DRAGONBANE - THE LEGACY

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MORE THAN FANTASY

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An evalution raport**

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For the Reader

The international fantasy live-action role-playing game (larp) Dragonbane was played on July 27th – August 4th, 2006 in Älvdalen, Sweden. It was unprecedented in ambition, the promises of the organisers including a functional village, working magic and a life-size fire-breathing animatronic dragon. It was also a vast international volunteer youth project. Hundreds of people participated in organising and financing the event, creating a world, constructing a story, building, clothing and feeding a village, and building a life-size moving, talking dragon.

This document is intended to describe, document and evaluate the Dragonbane project. The text draws on reports from, and interviews with, organisers, volunteers and players, and serves three purposes:

1) It is intended as a resource for government agencies, non-profits, cultural funds, youth workers and researchers that come in contact with role-playing projects in the future, to help them understand the breadth of activities, commitment and focus such projects entail.

2) It includes a wealth of tips and practical, hands-on advice for larpmakers or indeed anyone interested in coordinating a large-scale international cultural project.

3) It strives to document at least part of the larp itself, defined both as the physical reality of the game and as the experiences of the players within it.

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What is Larp?

Larp (sometimes LRP) is short for Live-Action Role Playing Game, and is an offshoot of the culture of role-playing games that has developed since the 1970s. Traditional role-playing games (RPGs) are focused on strategy or storytelling, and are often played around a table with the action represented through game boards, dice and statistics or, as in the case of the now wildly popular computerized RPGs, through interaction with game software.

Although many variations occur, role-playing games usually share at least this quality: they are constructed around a narrative, in which each player represents one of the fictional characters. And though some role-playing games do involve competitive elements such as collecting points, the players most often are not trying to win, but operate as some kind of team or collective.

Live-role playing was invented simultaneously and independently in the early 1980s in a number of countries all over the developed world. In traditional RPGs players had often acted out character dialogue while playing. The logical next step was to dress up as the characters and perform their actions as well as their words. At the time, most role-playing game stories were set in fantasy or science fiction worlds, and this was reflected in the early larps. Over time, the role-playing medium has gradually developed an interest in all areas of human interaction, and larp has followed suit (or sometimes led the way).

Today, role-playing games and larps can concern themselves with politics, human rights, every-day life and human relations, in genres ranging from romantic comedy and pulp adventure to social realism and historic re-enactment. The fantasy genre, which remains popular, has also widened its scope and raised its ambitions. As Dragonbane reflected, the original escapist emphasis on adventure and monster-fighting has been complemented with an interest in the workings of pre-modern communities as well as questions of faith and liberty.

In the Nordic countries, almost all larps are created (envisioned, written, produced, constructed) by unpaid volunteers organised into non-profit clubs or associations. Although larpmaking can lead to careers in for instance game design, nobody today is making a living on organising games within the hobby scene (and personal financial losses on the part of the most passionate larpmakers are not uncommon). Instead of money, larpmakers are motivated by skill development, the social benefits and pleasures of collaborating on a project, and the pleasure of seeing the players exert themselves to make the game designers' vision come alive. A small game, short in duration and number of participants, can be organised by one single larpwright, while a game the size and scope of Dragonbane requires a team of hundreds to come true.

The Vision Behind Dragonbane

Imagine a fantasy live action role-playing game completely free from the usual pseudo-Tolkien feudal clichés. An international game, where larpers from all over the world could play in their own languages. Six days in character around the clock. A game exciting and challenging to adults, yet equally appropriate for young children. A game focused on human relations and conflict resolution rather than fighting and conflict creation. A fictional religion with real complexities. A magical world that is physically present – real houses, sheep, a bakery, forest camps in a stunning wilderness setting. Real, functional props to fill the village with every-day life and memories of its past. Good-looking latex weapons provided by the organisers for characters likely to carry arms. And most importantly: magic that works. Supernatural lights! Real fire bolts! A life-size animatronic dragon!

This was the promise of the makers of the 2006 fantasy game Dragonbane. And bar one game day being cut to finish building the village, and bar the fact that not all players of all backgrounds managed to stay in character for the duration, this was what the makers of Dragonbane delivered.

We knew from the very beginning of this project, that it would be the most impressive international collaboration in the history of larp to date. Not because of the special effects, the dragon or the scale, but because of the way the game was a product of crossing geographical and cultural borders. What made Dragonbane more thrilling than any other big fantasy larp, was the explicit ambition to reach a degree of realism within the illusory world of Valenor, which could spellbind even the most cynical of players.

The participants were introduced to this vision through the web pages and the player manuals. There were reports about the game in both role-playing and mainstream media. All players formed a specific idea of what the game could and would be like prior to the game, and most worked hard toward the realization of the dream. But although the game makers' vision became a roadmap for the players in their preparation for the game, the amount of hype would also cause massive disappointment among them, as the production was not ultimately able to meet all the high expectations the pre-game advertising had generated.

The Experienced Reality of Dragonbane

On some aspects of the vision, the game did not deliver. Dragonbane was intended to accommodate a larger number of players than the 325 that ended up participating. The dragon was meant to be able to raise its eyebrows and breathe fire. And there was another promise too: that during the game players would not have to see anything that did not belong to the fiction. This ambition was not realised.

During the game, the players encountered plastic buckets in the loos, electrical wires running in the grass along the road, special effects crew in orange coveralls, even the occasional car passing by. And the dragon, with most of its animatronic nerves and muscles malfunctioning, very obviously moved on visible wheels. Given the efforts of most players to comply fully with the very strict rules on equipment brought to the game, these modern elements were experienced as incredibly frustrating. On the other hand, such anachronistic mishaps are hardly unique in fantasy larps. And it was possible, with only a little effort, to manoeuvre around most of them.

"About our dragon, I have to agree with Nagl, I wouldn't ever have expected moving eyelids or nostrils if I hadn't been told about them, so a bit less pre-hype and everything would have been fine. But I do understand all the problems there was, and don't complain." - Bianco, an organiser and a Dragontamer player from Finland

"I want us to create something spectacularly different, something that will forever change the way these people view fantasy. Not because it's so different, but because its difference makes it so good." – Mike Pohjola, author of Myrskyn Aika

"One of the main themes in Dragonbane was to create diverse experiences for all players, the new ones as well as the "seen it all" types. Something no modern technology or the need to imagine your surroundings was to spoil. To achieve this we just could not settle for conventional solutions. We wanted to support full immersion, which really demanded believable surroundings. So one of the first cultural decisions made was to exclude the classical 'Tolkien' mediaeval look & feel. That decision thoroughly affected every plan made afterwards; all costumes, culture habits, living conditions, food, music and everyday items had to be invented from scratch." ." -Tiina Kuustie, a Cinderhill culture creator, coach and organiser

"To make this vision real you have to see it in your mind's eye: the colourful houses of Cinderhill, the dark broodings of the witches' brews, the bravery and foolishness of the Dragontamers, the magic in the temple scrolls. And the dragon, you have to believe in the living red dragon, breathing fire, searching for something lost in the gruesome battle in which the bronze dragon had died. You must feel the bitter tears of the dragon in your heart and strive to make this event a worthy homage to the saga that began and ended in Cinderhill during Dragonbane. And the results of this project must be something that I, as well as everyone else involved, can and will be proud for the rest of our lives." – Timo Multamäki, Executive Producer

"It was February 2003 that Heiko and myself were having a conversation about why all fantasy larp games were so bad. The reason was poor implementation, we thought. A game master might walk in among players and state: 'I am a dragon, act accordingly', or a cottage could be standing in for a castle. We agreed it would be cool to actually have a believable dragon in a game... That is how it started. Soon we were talking to Mike about it, and by the summer 2003 we already had 50 people involved. Out of these Niki, Heiko and Mähönen stood with us to the very end." -Timo Multamäki, Executive Producer

A New Chronology: Year 1 ADB

The feedback from the Dragonbane participants delivers ample proof of the game's successes. Even the seen-it-all larp veterans gained new insights, and in some cases a rekindled interest in the fantasy genre. Young people participating in their first game communicate an astonished gratitude at having been allowed to live for a while in a really different world – a magical world, in which everything seemed to be possible. The small fraction of players whose experience was overwhelmingly negative is still likely to agree, that the European larp community has entered another era: the time After Dragonbane, in which ambition for the form and particularly the fantasy genre has been redefined.

Not everyone can get a 'Dragonbane idea': 'Hey, let's make a larp with a village and a huge dragon'. And only a few

of those people would be able to figure out how to realize the idea. Only some of those would be able to make it happen, and of them only a very few would see the project through to its end. Many did end up quitting with the project for various reasons, which made the situation harder for the ones staying.

The Dragontamer video was shot in December, 2004. The night of the shoot happened to be the coldest all year, with temperatures sinking to -30° C.

Various kinds of tattoos, as mementos and branding of one's origins, were prescribed by Dragontamer culture. Before the game tattoos were drawn on the skin using henna dye.

Can't believe we made it

"I lived with the project for a long time, yet it is incomprehensible to me that the game was actually realized. That we pulled through. The price was high, of course. The project broke many relationships. Mental and physical endurance was stretched to the limit – and unfortunately often beyond it. A part of me shouts that youth work should not be like this! On the other hand, this project and all its achievements are a manifestation of the priorities and values of today's adolescents, for better and for worse: they want experiences and entertainments to be more, rougher, heavier, more real. Thus many are also ready to stretch their personal limits when working for a cause. The ones who do are rewarded with a feeling of a strong bond to a community, and to values on which one they are not willing to compromise. The volunteers of the Dragonbane team wanted to create something together that would be remembered for a long time.

One participant, who stayed with the project to the very end, put it like this: "I knew that the time would be measured in the sentences 'before' and 'after Dragonbane'. Therefore I wanted to join." That certainly put the feelings of many other fellow project members in words."

-Tiinaliisa Multamäki, Dragonbane Project Secretary and CFO

More than 30 000 nails and close to hundred rolls of roof felt were used in building the village. The partner contracts with Nakorauta Oy and Trelleborg were so generous, that it made financial sense to transport the roofing materials to Älvdalen from Finland.

Thus the way the organisation was stretched thin had direct, if not fatal, consequences on the structure of the game and the nuance of the player performances. The players adjusted fast, however, so this primarily affected the beginning of the game. The other vast and immediate consequence of the organisational problems arrived with the flawed dragon at its end. And given that the game had been marketed primarily on the strengths of this dragon, given that the dragon was at the centre of most players' personal fantasies of what the game would or should be like, a sense of disappointment and a deflation of the atmosphere built up during the game were inevitable.

Katri Laukkanen was an efficient roofer in the summer of 2006.

> *"I don't see Dragonbane as a failure. It had short-comings, yes, but it didn't fail. There is a difference. This much I have learned"*
>
> *-Timo Multamäki, Executive Producer*

The Dragon Was the Least of It

The very fact that there were all kinds of items on the game site that did not belong to the fiction was testament to the chaotic state of the organisation on the arrival of the players. Many players, who had already paid a relatively high game fee, and invested much money and effort in their game clothes and equipment, were understandably upset at the amount of work they now needed to contribute during the last pre-game days for the village to become ready to play in. Even those who did not mind, or who indeed enjoyed pitching in, felt the sacrifice of one full game day very heavily indeed. The narrative of the game itself started at a point a few days after a major battle, and the first day of play, the speculative "if-game" day, was intended for the players to develop common memories of their characters as well as a sense of daily life before the battle. Since this day was spent instead on off-game preparation of the site, the players entered the story proper with no sense of normal village life to pit the crisis their characters were going through against.

But consider for a moment the insanity of the enterprise and the vastness of what was in fact achieved. With a village, and animals, and functional magic and all other bona fide successes, the dragon did not need to be the be-all end-all. The experiences of the players as reflected in the feedback seem primarily dependent on how well the participant was able to sublimate, or rationalize, his reactions to the broken dragon, the broken schedule, and the broken illusion of a completely pre-modern and supernatural environment.

Saying that the dragon was broken, the organisation exhausted and the game's aesthetic premise compromised is correct, but it is also far too simple. Explaining how the game was also a success is more difficult, as even just defining what, exactly, we mean by "the game" or "success" is a very complicated matter.

"My group, the witches, was the smallest in numbers and thus the lowest priority, and ended up losing almost another full day of playing time to practical problems. Communication gaffes as to the equipment we would need exacerbated the situation, and when we finally got in-game, it was to a day and a half of solid rain in poorly waterproofed tents.

