Interview with Richard Garfield, creator of Netrunner

Wormhole Surfer (WS) and Richard Garfield (RG) participate in this
interview on February, 24th 2011 in Cannes, Franc.

WS: "We are very grateful to you for having created so many excellent and entertaining games like Robo Rally, Magic, Netrunner and so many others. You really changed the world of gaming and for that we just have to say 'Thank you'.
Without being too much nostalgic: What are your feelings regarding to what was Netrunner?"

RG: "Netrunner in a lot of ways I thought was my best trading card game design but in some ways it was maybe my best board game design because it feels more like a board game and that was probably one of its problems. I had a lot of lessons from Magic and I was trying to make a richer game. I like Magic very much and every time I return to it, it's exciting but in Magic often the cards play you and with Netrunner I wanted a game where you play the cards. One thing I love in games is bluffing and with Magic there is bluffing but you have to be very good to bluff. So I wanted to make a game more like Poker where you would bluff very early in your game career and that's what I set out to do with Netrunner and I think I've succeeded with that. I've got fond memories of the game but I am certainly disappointed it did not do better and I think occasionally about looking back at it and see if I can make a new version or something."

WS: "Were you aware that this game would be so prophetic; our real world is more and more similar to the Netrunner universe: big corporations more powerful as states, hacking and virtual world growing fast, more and more people dependent on the matrix or grid or cyberworld, whatever the name."

RG: "I thought that the genre could be prophetic but I certainly can't take credit for that since it's R. Talsorian's universe that it was in. I was a big fan of Gibson and Snowcrash and things like that but yes it was a genre which looked into the future in an interesting way and often accurate."

WS: "If you would have created Netrunner these days in 2011 what would have changed compared to the original version? Maybe some different artwork, mechanics?"

RG: "I think the mechanics would be similar; I would have to look at it again. I have not looked at it for a while but I think the mechanics I was happy with and still I am happy with. There are probably some small changes because I have changed as a designer and I would have probably simplified some things. I'd say the biggest change would be that I might not make it a trading card game. I think it was back when it was designed that we were exploring the space of trading card games and didn't really know what the boundaries of that space were. I think trading card games can be very rich but it is a shame to have a game which doesn't need to be one because it just makes it so heavy, so hard to develop and so hard for the players. So I would redesign it so that it wasn't a trading card game but a stand-alone game with expansions. Maybe the art I would change, I don't know. I like the art, I love the flavor text and the universe but I would think about trying to figure out a way to make it more broadly accessible. It still even now - I like that part of it a lot - feels too niche, too much for hobbyists, not broad enough."

WS: "How do you feel when you hear players thinking that Netrunner is one of the best customizable card games ever - if it is not the best of all times?"

RG: "Ha! I think the mechanics are very good as a game. For best trading card game I think it had some problems but the problems were that it didn't need to be a trading card game. So for instance the best Sealed deck game? That could be but if it is not going to be an excellent customizable game, one where you actually construct the decks, then it doesn't need to be a trading card game. So I appreciate the thought and when it came out a lot of people spoke very highly about it and I believed that. There were a lot of reasons why perhaps it didn't do as well as we had hoped and most of those, I think, were because Wizards were concentrating on Magic and also once people start playing a trading card game they only have time to play one. But over time I've decided that some of it is also the fault of the design; perhaps if it had been a stand-alone product it would've been a little better."

WS: "Are you still playing Netrunner?"

RG: "No, but I would like to play more and that's mostly because I like to play new games and games that I am working on and Netrunner is neither of those things. But I certainly would like to play it again and I am looking forward to showing my son the game; he is now just getting into Magic and I play lots of different games with him. No, I can't say that I do right now, sorry."

WS: "Have you played or seen any of the 18 fan expansions? What do you think about it? Do you think, like us, that most virtual expansions are incomplete drafts, unbalanced, badly worded? Which ones do you like most? "

RG: "No, I can't say those. You have sent me some links to them and I have looked at them and they were fun to look through. It was really nice to see such attention had been paid to; the art was good, the mechanics were inventive. I am not in a position right now that I can talk about being balanced or anything like that but it is great to see that sort of enthusiasm for the game and it does make me interested in revisiting it."

WS: "Regarding the still ongoing Netrunner fan community, what are your thoughts?"

RG: "It's really flattering to see that people have stayed with it and that does make me interested as I said and looking into it again. Maybe I can get the game from Wizards, I don't know. Of course, it's not that they dislike the game, it's just that Netrunner is very small "potatoes" for them; it is not worth a lot. But at the same time if somebody says 'well, this isn't worth much to us, so we'll give it to you or we'll sell it to you', if that happens and then it becomes big then it is all risk, not for Wizards but for the person who does that it is only risk, there is nothing they get from it other than perhaps my good will.

WS: "Would you accept to give your approval, as father of this game, to our small players community at least for us, the Netrunner Online Ruling Team as recognized or/and qualified authority for the game evolution and rules - this is what WotC should have done in the first place. This would be a great help to reinforce our reputation for the game."

RG: "Hm, I am open to that but I have to look into it a little more because I don't want to endorse one group if there is another without looking at this but I think that is a great idea and I think I should endorse some group and I don't think there is a lot of groups. From what I have looked at I think that you certainly have the best reputation for it but I don't want to say that without looking into it. I am totally open to that.

WS: "Perfect. Thank you, Richard."

RG: "Ok."