

English version of RPGForum article:

<http://www.rpgforum.dk/mod-perl/rpgforum.pl?cmd=showarticle&id=8613>

1. What's your roleplaying history? How and when did you start? What games were formative for you? When and how did you encounter The Forge-community and what did that mean for your gaming?

Hva så? Jeg taler ikke Dansk - undskyld!

I started playing roleplaying games in 1977 with white box D&D. My brother had a regular group and I, as the kid brother, tagged along through AD&D, Bunnies and Burrows, The Fantasy Trip, Traveller, and The Morrow Project. Eventually my brother moved on to girls and marijuana, and I moved on to Call of Cthulhu, Fringeworthy, and GURPS. In GURPS I found something I could really sink my teeth into, and for a long time it was my game of choice. Eventually my lust for "realism" faded, and my games evolved to the lightest possible implementation of GURPS, and then to FUDGE, and finally to even more stripped down home brew rules. It was around this time that I heard about Matt Snyder's Dust Devils. This game challenged my ideas about theme, form, and content, and I started lurking at The Forge. Up to this point I had been a frustrated game designer, monkeying with every system I played and creating my own with limited success.

2. What were the gaming frustrations - if any - before you learned about Forge-style games? And, conversely, what are your frustrations - if any - with the Forge-style games?

I think there were a lot of things I never even thought about as a gamer, and there were things that made me pretty unhappy. I was a hardcore illusionist GM. I wanted to tell my players a story, and I couldn't figure out why that wasn't completely satisfying. The Forge had language for the difficulties I was experiencing - sometimes cryptic, elliptical, or even infuriating language, but *something.* I ate it up; it was inspiring. As a result I preached it to everybody I knew and alienated them - I'm not sure I've completely repaired that damage!

I'm not exactly sure what a "Forge-style game" is.

3. Have you always designed games? If so, what made a difference when it came to The Roach (which, as far as I know is your first published RPG)?

Yes! My first game design was called "Baby Wars" and was a transparent rip-off of Steve Jackson's "Melee". Then I plagiarized "Bunnies and Burrows" to make "Kitties and Catnip", complete with detailed rules for blood loss. Three factors combined to bring The Shab-al-Hiri Roach past the abandoned game stage: The Game Chef competition, Ron Edwards, and the culture of The Forge. Game Chef ensured that I got lots of useful feedback, Ron unexpectedly played and praised the game, and through The Forge I followed other projects to publication and realized that I could also do it.

Baby Wars, circa 1978: http://www.meekmok.com/sassy/games/baby_wars/

4. Tell me a little bit about Bullypulpit Games - how was the company formed, what's your goal and what is next in line?

Bully Pulpit Games is myself and two good friends - Steve Segedy and The Mad Irishman. Right now I'm designing games, The Mad Irishman is laying them out, and Steve is maintaining our Web presence and business relationships. Our primary motivations are to share our ideas and not lose money. We all have publishing aspirations, so those roles will shift somewhat over time. As a designer I'm working on several projects, the biggest of which is Grey Ranks. It's a pretty ambitious game.

Grey Ranks: http://www.bullypulpitgames.com/games/index.php?game=grey_ranks

5. What's the history of The Durham 3 - how did you hook up, when did you decide to make the podcast, are there any plans for the future that make you excited?

I have two weekly game groups, and the Durham 3 is one of them. Clinton, Remi, and I met at a local convention, where we got to know each other and play some games together. The Durham 3 has nothing to do with Bully Pulpit Games and, in fact, we have a "no playtesting" rule in place, because we really get together to have fun first and foremost. Playtesting is hard.

I don't recall how the podcast got started, but I remember agreeing that it would be fun and that we had things to say - there was a niche we could fill. As far as future plans, we rotate responsibility for games, and Remi is up next with some sort of crazy Jewish-Kabala-pirates game using Sorcerer. I always look forward to what they come up with. I hope people enjoy the podcast.

Podcast: <http://rpgtalk.net/durham3/>

6. From a designer's standpoint, what does playing in a great group as The Durham 3 mean? Is there any competitiveness between you and Clinton as far as game designing goes(I'm leaving Remi out, since he doesn't design games as far as I know)?

Remi has some great ideas and participated in Game Chef 2006, so don't count him out, but he's really more interested in art direction at this point. Clinton and I are not at all competitive. I know I can rely on both of them to give me feedback on my early ideas, or to help round up a playtest, or sort cards, or whatever needs to happen. I'm lucky to have two such groups - my other weekly group is also tremendously supportive and willing to try out my strange ideas and help out.

Remi's game: http://www.1km1kt.net/rpg/The_Right_Hand_of_Mr_Big.php

7. What's most important to you when you roleplay? What's most important when you design a game? Are these two connected?

Tak for spørsmålene! Of course I play games for fun, but beyond that I love to make hard choices and see memorable, dramatic, interesting stories emerge. I'm often the guy with the character who is destroyed by his enthusiasms or beliefs. As a designer I want to create a tool that allows for fun, memorable play, so there is some connection there - I design for my own play style and group of friends.

8. You spent some time in Denmark a while back. What's the story behind that and did you learn anything about the Nordic scene? I hear from Olle that you were introduced to Jeepform - what's your take on the difference between story/conflict-oriented games such as Sorcerer, Roach and Dogs on the one hand and Nordic immersionism?

