

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

The Redmond I Knew

By John Prados

I'm sure there are others who knew Redmond Simonsen longer than I, and who worked more closely with him than I did, but during the course of nine years, about half a dozen games, and probably thirty or forty historical articles or detailed game reviews, I knew Simonsen quite well.

He was a very private man and probably those of us who knew him knew only those pieces Redmond chose to show. For example, I knew Simonsen as someone from Pittsburgh striving to fit in in New York, sort of self-consciously lacking a certain urban sophisticate edge. Only in the past day have I heard that Red was born in New York.

Simonsen was a good man, and a friend. He did not play favorites – at least not that I saw – and his contributions to gaming are legion, not least to games that I invented. Watching his approach to graphics, which he called “physical systems design,” just watching, I learned things I used to streamline the graphic design of the prototypes I created for my designs, games that went to SPI but also elsewhere. I'll always appreciate Redmond's creativity and imaginative approach.

I've commented elsewhere on Simonsen's fascination with technology so I'll say little about that. But I suppose his own imagination, that sense of having the wherewithal to create at the leading edge, drove this in him. He always had the best toys!

Redmond was pleasant, but quick to become frustrated. I remember a moment at Origins '78, which took place at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. He wanted to do some pictures of me (Simonsen was a big photography hobbyist) and for a backdrop wanted the outside, so we walked down a hill, a slope that is now studded with various academic and administrative buildings and the Ford Library. Anyway, we took the photos and began walking back toward the Michigan Student Union, which was the convention site, and long before we got there, Redmond was angry at the hill, its slope, the distance, whatever. Yet, the locale for the shooting had been his choice.

Or another vignette – Redmond loved to play the games, not just make them (that was distinctive). But he was *very* competitive. Losing frustrated him quite a lot. SPI staffers tiptoed very carefully around Redmond's office when he'd gone down in defeat.

SPI's offices (actually the second office, at 44 E23rd Street) were like the head of a long-horn steer. You entered a reception area somewhere in the middle. Staff offices ran along the outside length of the horns. The playtest rooms were on the inside edge. Jim Dunnigan's office stood at the tip of one horn. Down the other, at the tip, was

Simonsen's domain. Red could almost closet himself when he wanted to, and there were times that happened.

On physical systems design, Redmond prided himself on making at least one graphic innovation in every game. He didn't always achieve that, but he worked at it. The graphic representations of variable time intervals in the *Task Force* game, the production cornucopia in *War in the Pacific*, and many more notions that Redmond pioneered were honored in the imitation and gaming was the better for them. He did wonderful off-map displays too – the unit charts in Eric Goldberg's *Kursk* come to mind here. I believe he was the first to use representations of soldiers instead of unit symbols on counter art. Simonsen certainly felt inhibited at SPI's original limitation to two-color artwork, and his creativity exploded when multi-color graphics became possible. Some simulations were so simple or straightforward – the quad games come to mind – they did not lend themselves to this kind of innovation, but even there Simonsen stood for good clean graphics.

In the later 1970s, with much stiffer competition in the gaming industry, much of it fuelled by the entry of new companies populated by designers (and graphic artists) who had learned from SPI and Redmond Simonsen, Simulations Publications fell on hard times. Tensions at the office rose, and more frequently Simonsen seemed closeted, or absorbed himself with his other hobbies. This may not have been so evident for those who worked at SPI from day-to-day, but for an outsider like me it was palpable. The company became overextended from too rapid expansion into the retail business, attendant problems with distributors, and the overhang of debt to its printers. Simonsen and Dunnigan were not successful at devising a solution to these difficulties, and finally sold their interests out to TSR Hobbies. Almost immediately after that, Simonsen moved to Texas and put a foot into the computer-gaming world – again at the leading edge – and was not again to be found on the New York scene. I missed him, but then soon thereafter I moved to Washington, DC, and lost contact with the New York scene myself.