Alter Reality

Angband development 2006-2016

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Angband, what is it?

— roguelike created in 1990

— **rogue → moria → umoria → angband**

— descend through 100 non-persistent levels

— grueling, few tricks, no shortcuts

— focus on items, inventory, and tactics

— heavily forked into 50+ *"variants"*

Stewardship versus innovation

The maintainer's role is influenced by:

— community inertia/nostalgia

— authorial privilege (or lack thereof)

— maintainer motivation

— external drivers of change

Challenges, circa 2005

— item distribution/balance (junk, randarts, etc)

— popularization of diving

— combat balance (melee vs ranged, LoS, monster AI)

— incomplete incorporation of lua

— licensing (the non-free *Angband license*)

— influence of innovation in variants

Difficult transition

Jun 2005: Robert Ruehlmann releases 3.0.6.
          Announces burn-out, intends to step down.
...
Mar 2006: Julian Lighton announced as successor.
...
Dec 2006: Andi Sidwell releases unofficial 3.0.7s1.
          Julian commits to New Year's release.
Jan 2007: <crickets>
...

Long live the maintainer

On March 23, 2007, Nick McConnell wrote:

> OK, someone needs to say it:
>
> [Andi Sidwell] should be the Angband maintainer.
>
> Comments from anyone, particularly Julian, encouraged.

Dev team, dev philosophy

— Creation of official *dev team*

— Public issue tracker, version control, etc.

— Re-licensed to **GPL v2**

— From singular vision to increased collaboration

— Support new players and new platforms

— Delegate various features, components

— *"What is Vanilla?"* still an unanswered question.

Ergonomics and approachability

— monster and item lists

— more mechanics information exposure

— missile attack convenience commands

— birth screen

— starting kit option

— knowledge menu

Streamlining and aesthetics

— pruning of options and ports

— removal of various junk/flavor items

— haggling and Charisma stat removed

— improved tilesets

— UTF-8

— Cocoa, Android ports

Tales of the Bold

In 2004, Eddie Grove described the *diving* strategy:

— runs counter to traditional "conservative" play

— embraces danger to create interesting situations

— more emphasis on stealth and avoidance

— less chance to die of boredom

— high risk/high reward

Faster, Legolas! Kill! Kill!

These changes support fast-paced, exciting play:

— forced descent

— id-by-use

— no-selling

— sell more staples in town

Too much of a good thing

Relatedly, some strategies needed to be toned down:

— make object detection fuzzy

— teleport other: beam -> bolt

— destruction removes artifacts

— tone down missile weapon multipliers

— (RIP globe of invulnerability)

Combat

Some changes helped balance combat:

— fractional melee attacks

— slight nerfs to paralysis/stunning

— stat drain/stat restore on level up

— toned-down "weak brands"

— higher device failure rates in some cases

Dungeon generation

Others made levels more interesting:

— add labyrinths, caves, etc.

— more room types, lesser vaults, etc.

— increased gold variance

— tweak drops to limit deep level + weak monster

— level simulation, stats, and logging

Backlash?

Unhappiness with these changes tended to fall into one of three categories:

— attachment to the ways of the past

— disagreement over the way forward

— overall difficulty and balance objections

Other reactions

Overall many people seem to appreciate these changes:

— most players never post on forums, IRC, etc.

— hard to get accurate picture

— plural of *anecdote* is *anecdata*

— skeptics can change their minds

Closing remarks

What can we take away from the last 10 years?

— difficult/rewarding to work on a game like angband

— discovering intrinsic versus incidental features

— fun to work with passionate and vocal players

— developer interest naturally waxes/wanes

— the future is exciting!

Winner after >20 years

On September 14, 2016, simon_a_robinson wrote:

I have finally beaten Vanilla Angband, and it feels great! I started playing in the early to mid 1990s with MattB (also of this parish) and have played off and on since then. I have been very close to winning once previously, with a Dwarf priest IIRC, but I was too scared to dying to carry on and eventually lost the character in a computer upgrade. I have taken quite long breaks from Angband over the years... [but] in the end I had to come back to settle some unfinished business with Morgoth!

Winner after >20 years

On September 14, 2016, simon_a_robinson wrote:

I played with forced descent and randarts, neither of which I had tried before. I liked forced descent because it acts like a timer... If I had been able to scum level 98 for longer then I would probably still be playing in order to find the perfect equipment... the fact that I was forced to descend made the game (a) shorter and (b) more exciting.

The End -- Thanks for listening!

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                                                    i) Information
          _____                  m) Messages
         /                       \        ___       f) File dump
        /                         \ ___   /   \     v) View scores
       /          RIP              \  \  :     :    v) View scores
      /                             \  : _;,,,;_    x) Examine items
     /          Galanya              \,;_          h) History
    |            the                  |   ___       s) Spoilers
    |          Attendee               |  /   \      r) Keep randarts
    |                                 |  :     :    q) Quit
    |          Enthusiast             | _;,,,;_    ____
    |          Level: 25              |          /     \
    |          Exp: 31,966            |          :     :
    |          AU: 219                |          :     :
    |       Killed on Level 98        |         _;,,,,;_
    |        by a Presentation.       |
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