



Tadashi Ehara Interview

with Tadashi Ehara

Originally an editor at Chaosium, Ehara is best known for his work on Chaosium's gaming magazine, Different Worlds which ran from 1979 to 1987. In the latter part of his time as editor, Different Worlds was published through Slueth Publications (issue 39-46), and the final issue (47) in May 1987 by Different Worlds Publications. Recently Tadashi has released through Different Worlds Publications two gaming-related publications relating to feudal Japan.



Welcome to RPG Review, Tadashi. You will be pleased to know that we consider 'Different Worlds' to be one of our inspiring magazines, and of course, the namesake of this issue. Could you tell us how you introduced to roleplaying games, and what those first experiences were like?

My first role-playing game was the D&D white box set back in the late 1970s. I was immediately fascinated by the books and the possibilities. I loved the games, but never played regularly until the past few years. In the early days, Dave Hargrave and Dave Arneson lived in the Bay Area, but I never played in their campaigns. I was a big fan, of course, but I was too busy publishing and managing Chaosium business, and I only played in a few play-testing sessions.

'Different Worlds' ran for almost eight years, and it remains the work that you are most well-known for. In the first issue your editorial said 'One of the many purposes of Different Worlds; is to get all the role-playing gamers together and to facilitate a means for the game designers and the GMs to communicate with them'. How well do you think the publication succeeded in that objective?

Very well, I think, based on the kind comments I still get to this day. It was the only place role-playing game designers of all genres published articles on what they thought personally about role-playing and what gamemasters should keep in mind while running games.

There was also quite a few famous names that graced the pages; not only through the classic 'My Life and Roleplaying' interviews, but also early works by people such as Larry DiTillio (executive story editor of the science-fiction series Babylon 5), and illustrator Steve Purcell (who did the Sam and Max series). Good talent spotting on your part? How did you find your contributors?

Initially, to get submissions, I invited all the authors who have published role-playing games up until then to contribute a "My Life and Role-Playing" article. The response was great, and got the magazine rolling. I got a personal letter from Gary Gygax declining to participate, and ironically I never got an ML&RP article from Greg Stafford.

Back then, "Empire of the Petal Throne" was the only published campaign world description worth mentioning. "Blackmoor" and "Greyhawk" only described a few locations, and were not really campaign descriptions, they were mostly added rules for D&D. So I individually asking the designers to describe the campaign world they were running. I believe Marc Miller's article in Different Worlds #9 was the first place an overall description of his campaign world of The Imperium was ever published. Likewise for campaign worlds of Dave Hargrave, Ed Simbalist, Ken St. Andre, and B. Dennis Sustare.

Once Different Worlds had published a few issues, submissions arrived regularly, and I never had a problem having

enough good articles to publish

in each issue. Artists especially clamored to be published in *Different Worlds*. I mean, a Frank Frazetta cover? I did not solicit that, it was offered to me.

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In issue 39 of 'Different Worlds' your editorial says that the decision to change publisher from Chaosium to Sleuth was 'entirely my responsibility' and based on a decision to move back to San Francisco. Yet in other sources I have read that Chaosium was in financial difficulties at the time. So did you jump, were you pushed, or was there a bit of both? Also, what happened to Sleuth publications? By the last issue you had parted company.

Money was always tight at Chaosium. I was getting married and moving back to San Francisco. Sleuth Publication was located in San Francisco. They had published a successful main-stream Sherlock Holmes game and had offered me a job. It seemed like a good opportunity and I was burning out trying manage Chaosium's cash flow, so I moved on. I was not pushed, Chaosium was disappointed to see me go.

As it turned out, Sleuth was terribly managed. Sleuth had a bad relationship with one of the bigger distributors of *Different Worlds*, and when the magazine moved over to Sleuth, the distributor declined to continue selling it. Sleuth's cash flow, however, was really good at times. Their "Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective" game-in-a-binder consistently sold well. It was used as a contributor bonus by PBS stations all over the country when they had pledge nights that coincided with a new "Sherlock Holmes" series that they were promoting. Australia, Germany, and especially Japan published their versions in their respective countries, and sent royalty checks to Sleuth. Waldenbooks ordered thousands of copies for their stores. But Sleuth eventually put the game in a box, making it no longer the "Sherlock Holmes game that comes in a binder," and eventually even did a book version. They blew all the money on various projects that did not pan out and eventually went out of business. They had published only two supplements for SHCD, and lost a franchise opportunity.

Different Worlds Publications produced a release of the classic and exotic game Empire of the Petal Throne, plus a couple of supplements. These were in 1987 and 1988. The next publication was the Blackwatch Technical Reference Manual, a science fiction roleplaying game in 1988. After that it wasn't until 2004 that we saw more publications, being a scenario, a setting, and a d20 rewrite of an AD&D scenario. That's a lot time between drinks; what was happening then?

I left active gaming to raise a family and work in hi-tech. I have a degree in Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences from UC Berkeley, so I worked in Silicon Valley to support my wife and four kids. Any spare time I had, I played PC games. "Civilization" is my favorite computer game. If I would ever design a computer game, "Civilization" would be it.

Most recently, there have been publications on Japan's transition through feudalism to modernity with the generic supplements (i.e., Gamers Guide to Feudal Japan: Daimyo of 1867, 2010 and Gamers Guide to Feudal Japan: Shogun & Daimyo, 2011). Can you tell us more about these? Will we see more publications of a similar nature?

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Well, I thought it was time to author my own books, and logic said I should write about what I knew more than anyone else in the hobby, and that was feudal Japan. I am not a game designer so I wrote reference books for gamers interested in designing campaigns based in Japan during the time of the samurai. The first book, "Daimyo of 1867," took seven months to publish, "Shogun & Daimyo" took 14 months.

It is generally not a good idea to talk about ongoing projects until they are near publication. After my second book, I started work on a third, but after a year the project became too big and unwieldy. I have to rethink and figure out a new format before I can get back into it.

Finally, what do you think the future is of roleplaying adventure games? How is the computerisation and Internet affecting the hobby and how will it do so in the future?

If I had stayed with Chaosium, I believe we would be more involved in computer games today. They have licensed out

"Call Of Cthulhu" computer games, and that should be fine.

Tabletop role-playing games may perhaps provide the ultimate cooperative gaming experience. It is inherently different from computer games. There is something infectious about getting a bunch of gamers together to play face-to-face cooperatively and meet regularly to play in a campaign.

Tabletop RPGs serve a different market than computer RPGs. May they both prosper.

The hobby needs a good universal system that all gamers can use. I think "Pathfinder" is doing the best job. I now play in three regularly-run campaigns based on that system.

There is still room for innovation. Especially with regards to playaids. But that is a big subject, suitable for a separate article. If Different Worlds was still in publication, I would publish that article.

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