"Pathless Journey" Polysentience Learning Node

A non-physical invention, the "Pathless Journey" learning node was a Polysentience data-mining initiative conducted in the years following the Freespacer Genocide. Developed by the Cult of the Network Backbone, in association with the Independent World League. The Pathless Journey node was an attempt to rectify the loss of knowledge and experience associated with the huge loss of life seen in combat.

While the Pathless Journey Node was born in the initial conflict, it took a significant period of time for the data-mining initiative to see fruits. What was born to be a combat training machine later took off and became a Polysentience E-sports phenomenon, with some occasional real world use.

More about the Pathless Journey

Simply put, while foreign militaries had access to soul transfer technology, the Freespacers had less reliable methods. Those who died could pass on their knowledge, but those born in their place would not be able to instinctively have learned these skills as well as a true replacement of the original. As such, several programmers of the Hacker Cult sought to rectify this by constructing a means of continually updating the pre-set Raw Data Format (.rdf) files used in construction or birth of new-generation Warmonger- and Emptyhand-format Freespacers with new, fresh to the minute combat data.

The Pathless Journey was a data-mining program tapped into the Polysentience's most common virtual reality realms used for combat training. Primarily found today in the PvP_Aggrodome.vri, and BlaQue_Realm.vri, but also able to be applied to any Polysentience realm enabling Aggro rules, the Pathless Journey Learning Node consists of three separate components:

- The Leader boards.
- The Database.
- The Discursive Guides.

In order to provide incentive, the Pathless Journey applies a Leaderboard system. Most Freespacers are built with specific roles in mind, and almost all of them like to excel in one way or another. The programmers of the Pathless Journey sought to provide incentive to both promote competition in order to enable evolution of data-quality, but also to discourage meatspace violence where possible in the case of those built for combat. The Free State seeks peace, even in combat training.

From all simulated matches, information about specific movements, reactions and skillsets are observed and archived. This is then sent to a decentralized database, in order to provide an evolutionary database of combat data which is updated to the minute, and available for analysis and incorporation to a .rdf format file. This may be used to program new combat cyborgs or automata, or be uploaded to a user's mindware for replication of motion.

In order to encourage new thought to bloom, a nest of archivist Syntelligences were produced alongside the packaged Learning Node data-miners. The purpose of these SI was to guide discourse which would

allow the growth of new styles and methods, rather than allowing the Node to default to 'best methods' which secure consistent data but create stagnation. These SI offer incentives to new and inventive movesets, and provide new and inventive challenges for those who use the Pathless Journey to face. Allowing combat data to be tested in thousands of variations.

This in essences was intended, and succeeded in forming a community of fighters who utilize a game-ist approach to developing new martial arts, and methods of conflict. At the same time creating less incentive to actually implement these methods in real life if unnecessary. In a sense, the Pathless Journey was there to seed the notion that any Freespacer may in fact be a master martial artist in their spare time, however due to the pacifist nature of most Freespacers its primary popularity came from those in an active combat role already.

Implementation, and The Meat-Metal Divide

While the actual Learning Node was developed several years ago, the amount of information needed to reach functional creation of martial arts forms took a great deal of time. While initial introductions of the data to .rdf format would allow those who uploaded the information to pull off stunts and actions perfectly (in most cases), it took years of testing, revision and shenanigans in order to create coherent styles and schools referred to as Synergies.

Synergies consist of set databases full of actions and movesets which have been tested thousands, if not millions of times in order to ascertain the most effective courses of action. Called Synergies as each action synergizes with each other action in the database, and can be readily executed one after another while leaving minimal openings. Each action has set points where the motion can be cancelled and flow into a combination of other movements; whether blocks, counters, dodges or further attacks.

Effective use of a Pathless Journey Synergy comes from mental acuity, improvisation and foresight, rather than rote practice. As long as a move is uploaded to a Freespacer's mindware, it can be implemented and used perfectly each time without fail. It takes a quick mind to know what move would be best for what situation, improvisation to adapt your synergy of motion to different opponents, and foresight to counter and opponent's own use of the first two.

At this date, multiple Synergies have come to prominence, but the continued popularity of these styles on the Polysentience has created what is called the Meat-Metal divide. While a synergistic database can be used by anyone in a virtual reality realm, most living bodies will tend to have different hard limits than an automata or cyborg. There's not enough hard processing power in common Freespacer mindware implants to electronically simulate the muscle memory needed for perfect replication of motion in a real-world setting.

