

A Tendency To Shine*

Keith Hackwood

"The quiet sadness of it all to me is just this: It (role-playing) was meant to expand minds and not to contract them, or worse, to set them spinning in a circle."

Robert J Kuntz, LOTGD blog post 'Spin Cycle Meets Spin Doctor' 4th January 2010

This time out I'd like us to scout ahead a bit further, or maybe a bit deeper – less beyond the edge, as beneath it. The lifeline we'll be using for this exercise in descent, and for our subsequent spelunking, is woven from the colours of our mind-play, braided into a lightweight and unbreakable fibre, known by its generic name, Imagination.

Clip on folks, here we go, and we're following the tendency to shine inherent in all living things (and in the imaginations of gamers especially). We start by entering the rift where RJK marked it out for us – that spot in time and space where, somehow, an innovative game of made up stuff, seduced out of a need for play and imaginal indulgence, suddenly became a commodity, a thing-in-the-world to be exploited for profit/orthodoxy/control. As Kuntz points out above, one result of being on this side of the event horizon of role-playing is the experience of things contracting, narrowing in through some inevitable heat death of creative juice; of a golden age losing its motility to a fixed and fading big bang moment now separated from its current arid state – a state where there are a billion diverse but empty forms slowly succumbing to final entropy.

Well, it's a seductive narrative, a romantic trajectory raging against the dying of the light, at its best singing elegiac wakes for a beautiful moment, long since bereaved from our plastic present. There are many traditions of this sort of thing, from Anglo-Saxon poetry down through the Celtic horizon, distilled out into what we call fantasy via the inkling scenes of Tolkein et al. To sum it up (and to quote the anonymous poet of 'The Wanderer') 'wyrð bið full aræd'- fate is wholly inexorable. That the genius flash of D&D would flourish and fall into what some in the grognardisphere refer to as 'golden age', 'silver age' and so on, is seen to be inevitable. And from that perspective, especially to those who have the t-shirt that reads 'I was there', this is a perfectly reasonable view. The best of the promise of roleplaying flashed across the skies in the early seventies and has been diversifying (and dying away) ever since. We that come after the flash can but attend the funereal demise and wrench a noble stoicism or two

from the acquired memory – we must mourn something that we never directly knew.

Or did it? Do we? I don't mean to adopt the standard defence against the elegiac view, that now more than ever before we see a vibrant and diversified thriving roleplaying ecosystem, with endless niches and crossover points, fertile boundaries and mutations in form. Those observations also carry some weight, of course, and have some literal, material and tangible truth – although they can also provide a mask of neurotic 'we're OK aren't we?' feelings, since much that glistens on the surface turns out to be pretty shallow underneath. I'm loathe to use the oxymoronic epithet about 'creative industries', since most of the time that is mere dualistic doublespeak for economic standardisation and shifting units of product, for compartmentalising the imagination and assuming to control the process. There is nothing creative about that, in the sense in which I am using the term creative. So do we need another Hollywood treatment of a formulaic RomCom #A or Disaster Movie #B? Do we need another rehashed D-list apocalypse RPG clone with a tweaked ruleset? Maybe we do. I'm sure that I don't, though, and here's why – such projects and their end products lack creativity from top to bottom, they're fat, lazy, complacent, overblown, dull, closed off, like zombies chewing gum at the mind's crystalline shine. I don't need them because I've seen them a million times already, I can do better in my own imagination – and so can you. I don't need that stuff because it deadens rather than vivifies, it makes the heat death of the material universe a welcome release from the asinine boredom of the consumer-present, you see? Present, as in gift. Where is the gift in deadening someone's most vital essence? Our play, our gaming, our purpose in continuing to be, is in our shining, not our consuming, our imagining not our stagnating.

To return to my theme, at this point we need to know what it is that shines – what it was, for instance, that shone at the birth of roleplaying? What shines during a particularly great session of play? What shines in our imaginations when we really give ourselves to something? The answers to all these floating questions tend to return to one point – to ourselves. We shine, our nature is to shine, when we remove the conditions that block our shining, we shine. Like the sun behind low and dense dark clouds, actually we are always shining, it is how we are, though we usually forget about that part and identify with the clouds. Back at ground level, dice in hand, opening up the cleft of rock to descend further, clipped to our imaginal rope, we also shine – and nothing, nothing under the stars, is as important as that shining, be it only for a fleeting moment.

What if our language had no verbs, only adjectives? What if rather than 'to be', we had to say something about belonging? So yer man Gygax would no longer 'be' the visible progenitor of D&D, we would say something about how he 'belongs' to D&D. You and I are not gamers, we belong to the game. We are not the creators of worlds, we are 'those within whom the growing worlds flourish'. We do not own things, we maintain them, we pay for their coming and going

with our own time and attention, ritualised as play. Rather than building and exploiting things, inwardly as well as in material form, our process is one of attending to and maintaining things, using adornment and beauty. 'To be' is efficient, but it traps us in identity, in false selves and positions, in forcing the world (or a game) to conform to our vision of it. Ultimately it is an attempt to control life. Another way is to make friends with that life (or form, or game), let yourself belong to it, allow it to be flimsy and flawed, not monumental and epic, because the relationship is all – the commitment to it is an enduring one. This is a tendency to shine that I see all over the place in gamers – often expressed in distorted forms, in turf wars, arguments of control, A is better than B, this is the true form, that is a travesty, 4E is a heresy, and so on. No. Enough. Let your game break and fall apart, then you can renew it together – the renewal is the thing. This is the meaning and the moment of shining. This is the way of 'choreographed disasters' (in Martin Prechtel's phrase) the cultivation of intentional crises to bring about collectively formed renewal – the flipside of that ugly old coin we know as 'edition wars' or any other expression of schismatic desire. I guess what I'm probing for here in this cavern is the place where the stalagmite and the stalactite meet and unite – eternalism and nihilism resolve themselves, where the split worlds heal. A trunk of earth in a hollow place, where we can all sing and weep together, relatives in 'that delicious, fantastic, eloquent medicine'.

Creativity is typically used to refer to the act of producing new ideas, approaches or actions, while innovation is the process of both generating *and applying* such creative ideas in some specific context.

Archetypal creativity and spontaneity

Collective creative usage - evolution

Oxymorons – 'creative industry' etc economic usurpation of creativity (creative destruction)

Temenos ethos

The Romanyshyn 5 stage Jungian active imagination model

Quote Adyashanti poems

Use Drukpa Kunley tales & aphorisms/divine madness

Look at Rabelais on priestly class

Examine orthodoxy as deadening creativity – renewal of culture – John Michell

Quote 'The Who'

Refer to Games Britannia and the rootedness of play in metaphysics (snakes & ladders as Hindu game of karma, chess prototypes as war strategy of the gods etc)

Benjamin Woolley

Jonathan Swift

***A Tendency To Shine – A poem by Adyashanti**

If you prefer smoke over fire
then get up now and leave.
For I do not intend to perfume
your mind's clothing
with more sooty knowledge.

No, I have something else in mind.
Today I hold a flame in my left hand
and a sword in my right.
There will be no damage control today.

For God is in a mood
to plunder your riches and
fling you nakedly
into such breathtaking poverty
that all that will be left of you
will be a tendency to shine.

So don't just sit around this flame
choking on your mind.
For this is no campfire song
to mindlessly mantra yourself to sleep with.

Jump now into the space
between thoughts
and exit this dream
before I burn the damn place down.