F&M Exclusive INTERVIEW

Game Designer and Developer HARRY ROWLAND

Co-Designer of the Charles Roberts Award and F&M Award winner "World In Flames"

by Jay Selover and Rodger MacGowan

F&M: Harry *Rowland is co-designer* of *the sensational game* **World In Flames** *from Australian Design* Group. *How in the world did* you *get interested in wargames and in designing them?*

ROWLAND: Originally, when I was just a nipper, I was very interested in games; **Monopoly** and **Squatter...** oh, you don't have that here.

F&M: *That's an Australian game?*

ROWLAND: That's right; it's about sheep... very popular. (laughter) And I was very interested in game theory, decision making, and those sorts of things; without actually being able to put it in those sorts of words at the time, of course. I started out with miniatures; little Airfix models and those sorts of things, and I saw an Epyx magazine in probably 1973. They had a one-page review about wargames and they were covering **Drang Nach Osten.** Now, I didn't exactly buy **Drang Nach Osten** as my first game, but I had never seen anything like this before.

F&M: *What was it that intrigued* you *about them; was it the history* part of *it?*

ROWLAND: Yes, the history... and this was a new field of gaming that I had never seen before.

F&M: *And then* you *went* on *and became involved as a player? Were there any games that* got you going? **ROWLAND:** Yes, the first ones I can still remember of course. They were AH's **Blitzkrieg** and **France 1940,** and I was just in seventh heaven with these games.

F&M: *Did* you *teach yourself?*

ROWLAND: Yes, oh yes. I'm from a fairly small town, just west of Brisbane, called Twoowoomba and of course there were no wargamers anywhere in Twoowoomba.

F&M: *Ah, yes, famous Twoowoomba.*

ROWLAND: Yes, it's the Aboriginal word for `swamp'; there's a bit of information for you.

F&M: *Did* you *start playing solitaire?*

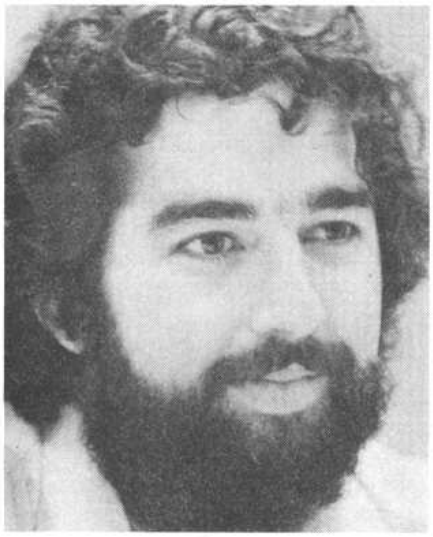
ROWLAND: Yes, there were some miniatures guys I was playing with and I got them involved a bit, but they sort of left the hobby, so to speak. They didn't really get involved. And then when I moved to Canberra in 1975 or 76, there was a club there, so I just got involved with the club.

F&M: *What was the club like?*

ROWLAND: Well clubs in Australia are pretty big. The Canberra Wargames Society, which runs the national games convention each year, has forty or fifty members and it's only one of about thirty or forty in the country, so there is quite a `club scene'. But really, fantasy games are what is big in Australia; that's what well over half of the players are interested in.

F&M: *So then, after becoming a player, and learning a great deal about* how *games* work, *were* you *then intrigued about doing one yourself?*

ROWLAND: Well, the whole thing about how **Empires In Arms,** our first game, came about was more accident than anything else. If you remember a game many years ago called **1812** by SPI; they had an area system and a hex grid in the same game. I thought it was a great game; I loved it. And I thought this was the kind of system you could apply throughout Europe. This was while I was still in Twoowoomba, actually; I was fourteen or fifteen at the time. So I made up this game that was just like **1812,** only with all of Europe. It was really a pretty bad game. Well, you know with the way that depletion works in that game, you fight for a couple of months in one part of



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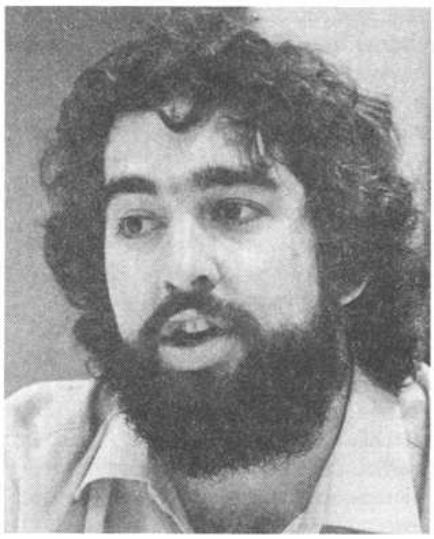

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HARRY ROWLAND

Europe and it's sort of like *Scorched Earth*. And so, I just stopped playing it after a while, but when I went to Canberra, I took it along with me. Well, the group of guys that I was playing with included Greg Pinder, and one evening we were really bored and we were just looking around for a game to play, and Greg said "Hey, how about this?"; he's a real Napoleonics buff. I told him it was really boring, but he insisted so we just started playing it. I hadn't played it for years; by now I was twenty-one... *it was still horrible.* But Greg was interested enough to continue on with it; so we just changed it and changed it and changed it.

