

Tuesday, January 30, 2007


## Factions: Social Control on Newbie Bashing

A recent discussion was sparked on the [Astrum Futura forums](#) regarding player retention and new player protection. It was one of those times when the discussion branched to a higher view - a wider look at how players interact on a large scale.

The current suggestions called for players to be penalised for undesirable actions, e.g. attacking a new player who is incapable of defending him/her self. This remains a long standing issue in many online games. AF could resort to enforced levelling - limited who a player can attack, and be attacked by. But this is all artificial - in the real world it's open season on anyone.

Cyberlot (Richard) raised the question of penalising through a Karma rating. As a player attacked newcomers they would attract negative Karma marking them out to other players. I can see the rank of "Newbie Basher" emerging as an undesirable outcome for many players. But Karma while adding some measure, does not address enforcement. Exactly who enforces what and when? Who sets the standard for interacting with other players?

From there we hit the subject of Factions. A Faction would be a specific group of players sharing a common interest. This obviously includes Races, but is also extendable to a Merchant Guild or a Pirate Clan. The point is to give players an instant group they are a member of. Now where it gets interesting in how the player and game logic would respond in the presence of Factions.

Say you have a Faction, Earth Humans United (go Terrans!). What happens if a member of this Faction attacks a new player who is joining the Earth Humans United Faction? Can't have allies killing each other off (even if it might reflect reality 

). The answer is in the Karma. Killing a new member of your own faction is stupid, damaged the Faction, and makes other players less likely to join it. That member should sur be paying tax to the Faction, which is needed. Such a player would immediately get negative Karma.

So we have Karma, and we have Factions - how do they relate?

Karma is a measure of one's standing within a Faction. If your Karma falls below a minimal level you'll be declared an enemy of the Faction, and then its time to start running before you're hunted down by your peers. Where do you flee? If you're lucky, some other Faction still has you as Neutral.

But this is where Newbie Protection get's interesting. It's not Faction specific - your bad Karma is classified when killing a new player as a "Stigma". It decreases Karma for **ALL** Factions. It's the ultimate punishment - imagine playing when nearly all the Factions refuse to grant you trade access, when your planets are penalised with "special tax charges", when other players are unable to maintain an Alliance with you once you become Factionless (Outcast). In short, if you gain a reputation for killing new players, you'll be kicked, booted and sent to Hell with a one way express ticket. No Admin interference or funny AI fleets required. Society will put you straight or else...

More on this later as details are worked out, but it looks like it's a feasible and supported suggestion.

Posted by Pádraic Brady in Astrum Futura, PHP Game Development, Quantum Star SE at 17:37

Then you'll just have a fairly small or mid sized Fraction of Outcasts who just attack newbs all day and night. :+

Not good mojo.

There must another way to gain back the good graces, by which helping the newbs to gain firmer footing by trading with those not in a Fraction. It is probably harder to trade with the enemy than a friend.

The player if they do trade would be further penalized if they choose to keep attacking newbs and life for that player would get really horrible indeed.

At which point I would suggestion a redo, where the player loses everything but starts over with neutral karma and newb status.  
Anonymous on Jan 30 2007, 21:37


Well, the point is to be mostly preventative but failing that bad Karma would quickly close up access to all Factions. Given factions would exercise territorial control, this means we could start sealing off access to Ports and even planets. Eventually playing the game would become difficult if not pointless.

As for a redo - likely that's the scenario though I'll make that part optional. If players choose to build up bad Karma it should be made clear the consequences are their fault and they need to live with them for at least some time.

Good points, thanks! Anonymous on Jan 31 2007, 10:39

We did something like this with AATraders.

There is bounty range in the game to prevent wealthy players from preying on poor players. If they attack the poor player they will get an enormous bounty placed on their player. They won't be able to use any normal ports until they pay it off. They can use Alliance ports but at 10 times the normal price. And they can be attacked by ANYONE in the game bounty free.

We also added something like Karma. There is a Good/Neutral/Evil rating in the game. How you are rated depends upon what you do in the game. Some things are good, like trading and others are bad like attacking a planet. And it gets even more complicated. 

If a good leaning player attacks an evil leaning player they boost their good rating but if they attack a good leaning player they move their rating toward evil.

The kicker to all this is if a player moves out of the neutral area and becomes a completely good player then they can attack ANY completely evil player without getting a bounty no matter how poor they are at the time. The reverse is true for the evil player. It really added a whole new dynamic to the game as some people wanted to be good or evil just so they attack certain people who were opposite them.

There are many ways we can even extend this. There can be good and evil planets and an evil player owning evil planets gets better production from them but if they own good planets they get poor production based upon how evil they are and the planet might try to overthrow their rule. Anonymous on Jan 31 2007, 12:18