

Misconceptions of Design & What a Designer Does

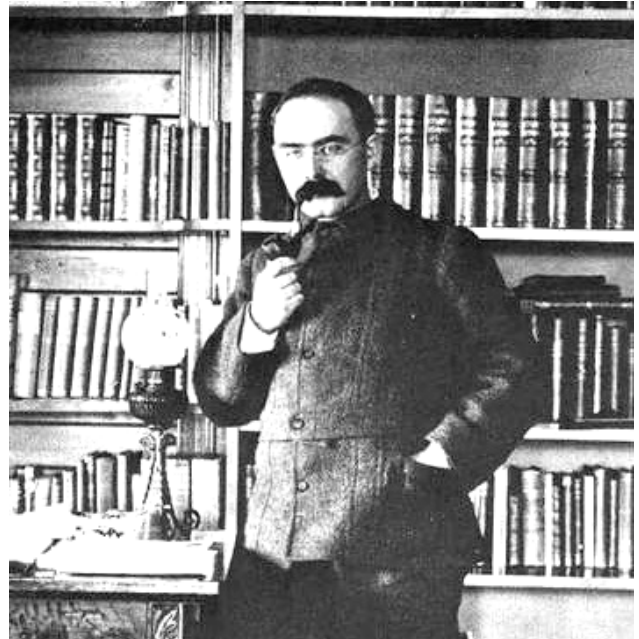
Kevin Zucker

I encounter lots of gamers in my line of work, and you will find all types; but they have in common an intelligence and curiosity which is very good. They like to ask challenging questions. They really want to find out the truth, and their bullshit detectors are fine-tuned. They may know a good deal about the history, or at least they have played some games and studied the era.

Sometimes with their chutzpah they skip to the wrong conclusions, especially as to what they imagine wargame design is all about. You can see in the way they formulate their questions that they are trying to get the designer to agree on what *should* be covered in the game, and *how*. They tend too far to the factual side and don't understand the art of abstraction at all.

One of the fun things about TLNB are its many departures from the common Napoleonic bells and whistles. These differences give it its character. For those used to another game, the TLNB rules may trip them up until they finally drop their assumptions. When they write, their questions don't make sense. The design they *want* is their reference point, not the published game. Some players just want lots of special rules for handling one of a kind situations. That satisfies their sense of completeness and accuracy, but at the total loss of playability.

The designer is designing a game, not a historical document. Playability has to be above a certain threshold. The gamer-historian doesn't care about playability. He doesn't understand that we need the competition-gamers as well as uniform buffs, Napoleon fans, even Zucker aficionados. All of those groups are looking for something slightly different, but it is our balanced commitment to all the different groups that makes the TLNB line successful.



The second worst thing a designer can do is to argue with the player who has a false notion about game design and what a designer does, the "how." But the No. 1 worst thing he can do is to cave and modify his design to meet the demands of the audience. He's got to stick to his guns even though the internet followers don't understand. They are a small cohort. He has to refer to his Design Intent and remember why he began this design in the first place.

Adjusting a design basing on gamers' feedback is part of the work of the designer. "Feedback" may come in a vast variety of forms, but it is up to us to elicit what is essential and what is not.

I do pay close attention to player feedback, player comments and suggestions, and I implement some of it. However, there have been other times where I regretted making changes. In the 1997 edition of *NAB* I acceded to gamers demands for too heavy weight on combat. This conflicted with the Design Intent, to have room in a playable game for Command, Attrition, Administration and Combat.