At that point some players had given up and left, and a few others left during the game, effectively sabotaging the plots of the remaining players. Yet here too, *player solidarity saved the day, and the organisers did their utmost to compensate for our unfortunate situation. Witch players that did not despair and decided to bottle their frustration away until later generally had a reasonably good game. With a fair amount of justification, some of the same people were among the loudest critics of Dragonbane after the event."*

- Johanna Koljonen, Witch player from Finland

Game Design

This first sketch of Cinderhill is from 2003.
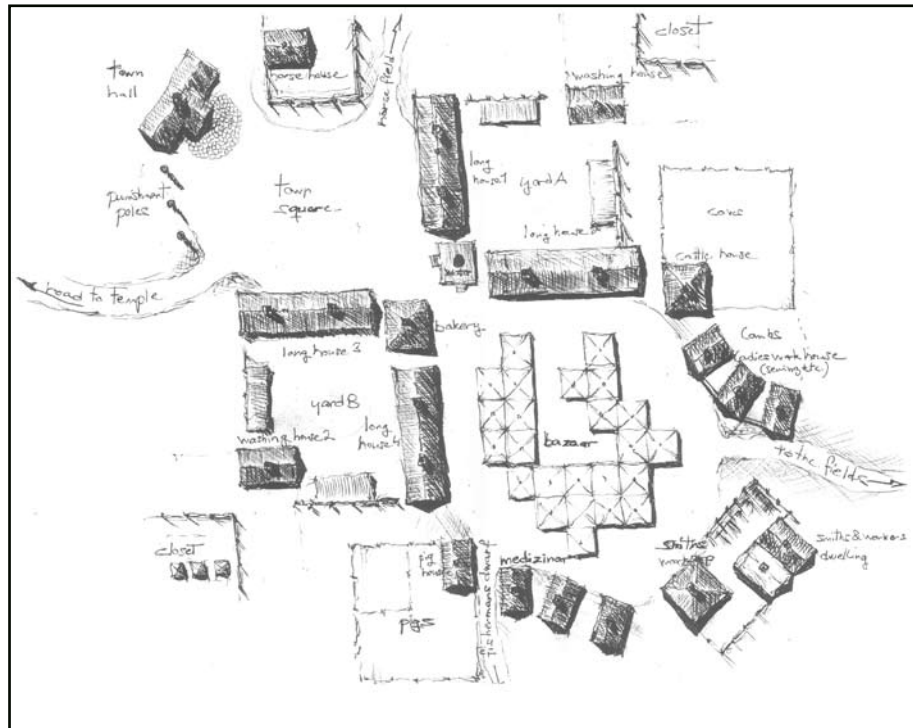
The Story of Dragonbane

Dragonbane was the saga of a dragon that had given a community power beyond belief, at very high price indeed. It employed this story to discuss how utopian societies and the happiness of the individual are contaminated by the all-powerful rule of indifferent superpowers. For all its fantasy elements, the game essentially centred on issues of relevance to an industrial capitalist society. About how what you own can end up owning you. About how peace and wealth at the price of one's integrity might be worse than poverty. It was a tale about pride and ambition and about the problems with allowing the end to justify the means. And in the end it was a story about how letting go of one's way of life is sometimes the only way to realize a meaningful life for oneself.

In contrast to many role-playing game plots, the story began rather than ended with a battle, and was constructed to resist obvious solutions and the use of violence as a method of propelling events forward. While violent at the beginning and dark at the end, the unfolding of the narrative was based on interpersonal communication rather than conflict

About Choosing a Story and Writing It

The longer the preparation period before the game, the more important it is to define and select the story and stick with it. One can always refine the story further on as the production goes along, but changing any of the basic facts

between groups. And then, as the last pages of the tale were turned, the magic ink started to fade. The pages turned blank, and what the final chapters were to include was left entirely for the players to decide.

"As you walk past the Dragontamers' pavilions and tents of burnished gold and dampened grey, your gaze searches the woods, pierces the mist. At the far end of a ruined field lies the old temple and village of Cinderhill. It is a settlement of painted longhouses and temple spires, aflame in crimson red. Further beyond the temple gates lies the dragon's lair, into which only the brave or holy wander, and those doomed to human sacrifice. There were farmhouses where you stand, but they are smouldering ruins now, their denizens fled or slain in the recent battle. On the other side of this no-man's-land the witches are gathered. The situation is not without tension. It is only days since the bronze dragon feel at the foot of the watchtower of the village. As you step onto the burned ground, charred undergrowth crackles, and a butterfly leaps into the air with two frightened flaps." -From Dragonbane faction manuals

More than Fantasy

The action of the larp was centred on the village of Cinderhill in the far north of the fantasy world of Valenor, created by Mike Pohjola for his role-playing game Myrskyn Aika, and appropriated for game use in collaboration with the author. The three cultures represented in the game – the villagers, the Dragontamers and the witches – were created afresh, with the game design in mind. The cultures' real differences in lifestyles, beliefs, social codes, dress and behaviours were geared specifically towards setting up social conflicts in which violence would not be the immediate solution.

The game events start a few days after a vast battle, in which the Dragontamers have succeeded in killing one of the village's two dragon deities. The part played by

will inevitably lead to confusion, frustration and fruitless work.

Whether you are building a story this magnitude or something smaller, make sure all players can understand the central story concept. And the longer the story needs the game to be, the more important it is to make sure everyone is able to eat, drink and relax in a way that supports the fiction. A lowly slave, who eats like a king and never needs to do any slave work, will have poor gaming experience, just like a king who needs to tie his own shoe laces won't be getting what he expects.

Make sure everyone writing material for you knows what level of coherence, realism and cross-referencing you expect. The higher level of internal coherence you deem your fiction requires, the more important it is for you to have someone cross-checking everything, and maintaining a list of dos and don'ts to keep the story working with the game.

the witches in this tragedy is unclear, as are indeed all the details of the conflict, since the magical energy released by the dragon's death has confused the memories and senses of everyone in this very magical environment.

The "you cannot remember the details" topos is a common and rather crude fix to a typical larp problem – that players purporting to have grown up together in an isolated village do not remember all their neighbours' names, let alone age-old customs – but it worked reasonably well here. The player's process of finding one's feet within the fiction paralleled the process of the magical befuddlement lifting from the character's minds.

Over the course of the game, the goal of the villagers was to convince the stronger and better-armed Dragontamers that

they had no need to be rescued from the remaining dragon. The Dragontamers' goal was to decide whether their honour code about not harming humans should be interpreted in support of or in opposition to the villagers' wishes. And the witches needed to decide whether to trust an offer from an oppressive far-away emperor to stop anti-witch apartheid within his realm in exchange for the remaining dragon's heart, a powerful magical object.

Characters within the groups agreed with the collective goals to differing degrees, making many individual narratives reflect the positive effects of multiculturalism – that being confronted with alien values can make us challenge what we have previously accepted without question.

The Dragontamers' culture was perhaps closest to traditional

ideas of fantasy fighter-adventurers, except that the collective was gender blind (like all the cultures in the game). The witches, knit together in close units of two nigh-Siamese magical collaborators, were conceptualised as very far from human in their priorities, habits and values. And Cinderhill operated as a sort of theocratic utopia, in which a peaceful collective was organised around service to an ideal – the dragon – that only upon consideration could be construed as a sort of implicit dictator.

A number of high-profile creative people from the Nordic larp scene were associated with Dragonbane in the project's early days. Whether because of creative or personal conflicts, or real-world demands on their time, keeping them on board proved difficult, gradually relegating the status of writing tasks from a key creative element to a mere necessity. This work was moved around a great deal within the organisation, which led to confusion especially about who, exactly, had the final say about the practical specifics of the different in-game cultures. This proved problematic since one of Dragonbane's experimental approaches included moving all visual design responsibility away from the players.

Camera crew in action. "Luckily" the chosen date for the tamer video outdoor shoot was the coldest night in winter 2004-2005.

Game Design in Practice

As with any kind of entertainment, making a good game is a question of creating good content: a positive experience of engaging with an interesting story. When it comes to larps, which are always experienced from a within a role – from a vantage point within a fictional character – "good content" is all about creating characters which involve the player and are enabled to interact with each other.

In Nordic style larps, character descriptions (defining the background, context and ambitions of each role) are sometimes written by the organisers, and sometimes by the players. Both approaches have weaknesses as well as strengths, and in practice responsibility for the character is

always shared between the writer and the participant. The player is usually free to interpret the information given to him in any way that works within the overall limits of the game, and expected to improvise and extrapolate any information not provided by the description.

The creative writing tasks involved in creating a Nordic Style larp can be summarized under the headings "world", "plot" and "character". Writing the world includes defining the fiction's physical reality, history, cultures and metaphysics. Writing plot involves setting up the conflicts and interactions projected to occur between character groups and individuals during the game. And writing characters involves specifying as much detail about the fictional roles as the game design requires. Typically this involves

deciding the relationship of the individual to the culture to which he belongs, specifying some biographical background and the events that have led the character to the moment at which the game begins, and defining the character's personal ambitions and his relations to other characters.

In the Nordic larp scene, the world is typically written by the larp's creators, as is the plot, if it is relevant to the game's design and structure (it usually is). How character is handled varies a great deal between game cultures and even individual games. Sometimes the

There is no simpler nor more honourable task among the children of the Dragon than doing chores daily according to ability. Everyone was to help out.

larpmakers will define only character functions necessary for the plot (such as "the king" or "the murderer") and allow the players to create these characters within the proper culture groups as they please. At other times, when the characters are written by the larpmakers, the player is encouraged to fill in additional biographical and psychological information, as long as it is not in conflict with what has been previously written.

Dragonbane's world and some of the plot were provided by the projects' larpwrights. Players were then encouraged to create their own characters in collaboration with a character coach, who would monitor and edit or approve the players' written entries in the character design section of the game's online system, NEST.

Character Design in Context

Dragonbane was constructed to appeal to a broad mass of dedicated larpers. It was traditional in that it encompassed all the fundamentals of what we have come to expect of a fantasy larp. It was also progressive in the sense that it attempted to reinvent the failed design and methodology of past larps. The numbers of participants – over 400 – was not a problem in itself: most core organisers had worked on projects of similar or greater magnitude before. The real challenge lay in providing all of these players with good characters – the fictitious roles as inhabitants of Valenor through which they would co-create the illusion of the larp.

In Dragonbane, the theory lessons of Markus Montola were received with gratitude and were used as basis when the NEST character creation tools specifications were drawn. In retrospect it is easy to say that an even better implementation of these principles would have been needed in some groups. On the other hand, some of the participants found even the current system of character design radical and unfamiliar.

The character design system guided each player to answer a large number of questions about his character, ranging from age and gender to, for instance, main events in the character's life between ages 10 and 15. Each reply could be a brief statement of fact or a long narrative sequence, according to the preference of the player doing the writing. The material was then reviewed by the character coach, whose insight in the general game design ideally enabled her to make suggestions for changes or emphases likely to resonate with the ambitions of characters with which the player

Montola Theory

"Good larpwriters write characters that are enabled to participate in meaningful action as much as possible. Good writers realize, that all characters are disabled from some meaningful actions, but pay attention to how the characters are disabled.

We can see that in the society with a big class divide the classes are enabled in action typical for their class, while they are largely disabled in the actions of the other classes. In a game lasting for a week, the question of enabledness is probably the most important issue in the good writing.

If the characters do not have meaningful action, the players a) begin to play against their characters, b) get bored or c) go off-game.

Christopher Sandberg, in character, reads magical words from the Cinderhillian book. Notice the "Dragonsticks" typeface, yet another detail helping the players immerse.

was likely to interact, as well as with the themes of the game as a whole.

Such a system of character creation forces the player to think carefully about his expectations for the game, and to consider what types of situations he would want to explore through the narrative. It also encourages him to draw on private experience, to see the character as a complex biographical entity rather than just a symbolic subject. In some games, it is of course highly appropriate for player characters to be little more than shells or costumes. In others, emphasising psychological realism is very helpful indeed, but players often find it challenging to elaborate individualised life-narratives in completely generic environments.

Dragonbane's character creation process encouraged the players to engage actively with the idea of every-day life in Valenor, and enabled them to create intra-character relations and collaborate on common fictional memories regardless of geographical distance before the game.

"The main problems with communications and writing had to do with lack of organisation and able personnel. Too few people were in charge of updating, verifying and publishing information, which led to outdated and even conflicting information being published. Communication problems within the organisation also led to a few problems with communication. The lack of organisation also led to inequality between the three character factions in the game. At the time Cinderhill had hundreds

of pages of material written for its players, the witch faction had a few pages worth of unpublishable sketches. In the game itself the villagers had a lot of extra unnecessary for the game - baths, livestock and a working smithery, for example. At the same time the witches had to start their game a day late because their simple camp wasn't ready for them to start playing in.''

