Grendel's Cave Interview

Looking at a Classic Browser Based Game
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I talked with the creator of the game, Beowulf, and he asked me to share this interview. I played this game a long time ago for years. It's really fun and can get addicting very quickly - you've been warned, haha.

Basically, you're a thane set out to kill the mythical monster Grendel. You may know of Grendel from the really old myth, or the 2007 animated movie Beowulf. While the movie changed the story a little from the original myth, the game Grendel's Cave follows the story more closely - as well as tying other myths into the game as well.

This is a game that brings back memories for me. So try it out and let me know what you think. I hope you enjoy playing as much as I did! :-)

Here's a link to the game site:
http://www.grendelscave.com

And now, here's the interview that will tell you more about the game:

Alerion Radio: First of all tell us who you are and just what Grendel's Cave is.

Beowulf: That is two questions that I will incorporate into one answer. I am a programmer, who loves the myth of Grendel. I have been captivated by the story ever since I read it at an early age. I have been playing with this myth my whole life. GC is just my most recent incarnation of the myth.

Alerion Radio: Now Grendel's Cave is a browser game, which I tend to find cater to the casual player in a way that most downloadable games never seem to manage. But it seems to work equally well for the dedicated hardcore gamer as well. What is it about Grendel's Cave that makes it work so well for different types of gamers?

Beowulf: It is easy to learn but hard to master. It constantly surprises you. It keeps changing. You have to think to be good at it. It has a lot of random elements and is unpredictable. People who like these elements like Grendel's Cave, but only if they can get past the fact that it is low tech and low quality from a graphics and UI perspective.

Alerion Radio: So the design is relatively simple but the gameplay complex. Is this generally helpful to attracting new blood or do you find it can cause people to shy away from a game they really shouldn't be missing out on?

Beowulf: I find that I am lucky if I can pick up new blood. That game has some definite negatives. For the casual gamer it is free, simple, easy to learn but it is mean game. GC is cruel, like Grendel himself and that is off-putting. For the serious gamer GC is rather stupid. It is low tech, has simple graphics, and an old-fashioned UI. It takes someone special to like GC. It takes someone who appreciates the design elements of the game itself and someone who doesn't mind losing over and over again to elements that were not explained beforehand. It takes someone who can tolerate being treated unfairly.

Alerion Radio: I often tell people when introducing them to Grendel's Cave that they will die. I tell them they will die a lot. And when they die they're dead. This sets Grendel's cave apart from other browser games though in that it offers a real challenge that requires skill, dedication, and some amount of luck rather than relying only on the amount of time you play. How else does Grendel's Cave deviate from the "norm" of the modern browser games?

Beowulf: I don't play that many games; I am not a gamer myself, so it is difficult for me to compare GC to other games. I can say there aren't many games based on Beowulf, unless you count that terrible game based on the Zemeckis film.

Alerion Radio: I certainly would not count it.   But on the subject of other games were there any games that inspired you in the creation of Grendel's Cave? It certainly has a sort of old school dungeon crawler feel, albeit a bit more vindictive.

Beowulf: I am old school and started game development before the Personal Computer existed. The first version of Grendel's Cave I wrote was a board game, played with chits, charts and dice. I based all subsequent versions of GC on the original.

Alerion Radio: Well it sure beats Chutes and Ladders online. Back to the difficulty level of the game, I'm sure you've had more than a few complaints about it. Is the difficulty and down right viciousness of Grendel so necessary to the gameplay?

Beowulf: Yes. I will never compromise that. Grendel is the inspiration for the game. I want the players to feel the terror of Grendel. If I could have Grendel himself come out of their monitors and teach them who is boss I would do it. I appreciate it when gamers hate me. Then I know I have done my job. It is a fine balance for me. How do I terrorize my players but just so much that they keep playing?

Alerion Radio: Balance seems to be a key element once you get past the obviously "unfair" aspects of the game. There are a lot of viable strategies and character types that work well. On the subject of character types I think the question that needs to be asked first is how does character creation work in GC and why is the method suited for GC?

Beowulf: Character creation is a hold over from an earlier version. If I were to do it over I would probably take a different approach. With that stated, I will say that not too much thought went into character creation. You get your father's physical attributes and your mother's abilities. It is suited to GC because just like GC it is what it is. I make the rules and the player's figure out how the pieces fit together. When I write elements into the game I try to ensure that there exists a path to victory, though is some cases it may be very difficult. I leave it up to the players to figure out how to get there. When someone asks me how to win at GC I tell them I don't know. I don't play and I'm not very good at the game. My players are much smarter than I am when it comes to game play.