While Automata and Cyborg Freespacers are able to replicate their Synergies in physical space, supplemental processing power is needed for a biological Spacer to replicate these motions. This combined with many movesets which are calibrated to tolerances far higher than most meatbodies can't replicate means that most Pathless Journey Synergies are considered solely to be Cyborg or Automata Fighting Arts. Most Synergies are divided between meat and metal styles accordingly.

Biopatching: "Unmapper" Mindware Module

While the Meat/Metal divide does exist, many clever mindtwisters of the Free State have sought to counteract the issues prevalent in a lack of simulated muscle memory. The answer most have come up with to date, in failing to implement newer forms of Mindware implants on a wider scale has been the implementation of an "unmapper" module. Essentially a supplemental processor resembling a heavy metal collar, which has enough processing power and memory capacity to functionally overwrite the wearer's muscle memory and sense of balance.

In effect it allows total bodily control from direct mental command-inputs, as opposed to through normal neural process, and facilitates biological Freespacers utilizing Mindware based fighting arts. The main downside is that the use of the Unmapper feels functionally like a violation of one's self, artificial reflexes installed feel alien and unpleasant, causing the same sense of dread and unease found in those who suffer sleep paralysis through extended use.

While a wearer could acclimatize themselves to the use of an Unmapper, it is often just as easy to practice forms and earn your own muscle memory.

Common Synergies

While there are dozens, if not hundreds of different possibilities of full Synergy styles, the actual time it takes to compile live combat data into a full and cohesive Synergy database can be anywhere from months to years depending on just how many people are experimenting with different methods at one time. The following are some of the most common moveset synergies used, and the most readily recognizable martial art 'styles' formulated by the Pathless Journey node.

"Deckape" Spacer Tag

The most prevalent style reaped from the Pathless Journey nodes, and one of the few styles considered to be a 'pure meat' synergy that can be practiced by biological Freespacers. Promoted as both a sport, a competitive game, and a means of self defense. Deckape is increasingly learned by a large number of young Freespacers, and practiced in their free time during apprenticeship following their bout in the learning tank. Deckape's focus is on effective motion in zero- or micro-gravity, evasive maneuvering, and prevention of your opponent's motions.

The core of Deckaping is in control of your own orientation of up and down, always keeping yourself 'above' your opponent, and to always be in motion. Deckape is considered to be a game as much as a means of self defense by most Freespacers, and is a common sight in 'spacer cargo holds. Deckaping as a competition is usually a rabid free-for-all, with individuals seeing who can keep in motion long enough. You are considered to have lost when you are stuck free-floating in zero-gravity without anything to kick off of, and to have won when you are the only one left able to maneuver.

Offensive maneuvering is in launching yourself towards an opponent, moving to intercept them, and kicking off of them to neutralize their momentum. While a practitioner will tend to use their hands to

navigate handholds, and continually fling whatever comes to hand at their opponent. The unfortunate naming scheme of the form is due to bouts resembling a swarm of 'furious apes flinging their own filth'.

What actual combat applications it has is mainly as a means for crew members to evade hostile boarders, but with the addition of grenades or throwing knives can easily be used as a means of facilitating hit and run attacks on enemies.

"Portrait Rezoning" Shootism

Arguably the most complicated style to have run simulations on, and the most technical of the synergy movesets ever developed to date. Portrait Rezoning is a full combat Meat/Metal style intended for when you need to utterly destroy an opponent, and the only Freespacer fighting art intended for use with firearms. The core of Portrait Rezoning is in a combination situational awareness and pre-programmed firing trajectories, and stances to allow total coverage of your surrounding area.

An experienced Rezoner can functionally cover all angles around them, in order to provide area denial to their enemies. Performing amazing feats of trick-shooting, and accuracy through technologically assisted targeting. While it can function as a meat-form for biological free-spacers, much of the programming is in allowing a mechanical body to have a firing solution for functionally every angle around them, and relies greatly upon mechanically enhanced wrists to ensure stability of shots and loss of accuracy from recoil.

This style is surprisingly popular among many Warmonger Freespacers, simply because the combination of total area coverage and required mechanical assistance means that it is a shootist style which relies less upon stability of stance, or breathing control (as would be seen in a biological shooter), but rather flows in a series of stances. It is called Portrait Rezoner because it relies on the skilled painting of targets, and is quite aesthetically pleasing in the process of taking control of zones where one can safely operate.