-Maija Nevala, a witch culture creator, witch player, organiser and coach from Finland

The cultural context of the characters is obviously a factor that can enable or disable characters from action. In a feudal setting, peasant characters and females typically have a small sphere of action, making them less interesting to

play. In Dragonbane this was countered by creating a world as gender-neutral as possible. For instance, the Cinderhillian deity, the dragon, was deliberately made genderless, the costumes for each faction had a unisex look, and the Cinderhillian language was equipped with a gender-neutral pronoun.

The Dragonbane writers failed in their enabling tasks in one area. The culture of the witches, with its anti-social and paranoid attitude to almost all people including other witches, made it challenging for the witches to engage with game events in a natural manner. Additionally, making the witches afraid of water added very little to their game experience. Instead it detracted from it significantly, as day-to-day survival and hygiene

Being an egalitarian community, the most disliked chores were allotted every day through dragon rituals. The person wearing the dragon mask was not able to see, and the persons he or she touched were selected.

became very difficult – a practical example of how small details can enable or disable the players from acting as their characters.

DB factions

Cinderhill

In the uncharted north of Valenor lie lands untouched by Kings and Emperors, areas in which strange traditions and rare religions survive to be wondered at, should anyone venture that far. One such culture inhabits dragon-worshipping Cinderhill, a village laid out entirely on a plan received from the divine parent itself. In Cinderhill, all work and property, and every hour of the day, are shared with the community.

At Dragonbane, all child players were placed in Cinderhill, as this was the only faction that would logically have had children or minors in it. Cinderhill was also the physically safest and most comfortable place in the game: the players slept in dry, heated houses and had access to better hygiene facilities (like the bath house). Most plots in Cinderhill were interpersonal or related to the religion of the dragon worshippers, and on the level of the collective concerned themselves with the fundamental issues of challenges to old customs and a static world view. Cinderhillian characters were best suited for

On the Amount of Background Material

If your story is set in a historical environment, the players will have some basic knowledge about it and can also find things out relatively easily. If you have invented it all from scratch, you need to make sure your players know in what ways your fiction differs from their expectations – which equal more background material that needs to be communicated in one way or another. But the more material your players have to read, the more likely it is they won't read it at all.

players interested in realizing open and co-operative characters. But in a community of Cinderhill's size some room was inevitably available for all kinds of tempers and relations.

Adepts

The graduated temple adepts of Cinderhill had all reached their maturity. The minimum age for adept players was 18, but players of 15-17 years of age could opt to play adept apprentices. The adepts had to perform religious rituals, which required the players to master more material than other Cinderhill players prior to the game. They had to study the game world's philosophy, rituals, choreographies and chants, and learn practical skills of scroll making.

The adepts also had more daily chores than other Cinderhillians; their responsibilities included fetching water for the village and emptying the village outhouses. Adept players wishing to perform active magic needed to participate in a magic workshop prior to the game, which entailed additional travel expenses for some.

Dragontamers

These wandering tribes are monster-killers are motivated by their ancient honour code and the possibility of spoils to face danger and protect the innocent commoners of Valenor. The tamers are powerful fighters, but adventurers more than warriors, since their honour code forbids them from harming a human being.

The minimum age to play a Dragontamer was 16 years. The 80 tamers all lived in one camp, but were organised in smaller clan-like groupings. Many of the plots centred on interaction within and between the groups. A typical Dragontamer was a good fit for a player wishing for a competitive and extrovert character.

The only way to get around this is to section the material in easily digestible bits. Consider whether other media than text can be used – illustrations, workshops, video? We found a good way to communicate the values of Cinderhill was through "campfire tales", written in the way a member of the community might have told it. Tales are longer but easier to remember than a dull list of rules like "Cinderhillians do not shake hands".

Whatever method you choose for writing the world and the characters within it, make sure all of this material is finished at least one month prior to the game.

A video explaining the nature of the witch culture was planned and shot. The editing and post production took too long for the film to be used before the game, but there are still plans to release the video.

The still pictures taken on location were used to help the players with costume design.

Witches

Witches are born with the gift of magic, but are unable to control or work it on their own. Two of them together can calm the raging powers within them, and put it to use in changing the world around them. The halves of a witch pair always share an affinity for an aspect of one of the elements, and that is the focus of their magical practice. Witches are shunned by other humans, persecuted in some countries, and rarely socialise with anyone apart from their partner. The age minimum to play a witch was 18 years. The witches had the most uncomfortable living conditions of all the factions. Their tents were unheated and they had little chance to wash themselves (or indeed interest to, since it was decided witches fear water). Since each pair had to perform their daily chores on their own, a basic grasp of wildlife skills and camping out was required. Most witch characters were extremely introverted and troubled, with plots centred on the relationship to the partner, to the magic, and to the other witches with whom they were now forced to collaborate. For witch players who had not been able to travel to magic workshops, brief preparatory demonstrations of magic use and special effects were held before the game.

Casting

Players signed up through filling in a digital form on the website. Short descriptions of each faction were provided on the website, giving the players a chance to form an opinion and express a preference for which faction they wished to join, and the form's questions provided a rough basis for the organisers to judge whether placing the player in his preferred faction was a good idea.

As a piece of communication technology, the form worked beautifully, and organisers were able to make reasonable judgements based on the information it provided. Unfortunately they did not know until after the project exactly what questions should have been of the players before

hand, and the information design of the form was based on flawed assumptions. It was, for instance, originally assumed that any larper over 18 years of age with wildlife skills and an interest in extreme gaming experience could manage playing a witch. While this was true in physical terms, however, it turned out that the social isolation prescribed by the witches' culture worked best if the players has experience of demanding games with an internal playing style (something practically unknown in many gaming cultures in Europe), and a high level of trust in their witch partner (something difficult to achieve if the players met in person only briefly before the game). Such issues could perhaps have been predicted based on experiences from other games. Asking better questions would have enabled more appropriate casting, and offered some players who now ended up unhappy with

Casting the witches was difficult. Game materials had communicated that witch players would operate in uncomfortable and unpleasant conditions. Some players could not imagine what this would involve when playing around the clock.

Witch characters operated in pairs, and one player backing out inevitably disturbed the game of the other player too.

their experience a context they could have enjoyed more than the roles they now ended up in – even though the factions were picked based on their own preference and the characters were created by themselves.

Character Creation

Letting the players write their characters does lift a tremendous amount of work from the larp-makers' shoulders. When characters are written by the organisers, they must also be cast by them, a process either incredibly complex or completely arbitrary unless the players, their playing style and preferences are previously known to the larpmakers. In a project of Dragonbane's magnitude, satisfying the wishes of all players while respecting the ambitions of the writers for their pet characters

would have been very difficult.

It was decided to let each player create his own character. But letting the players do their own unsupervised writing always risks resulting in incoherent characters that are not a comfortable fit with the game's world, and do not resonate with the game's themes. In a game like Dragonbane, which was struggling to move away from a dominant tradition of fantasy cliché, ensuring that players would not fall back on derivative assumptions about the world or its cultures was especially important.

In Dragonbane the actual character invention and writing was done by each player himself, but always in interaction with his assigned coach at each stage of the process.

J. Björklund photog

A very rough character skeleton was generated based on the player's replies to the questions in the sign-up form from a pool of 24 archetypes. The skeleton gave an outline and some suggestions for how it might translate into behaviours and which faction would fit the player best. This outline was then transported into the player's NEST account, which allowed him to first expand on it, and later create more background information about the character. The coach monitored and green-lit the ideas on the character sheet or made suggestions about how to edit the character to better fit the realm.

All members of the same faction (such as the witches) or large group (such as the temple adepts of Cinderhill) had the same coach. The duty of the coach was to ensure that all characters and the events in their pasts fit logically into the game world, and did not contain claims or information conflicting with that in others' of the same faction. The coach was also responsible for establishing the character's social contacts, and for creating some concrete in-game goals for the player. The goals would spring out of a character's internal personality traits (like ambition), or out of social detail like his being in love with another villager. Coaches could use descriptive suggestions to steer likely game events ("if he were in danger, you'd go to any length to save him"). If a specific outcome in a specific situation was necessary for the over all narrative of the game, coaches could use fate play rules, that bind the player to act in a certain way while leaving him space to decide

not know how to use them or feel they had a mandate to use them.

"In my opinion the greatest communications success in Dragonbane was the NEST, an interactive forum where players built their characters guided by their character coach. In the NEST players could discuss with each other and the game organisers and download game material. The system also made it possible for the organisation to effectively keep track of players, paid and unpaid game fees etc. Like the game world, NEST could be used in many following larp projects."
-Maija Nevala, a witch culture creator, player, organiser and coach from Finland

NEST technology is still being developed into a more advanced character creation and game design tool. At the computer convention Dreamhack in the summer of 2006, the crew implemented a new group structure and modular programming for ease in further development.

how to fulfil the instruction. The situations might not necessarily seem very central to the players, which makes the effect of fate rules less intrusive. One might for instance specify, that if the values of the village were threatened, the character should try to exhort the others to act according to village traditions.

The use of character coaches was not a Dragonbane invention, but they have typically been employed to guide character creation in games designed to avoid an over-reliance of the written word. Such coaches work through personal meetings, conversation and workshops. The online tool NEST created a form for coached character creation based on writing. One benefit of this is that each character design decision potentially affecting other characters or the outcome of the game is documented as it is established,

enabling the game designers to act upon or employ such details if they wish to. The main downsides are that some players are not comfortable writers and would rather work in another medium, and that some in fact enjoy the challenge of engaging with a character that springs from somebody else's imagination. In Dragonbane, an additional limitation on the effectiveness of the method was placed by the personnel shortages within the organisation. Some factions had new coaches appointed to them as the previous ones were reassigned or fell by the wayside. This caused duplication of work on the coach side and sometimes resulted in conflicting instructions being given to the players.

Coaching

Each coach was originally intended to have around 20 players to care for. But as the project went on and the names and numbers of the character coaches shifted, so too did this number, resulting in some coaches having less than 10 players, and some over 60 to handle. Coaches with more time on their hands typically volunteered to carry the heavier burdens, to enable others to focus on other areas of the project (or indeed their personal lives, an increasingly fraught issue as the project dragged on). Nevertheless, at the most stressful stage of the project

A vast amounts of varied background materials were created to help with coaching and deepen the cultures. Among these materials were 'holy scrolls' explaining the creation myth of Cinderhill.

with the game fast approaching, additional character coaching was also desperately assigned to organisers with more than enough on their plate already. Even the organiser general, Timo Multamäki himself, was attempting to fit in some character coaching in the last few weeks, while averaging 18-hour days on the project.

At its best, coaching was pure interaction, a creative and fruitful dialogue between the players and the coaches, an inspiring collaboration on a common story. Some parts of this story creation were expanded onto the larger player community, and conducted in the NEST forums. In the discussion forums all players were able to submit and discuss stories and ideas about their characters and their cultures. In the chat forums, in which messaging and reaction occurred in real time, some player groups created little online role-playing games, in which stories were improvised on the go, with coaches monitoring for game-world consistency and participating as non-player characters. Sharing experiences and history in these kinds of virtual role-playing games was a valuable method for bringing alive the fictional community of the characters, and forging a real-world community of the players.

All coaches found, that getting the players to start the process of character creation early enough before the game was quite a

challenge. With several months to the game itself the focus of most players will inevitably lie on mundane matters, and prioritizing the occasional hour to work towards an event is quite difficult. At this stage, the primary function of a coach is to be the catalyst; to know when and how to get the player excited about the process.

This is a question partly of luring the players in, partly of whipping them into shape, but mostly of creating an inspirational atmosphere and gently guiding the player in the right direction. At this stage, meeting face to face or at least speaking on the phone is the most efficient way of making the connection between the coach and the player real. (A real-time chat conversation is a good alternative).

Reality Bites

Unfortunately, regardless of the great potential of the process, things do not always run smoothly. In some cases it soon became obvious that the player would not be able to contribute a single idea or a word of writing. In those cases the coach had to do the writing in the player's stead. Not an enviable situation if the coach was saddled with a large number of players and happened to get a large number of players with no time or ability to work on their

characters before the last minute, if at all.

Having a plan with clearly defined stages and deadlines, and communicating it very distinctly to the players is absolutely vital. For future projects, organisers should probably consider entering a kind of contract with each player, non-collaboration in which could lead to losing one's place in the game. To make this feel fair, the process should be completely transparent. Many players who only started writing at the very last moment (weeks or months after the recommended deadlines) are likely to have finished at least the central parts of their character descriptions much earlier if they had only understood, that other players needed their data in order to process their characters further.