Alerion Radio: Well I'm sure the players would be glad to have that one up on you. The fact that you can win sets GC apart I think from most other browser games. Where as the

goal in many games is to simply better your character until the end of time GC actually gives you a set in stone single goal. Kill Grendel. I'm sure a few folks who are unfamiliar with the game would want to know a little more about that bastard...er...creature. Care to shed a little light on the role Grendel plays?

Beowulf: He is central. Everything revolves around him. He has some intelligence, he is not just a dumb monster running around killing. He wants to win and has some limited skills to win. In versions previous to 1.9 Grendel was a whiner, but when old-time players asked me to bring GC back and I decide to, I also decided to make Grendel mean. I wanted Grendel to be pissed off that he was forced out of retirement and I wanted him to take it out on the playing community. Grendel is angry and he tries to extract his toll.

Alerion Radio: So Grendel isn't your standard bad guy. What's worse yet is he able to, and often does, hunt you down. The other in game characters don't take a back seat in Grendel's Cave. Rather than simply offering color and minor interaction some of them are just plain necessary to the goal of killing Grendel. Care to give the unfamiliar a short rundown on a few of the NPCs they'll run into?

Beowulf: All the NPCs play a role. King Hrothgar is the gift giver, though, Weatheow gives the real gifts. The Witch, of course, is key. Without her you really can't make any progress at all. She is a trickster and is fickle. You have to visit her but don't want to at the same time. The Dragon is needed for certain hints and some nice things can be found in his treasure. These are the original four NPCs in the game and I introduced them as elements key to the play of the game. I added all of the other NPCs as elements to a specific quest or quests. I pulled all of these NPCs directly from Norse Mythology to give the game more of a period feel to it. I would like to do more of this in the future. I really like the Norse elements in the game.

Alerion Radio: The Norse elements do add another dimension, at least from what I remember of when I started playing GC. GC isn't exactly a new kid on the block either is it? In it's time it has gone through a lot of changes but the core gameplay seems to be relatively unchanged. Do you ever have any afterthoughts about the gameplay aspects of GC or are things right where you'd like them?

Beowulf: I like the way most of the major elements in the game work. I like the combat system. Many players just starting out don't like it because it doesn't seem to work they way traditional combat systems work in other games. It can be hard to get your head around the logic of the system but I think my system is more realistic than most, well, except for the whip, I might do that one different if I were starting over. I like the magic system, too, the way it stair steps a ladder of progression deeper and deeper into the cave. You get the next skills just slightly after you need them. You're always reaching for that next step. There is a mathematical progression to GC that I like. I spent a lot of time on character progression and I think in the end I got that right.

Alerion Radio: I'm inclined to agree with you on the way things work. In a strange kind of way it all seems very natural. Now I can't wrap this up without few questions that just

have to be asked. The first of which is this; what advice would you give to a fresh new player with no experience in this sort of game?

Beowulf: Take your time, be careful and be patient. Getting impatient is a sure way to get yourself killed. Getting careless, at any level in this game, is bound to get you killed too.

Alerion Radio: I can definitely vouch for that. I've died more than a few times because I was in a rush. Finally, is there anything coming up in the future for GC that you could maybe hint towards? Just a little teaser. A miniscule taste even.

Beowulf: Personal kingdoms really are coming. I am working on them now. You will be able to create your own kingdom, defined by your parameters and invite your friends, and enemies for that matter, into your kingdom to play. I think this is the next big thing for GC.

Alerion Radio: Personal kingdoms would definitely add a whole new level to an already multi-dimensional game. Can't wait to see how it turns out and I'm sure there are plenty of other folks who feel the same way. Thanks for the opportunity to ask you some questions and get some insight into GC from the Boss Man himself and thanks for putting together a unique and challenging game. Grendel's Cave is easily one of the best browser games in a long while and still stands at the top as far as I'm concerned.

Beowulf: Thanks for your compliments. Grendel's Cave is not for everyone but for a special kind of player. I never want to dumb it down for the average person. I aim to keep it an evil bitch of a game.

Alerion Radio: But again thanks a lot for the opportunity and I hope a few of the regulars will read this and try GC.

Beowulf: Thanks. I appreciate the free publicity. Happy monster killing and good luck in the caves.