

Elements & Play Styles

Characteristics in existing sources

Water

healing
cold, wet
fluidity
liquid
regeneration, renovation, dissolution
emotion, psychism, mysticism, intuition, nurture
knowledge, manipulation, illusion

Earth

force, stability
dry, cold
solidity
solid
form, binding, manifestation, feminine
practicality, stability, materialism, realism, nature, life
growth, instinct, nature, darkness, ambition, death

Fire

aggressive, cruel
hot, dry
temperature
destroying
duality, light, heat, death, destruction
passion, energy, impulse, enthusiasm, inspiration, idealism, faith
freedom, emotion, impulse

Air

evasive
wet, hot
mobility
movement
mental, masculine
mental, language, intellect, reason, communication, social
order, protection, light

Avatar¹, Classic Elements²: (Greece, Buddhism, Japanese), Wicca³, Astrology⁴, Magic the Gathering⁵

¹ <http://www.avatar-four-elements.nl/info/elementen>

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_element

³ <http://www.controversial.com/Elements%20and%20Elementals.htm>

⁴ <http://www.mollysastrology.com/astrology-tutorials/four-elements>

⁵ <http://www.wizards.com/Magic/Multiverse/Colors.aspx>

Elaboration

Egyptian

Of living things, my son, some are made friends with *fire*, and some with *water*, some with *air*, and some with *earth*, and some with two or three of these, and some with all. And, on the contrary, again some are made enemies of fire, and some of water, some of earth, and some of air, and some of two of them, and some of three, and some of all. For instance, son, the locust and all flies flee fire; the eagle and the hawk and all high-flying birds flee water; fish, air and earth; the snake avoids the open air. Whereas snakes and all creeping things love earth; all swimming things--love--water; winged things, air, of which they are the citizens; while those that fly still higher--love--the fire and have the habitat near it. Not that some of the animals as well do not love fire; for instance salamanders, for they even have their homes in it. It is because one or another of the elements doth form their bodies' outer envelope. Each soul, accordingly, while it is in its body is weighted and constricted by these four."

Hinduism

The basest element, earth, created using all the other elements, can be perceived by all five senses - hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell. The next higher element, water, has no odor but can be heard, felt, seen and tasted. Next comes fire, which can be heard, felt and seen. Air can be heard and felt. "Akasha" (ether) is the medium of sound but is inaccessible to all other senses.

Buddhism

The earliest Buddhist texts explain that the four primary material elements are the sensory qualities solidity, fluidity, temperature, and mobility; their characterization as earth, water, fire, and air, respectively, is declared an abstraction—instead of concentrating on the fact of material existence, one observes how a physical thing is sensed, felt, perceived.

Play Styles

Introduction

For each element we want a different play style that fits within the theme of that element. Play style is not to be confused with role. Having a role means that the player has a responsibility to fulfill in a group of players with the same goal. Such as in World of Warcraft where players take the role of either damage dealer, healer or tank, their goal being to finish a dungeon. In our game, there is a single role; that of the hero leading an army and a single goal; to defeat your opponent.

There are two parts to play style. One is the player's own imagination and creativity to come up with his own, unique and iconic play style. The other is how we; the developers, govern the play styles. Let me elaborate on this by using a simple and a more complex example.

Imagine you're a kid sitting on the carpet in the living room. Your mom says "Let's play a game; you have to build a tower but you can only use one type of material" Taking a peek in your toy box, you see wooden blocks, a couple of baseball cards and a few checker pieces. You decide to make your tower with the wooden blocks; a nice straight tower, bravo! Your friend comes in and quickly joins you in your game to build a tower. He grabs the baseball cards and creates a house of cards; a nice little tower. Then there's the checker pieces left, you both grab a few and each start building a tower with them. You pile them up and create a nice stable tower. Your friend piles them up in a combination of two, one, two, one, creating a pretty cool looking, but unstable tower.

The mother in this example are we; the developers. We govern the play styles by saying our kid can only use one type of material to build a tower. The kids in this example are the players. Where 'you' liked to build solid towers with both the blocks and checker pieces, your friend seemed to like making towers in a more challenging and creative way. This resembles the player's own imagination within the governed play styles; the free play style.