The lack of data on some characters resulted in odd character relationships, since it is obviously very difficult to imagine what connections might exist between two characters when one of the parties has no personality, ambitions or history. It would have been useful to define a "point of no return" date across the project, when the coaches would no longer wait for players to fill in the missing info. As it was, each coach had to judge for herself when to jump in blindfolded and just force a connection on two characters, regardless of

whether it was logical to what the other player might have planned in his mind without deigning to commit it into writing.

Overall the methods for character development and player guidance in Dragonbane were innovative, well thought out and truly functional. It was easy for the coaches to cross-reference information and possible to jump in and help each other when one of them was in trouble. In a coaching method not based on writing, a coach dropping out would have left the others with nothing to go on; here one was at least always able to log on and read up on whatever one's predecessor and his players had agreed on.

Even with the help of NEST maintaining the overall coherence of the game and achieving a complex network of social relations within the game would have required a person or team in charge of cross-referencing. They would have read and learned all characters in each community, and coolly made matches to establish fictional friendships, family ties, ex-lovers, mentor-pupil relationships, rivalries and business contacts.

"What do you mean I am not the maker of your character? Yes, you wrote it. But did not I stay awake months worrying about him? Did not I bring content to his dreams? Did not I create all his friendships

The first encounter between Cinderhillians and witches since the battle was coloured by fear, mistrust and grief.

and invent the drama? I carried him through all this and fought for him. That makes me equal to his mother." –Tiina "Trina" Kuustie, coach, organiser and Cinderhill culture creator

The Challenge of an International Larp

The meeting –or clash – of different larping styles from different countries and cultures had been expected, but perhaps not sufficiently discussed early in the project. The issue was owned by the character coaching team. Coaches had meetings with the players (either in IRL or on the internet), explaining the Nordic style of larping, and developing characters in co-operation with players.

International Larp Society Pioneer

Larp communities in different countries have developed independently and in various directions, with international exchange of ideas and experiences starting only in the last decade at conventions such as Solmukohta-Knutpunkt. Dragonbane was the first truly pan-European practical larp project, and offered a shared production and gaming experience to base discussion on. Even within different countries, larpers differ in their views and goals. Is larp to be regarded as a hobby, leisure activity, or art? Are larpers just bored middle-class escapists or youth looking for new ways of adapting to a rapidly changing world? Are the different larp styles a result of cultural differences, e.g between southern, mainly Catholic Europe and northern, mainly Protestant Europe? Is the Scandinavian larping style with strong emphasis on realism and immersion possible to employ in French, Belgian or Italian larps with their emphasis on action, adventure or plot-solving?

Larp as a subject of interest leads deeply into social, psychological, cultural and religious issues, where questions of identity, socialization and adaptation to globalism and post-industrialism are at the forefront.

The larp community in Northern Europe consists mainly of young adults, 16-26 years of

- Finland
- Sweden
- Denmark
- Germany
- Spain
- Russia
- Czech Republic
- An Undefined Country
- Other countries total
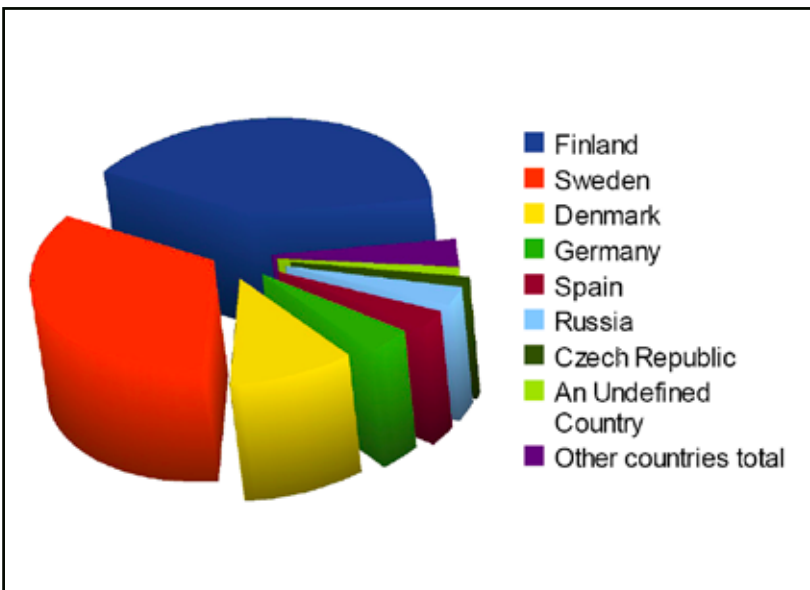
The humanoid wicker-man built by the tamers stands in the rain.

age. Regarding youth as the future of Europe is not a cliché, it is a fact, and any activity that brings together large groups of youth from many countries should be seen as a very good investment in the future. Common for most larpers of Europe is a strong interest in history, acting, media, storytelling, handicrafts and writing, combined with a will to explore the boundaries of the concept of identity.

The Nordic countries are world class producers of role-playing know-how both in game design, production, criticism and academic study. In the Nordic countries role-playing games including larp are an accepted part of the over-all culture. This is not always the case in other parts of Europe. Where strong gaming cultures exist, as in German- and French-speaking countries, these have little or no ties outside their own language area. On a European level, no organised network of gaming societies exits; even within different countries, separation between geographical areas or genres can be complete. Dragonbane was created in part to further the development of international cooperation between larpers.

Legend:
- Austria
- Bahrain
- Belgium
- Croatia
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Israel
- Italy
- Mexico
- Norway
- Netherlands
- Philippines
- Russia
- Sweden
- Spain
- United Kingdom
- United States
- Undefined
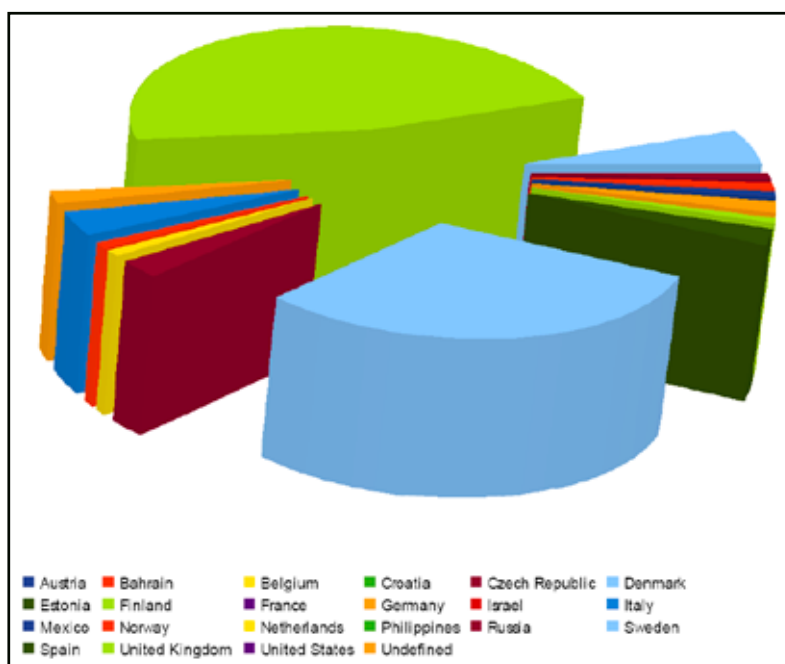
Communicating in a Multicultural Project

Sometimes it just is better to state early in the beginning of the project, that it will not be, nor feel like a democracy. In a multicultural project there are as many assumptions on how a project works as there are participants. Negotiating these is possible, but in many cases it is faster just to dictate the procedures. A short list of the working methods used within the project should be published in a place that is easily accessible to all participants and collaborators. Perhaps some kind of 'Terms of Practice', that could be agreed on before the first sign-in, would help make the participants less surprised or offended by cultural clashes. All cultures have different ways of communicating, and most of them sugarcoat information more than Finns do. What Finnish members of the core team saw as straight-forward, efficient and polite information, foreign team members and players would sometimes consider rude or offensive.

A properly functioning system for data processing is necessary for any big project, especially if the organisers are collaborating long-distance. In a multi-cultural project it is especially important to be able to check facts and clarify information online. But a system like NEST would also need an active help desk, to help the project members – including the main organisers – to use it efficiently.

Communication!

"Knowing and understanding there are other ways, other cultures of communicating, helps.

Communicating in big multicultural organisation is always more difficult than communicating with people speaking same language. It is not just about the words; people tend to use different meanings for phrases and basically just simple misunderstandings cause a lot of fuss.

A big organisation, multicultural or not, also requires active information-sharing about the current status of the processes."

– Timo Multamäki, Executive Producer

Clashing Ideals

The clashes between different gaming cultures and traditions were the most visible source of tension and misunderstandings, but a more fundamental conflict in priorities added to the difficulty of resolving them. The entire production operated with two sets of ideals that often conflicted: the basic principle of youth work, that everyone should be able to participate, and the artistic goals of the game, which demanded that participants as well as organisers committed to the vision of the 360° illusion. The vast diversity in the participants' ability to commit time and effort to making their clothes and equipment, or to participate in building the village, often necessitated compromises that seemed unfair to those who had worked very hard to a higher

standard. But the alternative would have barred many players from participating entirely – not only those who were not very motivated, which could arguably have been fair, but also many who were just very busy, limited in practical skills, or constrained in economic means.

Having a real smithy, while lacking essentials like working wells, appeared an error in judgment on the organizers' part.

But the cost of the smithy was negligible: leaving it unbuilt would not have released any funds and only very little time for other parts of the building process.

Participants as well as outsiders found it difficult to follow the changes in project priorities based on available funds, materials, work force and other variables.

Rituals combining sequences from oriental martial arts and yoga were created for the culture of Cinderhill. Unified choreographies made the rituals feel suggestively real.

Production

Keeping Up Appearances

Have fresh workforce on site to greet and check in the arriving players and perform the safety inspections of their equipment. If such people are not available, sleep well the previous night and turn that frown upside down. Grumpy faces and rude commands will convince players who arrive with apprehensions that their fears are true – and risks quenching the enthusiasm of those that are excited about your game.

July the 27th, 2006, in Älvdalen

Aside from a handful of volunteers, the players started arriving at the Dragonbane headquarters and check-in zone (known as the Boot Camp) in the week before the game. The last arrival dates were staggered to allow for preparation time with the organisers, but participants were encouraged to arrive early. Those that did were immediately roped into physical labour, since the village was far from finished. organisers operating on very little sleep, drowning in work, were curt of tone, and there was a fair bit of grumbling amongst the players at what was perceived as a lack of gratitude for the work they were now putting in. There was also a very real sense that there was simply too much left to do before the beginning of the game. Finishing several buildings? Building an entire temple? Setting up an 80-person camp for the Dragontamers and many small ones for the witches? How could that possibly be achieved in two days?

The participants put shoulder to the wheel, and a satisfying communality did emerge in the process. Even though it often took the form of collective griping, there was also solidarity with the

common goal. Many individuals who had been only loosely connected with the game organisation stepped into leadership roles and mediated between the practical needs of the project and the needs of the players. The first, semi-official game day was, in practice, sacrificed to finish setting up the camps – and the witches lost most of another day on theirs – but all in all, tackling the immense practical challenges together involved quite a lot of fun.

Cinderhill players helping to unload the food supplies in the village before the game. At the same time, the dragon team was attempting to fix the dragon's broken neck in Loimaa.

A Close Call

"Wednesday, July 26th 2006, approximately 01:00 AM. I have just finished packing my stuff, emailed the last answers on various project-related questions and am just about to sleep a few hours. I am supposed to leave for Älvdalen with my newborn son and the documentary team in the early morning. At Naantali harbour we are to meet The Dragon and hold a press conference with the dragon builders. Then the telephone rings. It's Timo with a dead serious voice: "We have a problem: the dragon is broken"

In the Åsen school kitchen, at the Boot Camp, a crisis meeting is held. Timo, Coffe, Elge and a few others are sitting around the communicator on the table. At the other end, I am in Espoo, in front of a computer in a house where everyone else is sleeping – on the line are also the Dragon Team in Loimaa. All we are seeking for is a solution to one issue: is it possible to fix the dragon, and if it is, how long will it take? Heiko replies "yes" and gives an estimated time. After this we focus on other issues: the press conference
at the harbour needs to be cancelled, the members of the dragon team already on their way to Älvdalen, have to be called back, and will need new tickets. The transportation of the dragon has to be postponed. A list of the most important props, that were to be transported to Älvdalen together with the Dragon, needs to be made and alternative transport for them has to be organised.*

After receiving directions I return to work at the computer. Soon we have new travel plans: we would leave immediately with the documentation team, drive to the Loimaa Dragon workshop and the Turku workshop to collect all the necessary props. We would also take photos of the dragon, just in case there would be members of the media at the harbour, so we could show them this was not all a hoax.

