Weekly Newsletter #6 - February 24, 2012

Getting the Gears Turning

At the conclusion of last week, the team had begun to revamp the theme of the game so as to stand out more to potential players - this week, efforts centered around mapping the existing design to a gear/machine theme. Instead of growing trees, the player's activity will be constructing a Machine, one Gear [or Cog] at a time. Every Gear in the Machine will represent the connection made, just as the Leaf was representative in the Tree system. In this way, the game is presented as a working engine that people can become a part of and impact in concrete, meaningful ways.

Current challenges include whether the Machine is a personal or communal entity, the mechanics of passing and receiving data through the game system, and the mapping of Gears in the virtual Machine in a relevant way. The team has been discussing these issues daily, working with gear-shaped paper cutouts to ease the visualization of abstract concepts in discussions, as well as receiving feedback from visitors to the ETC building.

A focus group session was also held at the end of this week to assess reactions to different types of deeds, and lots of useful feedback was received in addition to some input regarding the game system in general. It has proven very helpful to present the design challenges to fresh pairs of eyes. Participants also provided feedback on some preliminary art styles, and the overwhelming trend in the responses was a preference for bright, solid, clearly-defined gears with a bit of a vibrant color scheme.

Next Steps

Focus group testing will continue next week to assess different aesthetics and content for the Gear Card artifacts. The results from this week's session have made the team scrutinize the general vs. specific presentation of good deeds, and this question will be in focus next week as well.

With the theme at least nailed down, next week's work should resolve the mechanical and ideological questions of the game system - a design document will be compiled in addition to the design log to serve as a solid frame of reference during development. The game system's features will also be illustrated in diagram form so as to communicate the ideas more clearly.

Work has already begun on using php to construct a test site for the game's online component, and once a solid design documentation base has been established, the Web UI and content design, including types of deeds, features for the online component, Gear Card layout and content, will be addressed.

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The team will be working with a sense of urgency this coming week, as GDC and Spring Break are looming, with Halves Presentations shortly to follow. The goal is to have the major design challenges solved by then with clear illustration of the game system.