

Interview with Tuomas Pirinen

Strike to Stun: You were the game designer of Warhammer Fantasy Battle 6 and Mordheim. What are your feelings about these games? Are you proud of them?

Tuomas Pirinen: Extremely. There are few things in life as good as seeing your work turned into a product, and seeing how people enjoy your work. This is the reason why I chose games as my career.

StS: Can you tell us how you got the job at GW?

TP: Sure. I wrote several tactics articles for Warhammer races, and Jervis Johnson and Robin Dews read them and invited me over. They liked my work and my attitude, and offered me a job. The rest, as they say, is history.



StS: You left GW last year. What was the reason for your decision?

TP: There were several reasons: Career, family and remuneration. The sad truth is at that time I could make a lot more money working for computer games industry. I don't like to think I am greedy, but you simply cannot ignore things like that. It was very sad for me, but I felt I had to do it.

Besides, working for computer games industry has allowed me to pick up lots of new skills and meet plenty of great creative people.

StS: What is your current occupation?

TP: I am a lead games designer/project leader working for Elixir Studios.

StS: What exactly do you do at Elixir Studios?

TP: I write design documents for games, co-ordinate the efforts of games designers working under me, liaison with company directors and generally direct the creative process of game making.

StS: Could you tell us more about the projects you are currently working on?

TP: <BZZZZTTTTZZZ> <CRACKLE> <CENSORED>

StS: Lets go back to Warhammer. We noticed that the Warhammer-world became a dark and sinister place again during the time you were in charge of the WFB-stuff. What was the reason for this?

TP: Simply because that is my vision of the Warhammer world, as well as the vision of Rick Priestley and other Warhammer developers.

StS: Are you still in contact with the guys at GW?

TP: Constantly. We hold games development meetings every few months, and drink ourselves silly while talking about games.

StS: What are you thinking about the recent products for WFB?

TP: They show a lot of promise. A new, young team is in place, and I wish them all the best. The next army books after Dark Elves will have no input from me, so I am really looking forward to them.

StS: Although there is a new version of WFB out now, it seems that the races and armies remained the same (besides of a few minor modifications). Don't you think its time to for new armies/races to be created?

TP: I think everyone, including GW would love to see more armies, but this ties with boring stuff like marketing and shelf-space.

The bottom line is this: there is only so much shelf-space in games shops, and GW cannot simply add new armies indefinitely.

StS: Not all people like GW's current view of Bretonnia. Some people prefer the old WFB3 version in which the land is a dark and corrupt palce. How do you think about Bretonnia?

TP: For me personally, Bretonnia will always be a glittering kingdom of knighthood in the surface, but if you scrape at it underneath there is bigotry, xenophobia, poverty, religious intolerance, corruption, and chauvinism, not to mention Chaos worship, undead and murder.

As a professional games designer however, I think Nigel Stillman did a right thing when he turned them into this Arthurian legend. I held a quick poll in one of the larger games conventions where I was a Guest of Honour. Vast majority of the gamers preferred knights in shining armour. Before the changes, no-one played Bretonnians.

StS: Many people would like to see again a Fimir army for WFB. Do you know the reason why GW doesn't like a rerelease of the Fimir?

TP: Simple! No one ever bought the models, or played with them. It was an unsuccessful product. Maybe one day GW will re-vamp it and turn it into something gamers actually like.

StS: Are you still playing WFB or Mordheim?

TP: I pick up a game of Mordheim now and then, especially when I attend gaming conventions.

StS: Mordheim is one of the best (if not the best) Games GW ever released. It has this Dark Fantasy Flavour which WFB lacks. Many of the Skills were taken from Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay.

How strong was the WFRP-influence when creating the game?

TP: Very strong. Back in Finland I ran a WHFRP campaign for five years, which influenced me hugely. Also remember that I worked very closely with Rick Priestley (director of product development at GW), creator of WHFRP, and he has been a major influence in my professional career.

StS: What did you envision Mordheim to be and how successful do you think you were in your effort?

TP: If anything, it turned out to be better than I imagined. Game has been very successful, and gamers have really adopted it for their own. I would have liked to have spent more time on the rules side of things, doing a bit more generic skirmish rules to accommodate stuff like fighting amongst trees, underground etc. But overall I am well satisfied.

Especially the visually and in terms of atmosphere the game really shines, thanks to the artists led by the mighty John Blanche.

StS: What were you planning on doing in the long term with the entity known as the Shadow Lord?