Three AM we start our journey. My little son sleeps unaware of the crisis his parents are going through. At 5:30 AM we arrive at Loimaa. The dragon is not anywhere near finished. It lies in the yard, seemingly asleep. Some
of the builders are awake. I doubt they have slept at all. The prop items in Loimaa are loaded and we are given instructions on where in Turku to find the rest.*

Just before 7 AM we arrive in Turku. We have to use all of our creativity to manage the heavy treasure trunk tied to the Winnebago bicycle rack. We get to the harbour on time. No members of the media are in sight, so the early morning press release has reached everyone. We eat the ship's breakfast and go to sleep. In the evening we arrive in Åsen. The Boot Camp is filled with grave, tired and busy organisers. Too many things have gone wrong; too many things are left undone. The three years of hard work is about to go to waste. We tell them the news from the dragon workshop and try to lift their spirits. I accommodate myself and my son near the school. When going to sleep I try to grasp the situation. Everything seems so unreal, chaotic. How on Earth we are to pull through? The players arrive tomorrow." - Tiinaliisa Multamäki, Dragonbane Project Secretary and CFO

Producing Fantasy – the Insane Way

To the Edge of Human Endurance – and Beyond

It would probably have been bittersweet for the organisers (had their zombie-like exhaustion allowed for any reflection) to discern that it was the volunteer spirit of the player community that ultimately swung their way and made the game possible. A dearth of volunteers was what had originally created the desperate situation. As larp in the Nordic countries is a non-profit activity, the hundreds of Dragonbane team members had all worked for free, in some cases also choosing to work shorter hours in their professional careers to free time for the project. Many though they were, there would have been work for as many again.

Mentioning one name above the others in such a committed group is almost inappropriate. But Dragonbane was indisputably a product of the personality and passions of its originator and main organiser Timo Multamäki. Impossible is not a concept he holds in high regard, and he is sometimes accused of megalomania. If that is what Multamäki suffers from, it is a particularly infectious strand: in all of his larp projects, most of which have been

admired for their ambition and criticized for their artistic content, he has demonstrated an ability to convince large numbers of people to work toward the realization of his implausible visions.

It is certainly fair to say that Multamäki's authoritative and demanding managerial style generates conflict as well as loyalty. (It is equally fair to say that a great part of his bluntness, perceived by some as rude or shocking, is a cultural trait – a reflection of traditional Finnish communication styles). He demands the unwavering loyalty of people sharing his passions – a quality that is both positive and negative – and works with a recurring core group of skilled collaborators on special effects, technology and game design. They typically share his ability to work very hard for long periods of time on very little
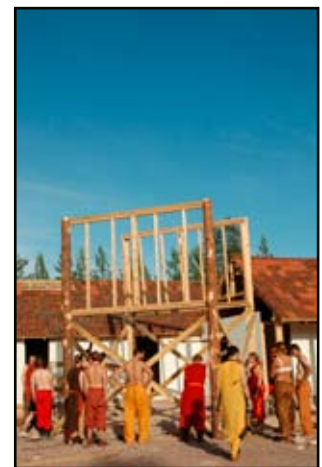
Controlling the Workload

A successful production needs some very simple principles:

1. Make sure everyone in production knows who decides what and when

2. Delegate

3. Delegate more

4. Plan. Then follow the plan to avoid doing stuff twice. "Failing to plan is planning to fail".

5. Keep the project crew updated. Internal communication is the key to avoiding superfluous work and to finding out who can still do more.

6. Realize that most of the work effort assessments are vastly optimistic. Add 30% time on top, more if you are not familiar with the skills and commitment of the team members.

7. Never assume anything is taken care of. Unless you already know who is doing something and when, nobody is planning to and probably never will.

sleep. Yet an alarming number of Dragonbane team members broke down physically or mentally from the sheer workload of the project.

Of those that decided to quit before it got that bad, many did so through quietly dropping off the radar rather than stepping down and handing over their tasks in an orderly fashion. A small larp is typically organised through a series of in-person meetings, but the Dragonbane team was spread out over Europe and much of the interaction was web-based, making it practically impossible to monitor the well-being of the human resources.

Very soon identifying and reassigning dropped tasks, and okaying completed ones, could have been a full-time job in itself. But as often happens in overstretched organisations, practical management especially on the middle

levels was simply overlooked. As the dwindling number of remaining volunteers agreed to take on even more work to keep the project afloat, scant resources remained for the day-to day running of this complex, multinational project.

Scrambling to Keep Promises

Especially after the plans to host the game in Estonia were scrapped, it became evident that delivering the larp as at the planned time (in the summer of 2005) would be completely impossible. A decision to move the game ahead by one year was made, and although this was generally met with understanding from the players, it stretched the exhausted organisation further.

It would seem that this dire lack of manpower would have been

reasonable cause to cancel the production at this point. But here too, Multamäki's personality shone through. To him and the team around him, stopping was impossible – not because of the work already put into the project, nor indeed for the sake of any private ambitions, but because of their loyalty and pride.

Dragonbane had applied for money as an international youth project, which of course it was, and for sponsorship as a unique cultural project, which it was too. Funding the half-million euros project through volunteer work, external grants and sponsorship was an immense feat in itself. In the probably correct opinion of the Dragonbane team, cancelling at a point when those resources had already been committed to the

production would have harmed the image and status of the larp hobby as a whole.

A more complex question is why the ambitions of the project were not scaled down when the problems became apparent. The organisers' reply would be that they were: the number of participants planned for was dropped, the building schemes in the game village Cinderhill rendered less ambitious, and many small plans that players had not even been told about abandoned.

The other, obvious reason was the game's continuing need to attract players and retain the ones already signed up. The vision the makers had touted was very specific and abandoning any central part of it would in all likelihood

Cinderhill building modules were produced in the spring of 2006 in vocational building schools in Swedish Mora and in Tornio, Muonio, and Sodankylä in Finland. The collaboration with schools was vital for the project's success, but not without problems. The final quality varied when students had adapted instructions thoughtlessly – three one-inch nails are not in fact entirely equivalent to one three-inch nail…

2005 and 2006 against a substantive game discount. When such local help did not materialize to the expected degree, the majority of the building was undertaken by Finnish core organisers and, randomly, Spanish volunteers. Seeing how time-consuming this ultimately became, Multamäki has later observed that it would probably have been more efficient to use that time to raise even more money and just invest in professional builders to finish the work.

Timo's company acquired a truck just for Dragonbane use. Without it, the game would not have happened at all: it was driven over 40.000 km for the project. It had earlier been assumed that vans and trailers would suffice, but in the winter of 2004-2005 it became evident that such assumptions were just wishful thinking. Timo's company acquired a truck just for Dragonbane use. Without it, the game would not have happened at all: it was driven over 40.000 km for the project. It had earlier been assumed that vans and trailers would suffice, but in the winter of 2004-2005 it became evident that such assumptions were just wishful thinking.

have led to player cancellations. Most importantly, the game had promised a dragon. In Finland, its design and construction continued at break-neck pace, with the dedicated team of builders and programmers running into a number of hurdles of their own.

As for the game site in Älvdalen, Sweden, the organisers had also had high hopes for players from the Swedish larp communities to spend time on building work in

Struggling Persistently Onwards

For the players arriving at the check-in area that last week in July, it seemed bizarre that the organisation could provide, say, decorated lanterns for the witches, carved statues for the temple, and some wooden skis to hang on the walls of a Cinderhill longhouse (because surely Cinderhillians would ski in winter) – but not enough cars to transport the players to the game

area on schedule. The players did not realize how much of the props had been produced in collaboration with Finnish and local arts-and-crafts schools, another undeniably ingenious example of the organisation's way of identifying untapped resources. But regardless of how this looked to the players, such resources could not at any point have been transformed into middle management, transport or money.

In retrospect it is easy to see, that the addition of as few as three people working full-time on management, internal communication and coordination – and nothing else – could have made all the difference to the project at large. Having them on site as the players arrived, to coax instead of desperately demand their help, would certainly have affected the pregame atmosphere constructively.

The need for these three people was acknowledged, but in spite of great effort, trying to find even one person to be able to take that post failed.

"In retrospect it is easy to see" – but that is of course only possible after the fact. Had those three people been available, they would almost certainly have spent the summer building the village, because that task seemed most vital at the time. It would have made a difference, of course, but not a real change. The problem was not one of naiveté: many of the key Dragonbane operatives work with project management professionally, and know full well the importance of planning and overview.

It is possible that they brought the dangerous exhaustion of the last frantic weeks upon themselves

2003			2004											2005			
Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.

Game design meetings — 1st Estonian meeting — Feb. 19th Official project launch — Search for the game location — Project slowdown — Jan. 6th - 9th The Rome Summit — Game not possible in Estonia — **Apr. 21st Game postponed a year**

Dec. 21th Shooting fcs video — **Prop Team** — 4 prop building weekends — Staging — More prop building workshops — Prop building - Workshops - Staging — Cauldron holders — Prop building

Sfx workshop

Dragon team — Jan. 28th Plastic industry veteran gives Dragon eyes

Sfx workshop

Writing the game design material — **Writers** — Myrskyn Aika translation — Recruiting coaches — Game Design Document finished

Set & building design — Location survey Estonia — Location survey Estonia&Sweden — Youth workshop to make building components

IT-team — Website launch — Aug. 17th Multilingual website — **IT -team** — Sign up form online — Hostile attack against DB servers

Partner aquiring begins — New partners added every month — **Finance** — Applications for public funding & constant effort to find new sponsors and partners — Vocational school does grading — New

Costume design — Patterns — Patte — **Costume Team**

willingly. They refused the bird's eye view because it might have told them the one thing they refused to accept – that, step by step, their goal, even in its reduced form, was impossible to reach. And because they did not accept it, they turned out to be right. The help they would have needed along the way materialized at the last possible moment: the moment the players could see – and touch – what the game really had the potential of becoming.

Production Schedule – What Really Happened

The first quarterly report for 2004 (released 4.4.2004):
The Dragonbane project was officially launched February 19th.

The Dragonbane game location has been chosen. The game will take place at the Soomaa National Park in Estonia, which is about 150 km from Tallinn. New people have joined the project, making the team

Timeline chart spanning 2006 to 2007:

	May	June	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	**2006** Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug. 4th	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	**2007** Jan.

Original game date (Aug.)

Intensive work (Mar.–Apr.)

The Game — July 27th - Aug. 4th

Row 1 (tan): May 5th Game site found — Sep. 18th Building Camp targeted by thieves — Great recruiting — Intensive work — May 4th 500 organizers signed in — Exhausting building work — Cinderhill visited by thieves — Overall exhaustion and burn-out

Row 2 (red) Prop team: Music instrument workshop — July 2 -3rd Ceramics workshop — Prop building — Prop manufacturing — May 5 - 7th Last prop & costume workshop — Intense staging — Building Cinderhill — Packing after the game — Prop inventory

Row 3 (dark red) Dragon Team: July 18th Dragon skeleton arrives — Dec. 2nd Dragon construction begins — Dragon workshop weekends — July 27th Dragon's neck broke — Exhausting work — Transporting the Dragon to Sweden and back to Finland — Dragon 2.0

Row 4 (purple) Coaching: Aug. 9th Characters sendout begins — Player & Faction Manuals — Design of in-game culture rituals — Character contacts — Intense plot writing — Cross referencing — Faith play plots — Follow up

Cinderhill photo shoot — 1st prop delivery

Row 5 (green): June 7th - Sep. 15th Building Camp — Winter work in Cinderhill — Building Camp — Intense staging — Clean up — Cinderhill village preparing for winter

Row 6 (black) IT-team: Sep. 28th Intranet corrupted by hostile attack — Patterns & instructions online — Player forum online — Mar. 31st Tamer video online — upkeep

Row 7 (grey) Finance: New partner contracts are signed each month — Applications for public funding & constant effort to find new sponsors and partners — Intense application writing — Accounting — End report for sponsors — Searching for funding for the DB Legacy

Row 8 (orange) Costume Team: Mass grading — Workshops - Follow-up - Giving advice - Helping the players — Intensive work

Original game date — The Game

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even more international. With the addition of team members from the countries of Brazil, Turkey, Israel, and Austria, Dragonbane now boasts organisers from fifteen different countries.

