

The Charles S. Roberts Awards
1977 Hall of Fame winner
Redmond A. Simonsen
1942-2005 *Requiescat in pace* (may he rest in peace)

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Before I go into the personal bit, I'll explain why you should know Redmond's name, even though you probably don't: Redmond *coined* the term "game designer." Before he did, we had no good term – game inventor, game author... but he put his finger on what we do.

Redmond also established the look for the graphics of the board wargame. Redmond wasn't the first to design a fantasy/science fiction boardgame, but he almost single-handedly established it as a successful genre... And Redmond was a kick-ass game designer in his own right. Go find a copy of *StarForce: Alpha Centauri*, or *Sorcerer*.

Tscch... that's totally insufficient. But I suppose if Redmond at least gets a footnote as the coiner of "game designer," it's something.

Every time I pass one of the buildings that used to hold the offices of SPI, I want to turn in. I want to go to the elevator bank and press the button. I want to ride up to the offices, go in through the door, and walk down the hall. And I want to turn in to Redmond's office, find him there, playing with his cameras and reflectors, or his light-table and exacto, and have a conversation. There are other people I miss from those days, but when you come down to it, there's no one I really *need* to talk to – just Redmond. And I imagine him there, working away, as he did, virtually 24 hours a day, looking up – not with a smile on his face, but a nod of acknowledgement, putting down the camera, and ready to advise. I almost can't imagine him in any other setting.

I'm not just saying this now, to make a point. I try to avoid walking past 257 Park Avenue South, or the building that used to be called 44 East 23rd (but now has a Fifth Avenue address), because I *know* I'll find myself grimacing and lowering my head, and muttering "those days are gone" to myself. I can't help but find myself thinking that if only I go in and find the elevator – I can go up and talk to... to Redmond.

With JFD, Redmond founded SPI, and established the first real game geek enterprise, but while I still admire Jim, Jim is an operator. Redmond was a decent human being. And very likely, Redmond was the first human being on this planet--with the possible exception of Sid Sackson--to think seriously about game design.

I find myself wanting to talk about the things I learned from Redmond, but I almost don't know where to begin. But perhaps this will suffice: before computers were anything that existed outside academia and government, Redmond taught me about UI. He taught me about the importance of graphical representation of information, how showing could be vastly more important than explaining, how a clever visual system could transform a

game from mediocrity to fascination. Before digital games existed, he taught me the importance of math in games, the use of algorithmic systems to create gameplay. And he taught me the importance of decency and attentiveness to your customers in business: Redmond made it a point of personal pride to respond to every customer complaint, and on more than one occasion, raised holy hell with the customer service or warehouse people to ensure that complaints were addressed.

Redmond Simonsen was... is... was... one of the smartest, and most decent men I've ever known. After SPI imploded, and he moved to Texas, I kept on expecting to hear about the next fantastic thing he'd done--but life is not always kind to the best among us, and Redmond was, I suspect, like me, prone to black depression. I don't think he ever did find again his muse.

I haven't seen him in twenty years, and exchanged email with him in those years only once or twice. I'm wondering why that's so, now.... And I suspect it's more than a little because I didn't want to see him diminished, to find that the man I admired so greatly had not found his way, had not found something worthy of his many talents. That's more to do with me than him: the bleak fear, the sinking feeling that you haven't done anything worth a damn in twenty years. I guess I feared that if I met him, I'd just see another middle aged guy, damaged, as we all are, by life. And what I wanted was the competent, creative, self-assured, impressive--if geeky and socially somewhat inept--fellow who was, when you get down to it, the only thing approaching a mentor I ever had. I didn't want to see him diminished; I just wanted to take the elevator up, and have a conversation in his office, amid the smell of the rubber cement and the photographic equipment.

I do that, sometimes... Visit him in his office, I mean. In my dreams. I suspect I will again, in years to come. And if there is an afterlife, I hope to see him there again. It's where he belongs: designing the graphics for the next game.

This will mean something to some readers and nothing to others: As art director, Redmond chose cover illustrators for several of my early games. I think there's no doubt he had an amazing eye for talent. One of my games featured cover art by Charles Vess. Another by Howard Chaykin. They were then basically complete unknowns.

Some years ago, I wrote an obit for **Dani Buntén**, and thought I'd summoned... a sufficiency of emotion. But while Dan/i was a friend, s/he was not someone who was, when you get down to it, someone fundamentally important to me: I do not dream about seeing Dani again. Today, I'm feeling bitterly ashamed that I never did look Redmond up, on my (infrequent) visits to Texas. And I am very, very sorry that I will never see him in the flesh again.