Interview with Steve Darlington

How would you define your work? Do you define yourself as a writer, a game designer, a developer?

It's a curious mix of all those things. I describe myself as a writer and a game designer. I think in writing RPGs I am thinking like a game designer but in a very specific way that only applies to RPGs.

In your opinion, what can you do with RPGs you cannot do with any other media?

One thing that RPGs do is they really let you get very close to the rules of settings and narratives. Even if you don't notice them, there are rules in these games that determine the reality of the world you inhabit and the stories that emerge from that, and they are much more present than they are in video games or board games where more abstract rules hold sway.

When you work on a RPG, like *Warhammer* or *Doctor Who*, what is your main inspiration? A specific background, the kind of characters players can play, the type of scenarios you can imagine in this universe?

My main inspiration is the players reading the book or using the rules, I try to always focus on communicating to them what's interesting or cool or scary or amazing about whatever I am writing. In a sense I am a salesman, and I am selling them the world, the character and the scenarios, and I want to make that sale.

How would you define a game system, its purpose, its function, its role?

A game system exists for a lot of reasons. It makes explicit certain social roles and assumptions, it exists as a toy to play with and explore, as a puzzle to unlock, as an inspiration and guide to creative flights of fancy.

How would you define roleplay?

Roleplay involves engaging with a fictitious reality as a participant of that reality.

In your opinion, what are the best RPG(s), in substance and in form? Why?

Hard to pick a few, there are so many excellent ones. Also there are so many genres and tastes, there is the best game for a person but many many best games. I do think the Buffy RPG is extremely close to perfection in every aspect, though.

What are your favorite game systems? Why?

What are your favorite campaigns? Why?

What are your favorite backgrounds? Why?

I don't really split these up, I think the games are a combination of these things. Rules implement backgrounds and campaigns implement both. Warhammer and Buffy have always had all three working together, and are two of my favourites.

What do you think of the distinction between story games and RPGs?

I think it might be a better name for explaining that not all things under that banner require a total "immersion" into character, and to be a more inclusive term of a whole variety of activities that are part of the same concept. And it wouldn't sound like the psychological term of roleplaying, which is different. But I don't think they are two different things, I think we should think of the term as an evolution, not a separation.

What do you think of the RPGs market today?

I think crowdfunding has totally changed the RPG market although it was also in flux for other reasons; the growth of PDFs and PDF-theft hurt the bottom line a lot before crowdfunding came along to help shore that up. I think every time the market has changed, RPGs have changed as well: for example when indie games sprang up as a response to direct marketing through the internet, and I think we're beginning to see RPGs changing to suit crowdfunding. Part of that is I think we'll see games being more portable (to other systems) and expandable (to new worlds) because those make good stretch goals.

How do you see the future of RPGs, in substance and in form, economically speaking? (new funding plans like crowdfunding, distribution, Internet, magazines, conventions, etc.)

I mentioned crowdfunding above because I think that's already here in the present. I think there's this great hunger to unlock ways to synthesize technology but I'm not sure anyone's cracked it yet. We have tablet/pad tools to use at the game table, and ways to synthesize as much of the tabletop online, or on the pad, and ways to combine traditional system stuff with the huge field of online roleplaying which we've never touched before (the thing where people do shared, in-character fan-fic, basically, that grew up independently of our hobby) – storium.com is one example of that last kind. It feels to me like everyone is coming at this idea from all sorts of directions - another one is making video games more story based and more focused on story than shooting things – and what's going to happen in the next ten years are all sorts of new pinpoints on a graph in this intersection of ideas. Which pinpoints will coalesce into a future is impossible to tell and that's a good thing, because what's interesting right now is all the awesome new pinpoints we will get.