

My Unified Thoughts on Spud Guns

Introduction-

My purpose for creating this document is to share my opinions and feelings about spud guns with whoever would like to know them. While there are plenty of facts in this document, all the big ideas and concepts are what I have just called them- opinions. You do not have to agree with them, they represent the world from my point of view, and no other person will agree with everything that I believe. Most of the opinions below were developed directly from my personal experiences, and I believe in all of them to the fullest extent possible.

The Spudfiles umbrella, and keeping everybody dry-

For most of the people on the forums, Spudfiles *is* spudding. They do not know any world of spudding outside of the forums, or know of only a very small one, one too small to create anything but a skewed view. This is most apparent in the situation of the “noob”.

We very often times encounter a new member, usually after they make a post. We then proceed to post a dozen or so replies telling them about the search function (usually in the form of yelling at them to use it.), we welcome them, we give them a lecture about the reasons their cannons are unsafe, et cetera. It is obvious from these actions that they are more than new members, they are outsiders. If they were not, we certainly would not be treating them this way.

Another illustration of my point that may be familiar to fewer people is the odd sense that a lot of people get when they encounter spudding outside of the forums, in the “real world”. I have talked with a lot of people who tell me it gives them a feeling akin to seeing a teacher at the supermarket, or your boss at the bowling alley. It is very much out of context and can even seem a bit uncomfortable.

As it is now, Spudfiles is far detached from this outside spudding world. The forums represent a small group of what is often described as “the spudding elite” or as “a very dedicated bunch.” While it is certainly important to uphold Spudfiles' tradition of being the absolute top rung of spudding, we also must broaden our horizons. There is a comfort in being small. Things are easy to control, and everybody knows everybody. The truth is I love Spudfiles' current size, and would probably like it even more if it was slightly smaller. The problem is, a small community only serves a small group of people.

We may be perfectly comfortable alone under our Spudfiles umbrella, but unless we start collecting more people under it, even if it is at the cost of our personal comfort, they majority will be left out in the rain. I believe we must work to alter Spudfiles so that everybody that just enjoys spud guns can feel welcome, instead of only those who are smart, talented, and incredibly dedicated to spudding.

The current mentality of the forums is almost to charge people an admission fee in the form of a great cannon, an amazing post, or a stunning observation. If they do not (or cannot) pay this fee, they must either be violently jumped in, or turn their backs and head out into the storm. It is essential that people of any skill level can join our ranks, with the only admission fee being an interest in spud guns. By “can join” I of course mean “are able to join without bearing any complaints, grievances, or burdens from the current community.”

Just being nicer is not the only thing we must do in include others under our umbrella. We must not be afraid to spread the word, and must not hold back just because someone “doesn't meet the standards.” Spudfiles should be about bringing everybody up to our level, not excluding those that are not already there. Speaking of which...

Lowering the standards-

I have heard more than once that the lost of a member was nothing to sweat over, because they

were not an asset to the community. While it is okay to not care about the loss of somebody who is a deficit to the community, not caring about “the neutrals” is not right. By definition the majority of people are average. It seems like such a simple and obvious concept that is ridiculous to mention, but I feel that from what I have seen of the forums, a lot of people need to hear it.

I have already established that we need to broaden Spudfiles by incorporating these average folks, and a lot of people disagree on the principle that they will lower the “quality” of Spudfiles members as an average. The great thing is that while someone who is bad at any given thing cannot bring an expert down to his level, an expert can bring that same underperformer up a couple of notches.

By doing this, we will only increase the number of great members, and since we are talking about people that just do not add anything, not those that do harm, we will also have tons of new “regular” members. The average skill and knowledge level is irrelevant. Our level of experts will only increase, and we will have many more people that are doing no harm, but who are getting so much more help and support.

The emphasis on safety-

Anyone who has been around Spudfiles more than a few times knows that most everybody is obsessed with safety. This is a great thing. We are prone to negative attention by the nature of our hobby, and we must do everything we can to prevent an excuse to attack it. It is unfortunate that there are a lot of people that do not particularly care about safety, and that is why I feel we must incorporate safety measures and practices in ways that can be more passively learned. Most people will not read a 500 word document on safety measures, but if they are surrounded by the concept of safe spudding and how to properly use launchers they cannot help but absorb the information and have it become second nature.