F&M: So, *you met Greg through the gaming club?*

ROWLAND: That's right. I was president of the Canberra Wargames Society and he was president of the North Canberra Wargaming Society, which I discovered later had three members, him and two friends. But it sounded pretty pretentious so I started corresponding with him and we met at a local convention.

F&M: *Were most of the fellows in the club interested in historical games; what was the split between that and role-playing?*

ROWLAND: It's pretty much like two clubs in one. There is a miniatures part which is quite strong with about twenty members. And the other forty or fifty are split about 60/40 between fantasy and boardgames.

F&M: *Did fantasy and science fiction interest you, or has it been pretty much wargames?*

ROWLAND: Certainly science fiction has interested me; I have a Science degree from the University and I have always been interested in Einsteinian Physics. And that has disappointed me with a lot of games — they seem to completely ignore it. It's one of the problems in designing a science fiction game. If you are twenty thousand light years away from someone and you launch an attack; it will take some time for anything to reach them.

F&M: *So* how *did you end* up *being* a *company? How did* **Empires In Arms** *get beyond* you and Greg?

ROWLAND: Australian Design Group actually isn't a company, it's a partnership. We started with nine members and now we are down to seven; through natural selection we like to think. I was also a student, so I originally started out with only a four percent share holding. I was quite mortified to find out that to get in the Game Designers' Guild you had to have five percent, so I quickly managed to buy a few shares. Originally, Greg and I wanted a vehicle to sell **Empire In Arms,** so we went to some of the other club members and they chipped in. The current members are Neil Mackenzie, Greg, myself, Avi Solomon, Phil Clark, Nigel Stuart and Eddie Swart.

F&M: *Is this a side job for everyone?*

ROWLAND: Yes, we all have 'real' jobs. Most of us are in the public service; in Canberra that is the largest employer. I resigned about six months ago and I am now doing free-lance computer contracting...

F&M: *Does that mean that there is enough computer knowledge around Australian Design Group to* go *into computer wargames?*

ROWLAND: Well... It's interesting... The only computer person is myself in that group. However, I have put together a group of five programmers and we are actually going to be designing computer games. In fact, we have already started. This won't be through Austrailian Design Group, although the product may be marketed through ADG.

F&M: *These will be combat simulations; classic type wargames?*

ROWLAND: Yes, we've already got a contract with 3W to produce their **No Trumpets, No Drums** game. We also plan to be doing games for ourselves as well. We are called *Australian Games Simulations.*

F&M: *Can you give us a time frame?*

ROWLAND: Well, the Vietnam game we hope to have out around Christmas; which is a lousy time to release it. We are toying with a few different concepts; we would like to run a series of games perhaps; not neccessarily with the Vietnam system, because that one is peculiar. The one that I am most interested in is an Arnhem game, because I don't believe that there has been a good Arnhem game yet on the home computer.

F&M: You *mentioned Vietnam and World War II. Are there some periods that are most* popular *in Australia? In designing games, do* you *consider the American* or *Australian markets?*

ROWLAND: At the moment, the U.S. market makes up about 75% of our sales; therefore we basically design for the U.S. market. The periods are pretty much the same in Australia; World War II and Science Fiction are most popular, and then comes Napoleonics. The Civil War is not anywhere near as popular in Australia.

F&M: *Are there any particular periods that are of interest in Australia, while not particularly popular in the U.S.?*

ROWLAND: Well, Napoleonics is sort of like that; because of the larger miniatures contingent in Australia.

F&M: *There is a real history* of *miniatures in Australia?*

ROWLAND: Yes; the ancients in particular. The national ancients competition draws two hundred participants, which is quite large considering the size of Australia.

F&M: You *have* your own *conventions over there. Could you compare them to Origins?*

ROWLAND: Well, they get about 800 wargamers and fantasy gamers, but a larger contingent of visitors. At the first convention, we actually got 5000 people through the doors. It has declined a lot now; we get about 1500 each year. That one year, we had a very central location and people had never heard of these things called wargames.

F&M: *Now, the next step* for *Australian Design Group was* **World In Flames;** *how did that come about?*

ROWLAND: Well, Greg and I both wanted to do a World War II game, and we both like strategic games. We personally find them more interesting, maybe it is the role-playing aspect, who knows. I mean, you don't really feel that you are getting anywhere fighting five men against five men. I mean, who cares?