The sheer technical nature of this style is in gathering simulated data from a variety of firearms that exist. Many practitioners will customize their firing solutions to fit their favorite weapons, and expansive toolkits needed to answer a variety of armed threats. Actually coming out victorious in this style requires the right tool for the right job, as the amount of raw data and computing power needed to carry firing solutions for even two weapon sets can potentially max out storage capacity and processor speed for a standard Freespacer's mindware.

"Buzzpack" Maneuvering

Intended for military use, and popular with mercenary and pirate fleets among the Freespacers. Buzzpackers are martial artists who utilize the unique mental connection shared by Freespacers in order to facilitate perfectly timed group maneuvers and combination attacks. While it can be used by both sides of the Meat/Metal divide, Buzzpack stylists are unique in that they are inherently a 'team sport', and the actual implementation of Buzzpack techniques are considerably more effective when used by cybernetically enhanced Freespacers; particularly Type IV's, with their ability to synchronize with nearby Syntelligences.

Skilled Buzzpackers are able to execute perfectly timed attacks between individuals, but particularly with

drones and non-volitional units. The style itself was intended for use by Militant-series War Automatons, to better allow them to operate on a micro-level without oversight by strategic operations computers. The popularity of Buzzpacking is mainly found among programmers of the Free State, rather than military enthusiasts, with each individual programming teams of automata in order to compete at a squad level.

On the whole, Buzzpack maneuvering is considered a major off-shoot of the Mashup style of synergy selection. Intended to be a piece of a whole rather than a holistic style in and of itself. There are some moves which are considered unique to Buzzpackers, mostly involving disabling of individuals so another can strike them, or specific misdirection and ambush techniques. But at the same time, this style is intended as a means of splicing different techniques to work best in tandem.

"Vortex Break" Snappy Decisions

The first fully fledged cyborg combat art conceived of wholesale by the Free State, without basing techniques on earlier schools of martial arts. Considered also to be the first fully fledged Metal-only martial form developed by the Pathless Journey data-mining initiative. Vortex Break is a heavy, brutal style based upon rapid takedowns, high-speed counter grappling and limb-breaking conducted with or without active gravity.

Data analysis from early tests showed that many styles which revolved around striking, or holds were effective; that effectiveness went down when you considered individuals who could not be concussed, or have their bones broken. As such Vortex Break's movesets consist of attacks in two broad categories: Vortices, and Breaks.

Vortices are takedowns, tackles and throws which allow the individual to manhandle an opponent. Throwing them, unbalancing them, and keeping them in a state of returning to their feet, allowing greater tactical freedoms to be taken. While Breaks are attacks which target either the joints, or the soft tissues of the target.

A practitioner of this Synergy will generally start by either tackling an opponent to bowl them over, or using a counter-throw to unbalance them if on the defensive. These followed by strikes which leverage the limbs of an opponent to dislocate their joints, or gouging attacks to target sensitive areas such as sensory organs or exposed systems.

Broad attacks to maintain leverage and control over an opponent, followed by precision attacks to disable them entirely.

"AF Rushdown" Combination Crunch

The second main Metal style developed by the Free State, and made so by the necessity of maintaining effectiveness. The Armored Fist (AF) Rushdown is a style based upon sheer brute force, and executions of strikes from every potential body part. Headbutts, fists, elbows, knees and feet are all used. Synergies from this style are often very short, quick moves which can be made in incredibly rapid flurries, and are usually applied with a philosophy of an adaptive and unceasing offensive.

One attack is made, with the next chosen in rapid succession based upon the opponent's reaction. This

pattern continuing without ever ceasing the assault... As such the Rushdown is considered one of the least effective martial arts developed through this method, but also one which is widely popular with a certain subset of Warmongers and Emptyhands.

The main failing of the Rushdown method is that it has few concessions in place for if the opponent should be able to better control the flow of combat. A good portion of a successful Rushdown practitioner's strategy is picking their timing. Generally most successful in ambush, or on opponents who are unprepared for their assault, those caught on the wrong foot can easily find themselves battered into submission should they not be able to avoid flurries of strikes which can go on for upwards of 400 strikes (the present Aggrodome Record is 402) in a single combinations move.