TP: Ah, the Shadowlord... I'd like to return to that idea someday. I will not reveal details, but I did write his game rules for my own use, and if you look at the full-page picture of the Sister of Sigmar in Mordheim Rulebook, you'll notice a chained demonic form behind them. Coincidence? No it is not. And I am not saying anything more.

StS: This seems to be an important question for many Mordheim players: why is the number of models in a Witch Hunter warband limited to twelve?

TP: The character of the Witch Hunter warband is a compact, very well armed and equipped group of religious knights. It is the character of warband, and their special rules and equipment reflect this.

I actually would have liked to tinker with their rules just a little bit more(to allow them summon a few more zealots before a fight and allow them to ignore rout tests caused by dogs/rabble), but I was very wary of trying to make any warband stronger than others. I felt that Witch Hunters with no drawbacks would have been too good compared to Mercenaries.

StS: In the last two years there were many additional rules and scenarios released (new Warbands, Lustria setting, Khemri setting). What do you think about this stuff?

TP: This is exactly what I wanted to see. Mordheim is a haven for gamers to create their own background, rules, scenarios and develop their ideas. It was written with creative, enthusiastic, adult gamers in mind.

StS: Some people think that at the moment GW neglects WFB in favour of the forthcoming Lord of the Rings-game. Do you think that they are right?

TP: GW is a company, and thousands of people rely on them for livelihood. While they are gamers, they must also look at the bottom line. Lord of the Rings is one of the strongest licenses in the world, and after acquiring it, it would be mad not to promote it. Having said that, I know GW will never abandon Warhammer and 40K. You do not kill a goose laying golden eggs!

This is a thing that I constantly wonder when successful games companies are criticized for being successful. What good is a bankrupt games company to anyone? I much prefer a company that can handle both business and games -I am a hard-core gamer through and through, and I want the games industry to flourish.

StS: Do you think that LotR will bring new live into the fantasy scene? Will games like Warhammer benefit from a new fantasy boom?

TP: Yes, though the companies must be wary of 'boom and bust'. Popularity created by fads fades quickly, and you can be left with lots of staff you hired to accommodate that. However, I do feel it in my bones that it is finally time for Fantasy to become really mainstream. As it is my favourite genre, I am really looking forward to it - including a chance to work on lots of fantasy games!

StS: You were a member of the WFRP-mailing list and you contributed much to the WFRP community. Do you still play WFRP and what do you think about the future about this game?

TP: I want to start new WHFRP campaign once I have a bit more free time. The future is same as ever -Hard-core roleplayers will always appreciate WHFRP due it's excellent background and deep gameplay.

StS: You used to write fan material for WFRP, will we ever see any new material from you?

TP: Difficult to say. Some WHFRP players are unfortunately biased against me simply because I worked for GW which they see as this monstrous entity trying conquer the world.

If they only knew that GW is far too disorganized to attempt to strangle rest of the games industry -let alone the fact that GW is full of gamers who want nothing as much as see games. Lots of games. Lots and lots of games.

StS: There were rumours that you are planning to write on a skirmish game. Is this true?

TP: For a long time I've had an idea for a spoof 50's Sci-Fi skirmish game with killer robots, heroic Earth captains with rayguns, bug-eyed martians, big-busted Venus Mantraps and mad scientists with incompetent henchmen. I really want to have some fun with writing wacky rules that still play extremely well. But as I also have to make a living, so these rules must wait for a while before I have a suitable time in my life when I am not working so intensively.

StS: How do you see the future of the Warhammer Games?

TP: Very bright. GW is expanding towards interactive games (Warhammer on-line, deal with THQ etc.), while Warhammer itself grows from strength to strength in popularity.

The greatest strength GW has is their creative staff at the Design Studio. As long as all those wonderfully talented people like Jes Goodwin, Jervis Johnson, Perry Twins, Andy Chambers, John Blanche and Rick Priestley work for GW, they can always put out high-quality gaming product, which will sell well.

STS: Computer RPGs and strategy games are currently rather popular. Do they harm traditional pen-and-paper role-playing and wargaming?

TP: Well, games are a competitive industry. If you put out good enough product, it will sell. Warhammer certainly has suffered no ill effects for the influx of computer games.

I think we should not worry about new types of games but embrace them. I know that pen-and-paper games will survive, since they offer more freedom than any other type of game. Besides, I need the traditional gaming industry to groom future games designers! Many skills I acquired through role-playing and wargaming (story creation, rules writing, understanding of probabilities and games dynamics) were invaluable to me when I started making games professionally.