

Video Transcription for “The Geeky Gimp Presents #1 - Interview with Eduardo Baraf”

[Intro title, then a video of Erin (a.k.a. The Geeky Gimp) speaking in her bedroom]

Hi, everyone! Welcome to the first video ever for the Geeky Gimp. And today, we're interviewing Eduardo Baraf, who you may know from my review of his first game, *Murder of Crows*, which you can read on my blog. Today's interview is about his new game, *Lift Off*, which you can find on Kickstarter. We also discuss his design process, and how he feels about accessibility in gaming. If you have any questions or comments, just drop me a line on my blog or in the video. I hope you enjoy, have a nice day. Thank you!

[Question: Can you please introduce yourself and your new game?]

[Cut to Eduardo Baraf speaking]

Sure. So my name's Eduardo Baraf and I uh, I make games. Traditionally, it's been video games, but as of late I've been having a hand trying board games. And so, um, I have a game *Lift Off* which I'm doing the Kickstarter with, which is um, a two to five player, 'bout forty five minute, casual game where you're working to be the first player to get all of your aliens off the planet. Uh, basically, somebody's tripped over a wire, the whole thing's going to explode, and you need to work to get to the perimeter of the planet and find different lift off points to take off and take your aliens to freedom. And the way the game works is, initially, everyone's sort of working together to pay their resources to take a rocket, or UFO, or even use a slingshot to get off the island, excuse me, off the planet; but as things progress and somebody's sort of taken the lead or fallen behind, suddenly the dynamics change and people are less apt to help each other and start being little bit more nasty. And, um, you know, it's meant to be this semi-cooperative competitive game where, initially, everyone's working together much like you'd see on *Survivor*, but then eventually they're much more prone to getting off on their own.

[Question: Why did you choose Kickstarter to fund your game?]

Uh, you know, initially, I had made *Lift Off* and was playing it, and showing it to people, and I had built a prototype and I thought at first I was gonna go the publisher route and I actually started talking with people and spending some time, you know. I send the game to a publisher in Germany and, you know, it was sort of moving but no one picked it up. And then I was working with Disney, and I just sort of ran out of time, and I didn't have time to devote to dealing with a publisher and getting it done and, um, but a lot of people have played it. And during that period, sort of the Kickstarter movement had begun and, you know, since tabletop has become such a clear - Kickstarter's become such a clear option for tabletop that I, um, I was talking to some of the people that had played the game, and they were like, "Why haven't you done a Kickstarter, you should do a Kickstarter for this!" And it never really occurred to me, I mean as a board game with modular pieces and these wooden aliens that are, you know, they're hand painted and everything, sort of manufactured on you own is expensive. I mean, it's like 30,000 dollars to do all the pieces and all of it, so um, you know, it just it - once they sort of suggested Kickstarter, I decided oh hey, maybe I can do this and discovered it was way more work than ever going through a publisher. So it's much more work, but, you know, I think it's the right choice. Being able to engage with backers and start to build a community around this product has been fantastic, I've really enjoyed even just prepping for the Kickstarter.

[Question: What stretch goals are included in your Kickstarter campaign?]

So, you know, it's interesting. I've spent a lot of time doing a lot of research on Kickstarter, thinking about how to, um really, you know, have the most successful Kickstarter as possible, and it really drove at two key points. One, was trying to make the initial purchasing of the board game as cheap as possible. Um and, you know, making sure that um, the messaging in the Kickstarter was really clear. I actually had a bunch of, maybe, stickers or other, you know, extra things that you could get as rewards along the way, but in order to make sure I could get the cost down on the box, as well as just really streamline the approach... Basically um, if you back for a dollar, I'll save a lift - an alien in your honor, um, but otherwise the next thing is the game, is *Lift Off*. Um, in terms of stretch goals, um, there's a lot of great stretch goals. So actually, we are gonna be cutting up the meeples, but instead of painting them or having using a silkscreen, it's a sticker. So you'll get the char- the alien, and you'll get a sticker, you'll put it on, and you'll have it, it looks like the alien, fine. But it's just not as great as having the painted one, so the first stretch goal is just um getting enough money to have those silkscreened, that paints them on the wood - it would be fantastic. Um, from there, the stretch goals allow us to, you know, improve and add components to the game which we'd otherwise have to take out. We'd get to have a, um, sort of player board where you save your aliens too, sort of like a mother ship where you're saving them and has some quick rules on it as well, and we have some additional lift-off points, as well as some custom dice rather than just using the standard dice. So a lot of components that just level up the experience and make it more fun and add more gameplay based on the stretch goals.

[The following was transcribed by Sarah D.]

Question: What is the hardest part of the design process?]