In Starcraft II there are three races that each have their own unique set of gameplay mechanics. These mechanics can form certain combinations that would appeal to some players and to others it won't. Protoss for example can warp in units anywhere on the map provided there is a power field, something Terran and Zerg could never do because they are governed by the developers to not have that possibility. Within each race there are different ways to achieve victory. A player playing Zerg could focus on expanding and overwhelm his opponent with a far greater income, but could also choose to keep harassing the opponent, or rush them. The different ways to achieve the goal of defeating the opponent are only limited by the creativity of that player; creating an authentic play style with all the mechanics offered.

Freedom

The freedom a player has in their play style is determined by how the play style space is built up. This space is completely filled and is the accumulation of free and governed play style. The question is; how much of each play style is present in the space?

Completely Governed

When we fill the play style space completely as governed, each obstacle can only be overcome in the ways the developer seems fit.

[Pros]:

- This allows the developers to have the game played as they want it to be played and experienced.

[Cons]:

- Players can't come up with new strategies because everything is defined.

Completely Free

If the space is completely filled as free, it becomes a real sandbox. This means all players would have access to all the resources in the game and are left completely on their own to figure out how they would beat their opponent.

[Pros]:

- Allows players to come up with their own unique play style and gives lots of room for development.

[Cons]:

- Increases the learning curve tremendously, players would need to learn all the possible spell combinations before they have the feeling they can compete.
- Requires a lot of balancing work for the developers.

Balanced

A balance between these two will obviously leave us with just the pros and only light versions of the cons, which is ideal. But where does this balance lie? Truth is, there is none, you can't please every player with any balance you come up with. However, in the history of games the amount of free play style space has increased. More and more options of how to overcome obstacles were added and even sandbox-like mechanics where there are even ways to overcome obstacles the developers did not even think of; like in Populous The Beginning.

Elementum

Governed Play Style

In Elementum we're taking a similar approach to the play style space as Starcraft II. A player picks one of the three races in Starcraft II, in Elementum a player picks one of the four alignments. This is the core of the governed play style and the decision that has the biggest impact on the eventual play style of a player.

We're giving players the choice to pick the element they like best. There will be various reasons players pick a certain element. Most common would be basing one's choice on the play style, and theme/vibe/story of that element.

We're giving players a tip of the iceberg when they have to choose between elements. But by actual playing with the element, players will explore the element in deeper layers, both gameplay- and story- wise.

We don't want to confuse the player with too much info about each element the first time they start up the game. Just a basic view of what the core values of each element are, their characteristics, and an accurate general description of the play style players can expect. This should be enough information for them to have an obvious choice of what they prefer to play as.

However, we have to make sure the basic view of each element stays consistent and the details are cohesive throughout the whole game. We don't want players to feel they have been given false promises about an element's play style.

Free Play Style

Each element is offered a set of mechanics, some unique to one element, others will have similar mechanics, but never identical. The free play style aspect is defined by the way players will utilize these different mechanics. Most commonly will be combinations of certain spells, which can be discovered by players as they learn more about the game.

When designing spells, they should encourage players to come up with creative utilization rather than one set in stone use and any other uses will be classified as bugs and would need to be fixed. Not only is this more fun for the players; giving them more content to explore and share, but it will undoubtedly inspire us as well to come up with new spells. The only disadvantage to it, is more balancing work, but this is inevitable even when designing with a set in stone mentality. Man's ingenuity will always find ways to abuse existing mechanics, we should accept that and even go as far as give them a heads up and include this in our design process.

Elements Play Style

And now the part where it all comes down to; defining the play styles for each element. Ultimately, each element must have a distinguishable play style. Defining, will be mostly based on the character of each element in other sources, as shown on the first page of this document, but absolutely not to the letter. The four elements have a history and people expect certain things to be a part of each element. Surprises are good and offering a new perspective and character to an element is refreshing and exciting. However, they would have to make sense in the broadest sense of the word; an Imp affiliated with Water would raise an eyebrow.