We also must be careful not to exaggerate certain dangers. While we want to get our point across, making unreasonable exaggerations can lead to people undermining the safety suggestions and regulations that are not exaggerated, leading to dangerous situations. Cannons are inherently dangerous enough when used improperly, they don't need the help of trumped up warnings to get that point across.

Spud guns, a learning tool... wait, what?-

It is an amazing thing that this hobby has strong ties to physics, chemistry, engineering, design, art, and mathematics. I think it is a damn shame that we do not use spud guns as a tool to help teach others useful information, or get them interested in subjects they otherwise find boring. We often see posts about sciences and such explaining spud guns, but I can not recall seeing a single one that turns the tables and uses spud guns to explain sciences. Why not? Any time someone can tie something fun and interesting into learning, I think it should be done.

Furthermore, a large number of the members of Spudfiles and people interested in spud guns in general are around the high school age. To me, this just makes using spud guns to teach people even more of a no brainer.

What to do with a bad egg-

Of course, it is inevitable that we run into people that are doing unacceptable things. Shooting cannons in residential areas, at people, property, animals. Our current de facto policy is to scold anyone who talks about it (“Hey mister, saying that is against the rules!”), and delete or lock the post. This is usually accompanied by an amount of derogatory insult hurling.

While adhering to the rules, and telling them not to post such things clears us legally and keeps the boards squeaky clean, it often does not solve the problem. The truth is the forum is a community of peers- mods and all. While there is something to be said for an authority figure using power to improve a situation, peers trying to do the same thing often gets nowhere.

I think it is essential that we address the situation in a similar fashion to how we would if a friend who you had loaned a launcher to had told you the same thing. It is natural to be angry, and it is not wrong to scold them and tell them that they were stupid, but that cannot be all that is done.

We have to make sure that they come around to seeing things the way we do. These people cannot just hear that what they did is wrong, illegal, unsafe, etc., they have to actually understand and believe it. Most people won't bother to stick around long enough to do this if all we do is give them hell, and then we have just alienated this 'dangerous' (to themselves, others, and the hobby) person from the only place that can resolve the problem without a terrible incident taking place.

It's more than just a hobby-

For me, spudding is more than just a hobby. As of this year, I have been spudding for roughly one third of my life. It is what enticed me to take physics my freshman year, and later chemistry. Chemistry ended up growing into another passion, leading me to take 30 units of chem classes, and considering a career in chemical engineering. I have spent countless hours on Spudfiles and Spudtech, and between emails, posts, and PMs I have written literally thousands of pages on the subject. I have put two years of hard work into my site, and switched my major from chemistry to business, marking my decision to pursue my passion of spud guns for my entire life.

I have a lot of people wonder why I care so much about some of the things that happen on Spudfiles, and why I do not take some things lightly. The truth is what is a hobby to one person can be much more to another. To me, spudding is an incredibly large part of my life, and I am very serious about it.

It's a plastic toy, get over it!-

I know that I seem extreme and odd for the incredible love I have of this hobby, but I read much more into it than most people. It is not just cannons and launchers, it is what I have chosen to act as a mile long hall way, lined with doors.

Each door leads to something new, beneficial. I mentioned physics and chemistry before. Spudding is what lead me to discover my passion for chemistry. (Which in turn lead to carrying my math to Calculus, which I would not have done if I didn't need it to understand a large portion of chemistry.) Another door has lead to what will hopefully be a successful career that I love doing. So many doors have lead me to improve my life in so many ways, that it is a waste of my time to try and think of them all, as I simple could not do it. Without spudding I would never have met some of the most incredible people I have encountered, and gained some great friends.

It is no secret that there are some amazing people in our hobby, and God, what a spectrum they cover! From preteens to senior citizens, students to rocket scientists, and people that represent enough different nations to form a mini UN.

Everybody has that one thing that they try to draw parallels to, a familiar thing they like to relate the unknown and new to. Something that they use to open their eyes to the world and discover new things. I have chosen spudding, plain and simple.