My wife and I decided to go to Denmark on holiday and I sort of cold-called Olle through The Forge asked if he'd be interested in showing us around, and he agreed. He and Luisa were very generous and we spent a day together. We had a great time! Olle and I have been fast friends since, with much in common. I'd been following the Nordic scene through Mike Pohjola and other people's writing, but didn't really understand it very well until I met Olle and got a chance to dive into Jeepform. I still have not played a Jeep scenario and hope to remedy that at some point! As far as difference goes, the two styles are tightly aligned in the broader consciousness, so the differences are akin to high board and low board competitive diving - huge to competitive divers, but probably hard to understand outside the group of enthusiasts.

9. What inspired you to write Roach? What has been the highlights of that game's life so far? How does it make you feel that crazy Danes are playing your game?

The Roach was a Game Chef game, so I was working within a set of murderous restrictions - I had to use the concepts of ACCUSER, ENTOMOLOGY, GUARDIAN, and WINE. The game also had to use cards. From there I wrote a game in which there was one Roach, somehow hidden in play so that no one knew who had it, and early feedback made me realize that ***everybody*** could be Roach-bound and it would be more fun. I work in academia, so that was a natural fit. I had recently found a Sumerian lexicon and references to the Shab-al-Hiri potash mine in Iraq in my Web travels, so I threw those in. The absolute highlight was receiving the first print run and seeing my work published. I'm gratified and thrilled that people all over the world are enjoying my game. Especially Danes!

10. You are now working on Grey Ranks. Could you please tell me a bit more about it. I know it has a historical background and it seems difficult to deal with the Warsaw Uprising without touching upon politics. Ron will publish Spione any day now and earlier this year carry saw the light of day. What role do you think that politics can play in role-playing games? Do you see a future in that direction? Have you considered this while designing Grey Ranks?

Grey Ranks has been difficult. It's about children in war, and romance and killing, so it is not a light and cheerful game. Characters are more or less doomed, much like the Polish partisans in real life. Finding a morsel of hope and triumph amid an unbelievably horrible situation has been one of my goals. I hope I succeed and arrive at a compelling, exciting, dramatic, and honest play experience. I don't really see the game as political as much as moral, if it is making a statement at all. carry is a sister game certainly, and it also emerged from Game Chef. It's a troubling game to play for me because it deals very directly with a painful and humiliating episode in American history, but it can be cathartic and perhaps redemptive as well. I think we'll see more games that address issues of substance - Spione is another. I really don't know what to make of this, beyond the fact that the activity of roleplaying is maturing. Perhaps we're just catching up with you Nordic types!

11. What's your deadline for Grey Ranks and how do you envision the final product?

I'm enjoying the luxury of not having a deadline for Grey Ranks. It's been in development for eleven months and will need a lot of playtesting. In the back of my mind I'm thinking February or March. The final product will be a perfect-bound book, probably digest-sized or A5 or something. There will be a lot of historical background included, but none of it will be essential to play. I have several smaller projects that may see publication before Grey Ranks!

If you want to keep up, I post design thoughts here: <http://www.bulypulpitgames.com/fairplay/>

12. I know that you've been tinkering with Grey Ranks for quite some time now - and as far as I know, you've changed a lot of things in the mechanics. Could you explain this process?

Well, it is an iterative process - I wrote the first draft of Grey Ranks in two weeks for a contest, and it was completely broken. Unplayable. What emerged from the wreckage were a couple of interesting ideas - socially ablative damage (using the things your character holds dear as "hit points") and the mechanical juxtaposition of love and horror. That stuff has been the constant, and each draft refined or adjusted the way they were represented in play. I'm currently on version 40, by the way. I'm very happy with where it is currently headed. It's starting to fall into place at last.

13. How does current design trends and/or newly published games influence your own designs?

There's an amusing danger with a large, complex project of being caught in a cycle of constant

revision, because inevitably somebody will come out with something really cool that shatters your feeble ideas. There's always something new and hot that you want to steal. You see games that are essentially in permanent development (both tabletop and computer games) because the cycle of innovation renders them obsolete before they can be wrapped up. So yes, I'm hugely influenced, but I've deliberately ignored the excellent things that appear in games I took home from Gen Con this year. Except Agon - I didn't ignore that. And Contenders. And Shadows Over Camelot. Oh, forget it.

14. I know this is a pain-in-the-ass question, but anyway - top five roleplaying games?

In no particular order? Right now?

Bunnies and Burrows. A game of many innovative firsts that opened my mind back in 1976. Plus you play a herbivore.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bunnies_and_Burrows

Dogs in the Vineyard. My favorite game ever. I will throw down a Dogs town any time, anywhere. Hugely influential for me.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dogs_in_the_Vineyard

The Shadow of Yesterday. Keys are perhaps the perfect RPG mechanism. I play once a week without fail and it is always fun.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Shadow_of_Yesterday

Prime Time Adventures. Five kilos of fun in a two kilo sack. I have never had a bad game of PTA. Everybody understands television.

<http://www.dog-eared-designs.com/games.html>

FUDGE. Another mind-blowing concept - an open source game? A game you build yourself? Love at first sight.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FUDGE>

15. Do you find inspiration in other kind of games - board games, computer games etc?

Absolutely. Shadows Over Camelot actually had a huge influence on the final form of Grey Ranks. I play a ton of board games and they are a rich vein of inspiration. I adore Memoir '44, Wings of War, Settlers of Catan, Ticket to Ride, and lots of others. I'm extremely interested in the coming convergence of tabletop and on-line roleplaying activities, and until recently I was a pretty hardcore Half-Life level designer and player. That's waned somewhat since Bully Pulpit Games began.

16. What's the deal with Theodore Roosevelt?

The "deal" with Theodore Roosevelt? You mean the polymath, statesman, soldier, cowboy, lawman, two-fisted birdman, outspoken populist, doting father, all-around awesome dude? Sure, he was an imperialist lunatic, but he was the best imperialist lunatic ever!