: Your characters ability to think, remember, and plan. Each die of thinking allows you to remember an extra Idea.

Crafting: Your characters skill in working with its hands, the ability to use an idea to combine two things into something more (hopefully) useful.

Hitting: Your characters aggression and skill in making do what you want by repeated application of kinetic force.

Your character also gets three sub-stats. Toughness, Speed, and Stubbornness. Each of these starts at 2 dice but the player can move these dice around however they wish when they are making their character as long as no stat falls below 1.

Toughness: Your characters resistance to the aforementioned repeated application of kinetic force. In other words to not get hurt. You can also carry one item per die of Toughness

Speed: Your characters energy level, your speed determines how fast you move and whether or not you act before someone else.

Stubbornness: The ability to stick with something no matter what gets in your way or distracts you. Also your ability to make others stick to it as well. You also get to carry one item per die of Stubbornness.

Choosing your race:

The three races of Detritus are fairly similar physically but do have some important differences.

Gnomes: The thinkers. (Gnomes get an extra Die in Thinking and in Stubbornness)

To the extent that anything can still be built or maintained it is the Gnome that knows how to do it. With an innate knowledge that two things can be put together to make a bigger thing Gnomes are the only race that can create (albeit in a limited fashion). Unfortunately their small size makes them unsuitable for most labor. Gnomes are the only race that can come up with an Idea to combine two things.

Gremlins: The workers (Gremlins get an extra Die in Crafting and in Speed)

Great lovers of action the Gremlin is never happy if it is not doing something. The attention span of a Gremlin is quite short and without supervision and focus they often work at cross purposes to themselves. Gremlins automatically learn Ideas and as long as they are using these Ideas they are the least likely to forget them.

Goblins: The fighters (Goblins get an extra Die in Hitting and in Toughness)

Fearless and quick, Goblins are natural soldiers. Goblins have difficulties imagining a resolution to a problem that does not involve hitting that problem with something, and so rely on more imaginative races for tactical guidance. Goblins are the only race that can use complex weapons (weapons made out of more than two things)

Now cross out any Idea boxes beyond the 2 free ones and any your Thinking stat gets you, add a name, and that's all! you are done!

Creating your town.

In a quiet little valley with some trees and a lake lies The Town. Built from the rubble of some ancient building, the town is a series of small huts and silos surrounding the town well.

Lay out the town map and roll 3d6 for each blank square to see what it contains. Draw that in on the map.

3 An old shed (roll twice and pick your favorite if there is already an old shed on the map)

4 A Silo full of Sacks

5 A Silo full of Sticks

6 Ropemaker (Roll again if there is already a ropemaker on the map)

7 Tree

8 A Goblins Hut

9 A Gremlins Hut

10 Nothing

11 Nothing

12 A Gremlins Hut

13 A Goblins Hut

14 Rubble

15 Weaver (Roll again if there is already a Weaver on the map)

16 A Silo full of Rocks

17 A Silo full of Sacks

18 A Shop (roll twice and pick your favorite if there is already a shop on the map)

A Gnomes Hut: The home of a wise old Gnome who can teach one Idea.

A Goblins Hut: The home of a Goblin who will fight along side you. He has a Hitting and a Toughness of two dice.

A Gremlins Hut: The home of a bored and eager Gremlin that can be taught one Idea and will follow you around making that item until he runs out of materials.

A Silo full of Ropes: A storage Silo containing 2d6 Ropes

A Silo full of Sticks: A storage Silo containing 2d6 Sticks

A Silo full of Sacks: A storage Silo containing 2d6 Sacks

A Silo full of Rope: A storage Silo containing 2d6 Rope

Tree: An actual living tree. You can spend a turn to break off a stick and roll a die. On a roll of 6 that was the last stick and the tree is gone.

Rubble: A pile of rubble. You can spend a turn to pick up a rock and roll a die. On a roll of 6 that was the last rock and the rubble is gone.

A Shop: A friendly shopkeeper offers you any simple item from the basic list in exchange for 2 rocks, 2 sticks, or a single sack or rope.

An old shed: A spooky old shed left over from the old days. You can spend a turn searching and roll 1 die. On a roll of 6 you discover an artifact created by the referee. On a 1 you never come out, make a new character. Spoooooooooky!

Equipment:

There isn't a whole lot of equipment available, it is up to the Gnomes to come up with more advanced items using these simple materials.

Stick: A stick can be used to hit someone (+1d Hitting) or to poke things

Rock: You can hit someone with a rock or throw it (+1D Hitting or use of hitting up to a square away)

Sack: You can put up to 4 things in a sack and it only counts as carrying one thing (you can't put a sack in another sack if the first sack has anything in it, nice try!)

Rope: You can tie things together or climb using a rope.

a Gnome can try to invent something new using two items. To do this he must come up with an Idea.

An idea is a simple formula, "Of you take something, and add something else, you can make something new." The exact ramifications of this new item are determined by the whim of the referee but here are some samples. The referee should take into account what is being added to what, notice that adding a stick to a rock is different than adding a rock to a stick.

Some sample Ideas

If you take a and add a		you get a
Stick	Rock	Club (+2d Hitting)
Stick	Rope	Fishing Pole (to catch fish)
Stick	Sack	Butterfly Net (to catch small things)
Stick	Stick	Pole (longer than a stick, you can poke things up to a square away)
Rope	Rock	Rock on a rope (+1 hitting or hitting at up to two squares away)
Rope	Stick	Pulley (Ooooh advanced machines!)
Rope	Sack	Sack Trap (if something goes inside you can pull the string and catch it)
Rope	Rope	Net (to catch things)
Rock	Rock	Sharp Rock (+2d Hitting or +1d Hitting up to a square away)
Rock	Rope	Weight (to hold things down)
Rock	Stick	Lever (to move heavy things)
Rock	Sack	Weighted Sack (To hide things underwater)
Sack	Rock	Rock in a sack (+1d Hitting)
Sack	Rope	Closed Sack (so your stuff can't be stolen)
Sack	Stick	Stick Armor (+1d toughness)
Sack	Sack	Bladder (to make things float)

To come up with an idea a Gnome must think for one turn. He then rolls his Thinking dice against the referees roll (difficulty determined, once again, by the whim of the referee) and if he succeeds he has the Idea and may add that to his character sheet. If the characters Ideas are already full he must discard an old one.