The popularity of the style stems from how it is genuinely impressive to watch. It takes real technical skill to juggle variables needed to maintain a proper combination of synergies, and is usually practiced using massive hulking Automata 'spacer bodies favored by the most hardheaded showboating Warmongers out there. A Rushdown match is equally the work of the Junkhead as it is the Warmonger, with engineering of new combat-ready bodies equally playing into the success of one side or the other. Overall they are just fun to watch.

"Butcher Boy" Moving Brutality

A rare style originally commissioned by specific terrorist factions of the Independent Worlds League, which did not complete compilation until several years after the League's disbandment. An armed style intended for use by combat Automata and Cyborgs who could blend in to other portions of a population, and attack targets in terrifying manners. Emphasis was upon the notion of terrorist combat, as the shock and horror of this style was intended to be played up allowing threat of its use to act as deterrent by fear, creating a paradox of Freespacer thought which states that combat can be avoided by inflicting the maximum amount of harm and cruelty when it can't be avoided.

Butcher Boys use knives, batons, hooks, and chains, utilizing movesets which emphasize the brutality of combat and cause incredibly painful wounds. Where other styles will seek to break joints and bones, Butcher Boys will aim to sever tendons and rupture internal organs. Where another would try and immobilize through locks or holds, a Butcher Boy will immobilize through agonizing pain applied to nerve centers, or concussion with little regard for life or limb.

Overall an incredibly rare style in the post-IWL era of the Free State, and unlike other styles is never practiced in the Aggrodome competitively. Its use is limited to scattered holdouts of the older ways who have taken up the practice.

Terminology: Composites, Mashups, Remixes, and Freestyling

As these styles are composed of customized databases of movesets uploaded to an electronic brain, or a mindware implant, a user may create their own composite style. The practice of creating a compound style usually involves a martial artist selecting set moves that they in particular have found useful in a fight, and mixing them in with other moves from different databases. This can result in unusual

combinations of movesets which can vary in quality from highly effective, to nearly useless.

The variation in quality has been due to how discussion and research into these styles are conducted. A less variable and more reliable method of mixing is seeking out information on Mashup styles. Combinations of common and effective moves from different styles, which have faced a good amount of scrutiny from community testers. Usually a mix of only two styles, at most.

Other variations in style are considered Remixes, which use variations on given movesets to allow them to work differently. This is usually done by adjusting points at which one move may be cancelled into another action, or changing specifics of targeting to strike from unusual angles. A Remix style generally is one which focuses on unusual aspects to unbalance an opponent who knows what to look for.

In essence, these new Freespacer martial arts are based upon the notion that one can hack their own body to allow it to be controlled by mental triggers, similar to how one would control an avatar in a video game. This has led to the valorization of so-called Freestylers. Individuals who don't rely upon mindware to master these forms in a quick manner, and instead actually put in the work. Such Freestylers usually are more adaptive and quick on the uptake than others who simply use the Pathless Journey nodes to pre-determine movement and style, however in the Free State it is better to have simulated skills than it is to have none at all when it comes down to it.

Major League Synth

Overall, the Pathless Journey Node failed to make any sort of impact on the conflict it was designed to assist with. However its rise in popularity came about mainly because it provided two different benefits. The first of which was simply giving something to do to the large population of Warmonger-format Freespacers produced for conflict, but disbanded from the IWL and similar groups. The second of which was that its integration of conversation and discourse into its methods allowed it to become increasingly popular as a spectator sport on the Polysentience.

To this day, the phenomenon of Major League Synth combat is popular to watch as by the nature of it being based on the Polysentience it is bombastic and fantastical. Gangs, cliques and individual champions of particular styles turn out as hyper-stylized and flamboyant Polysentience avatars based on heroes and legends or outright monsters, with many adopting stage personalities or gimmicks to give themselves an edge or just to make it more entertaining for others.

As a competitive application which can be applied to just about any virtual reality realm, there are now thousands of leaderboards in existence for various .vri sites, with different groups of Warmongers, Emptyhands and Syntelligences competing for control of top spots. This usually leads to different roaming individuals seeking to challenge the leaders of different .vri realms, causing a phenomenon of wandering warriors out to 'conquer' different areas, or champions holding on to their own site. Some stylists or Polysentience gangs seek to control huge areas to demonstrate their skills, while some seek to challenge the absolute best of the best at all terms to try and claim position on the leaderboards, often drawing huge amounts of traffic to different realms of the Polysentience nodes to simply observe.

OOC Notes

Dumont created this article on 2016/09/13 08:02.