Water

Water is mostly known for it's nurturing and regenerating qualities. All life on earth relies on water to survive; plants, animals and humans all die shortly after receiving no water at all. The fluidity of water allows it to take on any shape and absorb any form of impact. At the same time it has very forceful and destructive qualities with the proper motivation; as demonstrated with Tsunamis. Water has a reflective surface which can easily result in illusion; like the mirage at the Xin'an river. The ocean still holds the biggest mysteries, take Atlantis for example, mystery is something that would fit perfectly well with Water.

Water's Characteristics

life, healing, regeneration, nurture, absorption, illusion, fluidity, mystery, force

Water's Spell Mechanics

- Spells that focus on the healing mechanic and also allowing to increase beyond the starting amount of vitality. [life, healing, regeneration, nurture]
- Out of the blue, pun intended, spells that give extreme effects, but only for a short duration, and may also affect the hero who casted it. Can affect all mechanics [mystery]
- Spells that focus on fooling the enemy; cloning, fake enchantments. [illusion]
- Spells that negate incoming hand to hand or spell attacks. [absorption][force]



Earth

Earth is known for its very rigid and solid nature. Rock and mountain are nearly impenetrable by known forces, this makes Earth slow as well. Earth is where we are born from, and where our remains go when we die. It offers life a place to grow, the rich and fertile soil has offered habitat to many life forms for ages. It's in tune with nature and life, but also with death and decay which adds a duality to this element due to the popular belief life is good and death is evil.

Earth's Characteristics

stability, solidity, rigid, growth, life, nature, death, decay, binding, manifestation

Earth's Spell Mechanics

- Spells that focus on defense, creature's defense attribute, protecting from and negating offensive spells, and spells available in the blocking phase. [stability, solidity, rigid]
- Spells that focus on resurrection and the graveyard.[death, decay, life]
- Spells that focus on interdependence; $1+1=3$ [binding]
- Spells that focus on making creatures more powerful, at a cost [growth, manifestation]



Fire

Fire is mostly known for it's destructive qualities, light, and warmth. When talking about the proverbial 'fire within' qualities such as passion, courage, inspiration, energy, and enthusiasm come to mind. Fire can spread aggressively, provided it has enough fuel to be sacrificed and the right impulse to get it started. Physical touching is often avoided because of it's high temperature which can scar the flesh permanently.

Fire's Characteristics

aggressive, cruelty, heat, destructive, passion, energy, impulse, enthusiasm, inspiration, sacrifice, persuasive

Fire's Spell Mechanics

- Spells that focus on offensive destructive attacks [aggressive, destructive]
- Spells that focus on increased amounts of willpower [impulse, inspiration, enthusiasm]
- Spells that focus on sacrificing for the benefit of the group [sacrifice]
- Spells that focus on torturing and converting [persuasive, cruelty]
- Spells that focus on overextending and restlessness [passion, energy]



Air

Air is mostly known for it's mobility. Objects and creatures can move freely through air, and wind has transported countless things from one place to another. Air is also known for it's quick movements and speed, which makes it naturally evasive. It also has a strong affinity with the mind and one's intellect and spirituality to a certain degree. Taking a deep breath of fresh air is often exhilarating and makes you feel clear and at peace. The saying: "Blow off some steam" eventually brings order to an individual.

Air's Characteristics

evasive, mobility, movement, mental, intellect, quick, spiritual, order

Air's Spell Mechanics

- Spells that focus on adding skills to creatures to make them quicker; unblockable, evasion, first strike [evasive, movement, mobility, quick]
- Spells that change the effect of enemy spells [mental]
- Spells that affect the spells each player has in their hands and graveyard [spiritual]
- Spells that change willpower mechanics [intellect]
- Spells that focus on naturalizing or turn enchantments around [order]

Short Summary

Difference Between The Elements

- If you like mysterious forces, tending to wounds, and fooling your opponent to buy yourself time and resources, you should go with Water.
- If you like to play defensively and train your forces to mighty warriors before striking with deadly force, you should go with Earth.
- If you like to wreak havoc and destruction from the moment you step into battle, willing to sacrifice and like taking risks, you should go with Fire.
- If you like pure spell casting and a heavy focus on manipulating things when they're still in preparation, you should go with Air.