So, I think, the hardest part of the design process is... You know, so I come from, um, video games. So, in video games, you have this computer that's doing all the math, moving things around. It really, um, makes your experience very accessible and easy to manage on your players. When you have a board game, you don't have any of that, right? I mean, you have different players, but, you know, each player needs to know, sort of their score, where they're at how to, you know, how their, you know, aliens or units are moving, and there's just much more having to do with the state of the board, your resources, how they, um, you know, like, how many moves you have, and so, making sure that your experience is really clear to the user. They know where they are, what they're doing, they can see it as it progresses, and they know how to win at all times. That's something that is much more specific to board games and card games that you don't really have to deal with quite as much in the video game space.

[Question: What sets your game apart from other games on the market?]

So, I think what sets *Lift Off* apart is sort of that idea I was saying before where, you know, first and foremost, I believe games should be fun and accessible and I know, um, we'll talk a little bit about accessibility from a disability standpoint, but just also from a ease of use, ease of play, something that anyone can sit down at the table and play, um, I think, and be successful the first time, right? I think there are a lot of games you have to, like, play a couple times to be good at and I don't have the opportunity to play the same game multiple times with the same group of people, right? You have game nights, you have other things with all these different people, it

just, I like a game where I can put it down, everyone can play, and everyone has fun the first time, and that was sort of a big part of of *Lift Off*.

And the second thing is this idea of working, you know, the semi-cooperative, work-together element, where we are all trying to get off the planet as fast as we can, but then this ship, the dynamics, where suddenly it, um, becomes much more, um, cut-throat and sort of “take that” if you will. The board is also modular, so, it’s a unique board, it’s a planet, it’s round and then, um, each of these little shards that make the “pie”, if you will, like each “pizza slice” can be removed and put back with different, um, lift-off points. So you might start with a rocket, uh, rocket ship, UFO, jet pack, um, and you might switch in a stargate or switch in a, um, uh, you know, a miracle, or switch in a smoke signal, and they all play differently. So the game, the requirements, the resources are always shifting, but in a way that’s unique to the pieces, right? So, you don’t have to know a lot of rules, the rules are very simple, it’s just, each piece creates new dynamics.

[The following was transcribed by Elena.

Question: Can you talk a bit about game accessibility and why it’s important?]

You know, that’s a really good question. I think initially when people think about accessibility in games they, um. You know, I think the first thing that everyone thinks about is just making sure the game can, you know, work for people who are color blind or have issues with color. And, you know, even sort of that, I know initially for me, I always thought that color blind as meaning that you see the world in black and white, but in reality, it means that you might mix up purple and blue or have a hard time distinguishing between green and oran--green and red and those types of things.

And so, you know, I think that’s a starting point of course. But I think, you know, in terms of thinking about accessibility, and not even to say that *Lift Off* is perfect, in any means,, and I’m sure it could even be improved, but thinking about how, you know, how the pieces are put together, how legible, um, you know, the font and the writing might be, you know how much, you know, physical motion and maneuvering is required to play the game and set up the game, and these are all things that different people with different, you know, disabilities have to deal with.

And so, I think the most important thing to think about is not, you know. When you’re making a game you’re usually...your priority is the idea, you wanna make the game, you want to have fun. And then you start moving toward making it as a product, and at that point, you’re going to get feedback. Even if you didn’t think about it you’re going to get feedback about ‘Oh, you know, I can’t distinguish between these two pieces or there’s this other issue.’ And I think as somebody who’s creating a game really for the enjoyment of everyone, you know, I want everyone to be able to play *Lift Off*, I don’t distinguish who I want to be able to play *Lift Off*. Um, I think, you know, it’s important just to hear it, just to listen. And you can’t necessarily, you know, fix everything, you can’t necessarily change everything, there’s cost, there’s time, there’s all these considerations. But at a minimum, you need to be able to listen, understand the concern, understand the problem and then decide if you’re able to address it or not.

[Question: You mentioned being a video game designer. How is accessibility addressed there?]

Sure. Well, actually, I have two interesting things I can say there. One in terms of accessibility, an experience I had. So, you know, in terms of accessibility in video games, you don't have as much physical components--well you don't have any physical components other than your controller or your screen, so, you don't have to worry about that as much as you do in board games, but you still need to be aware of, you know, how people approach and understand your product, your game, again, um.

One of the things you'll get especially in free to play mobile games is this idea of people coming in, into your funnel, and you want them to be able to engage and play the experience as much as possible. So if they're confused along the way because of, you know, language issues, or because of colors, or, you know, just different kinds of visual problems, they get confused, they don't have fun, and then they fall out. So it's really important to make sure that everyone can get as far as possible through that funnel.