Dragonbane has obtained several new commercial and academic partners. Among the more than ten new business partners are companies such as Bauhaus and Panasonic. The new academic partners include Tampere Technical University, The Interactive Institute, and the Hypermedia Laboratory at Tampere University. The work on translating the book Myrskyn Aika, which the game will be based on, has begun, and will be completed during the second quarter of 2004. It is currently being translated into English, Swedish, German, French, Italian, Estonian, and Russian, with the English version being done by late April. Half a dozen newspaper and magazine articles about Dragonbane have been published in Europe and Canada already.

DB News 2004:

29/04/04: New partners ensure ample harvest and huge lizard.

03/05/04: Microsoft and Sverok support Dragonbane

14/05/04: Dragonbane website powered by HP

18/05/04: Hatching of Dragon protected by F-Secure

28/05/04: Literature foundation supports translation of Myrskyn Aika (The Age of the Storm).

14/06/04: Sandvik and Bahco provide essential tools

17/06/04: Kemppi Oy supports welding of dragon

09/07/04: Oplayo provides streaming for Dragonbane website

09/07/04: Thomann new audio partner

15/09/04: Suomen Huoltopalvelu Oy to help Dragon production

01/10/04: Leading northern European electronics supplier partners up with Dragonbane

17/10/04: Data-Info Solutions Oy and Dragonbane to co-operate in the Dragonbane IT field

15/11/04: Dragonbane at Russian game convention

25/11/04: Nordic Culture Fund supports Dragonbane

06/12/04: Design work and components from Indagon Oy

08/12/04: Vocational institute site of supply building

09/12/04: SFX tubes from UPM Kymmene

DB News 2005

12/01/05: Merval provides circuit board manufacturing tools

17/01/05: Practical section added to website

19/01/05: Translated Myrskyn Aika available for download

20/01/05: Dragonbane recruits participant coaches

23/01/05: Cauldron holders from one-man company

28/01/05: Plastic industry veteran gives Dragon eyes

08/03/05: Cellulose from major Finnish paper manufacturer

18/03/05: Hostile attack against DB servers

05/05/05: Game area contract signed with local landowners

16/06/05: Propping weekend produced instruments (Updated)

16/06/05: Fantastic scouting trip to Älvdalen (Updated)'

17/06/05: Ceramics workshop July 2-3, 2005, in Finland

21/04/05:
Dragonbane 2005 – 2006

Press release April 21st, 2005

Dragonbane is a challenging project. We want to make Dragonbane the perfect larp, better than any other game we have participated in as players or organisers. We want to make Dragonbane more than fantasy.

But time is running out. The dream is in jeopardy. We will not compromise our fantasy. Therefore the Dragonbane team has made a major strategic decision. Rather than doing a game 'almost perfect' with the time on our hands, the Dragonbane project will now be split in two: a workshop week and prologue in August 2005 and Dragonbane in August 2006. The larp could still be done this year, but we will not risk the quality of it.

Workshop week and prologue in August 2005

The building of the Cinderhill village will be started this summer and therefore we invite all registered participants and others just curious to take part in the Dragonbane workshop week on location in Älvdalen, Sweden on August 22-27th 2005.

During the workshop week you have the possibility to attend workshops for costumes, music, rituals, dagger duelling, cooking, etc. The week will culminate in an overnight in-character village Dragon Feast! Dragonbane – workshop week and prologue will be free of charge. For more information about the workshop week, please visit http://www.dragonbane.org/en/prologue/.

Dragonbane 2006

Rather than compromising the quality of the game, the main game is postponed until July 29th – August 4th, 2006. We hope that your enthusiasm for the project will not diminish but grow with our effort to make Dragonbane more than fantasy. Another year gives the Dragonbane team and the participants the possibility to develop the characters and the setting that make Dragonbane a dream come true.

The Dragonbane team would like to express its gratitude to all our partners for supporting the project and getting Dragonbane this far. Without the partners the project could never be done. We would also like to thank all our participants and organisers, who

have believed in the project and supported our vision. The Dragonbane team will continue its hard work in making Dragonbane more than fantasy.

On behalf of the Dragonbane project,

Niki Bergman, Elge Larsson, Timo Multamäki, Heiko Romu and Christopher Sandberg.

All questions can be directed to info@dragonbane.org. All contracts can be viewed on demand.

Heiko making the building #1

DB News 2005:

06/07/05: Website update: Game location pictures + Cinderhill costumes

13/07/05: Fabrics saved by Finnish Laundry Company

13/07/05: Sign up for blacksmith workshop

18/07/05: Dragon skeleton delivered

18/07/05: Cinderhill buildings rising!

09/08/05: Character send out started

09/08/05: Local companies support Dragonbane

15/08/05: Dragonbane Update August 2005

27/08/05: Visitor's day huge success

28/08/05: Last roof trusses lifted for the winter

29/08/05: Building camp extended

08/09/05: Vocational institute becomes new dragon partner

14/09/05: Grain products secured from Finnish supplier (ultimately cancelled due to contamination before delivery)

18/09/05: Building site targeted by thieves

28/09/05: Dragonbane intranet corrupted by hostile attack

30/09/05: Finnish Ministry of Education increases support

08/10/05: Dragon skin material from leading elastic producer

05/11/05: Honey from one man company

14/11/05: Website overhaul this week

05/12/05: Dragon hardware selected

08/12/05: Hard drives from programming company save servers

13/12/05: Costume patterns and instructions online

14/12/05: Leading flax company provides wax and oil

19/12/05: Dragontamer video shot in snowy Finland

21/12/05: Stolen aggregate replaced
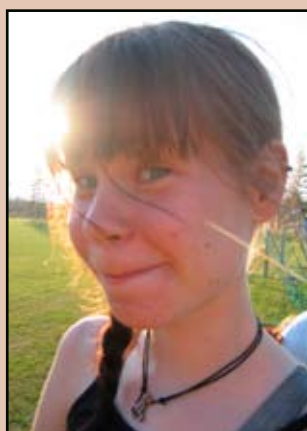
DB News 2006:

02/01/06: New Year Starting Up With Content Update

08/01/06: Latex weapons from Palnatoke

13/01/06: Dragonbane prelude in the UK March 3rd-5th

21/01/06: Traditional paint company colours Cinderhill

09/02/06: Join the Dragonbane team – coaches, translators and metal workers needed

19/02/06: Spice partner from Finland

09/03/06: Turku workshop open every day

15/03/06: Last prop building & costume session in Sodankylä, Finland 5-7.5.2006.

16/03/06: Nordic Youth Cooperation Committee supports Dragonbane

27/03/06: Dragontamers faction booked

28/03/06: Cables roll in from private manufacturer

31/03/06: Dragontamer duelling video finally online

03/04/06: Dragonbane testing camp over Easter

09/04/06: Dragon parts in Finnish steel

10/04/06: Witches faction also booked

18/04/06: Game schedule online

19/04/06: Summer building schedules online

21/04/06 Dragon workshop every weekend

27/04/06: Last tamer positions available

28/04/06: Top material from global industrial group

01/05/06: Sign up extended for a couple of days08/05/06: Sign up closed

12/05/06: North Calotte Council supports Dragonbane

15/05/06: Electronics from regional university in Finland

19/05/06: Environmental server solution

If you can recognize or guess early in the project into which category most of your volunteers will ultimately fall, you will save a huge amount of resources. Spending time early on identifying the nature of each volunteer's motivation is a good investment. A very large project, like a large company, would benefit from a team-member working solely on human resources.

Time had been scheduled after the project for summarizing the experience, cleaning up and packing the props, but very little of this was done. Everyone was so exhausted physically and mentally, that after promises to business partners and other "outsiders" had been fulfilled, the organisation just seized to exist.

Producer's Comments

Timo Multamäki, Executive Producer

This project was three years in making. Various people with different backgrounds signed up to help with realizing the Dragonbane project, or were summoned or recruited to join. All in all there were over 450 people from over 20 countries volunteered to be involved at some point in the project. It took us nearly two whole years to learn that all of these volunteers fell into one of the four categories.

Hang Around

Over the years it transpired that most of the people interested in the helping were in fact mostly interested in making new social contacts or just being able to say they had been part of a project this magnitude. Hang arounds are recognized by their eagerness to take part in conversations and criticize the work of others and their unwillingness to actually commit any time. It surprised me that most of the people in this category were grown-ups, experienced players and game organisers.

Names on the List

A lot of people showed great interest via email or when they met us at other events, but then lost interest before actually contributing to the game. We provided NEST accounts and participation instructions for over a hundred people, who vanished before even having written a short description about themselves in the system.

Among many other duties, Timo had to give some of the briefings. Here he is seen just prior to the game instructing the Cinderhill players on practicalities and safety.

Volunteer Work

Some tasks are most efficiently outsourced to professionals, but amateur volunteers are cheap and can be quite efficient, especially if you keep the following rules in mind:

1. Some players and organisers will not even show up. About half of the organisers will do far less they have promised and real life always gets in the way of the process. Make sure to place key tasks onto people whose skills and commitment you trust.

2. There is no free labour – volunteers may work for

In the end there were just under 120 people that had to be removed from the list for inactivity. To keep this "party of sleepers" awake and interested proved to be extremely cumbersome and resource-exhausting.

Volunteer Minions

The project would have been impossible without the help of these people. Dragonbane acquired the best, most active and most prolific volunteers from outside the boundaries of the role-playing community. Motivated by a selfless interest in a project this strange, and by a chance to use specific skills for an exciting purpose, these helpers made hundreds of props, dragon parts, items of clothing, took photos, drove cars and performed other clearly defined tasks.

The problem even with skilled minions is the question about management. Making dozens of volunteers perform complicated tasks efficiently is difficult even for the best team leaders. In the Dragonbane project we had a serious lack of team leaders over all, and few had time to efficiently guide the volunteers.

The Work Heroes

In the end, most of the burden of the work ended up on the shoulders of the very few. Many of these heroes too did not even have role-playing as a hobby, but were interested in some special part of the project, on which they focused with great effort and piety.

Heroes and minions working on the dragon, in winter. Neither cold, rain or darkness could stop the project's progress.

The Work Burden and Burning Out

During this project dozens of team members worked themselves into a complete burn out. Many individual factors contributed to this, above all the vast work burden, which exceeded the hours of a regular day job many times over. During the last two months everyone who could be convinced to took on more work, in most cases up to 70-90 hours a week, in some more. All of these people were completely exhausted when the game began. As a result most of them had a bad experience at the game itself – even though the playing of it was meant to be the culmination of the project.

During its five-year duration, 48 individuals left the project because of illness, stress, incompatibility with their real-life careers and mental or physical exhaustion – burning out. The first ones left in the fall of 2003 just after the project was publicly announced, the last ones merely hours before the beginning of the game. In most cases there had been warning signs for a long time, but no resources to do anything about it. The well-being and basic needs of full-time workers would often have required a dedicated support team.

Growing Pains, Learning Through Experience

The main problems of the Dragonbane project in the 2003-2005 period were lack of clear vision, a vastly expanding project, poor internal communication, and no consensus on management methods or culture.

Everyone with experience of the business world will notice these are the exactly same hurdles faced by every fast-growing small company. Six months of the project was spent on discussions about how it should be led. Basically it boiled down to a battle between idealism and realism. The larger the project, the more necessary it is to create a clear management methodology. A team of hundreds just cannot base their work on committee democracy – even though this, for cultural reasons,

Esa using his best friend, an axe, to carve logs in traditional building style.

companionship, skills development, pleasure, and a plethora of other reasons. Your volunteers will need to be praised, but in which way it should be expressed depends on the nationality and culture of the staff.

3. Free workers too generate costs – materials, travel, food, time… Sometimes these costs will be so high that simply buying the service would be cheaper.

4. Volunteer staff always requires more and better communication than professionals would.

is a method much appreciated by the Swedes.

Lacking a clear vision – or the inability to communicate it – enhances all other problems and causes frustration and much unnecessary work. Forming a clear vision for a vast project like this is difficult, especially since things inevitably change over time. It is very important to review the vision each time a new section of the project is begun. After this the new, updated vision needs to be communicated to everyone in the project. You really cannot overstress the importance of internal communication: in a large volunteer project the biggest problems will be caused by cultural and personal differences in communication, methodology and technologies. These can only be bridged by establishing clear guidelines as early in the project as possible.

The dynamic expansion of the project, when half of the incoming people are not actually committed to do anything, is very challenging. To sort the wheat from the chaff must be done as fast and effectively as possible. We were not able to find any established methodologies designed for this purpose for a volunteer-type project.

Dragonbane – More than Larp

In much of the publicity around Dragonbane, the professional manner in which the project was to be carried out received emphasis and attention. Many organisers indeed had much professional experience in the fields in which they were volunteering their help. At times this led to lost focus, when it seemed that the wish of the individuals to showcase their skills and experience distracted from the making of a great larp for the participants.

