

Roc Herms by Joan Ferrer

In 1978 Gary Thuerk and his assistant Carl Gartley sent the first mass email for the sake of publicity to 393 users of the *Advanced Research Projects Agency Network*, know as ARPANET, without knowing that they had sent the first example of what we now know so well as SPAM. That same year, some 6,000 miles away, Roc Herms was born.

As a scrawny youngster, with his vision falling far short of 20/20, burdened with hefty orthodontics, his face most notable for its battles with acne and his mind a bit sharper than average, he wandered into that swampy terrain of adolescence with all signs pointing to nerd-dom. A couple of years passed and armed with a handful of multi-sided dice and a Fujitsu 286x with 1024K of RAM and a 20Mb hard drive, he was well on his way to becoming a gamer.

High-elf, inter-galactic bounty hunter, cowboy and occasional Wookiee, he grew up in parallel worlds, both inside his head and on the computer's motherboard, and then discovered *Magic: The Gathering* along the way, a strategy game based on collectible cards that changed his life.

He set off on a journey into the depths of the world of *Magic*, participating in various regional tournaments and refining his technique. He reached the competitive level in 1996 after enrolling to study International Business at a somber faculty located just meters from the *Black Lotus*, a veritable Mecca for Magic players in Barcelona. The inevitable came to pass: his attendance suffered and eventually paled in comparison with his presence at the gaming tables.

During these days (and nights) of non-stop gaming, between cards and *Quake II* death-match LAN-parties, the legend of Roc Herms began to make its mark on the Magic universe. He toured half the world, participating

in *Pro* tournaments in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Tokyo, London, Houston, Seattle and Berlin, capping his career ranked a historic 9th in the world at the *Pro Tour* of London in 1999.

Even as all this was happening, and with the idea of finding a relatively socially acceptable profession, he returned to the digital world of computers and finished his Multimedia studies, planning to enroll in Graphic Design. Except there was one little thing which kept him from starting his classes as planned.

On August 6th, 2004 he landed at Narita Airport in Japan and the authorities arrested him for drug possession. His crime: having three grams of hashish. The sentence: three months in prison. He would spend the next 90 days in continuous introspection in a windowless white cell in the prison of the Chiba Prefecture. The same cell that the famous chess-master Bobby Fischer had been held in just days earlier. His full sentence had been one year and six months of prison and hard labor but the Japanese authorities decided to deport Herms and ban him from ever again setting foot on any of the islands of the Land of the Rising Sun.

Once back in Barcelona he headed off to class and finished his studies. He went on to work as an art director for the multinational DDB, where his budding professional career took a permanent turn.

In his first journey to China, he found his true calling in photography and from then on was inseparable from his camera, with which he could work on the ideas which interested him most in a natural and instinctive manner. When his first series, *The Sleeping Giant*, was selected for Descubrimientos Photo España, he took the plunge by abandoning advertising to dedicate himself to photography.

The Sleeping Giant was followed by *El Opio del Pueblo* (an ironic work about the commercialization of Christianity in Mexico) and his series *AntiSónar* (focused

on the somewhat absurd and very massive rave which has grown around the margins of Sónar, the festival of "advanced" electronic music in Barcelona).

He considers these three to be his early works and not until his yet unfinished work on Campus Party (a gigantic, annual LAN-party where thousands of hackers, programmers, gamers and geeks gather) do we discover the photographer who is with us today, obsessed by concepts including technology, the future, science and collective minority identities.

Now we are presented with *Postcards from Home*, perhaps his most ambitious work, where he dives into the virtual world hosted by Sony (where 23 million users share experiences as real as life itself). With his camera in hand, in this case virtually and capable of capturing words as well, he'll bring us the lives of ninjas, ex-junkies, virtual fashion divas, a Hawaiian grandmother with 17 split personalities and even a cult.

Welcome home.