F&M: *Ask those five men!*

ROWLAND: Yes, well, point well taken. Well, about the time that **Empires** first came out, we started to toy around with a World War II game. We just originally had an idea that we wanted a hex system for land and an area system for naval aspects; and we felt that the topic had not been done on this sort of scale. We were toying with the idea of making it two separate games and you would have to buy both and mate them, but we decided that would basically be a rip-off. Perhaps the most innovative feature that our game has is that you can fight the whole of World War II on a reasonable scale, in a reasonable amount of time.

F&M: *How much was the original concept like what ultimately became the* game?

ROWLAND: It was more evolutionary than revolutionary. The things like the hex dots, for instance, over the *sea* areas; that took some time. We were not sure how to work out the air system over the sea areas. We even toyed with using rulers to determine how far you were moving over a sea area, but we pretty quickly dropped that one. It was really a pretty horrible game when we started; it really was.

F&M: *How many phases would you say it went through?*

ROWLAND: Well, we went through three different combat systems. The naval combat system was more of a flash than anything else. We were originally going to use a code instead of the number of dice; on the charts we were going to have all sorts of complexity. That's perhaps where Greg and I work well together; Greg likes to keep everything as simple as possible. So, every time that I try to add a bit of dirt he sort of scrapes it out, so to speak.

F&M: *Did* you want *to say something with the game? Was there something that you felt that other games on the subject had overlooked?*

ROWLAND: Well, we were surprised that no other World War II game had been attempted on this scale. I can only imagine that it is because of the different scale. If you have a normal one-map Pacific game then you have a postage stamp Europe, and if you have a normal Europe then you need an auditorium for the Pacific. We were surprised that no one had thought of just changing the scale. It doesn't affect anything except movement and you can take that into account fairly easily. The other things were things like U.S. entry; the fact that it's variable. People seem to like that more than any other part of the game. It actually constrains players without actually saying "no, you can't do that". We really do believe that it's very important in any game to have decisions. The more decisions you force a player to make, the more you are going to separate a good player from a bad player. A lot of games say "you can do that, you can't do that, you can't do that", and there are very few decisions. That's why I think some games do better than others. **F&M:** *Were there certain games that* you *looked at that had been done before on the same subject; not really "the same" but perhaps with the same scale?* **ROWLAND:** Well the two that of course spring to mind are AH's **Third Reich** for the European game and GDW's **Pearl Harbor** for the Pacific, and also AH's **Victory In The Pacific;** I guess that makes three. **Third Reich** we liked, but we figured that the air and naval aspects were too abstract. You couldn't really do a Pacific game with a **Third Reich** system; it would be really boring. We liked **Pearl Harbor,** but one aspect of the naval system which we didn't like was that you move out into a hex and stay in one hex for two or three months; that seemed ludicrous. **Victory In The Pacific,** although very simple, was a brilliant game. Even though, as a simulation, it's not perfect; certainly it is one of the best games I've ever played.

F&M: *Going back even further, SPI put out a game called* **Global War;** *did you look at that one at all?*

ROWLAND: Yes, yes. Greg played that one quite a bit, and I've played it once or twice. We didn't like it at all. Just the fact that you couldn't fight any sort of a reasonable battle in Europe; why have half of Russia when not one German troop was anywhere near there? Or why have America on the map? I mean, great country, but there's no chance of invasion so what's the point? We think that they missed the point in what they did in that game.

F&M: *So* you *had reviewed all of these games and knew exactly where you wanted to go.*

ROWLAND: Our game is, in terms of scale on the European map, close to **Third Reich,** although it has a few more hexes so there is a bit more maneuver. And the only thing that really displeased us about that game, other than the air and naval systems, was that when you fought in Russia, it was like you pop at one entire Russian army and then another springs up; and then pop at that one and another springs up. We didn't think that was how World War II was fought.

F&M: *Where did* **World In Flames** *originally premier; did you originally sell it just in Australia?*

ROWLAND: No, Origins '85 was its premier, and even then it didn't show up. We had a couple of copies and took a hundred orders. A lot of people were interested.

F&M: *With the unfortunate incident at the convention, that you didn't get all of the games.. what was the next step? How did it develop?*

ROWLAND: Well, **Empires In Arms** was a great help because it had kind of established us as a game company, and as a reputable game company. We had already established some distributors, and others at that show were interested in buying the game. We were very pleased, because when we had originally come out with **Empire In Arms,** the distributors wouldn't touch it — "No, you can't sell it at this price; it's far too expensive." They are expensive games, but I think that the general public realizes that an import is going to cost more just because of freight charges.

