Who am I?

- Josh Sawyer, Game Director at Obsidian Entertainment
- Tabletop role-playing gamer for 30 years.
- CRPG developer for 17 years.
- Area and narrative design, but primarily system design and direction.
What are we talking about?

• Pillars of Eternity
• Attributes / Ability Scores
• *Viable* and *Optimal*
• Gods and Dumps?
Attributes in Class-based Role-playing Games

• We're really talking about Advanced / Dungeons & Dragons.
• Go back to pre-Basic, but tons of games have them, from Ultima to Final Fantasy to Dark Souls.
• Used to define and distinguish fundamental aspects of the character.
• Originally random, but a greater shift to point buy.

Strength! Constitution! Dexterity! Intelligence! Wisdom! Charisma!

(Comeliness!)
The Olden Tymes (Basic-2\textsuperscript{nd} Edition)

- Roll dice, figure out what class you \textit{could} be.
- Lots of dump stats and dead ranges (8-14).
- Viability was always in question.
The Reasonably Intelligent Wizard in AD&D

- Make a wizard with 14 Intelligence.
- Advance to 13\textsuperscript{th} level.
- Realize you can't cast 7\textsuperscript{th}+ level spells.
The Reasonably Strong Fighter in AD&D

- Start with 15 Strength (Khalid in Baldur's Gate), take Specialization.
- Damage is terrible compared to someone with 18(00) Strength – $\text{1d10}+2$ (7.5) vs. $\text{1d10}+8$ (13.5)
- Advance to 13th level, take Grand Mastery, get a +4 weapon.
- Damage is still bad compared to someone with 18(00) Strength – $\text{1d10}+9$ (14.5) vs. $\text{1d10}+15$ (20.5)
The 3E Shift

- *Explicit* class requirements and bonus XP disappeared.
- Linear bonus progression (+1/2 points).
- Multiple builds were viable, if not optimal.
- Some classes require 3 stats, some 4.
- Splat books introduced more gimmick build possibilities.
- A core fighter with high Intelligence, low Strength is a *bad fighter*. With the right optional rules, they could easily be a viable fighter.
3.X = Min-Maxer's Delight

- Stacking rules clarified, but left more room for optimization (bonus types).
- Character builders and online forums allow for much more in-depth analysis.
- Apotheosis of 3.X = Lol-R-SK8

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**Lol-R-SK8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Human, shapechanged Yuan-Ti Anathema most of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Cleric of the Computer I/Wizard 6/Contemplative I/Mystic Theurge 10/Seeker of Alpha Complex 1/Loremaster 10/Monk 1/Variant Druid 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment</td>
<td>Lawful Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HD</td>
<td>d8+d4+d6+1d4+d6+1d4+d8+1d8 = 26d4 + 1d6 + 3d8 = 6 + 26x2 + 1x3 + 2x4 + 31x23 = <strong>755 HP</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XP</td>
<td>(436000) 435000 (30 levels), 1000 spare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAB</td>
<td>+13 (3.5 + 6.75+0.5+5+0.75), +30 with divine power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>Gargantuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>(40'+10') base x2 +30' haste +10' domain = <strong>140'</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fly Speed</td>
<td>(40'+10') base x2 x2 +30' haste +10' domain = <strong>190'</strong> (good)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pillars’ Goals

• Six attributes
• Class abilities are not explicitly associated with attributes
• Influence statistics of importance to *all classes* linearly.
• Primary goal: "No bad builds."
• Secondary goal: Ensure that dumping stings (reality check).
Six Attributes - Why?

• Tradition.
• Fan feedback hovered between 5 and 7.
• Pairs worked well for 3 defenses (Fortitude, Reflex, Will) and defenses are not "opt-out".
Class abilities not associated with attributes

• Explicit ties establish inescapable emphasis for viability. Cf. D&D Intelligence and Pillars Intellect for wizards, D&D Charisma and Pillars Resolve for Paladins.

• If something is required for viable play, why is it an option?
Influence Statistics of Importance to All Classes

Image from the Pillars of Eternity Gamepedia, author Ineth2.
No bad builds - why?

• Role-playing is about building and expressing a character both through social interactions and (often) through mechanics.
• Viability limitations can result in mid- or late-game roadblocks.
• Fewer viability limitations = more viable character concepts:
  • The perceptive genius barbarian (high Per/Int).
  • The idiot muscle wizard (low Int, very high Might).
  • The clumsy, determined rogue (low Dex, high Res).
Cool Concept, Bad Character

- Ability scores and classes can often conflict.
  - Class A is good at X, Y, and Z.
  - Ability B drastically impacts X and Z.
- Mechanics and content balanced around one reinforcing the other.
  - Warrior THAC0/BAB, Strength, and Armor Class.
  - Rogue Reflex saves, Skills, Dex, and Difficulty Class.
- A cool concept (smart fighter) can be a bad character in practice.
  - Failure to min-max key attributes results in lower totals.
  - Content that scales assuming min-maxing leaves suboptimal characters behind.
Ensure dumping stings - why?