The larp Dragonbane itself lasted only a few days, but it was preceded by many years of voluntary work. Quite apart from the help of the professionals involved, Dragonbane was primarily a youth work project created for and largely by an international team of several hundred young people. It offered exciting opportunities for learning new skills,

making international contacts and adding to one's knowledge of other cultures and environments. This structure made the project very vulnerable to disruptions.

But Dragonbane was not envisioned as an interesting youth project: the vision was to create as unforgettable, unique gaming experience. It ended up under the youth work umbrella indirectly – as a consequence of most participants and team members being under 30 years old. This otherwise irrelevant fact became a key asset, as the status of youth project enabled the project to apply for public funding, which would not otherwise have been possible. After a while, this status became part of the project's self image. As time went by, the team's values, principles and ambitions related to youth work were clarified.

The amount of voluntary work was indeed astounding. About ten people were able to commit themselves to the project on a full-time basis, making it count as practical training or towards a dissertation. Many more put in full work weeks on top of their full-time jobs. At the other extreme, the project suffered greatly from individuals, to whom the concept of "volunteering" implied that tasks voluntarily taken on could be abandoned without warning.

No project management method can change or eliminate the human aspects of life. Over 500 people were involved in the project over its total duration. Many kinds of people found time to participate; independent, active and social teenagers, and teenagers who left the project in tears; children who relished every moment, and children, who cancelled their participation; adults who were reliable and trustworthy, and adults who needed to be taught responsibility. Personal life intruded on the ability and motivation of team members and players to participate. Over three years the project witnessed falling in love, breakups, joys, sorrows, illness, deaths and births. No organisers could schedule these.

The SFX Team (Arno, Timo and Väinö, at three weeks old) sorting out practical matters before dealing with the next emergency.

Project Goals

The main goal for the Dragonbane project was to arrange an international larp: an interesting, challenging and inspiring environment for young players to meet and interact with others from around the world. The larp form itself, like the organisational principle of the project, rests on a foundation of participatory culture. Young people were to take part in the planning, preparations or implementation of the project.

The idea was to organically create a network for European role-players, and to help young people to overcome language and culture barriers by interacting and collaborating within a stimulating, challenging and interesting environment. This would automatically raise awareness of the possibilities for cross-border collaboration enabled by European unity and the increasingly free movement of people and services.

The foundations of the smithy were built using huge logs. As machinery was expensive, we used manpower. In retrospect, machines should have been used when ever possible, since manpower represents costs as well.

Another goal was to increase their know-how in the areas such as role-playing (game design methodologies and playing techniques), event organisation, traditional crafts (building props and using old-fashioned tools), and social interaction.

In the Nordic countries, the status of larp as a valid form of artistic expression, as a legitimate recipient of corporate sponsorship and as a useful object of academic study is fairly firmly established today. This is not the case all over the continent, and the project was also to offer opportunities to raise awareness of and inspire to participate in the development of game design and larp theory. New models of collaboration would be explored between the role-playing community and other forms of folk art, and between larp organisations and regions with a diminishing population and a weak labour market.

Children enjoyed Dragonbane. The functional village made immersion into character easy and the escaping sheep provided action.

"I had the privilege to experience the power of mutual vivid experiences between a father and a daughter. Also it was amazing to be able to see how deeply my soon-to-be teenager, was able to immerse fully in the role of a child, without having to fear looking childish to her peers. At the same time, I was proud of her maturity, initiative and responsibility.

We got the best laugh when a worried father went to enquire about the well-being of his daughter, after having heard that she had cried with fear and excitement some time before. From among the bed sheets a laugh was heard as she exclaimed "Dad! I was role-playing"! I also learned a witch player had experienced the same thing. Startled by the fear she was displaying he tried to calm her down by showing her his face –to make sure she knew it was a genuine human being behind the mask. All he got was a blunt notice she was "in character".

Dragonbane offered the adult players a chance for self-exploration, and a hobby to share with their children, a chance for pure escapism and fun. A chance to put the cell phone and watch away for a while, and to think about the world in a way we are not used to seeing it. Sharing these experiences together with others led to the formation of new friendships, and that have enabled us to participate in future events together again."
– Rolf Lanndér, a Cinderhill player from Finland

Case: "Bad delivery"

1. Some wood owned by the Dragonbane project the accidentally delivered to the wrong place – co-operative vocational school involved in the project.

2. The over-enthusiastic students began building the modules for the houses using this wrong material.

3. The teachers decided it was probably best to finish the rest of the modules in the same way.

4. The modules ended up bigger and heavier than the designs required.

5. Transportation and shifting of the modules became more difficult, a logistical challenge the team had not prepared for.

6. Building the houses from the heavier modules turned to be harder and slower than the original estimate allowed for.

7. The building schedule of the houses did not hold.

8. One of the houses was ultimately not built, and rest were finished at the last minute.

9. Additional costs and logistical problems were caused by dealing with the wood originally intended for the purpose, as well as with the purpose for which the wrongly delivered wood had originally been intended.

All this was to be achieved without geographical inequality: it had to be possible to participate in the Dragonbane project regardless of where one lived. The project compensated its volunteers for some of the expenses caused by living further away.

We also wanted to create a possibility for families to participate. Cinderhill as a game environment offered a secure milieu for children. Preparing for the game together was a unifying experience for the families.

Work Methods and Co-operation

The organisation was divided into a number of hard-working teams, such as the costume team, the props team, the special effects team, the communications team and the team of secretaries. The team leaders were professionals in their respective fields. All teams operated fairly autonomicly within the frames of the goal and the budget. They organised workshops for designing and making items needed for the game; a workshop format was also used for the distribution of specialised knowledge (how to build a didgeridoo, how to mix chemical special effects). The village was built during two long international building camps in the summers preceding the game.

'Non-player newbie on site'

"For a person who has never larped this place is a house of amazement. Every day you encounter new things and learn more about the world of Dragonbane, about the history, the people, the dragon and the cult around it. The amount of things surrounding this project is so massive that I guess three weeks is not enough to learn everything.

The other thing that amazes me every day is not the amount of money, but the amount of volunteer work hours used on this project. People from all around the world are working to make the world of Dragonbane a reality. At home three weeks of work seemed like a noble and priceless donation to the project, but here I soon found out that it's actually just a grain of sand.

I've got to do things I have never done before such as peeling wood, cooking for 30 people, sitting on top of a roof with a nail gun, and so on. I feel like I have entered a completely different world where everything is possible. But although I do new things during working hours, the best part of the day is the evening: everyone is eating together, going to the sauna, playing games…

It has been and is great to be a part of this project and I really feel like my work here is appreciated, though I'm not the strongest and I know nothing about building. I'm like an apprentice keen to learn and the Spaniards have actually renamed me Anakin. When I leave, I will leave many friends, skills and experiences richer"

- Dragonbane Diary, July 19th, 2006, Matias Stubbe, a builder from Finland

Teaching young people to work with ceramics, bone and wood was one of the project goals of Dragonbane.

During the project connections were forged with both Swedish and Finnish vocational schools. Some of the preparations for the game, ranging from grading clothes patterns to constructing house modules, was done by students otherwise unconnected to the project (although they were, of course, welcomed to participate as players). Many of the younger actives in the project were able to count their volunteer work towards their studies. For example all ambient sound, the dragon sound effects and in-game musical cultures were designed as part of the final thesis of a sound design student Janne Särkelä also known as Sarana.

Besides organising the larp event itself, the Dragonbane team also organised workshops, training and game-related Internet communities for its young participants. For this reason, it also attracted non-larpers. The project offered young people a chance to learn about how to organise big events. The interaction at the crafts workshops improved their language skills and knowledge of foreign cultures before the game had even begun. Some participants felt that the workshops were a bit too hands-on – while welcoming a chance to try welding, for instance, they would probably have done a better job with a longer period of orientation to the world of metal work. Participants who enjoyed flying by the seats of their pants did feel they learned a lot on the job.

Three pottery workshops were held to create a multitude of clay items for the game. Many of the volunteers were bitten by the pottery bug and picked up a new hobby at these workshops.

Practical Realization

The vocational schools were not always sticking to the agreed-upon schedules, and the quality of the work was lower than expected in many cases. Many errors were made just because there was no-one to supervise the co-operation and communication between the project and the schools.

The project's vocational school co-ordinator did discuss the situation with the vocational school during stages 2 and 3, but a language barrier apparently prevented both parties from fully comprehending what the other had said. This was realized only when stage 5 was at hand, too late to change anything.

Co-operation with MoL

The co-operation with the Finnish Ministry of Labour was a disappointment. The project would have offered many possibilities for people to learn from professionals in the format of vocational apprenticeship. But although many skilled craftsmen worked on the project full-time, the fact that they volunteered their time without pay caused the Ministry to judge that it was not a proper job, and that training within the project should not count towards a formal education. After long negotiations we managed to get a vocational apprenticeship contract for a few people – a costume designer, a set designer, and two builders.

"I learned the hard way not to put my hands in jars without looking or to open bottles with unknown content. In one of the pottery jars was a dead mouse family! And just spending that much time in a dirty warehouse is a genuine Mole fever [Nephropathia epidemica] risk." -Piia Salonen, trainee secretary

Even though the European Union technically has free mobility of workers, we came to realise during the project that this does not apply to the unemployed. A Finn on unemployment benefits may not leave the country for over a week at a time, and even then must be reachable by the Labour Office. It is also not possible for the unemployed to go receive vocational training or work placement in other EU countries. This is why very few unemployed young adults participated in making Dragonbane – and why the few who did, did so in secret.

They found it frustrating to accept that it was somehow better to sit home doing nothing, than travelling a few hours to the neighbouring country to learn building skills that might actually lead to a job. How, in this age of information technology, can an official define people as "out of reach" when they have access to mobile phones, email, Skype and ground mail - and are free to leave for real employment at any moment? The unemployed do have the right to volunteer with non profits, but only in their home countries. The situation in other EU countries may be different, but the Finnish Ministry of Labour is entirely alienated from the reality of the mobile young, and has fallen off of the wagon on the road towards a global labour market.

Local regulations intended to reduce youth unemployment are in fact stifling the initiative and

mobility that EU rules were designed to stimulate. This situation desperately needs to be improved to meet the requirements of an increasingly mobile and internationalized society.

After the game, on October 2006, the project engaged a trainee secretary, Piia Salonen, to sort

Just a day or two before the players arrived the building crew consisted mostly of Spaniards, some swedes and the Finnish base crew. The importance of the Spanish volunteers in the last month cannot be emphasized enough.

through, list and photograph all the props left over from the game. During this process it was found that a lot of the game materials had vanished or were broken. To organise the thousands of items left, a systematic and pragmatic approach was the only way, and the job took two and half months to complete. Salonen found, that this was quite different from a normal, simple warehouse inventory.

Like so many young people involved with Dragonbane, Piia too got excellent work experience and a good written recommendation from the Dragonbane Team. "It was a perfect chance for me"

Piia continues. "These days, when there are job opportunities, they require a lot of experience from the applicant. I have now gained that, as well as really good friends – how could you beat that?"

Participatory Arts

Live action role-playing has a strong democratic spirit, allowing for just anybody to develop individual forms of expression without formal training. The last years have seen a growing awareness among larpers of the need for international cooperation, dissemination of organisational and logistic know-how, development of playing styles, and laying the theoretical foundations for a completely new form of expression – participatory arts.

The participatory arts are founded on the involvement and activity of the participants. By engaging the audience, they eradicate the unnatural border between producers and consumers of culture. The novelty of this approach has made it difficult for larpers to describe what it is they are doing. They do not, as in traditional spectatory arts, create interesting things for others to come and look at – instead they create a setting and invite others to come and participate in changing, developing and co-creating the final result.

As a form of expression larp is coming very close to the age-old dream of the "Gesamtkunstwerk", an all-encompassing artwork in which the participants all are co-creators. Larp also realizes another of the art-world's catchphrases,

one that was previously empty promise: "Everybody is an artist."

But on the road to the Gesamtkunstwerk, the Dragonbane players and organisers alike participated in many inter-linked creative processes designed to allow them to develop their individual skills in a myriad of fields: agriculture, acting, environmental sciences, logistics, journalism, creative writing, mechanical engineering, tailoring, pyrotechnics, CAD/CAM, carpentry, pottery, game theory and design, music composition and performance, audio processing, gem cutting, painting – and the list goes on.

A project like Dragonbane inevitably raises the level of ambition in the larp-communities of Europe and the world. But through the publicity it achieved in the media, it also demonstrated to the local community and the public at large that participative art forms can be just as serious as conventional consumer arts.