To use an Idea a character gathers the materials needed, and spends a turn putting them together, at this time he rolls his Crafting stat against the referees roll and if he succeeds he has made the new item.

Advanced Ideas.

You can also take the product of an Idea and combine it with another item to create even more complex devices.

For example:

If you take a and add a you get a

Stick Sharp Rock Axe (+3 Hitting)

Stick Rock on a rope Flail (+1 Hitting -1 to the opponents Toughness)

Lever Weight Catapult (Can use a rock to attack with your Hitting score up to 4 squares away)

The more advanced the device the harder it is to conceive of new ways to combine them, A Gnome trying to come up with an advanced Idea is at -1 Die per extra item that goes into the design. For example, the above Axe is a three item design and therefore the Gnome is at -1d. If the Gnome were to combine two simple Ideas there would be 4 items all together and the roll would be at -2d.

Likewise it is dangerous for a character to try to make these more advanced items and a failure will destroy all the materials involved.

Artifacts: items left over from the old times, very powerful, very valuable, often very fragile. Crafting with artifacts is dangerous, difficult, and unpredictable.

An artifact gives bonus dice to anything that the character uses it for (limited only by the creativity of the player) but any 1's rolled on these actions causes the artifact to be damaged and for that die to be lost forever.

The system

Detritus is played in turns with each player getting to act once during a turn.

A turn is a nebulous amount of time during which each character does one thing, the exact amount of time it takes to do anything shouldn't be worried about too much, that way lies madness.

Initiative

Each turn the player with the highest Speed goes first with the next highest going second and so on. When you come to two or more characters with the same score they roll their speed dice to determine who goes first.

Doing things

When a player wants their character to do something he describes the action to the referee. If the referee deems that the outcome is certain he simply describes the results, otherwise he has the player roll whatever dice are appropriate for the action (IE Thinking if the character is coming up with an Idea or Stubbornness if the character is trying to convince an NPC Gremlin to go attack an invader).

This number is then compared to one determined by the Referee. The higher roll wins and if the action was dangerous (as it will tend to be) the loser is penalized by losing dice equal to the number of 6s rolled by the winner. These penalty dice can be taken from any of the characters secondary stats (Toughness, Speed, or Stubbornness) as determined as appropriate by the Referee. If Speed, or Stubbornness are reduced below 0 the character is stunned and cannot take any actions until the stat is brought to 0. If Toughness is reduced below 0 that character is dead, bury it and make a new one. If any two Stats are reduced to 0 the character is unconscious and cannot take any actions until at least one of those stats is raised to 1 or more.

If one player is attempting to do something to another player then the referee steps back and lets it happen, the players are now rolling their dice against each other (Fighting against Fighting, Stubbornness against Stubbornness, and so on).

Recovering penalty dice

Each turn of absolute rest will allow a character to recover one die.

So at this point we have the characters running around, collecting items, and making other items, but to what end?

Running the game

As the games referee your jobs will be to control the NPC characters, describe the outcome of the players actions, and to choose how many dice the players must roll against for any given action.

Non Player Characters (NPCs)

There are two kinds of NPC characters allies and enemies.

For the most part anyone starting in the town can be considered an ally, these NPCs will generally be agreeable to whatever the players want them to do. But, with the exception of Goblins, won't want to do anything dangerous and will have to be talked into it. When you are playing friendly NPCs remember that they are not very smart and do not have very long attention spans. For maximum frustration and humor play this up.

Enemy NPCs will tend to be less chatty and more hurty. The characters main interactions will be in the form of combat which we will get to in a moment. Don't play the enemies too intelligently though, remember they are just as stupid as the players so make their tactics a bit quirky.

Choosing difficulties.

Rather than setting a hard number that the players are rolling against the referee chooses an amount of dice to roll.

Simple tasks: 1D

Normal Tasks: 2D

Difficult tasks: 3D

Hard Tasks: 4D

Really Hard Tasks: 5D

Most tasks should be Normal or Difficult.

Combat

In combat rather than choosing difficulties for the actions you will be rolling according to their opponents stats.

Enemy Goblins

Thinking 1

Crafting 1

Hitting 3

Toughness 3

Speed 2

Stubbornness 2

Everything Else.

Blast, Time is up and so much to be done. Well it's a start.

Afterward

Just time enough to vent my frustration in the forward and afterward and go through and clean up the most embarrassing grammatical errors.

I was crippled in this exercise by working the longest on parts of the game that were less than critical. In fact there is more that ended up being discarded than there is left to read. In future games I will begin with a clear outline of what I want to accomplish, prioritize that outline, and work on the highest priority sections first. In this attempt I just started working on everything at once and many important parts were neglected while I chased after threads that turned out to be attached to nothing, or worse yet to some ungainly beast that did more harm than good.

I will be reworking this game to include the missing parts I feel are critical and to rescue the other parts from the sticky goo that they picked up somewhere between my brain and my keyboard.

Also, in future 24hr endeavors I think I will avoid any game that relies on maps, counters, or other play aids that just take too long to do. It seemed a good idea when it popped up halfway through, but by the time the impracticality of it became obvious it was a bit too late.

I now take my wounded pride to sushi.