• Not to be punitive for its own sake.
• Reality check for the importance of systems.
• If people don't care about dumping it, it's not that important.
• Choice and consequence.
Some Good Things about PoE Attributes

• Hard to make non-viable characters.
• Easy to build a lot of unusual and viable character concepts.
• Not to hard to make different optimal builds that emphasize different things.
  • Interrupt-focused barbarian vs. striking barbarian
  • Gish muscle wizard vs. crowd control wizard
• Min-maxers can still go wild.
• Despite relative simplicity, mechanics allow for interesting analysis.
Accuracy and Damage

• Each point of Perception adds 1 to Accuracy, shifting Miss/Graze/Hit/Crit ranges for all attacks.

• Each point of Might adds 3% to Damage and Healing from any source.

• Certain builds rely more heavily on Accuracy than Damage output (e.g. crowd control) and benefit marginally from detailed analysis.
Common Criticisms of PoE Attributes

• They aren't realistic.
• They don't have enough of an impact.
• Perceived lack of value.
• The companions are awful!!!
They Aren't Realistic

- A/D&D's selective verisimilitude.
- Pillars already abstracts a lot.
- Realism was not a priority.
Not Enough Impact

• Viability requirement limits relative impact.
• Linear scaling means a regular progression.
• Avoiding A/D&D's known ability score imbalances (e.g. 3.X Strength).
• Strength vs. Might – 1d10+6 vs. 14-20+24%
AD&D Strength Damage Adjustment
(assumes AD&D Two-Handed Sword)

Damage Adjustment %

-40% -20% 0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100% 120% 140%

Damage Adjustment %
Pillars of Eternity Strength Damage Adjustment

Damage Adjustment %

-30% -20% -10% 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

Damage Adjustment %
Perceived Lack of Value

- Percentages are hard.
- Larger numerical values pose problems.
- Poor feedback in the UI.
The Companions are Awful!!!

- Companion attributes reflect who they are as characters.
- Attributes designed to be "middle of the road" for their class, not min-maxed.
- Despite player success on Path of the Damned using stock companions, players still want to adjust them.
Pallegina - Paladin

- Character is willful, tough, but describes failing her physical examinations in the Brotherhood of Five Suns more than once.
- As an avian godlike, she has heightened senses and her eyes are frequently described in reaction text.
Our Stance

• We don't really care about people adjusting companion stats.
• Well, maybe a little.
• Attribute system is designed to handle it.
• Sooooo....
Devil of Caroc - Rogue

• Has a modest Might score (13).
• Might bonuses to damage not multiplicative, but additive.
• 18 Might would net +15% damage.
• Rogue's Sneak Attack is +50% damage.
• Most rogue active abilities add +25% damage.
• Dumping Might to 3 would be -21% damage.
• Significantly lower damage, but not "non-viable".
Changes During Dev and Post-Launch

Initial:
• Attributes all granted bonuses from 1 on.
• Perception and Resolve contributed to Deflection.
• Perception initially granted +2 to Accuracy per point (no brainer), then no attribute contributed to Accuracy.
• Constitution's bonus to Endurance and Health was 3%.
• Perception modified range.
• Intellect modified radius, not area, and by 3% increments.
Changes During Dev and Post-Launch

Eventual:

• Attributes averaged around 10, with lesser values inflicting penalties.
• Perception contributes to Accuracy (no influence on range), Resolve to Deflection.
• Constitution's bonus increased to 5%.
• Intellect modifies area in 5% increments.
You Can't Make Everyone Happy

• That's true of any design, but we didn’t try to.
• Our implementation was within the audience's tolerance thresholds.
  • Some prefer no attributes, some for stronger/different attributes.
  • "We wish it were different, but it's not a deal-breaker."
  • No actual data to support this, just anecdotes.
• Ideological purity doesn't necessarily = happier players.
Would We Do It Again?

• Yeah, probably.
• Benefits outweigh the drawbacks.
• We were happy with the gameplay.
• Players seem happy, too.

Would I Do It, Personally?

• Nope!
• Don't like the conflict with classes.
• Don't like class-based systems!
Questions and Comments

Special Thanks:
- Our backers, beta testers, and players.
- Our QA testers.
- Brenda Romero.

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