F&M: *Well, you must feel pretty happy about your Charlie and F&M awards for* **World In Flames.**

ROWLAND: Yes, that's right, very pleased. Australia's always had a bit of a problem in that we've basically lived for a hundred years now on what we can dig up out of the dirt and what we can cut down and ship over to less fortunate countries for lots of money. Well we can't do that anymore; there really has been a cultural cringe in Australia and Australia's reaching a crunch point now. And so for us to be able to do this; you know, it's like America's Cup II — or should I call it the Australia's Cup now?

F&M: *We certainly think that it helps to show that* wargaming *is international, and that the American wargaming hobby is not unwilling to recognize the efforts of those abroad.*

ROWLAND: We had heard that there was the "lock" by the big U.S. game companies; that game companies with twenty or thirty employees can form a solid voting block and so we couldn't win these awards. The fact that a small game company can win should certainly give heart to everybody, because it shows that anyone can win.

F&M: *Well, the quality does come through. People notice it and recognize it; and usually it gets rewarded.*

ROWLAND: Well, we certainly hope that was the case this time.

F&M: *So where next; computer games, more boardgames, or both?*

ROWLAND: I really think boardgames do seem to be on the decline, and that computer games are getting the young kids into the hobby where the boardgames used to. With the way that the computer games themselves are going, the one megabyte game is only one or two years around the corner. When they get that kind of memory with a large screen; that will really be something. Apart from the memory limitations, the big thing that boardgames have over computer games is the graphics, but even that will change. F&M: So, you *will be moving into computer games?*

ROWLAND: That, and general games.

F&M: *Such* as?

ROWLAND: Business ;;times, economic games, gangster games... **F&M:** *"Dr. Ruth" games?*

ROWLAND: Well, we have heard about that one, but I'm not sure if Australia is quite ready for that yet. **F&M:** Are *you planning to do* any *more historical games?*

ROWLAND: Oh, yes, we are working on several right now. We're working on a Western Front 1944-45 game with Italy and France, and an Ancients game around the period of the rise of the Roman Empire; but it needn't be the rise of the Romans, it might be the Assyrians or the Carthaginians.

World In Flames?

ROWLAND: It would hopefully give the same feeling. People noticed that about **Empires in Arms** and then **World in Flames;** that they both gave the right sort of "feeling" for the period. You really "are" Napoleon, or Stalin, or Roosevelt. And that is what we try to bring out in our games; the role-playing aspect should not be ignored in any game.

F&M: *When do* you *see these two new historical games being released?* **ROWLAND:** We want to have a new historical game out by Origins in 1987 in Baltimore. We are not sure yet which one. I suppose it will depend on how they come along.

F&M: *ADG seems to have a eery distinctive philosophy* on *boardgames;* you *have direction and an objective. Now, talking* about computer *games, do* you *have a philosophy* about *what you want to do? Where do* you *feel current computer games can be improved?* **ROWLAND:** Computer games have several problems. One is the graphics, and perhaps the worst fault is the amount of time between turns. With a boardgame, even when it is not your turn, you can look at the map and plan your next moves. Because computer games are so often using limited intelligence, they force one player to go away for half an hour while the other guy makes his move. What we are planning to do with computer games is to *network games.* We feel that this is where computer games will be going. By *network games,* I mean you connect two computers together, put in the program, and both players run in real time at their own consoles. It won't be an arcade game; it will still be a matter of planning. While you are executing your attacks on one front, your opponent may be coming and attacking on another front. This kind of thing will be much closer to the reality and chaos of combat.

Of course, with modems and phone lines, you won't ever have to leave your house. We've found that most computer game players go to the computer because they can't find an opponent. So, now you will have a real live opponent as close as your phone. No game like that has ever come out, and we think that the first couple of games that come out with that capability will do very well.

F&M: *What sort of topic would* you *choose for a computer game?*

ROWLAND: Well, the one I like would be a "Parachutes In Arnhem" game. this game would have everything; parachutes, tanks, Germans, Americans... even British. Although that one may actually be a detraction. That topic would be a perfect vehicle for exactly this type of game. You know, the British are trying to push up the road, paratroopers are landing all over the place, Germans are coming in from everywhere, you don't know exactly where they are; and you have to react to this constantly changing situation. You might be working along on something and see some message at the bottom of the screen; "Help, we're in trouble. What should we do?". And now you have to go fix that situation. Of course you could ignore the message and continue your offensive, but you may suffer the consequences.

F&M: *Well, that certainly does sound most exciting. It seems that* you *have some definite plans with* regards *to* going *the* computer route. *Will this spell the end of ADG as we know it?*

ROWLAND: I certainly don't feel that Australian Design Group is going to die. I mean now that we've won the awards, we kind of feel obligated to do another game. In fact, at the Awards Ceremony, I almost felt like saying "Alright, alright, we'll do a third game."

F&M: *We will certainly be* looking forward *to that "third game", and all of the others to come. G'day*