



## **AN INTERVIEW WITH TOMAS RAWLINGS, DESIGN DIRECTOR AT AUROCH DIGITAL AND BOS TAURUS DICEWORKS.**

Dr. Tomas Rawlings is Design Director at the indie games studio Auroch Digital & physical games company Bos Taurus Diceworks. He is an experienced, award winning games designer who has created games from original titles to well-loved IP. He is a well known speaker and consultant on games and gaming who has also worked with major organisations such as the Wellcome Trust, the Royal Society, UK Parliament and the BBC. [He can be found on Twitter here](#) and there is [more about him here](#).

### **Tell us first of all a bit about who you are and what you do, and the relationship between [Bos Taurus Diceworks](#) and [Modiphius](#)?**

I'm a games designer, so ended up pitching to Agatha Christie Ltd along with my colleagues the idea of a card game based on her works. We got the basic outline working quite quickly and then brought it down to the London office to try out - and happy to say the staff there loved it. So much so that we had to print off another test copy for them! Once we'd got the game, the next step was to partner with a publisher to help turn it from prototype into the real thing, then get it into the hands of players; Modiphius was a great fit for this project as they understood the vision for the project and also had a strong track record of making amazing games from other IPs, so soon the three organisations were partnered to create together!

### **What inspired you to take on Agatha Christie?**

First I think it is interesting to understand the boardgame space is undergoing quite a renaissance at the moment. We're seeing a huge and growing demand for board and card games combined with a flourish of ideas and new titles that means it is a really exciting and creative space at the moment - perfect for the deep well of works that Agatha Christie created. Plus I think there's an interesting social push for things that remove the screen and sit you around the table with friends and family for a shared experience - which is also a perfect setting for murder and intrigue!

So I knew all this when approaching the initial design of the game, and I started by reading a bunch of her novels and short stories. This was not the first time I'd read her works, but it was the first time that reading was 'work'; It's a tough living, but somebody's gotta do it ;)

I started with *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* then moved on to *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and then devoured the collection of shorts, *The Hound of Death*. Then on to more general research and in my head an outline of a possible game started to emerge...

### **How did you approach the project? What did you look at first?**

What I was reminded of is the core idea that within many of her stories everyone is guilty, just not of murder - in the narrative this keeps you guessing as to who did it. It also made the perfect



setting for a social deduction game - where every player would be guilty, but only one of them is guilty of murder. The task of the players then becomes to unmask the murderer in their midst, while the aim of the murderer is to deflect suspicion until they can escape.

Having got a basic structure, from a game design point of view we then need to add the risk/reward mechanics that power the player choices - the idea here was that each player starts with three 'secrets' - things they don't want to reveal, housed on face-down cards - that give an incentive to thread secrecy throughout the game. One of those face-down cards has the secret declaration, "You are the murderer!" So the reward is the revealing of another player's secret cards, allowing the steady deduction to unmask the murderer, while the risk is having your own guilty secrets aired in public. The next game design task is to create a series of mechanics that protect or expose these cards, that interlock with one another so that there are plenty of opportunities for strategy, intrigue and pure luck to influence play.

### **What were the challenges of the project? And what did you love?**

When you're working with somebody else's IP (something I've had the privilege of doing a lot as a games designer) you're always aware that what you've been entrusted with is somebody else's 'baby' - they have birthed it, nurtured it and make it into something special enough to have that fanbase. You need to do right by their creation. What was so great about this project was how strongly the team at Agatha Christie Ltd helped me to understand where this project could go, which is important because in this game I needed space to have fun with it and let the players have fun too, while we are surrounded by a serious topic - death. They were great at helping me explore where we could take it, and I feel strongly that the final game has that right balance of respect for Agatha Christie's work combined with a bit of tongue-in-cheek, murder, tactics, strategy, luck, back-stabbing, lying, guilt and deception; all the ingredients you need for fun night in with your family and friends.

### **How did you approach interpreting the iconic characters of Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple?**

Within the game there was the perfect gameplay mechanic for them; players have secrets and we need ways to expose them. Thus came the idea of 'clue cards'; when cards of the same character are collected together, they can be played to expose a random player's secrets. This gave the game its core mechanic and also the perfect means to incorporate the myriad of amazing characters. Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple can be played as a group of three clues, more powerful than most other clue sets that operate in pairs. Other characters, for example Harley Quin's clue cards can be used as wildcards to fill in a missing card. Overall I was really pleased how well the different characters adapted into the gameplay - almost like they were designed for that purpose!

### **Do you have any advice for other partners working on developing/interpreting Christie's characters?**



Go back to the source! For me reading (and in some cases re-reading) her works gave me so many ideas and inspirations that the issue was more how to edit them all down into what I needed as there were so many! As we approach the 100th anniversary of the publication of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, reading the text gives you a sense of story and character that still feels fresh and interesting a century later. Nothing beats going back to the source in my opinion.

### **When is the release planned for, and who is the target audience?**

The game is releasing in retail and on the publisher's webstore [www.Modiphius.net](http://www.Modiphius.net) at the end of November.

The target audience is anyone who can understand how to play. It is a game about murder, so of course it is not for small children, but anyone who understands the themes of the game and can gather a group of friends and family around them - this is for you!

I also feel it is the perfect Christmas or birthday gift for that family member who loves crime fiction, but you're not sure what to get them as they devour so many books. This is the out-of-the-box gift I think they'll love and best of all - you get to enjoy it with them too!

### **In which territories will the game be available?**

You'll be able to find it across the UK, Europe and North America and it should appear further afield in Australia/New Zealand and so on. Anyone interested in foreign language versions should [contact Christina Macphail](#) at ACL in the first instance.

### **What do you hope for from the game?**

Two things would make this a success for me; one is that it gathers friends and family around the table and they have fun. There's so much bad news in the world, if we're helping to make some fun and connection, then that is a positive. Two is that some people who play it move on from the game to reading some of Agatha Christie's works. That the game is a gateway to the larger world of her works. That would be a win too.

### **Where can we buy it?**

You can expect to find it in Waterstones and Barnes & Noble as well as tabletop gaming stores, Amazon etc. You can also purchase direct from the publisher's official store: [www.modiphius.net](http://www.modiphius.net)