The other interesting thing was, when I was working at Blue Feng Games, our art director there, absolutely fantastic guy Lou Catanzaro, he was actually deaf. And interestingly, deaf late in life, so I think he — I'm not sure, but in his thirties he went deaf. And so, you know, he's this loud, Italian, you know, highly verbal guy, he just can't hear you. And you know, in the studio there were actually a lot of people in the studio who didn't realize he was deaf because when he walked around and moved, you had no idea. You know, in working with him, it really stretched, you know, me as an individual, but the studio as a whole as we were learning how to engage and work to, you know, whether it be, you know. Like having conversations where I would be typing and he would be talking to me. And so he would be talking, I'd be typing, and that's an interesting dynamic when you're talking about art implementation against an engineering problem, right? So having an argument in that context was very different than sort of just having a quick chat.

And making sure we set up meetings so that we had an agenda so that he had the information in advance. Having, you know, people taking notes while the meeting was going on. And just working through all these different dynamics but the thing was he was fantastically talented, he drew and had a fantastic art team underneath him. He cared and mentored for them great and the artwork was fabulous.

And I think it really, you know, there's some things you have to understand and get used to. Like, you know, he used to say: unless you know sign language, don't pretend like you can make gestures with your hands that make any sense. It'd be like, you'd never try to speak Japanese, but not know Japanese and just make up Japanese sounds. Like, that wouldn't make any sense, and so treating sign language like a bunch of hand gestures that you think mean something, chances are you're saying different things to somebody - to people who speak sign language.

So, you know, speak clearly, enunciate if you want, if he's doing lip reading, but otherwise just type or write, but don't try to sign if you have no idea how to sign. But Lou was just, it was fantastic working with him, great.

[The following was transcribed by Erin.]

Question: Can you tell us about your previous game, Murder of Crows?]

Sure. Um, so *Murder of Crows* I actually started a very long time ago, um actually Thomas Denmark had started it. Um, he originally made a fantasy game called, um, *Dungeoneer*, which has had a number of um updates and is a fantastic sort of light-weight dungeon crawl program. He wanted to make - very art intensive - he wanted to make a light-weight game a la sort of *Uno* that was quick to play, fun, um and engaging. And he started at it with this idea of this game *Murder of Crows* where you spell the word Murder in front of you, but, you know, initially he wanted to really just focus on the letters M-U-R-D-E-R and really wasn't terribly...um other than that's... there wasn't - there'd have to be lots of illustrations on the cards or heavy story elements. And so he had been working on it and he...and we were working at the same studio at the time for software, and I was asking about card - and I was getting into card and board games at the time, and I was asking about it and he mentioned it and we played it and started giving him feedback. And you know, I don't...I don't remember if he just wanted some support or we were just having fun, but, you know, he invited me in joining him in terms of developing - making the game, and as we, um...

I should take a second to say *Murder of Crows* is a game where you're um...it's two to five players, you're, you have a hand, you're spelling the word murder out in front of you, and as you do, different card effects are going off and it's sort of like a take that game where you're trying to be the first person to complete the murder. Um, and as we were playing, and talking and designing, it occurred to me that there might be an opportunity to make this actual spelling of the word murder actually tell a story of what murder occurred. So looking at it we were well, you've got two Rs, so you've got a victim and killer or killer and victim depending on how you write the sentence and I think we can get mood, we can get weapon, and through working on it and thinking about it, we were actually able to construct a sort of procedural system that as you play, the sentence structure stayed the same and allows you to have this ever-changing story underneath your play. And then when you complete, you get to read this, this murder and surprise everyone with what happened because you're playing very dynamically as you go.

And what was really interesting was when we implemented that, the game sort of came alive and was fun and dynamic, but then suddenly, you know talking about Abigail LeStrange or killing someone with the chopsticks or any of those things sort of fell flat on these cards that just had the letters. And so, um, you know, ultimately what happened was he had to, he ended up having to do art for every single card, the complete opposite of what he wanted, and he was actually in a style - you know you want it to be gothic, you want it to really ooze the theme uh, and, uh, he looked at uh Edward Gorey and Charles Addams' um sort of inspiration and ended up doing this style which really isn't his natural style. Most of the stuff, like on the *Dungeoneer* side, the high fantasy what he does mostly, but um I think when you see it, he did an incredible job. I mean, you talk about somebody sort of diving into this other style and and making it his own and making it feel special but um...um so it was a really fun experience but it took so long. We made the game - it took seven years before bringing it to mart. So it, it took a long time, but you've got to persevere and have fun and I think it's quite an enjoyable game.

[Question: Those were all my questions. Anything else you'd like to add?]

Well, um, you asked about *Lift Off*, and accessibility,...I mean again I think it's important to think about and work through. Um, both as you're developing your game and as you start getting feedback from people who are identifying things you may have missed. Um, you know, when um. and when you design things it takes you into interesting spaces as you consider these things, consider your color choice, consider your, you know, what your pieces are made of,

consider your construction. So I think that's all very important as a developer or designer as you make the rest of your game.

[Visit the Kickstarter at <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1655781518/lift-off-get-me-off-this-planet>]

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