"I won't lie and tell you that it is easy over here. We work quite long days, about nine to ten hours per day. And it's hard work, I say. Climbing rooftops, carrying planks, painting long-houses, cutting down big trees, nailing walls, setting house grounds and so on. After a day, you are very likely to be exhausted. But now you may get the picture that it's terrible over here, which would be an absolute false statement. I like it here, very much. There is a very nice, funny and overall amazing set of people here. The days are filled with humour, laughs and smiles. We have people from three different countries. At the moment we have sort of a Spanish invasion going on. There are nine people from Spain here, which is more than all the other people together! I have started to learn a bit of Spanish, some phrases that are useful over here.

We have a lot of job still to be done, I tell you. The whole temple is still un-built and the ground needs a lot of cleaning. But we are a bunch of time-optimists, so there is no panic... yet. We really hope that so many of you players would come over here and help us. Every man and woman counts! I have really enjoyed my time here. It's a beautiful place with amazing people. And oh, I forgot a rather important thing: We do have some days of rest too. Not as many as we'd like to have, but anyway, we have them. Tomorrow is my second day off, and we are going on a trip to Älvdalen City to eat some pizza. After that we come back to the school to play a game of soccer: The Spaniards against everyone else. Let's see how that turns out. I am looking forward to it very much!

So, in short terms; come to the boot camp and have a really really great time!" - A great time over at the boot camp!' Dragonbane Diary, July, 2nd, 2006, Cajsa Nykvist, a builder and player from Finland

New Form for Participative Tourism

Among municipalities and regions with a diminishing population and few possibilities for a varied labour market, the concept of an "experience industry" has been heralded as a way to innovate the tourist industry. So far the innovations have been mostly semantic.

The larp movement, although operating on a volunteer basis, has always been about creating experiences. In collaboration with local business communities and on reasonable budgets, larp-makers can create unique events to attract tourists to participate in recreating old times, local and regional myths, or historical events. In Älvdalen, Dragonbane was co-operating with local authorities as well as trade and industry. Since larping also is a prominent youth activity, such collaborations are an incitement to help the region's youth to find stimuli and occupations without moving to the cities.

Many of the builders, actors and participants of the work bees did not participate in the actual game. They were interested in seeing what Dragonbane was, in meeting new people and learning new things. Their work effort was the key to the project's success.

Should any similar project ever be attempted, I'd not begin any production phase without figuring out how to get the non-larpers to help us. -- Timo Multamäki

Fantastic week in Älvdalen'

"It was snowing really hard, but after over 5 hours driving, at 2 am, we finally arrived at the Älvdalen camping area and luckily found the key to our cottage. It was -25 degrees Celsius outside, but fortunately the cottage was heated.

On Monday morning we went to the garage of the forest owner Besparingskogen to get our most important equipment of the week: a snowmobile. The guys were supposed to move tree trunks to the other side of a swamp in Cinderhill and for that they needed a vehicle. We got a lovely orange snowmobile from the 80's – it hadn't been used for years. Mikko and Pasi thought that it would be a great baby-dragon if you just put wings on it. We hoped

that it would also work as a snowmobile.

We had a meeting with the municipality's environment department. They were really excited about our project and very helpful. Our local helper Tomas came for a visit on Monday evening and we had a good discussion over a nice cup of tea.

On Tuesday morning Mikko K and Pasi took the "Baby-Dragon" and went to Cinderhill. They found out that the village had survived the winter and snow.

Unfortunately the Baby-Dragon was too old and weak to help with actual work in meter-deep snow. So we started work on plan B, tracking down local horse owners. Fortunately, the next day the snowmobile tracks were so much frozen that the guys got their home-made sledge to work and managed to move all the tree trunks.

On Thursday we drove to Mora and met people in one of our partner schools, St Mikael's School. They are building modules for our small houses. They had also made our project part of their English programme: students are translating our building instructions from English to Swedish."

-'Dragonbane Diary, March 5th – 10th, 2006, Tiinaliisa Multamäki (then Turunen), Dragonbane Project Secretary and CFO

Front / Back — Acolyte

Front / Back — Chinderhill Peasants
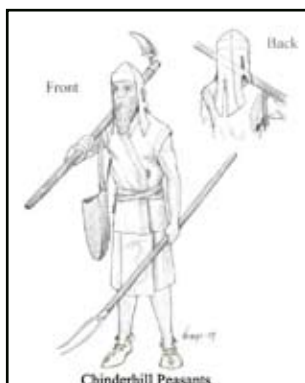
Teamwork of Strangers

"Having met nearly all the most central individuals of the project during one week early in 2005 made it much easier to collaborate with them long distance. It also put me in the mistaken belief that all other organisers had met each other too and knew the key people well. Actually I only realized during the work on this evaluation how few team meetings and meetings between the organisers and other key people had actually been held." - Tiinaliisa Multamäki, Dragonbane Project Secretary and CFO

Due to the near-impossibility of arranging real-life meetings, many team members had never met face to face at all. Many organisers felt that using email, some even telephone, was a cumbersome way to stay in touch. These discomforts of the 'teamwork with strangers' caused many misunderstandings and unnecessary anguish. The social and physical distance between the separate parts of the organisation made it unable to function to its full potential.

More meetings among just the leaders of the team would also have been needed. Even when each individual only manages his sector, it is good to have insight into the project as a whole. With such meeting routines, some problematic situations could have been

avoided – especially those due to the fact that some team members began making individual interpretations of collective instructions without realizing how this would affect the whole.

All the same, the way the Dragonbane team cooperated internationally was pioneering in itself. NEST – a network-based character creation and organisation management tool – was developed for the project. It ultimately proved highly functional, but was unfortunately not finished until January 2006 – almost 6 months after the original game date, and thus only in use during the last stages of the project.

The scarcity of real life meetings was caused by the lack of money. If a similar international event-organisation is to be put together in the future, it's recommendable to budget a few extra weekends in time and money for all of the core team to meet in the flesh.

Intolerable Difficulty of Decision-making

In a project as big as Dragonbane, several decisions ranging from the tiny to the larger than life must be made every day of the project. The progress and success of the project are dependent on how efficiently the organisers can make and carry out their decisions.

A 3d model of Cinderhill provided additional view of what the village should look like.

The central challenge is to determine the importance and urgency of the matter at hand. Is the question important enough for a month to be spent pondering each alternative? Or is an answer needed immediately to keep other processes from stalling?

In retrospect, it is questionable whether discussing solutions for the body of the dragon for six months was worthwhile, when a contingency plan could have been brought into use after two months. And in hindsight it seems obvious that waiting a month for the potato farmers of Sweden to reach a decision on whether to support the project or not, was not an efficient use of time for the department responsible for feeding the players.

An astounding number of hours were spent considering questions upon which a decision had already been reached. Most often

the information had just not reached everyone affected by it. There were of course also a small number of people who spent energy questioning past decisions instead of focusing on what needed to be done next. In this project, however, such speculations diminished as it went along and the urgency of achieving results increased.

The consequence of potentially making the wrong decision must always be weighed against the consequence of making no decision at all. Only when a decision is absolutely irreversible should it be allowed to halt proceedings once all the relevant and available data affecting a decision has been amassed and considered.

It must be clear to everyone in the organisation which decisions are made on which levels. If top-level decision-making is transparent, logical and clearly communicated

across the organisation, lower-level operatives will gain in confidence to use their own judgement in accordance with the principles established at the project's core.

"As the project progressed, it became increasingly evident to all participants that the only viable decision making model was a military style one. The more idealistic version proposed early in the game just did not produce results and in a project of this size and with this little time it is not a good alternative. There are reasons why corporations and businesses do not operate on committee or democracy basis.

A smaller, less international project could have succeeded with less dictatorial management, but with Dragonbane the more authoritative style should have been adopted even earlier. In hindsight, *it is easy to see that the year we lacked could have been saved by choosing army style project management from day one." – Timo Multamäki, Executive Producer*

Staging and Costume Design

The dwellings, clothes and equipment of the three fictional cultures represented in the game were designed to systematically reflect their respective belief systems. The costumes were distinct enough from each other to make it possible even at long distances to identify a person's group affiliation at first glance. Up close it was immediately possible to deduce a great deal about a stranger's lifestyle from his dress and equipment.

This coherence was a major game design point. One of the

Panoramic view of Cinderhill some weeks before the game.

challenges of operating within the fantasy genre was the predictable manner in which players, given free rein, will always revert to a derivative Tolkien/ Warhammer/ Dragonlance aesthetic.

To make a fictional culture truly plausible, the Dragonbane creators argued, artefacts of that culture should only evoke associations within the game (instead of activating the players' memories of popular culture texts or other larps). This rule was applied to all aspects of the game, from architecture and set design down to personal props ranging from sleeping equipment to cutlery. All objects were to reflect the fictional culture's underlying traditions and values, and become part of the game's conceptual, rather than just visual, design. This approach proved very powerful.

There was also a very practical reason for centralising all design to the larpmakers. They knew from gaming experience in many countries, that there is great variation in the standards of historical accuracy and attention to detail across different gaming cultures. In many places, for instance, pseudo-mediaeval outfits are worn with modern shoes; in others character costumes are only signified through symbolic attributes rather than naturalistic representation; in some places
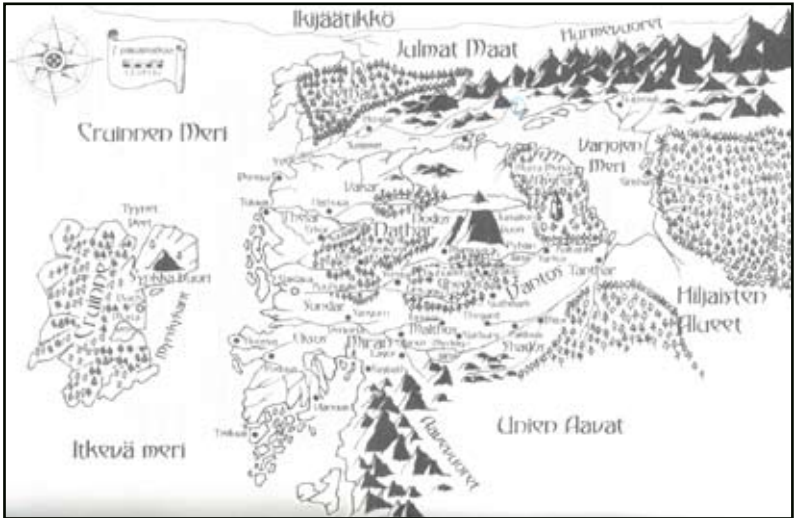
The original map of Valenor by Mike Pohjola

costumes are realistic down to the last detail. Keeping the players on a short leash was a way to avoid off-game conflicts between purists and others, as well as a way to serve the design of the in-game milieu.

Cinderhill 360°

Detailed guides to the culture they were to play were produced for the players, but version control of the

The game area map in full detail can be found in the end of the book. The same map was provided for the players as part of the off-game material package..

Valenor Came Alive in Älvdalen

Älvdalen is a forested valley in Swedish Dalecarlia, with fairy book landscapes of the wild and rugged kind. Rather than sunny glades and lush hills, moss and pine-trees predominate, and players needed to be instructed to keep an eye out for bear and wolf. Mysterious ponds and cold forest lakes lay within the game area, as did a swamp that, to the witches' chagrin, was inevitably infested with mosquitoes.

documents proved challenging, as responsibility for them was moved around within the organisation. As the guides could obviously never cover quite everything, a great number of detailed questions were also debated in the game's online forums, and some players felt organisers gave them conflicting information on occasion. The closer the game drew, the more decisions on design issues seemed to become divorced from the underlying game design principles. (This was a result of the compromises the organisation itself was forced to make towards the end). Yet the organisers offered no flexibility on the core issue of design ideology: that everything in the game should be constructed so that modern production elements (from double seams to rubber soles) were completely invisible.

In the fundamentalist reading of this rule proposed by the organisers, all shoes, likely to suffer wear and tear, should include no modern elements that might be exposed over time, all fabrics should be at least 95% natural fibres, and everything brought onto the game site itself – including spectacles and underwear – should be of a pseudo-medieval type and conform to the design standards provided by the organisers. A small off-game pouch was deemed acceptable, to be used primarily for medications.

Some players predictably grumbled, but the strict rules also became a selling point: Dragonbane would become the epitome of the larp aesthetic sometimes referred to as the 360° illusion. In this aesthetic, the larp text is not considered to be

The very first sketch of the temple, from the spring of 2003. Some of the basic ideas survived into the final design.

produced within the minds of the players (or at least not primarily). Instead, the larp is understood to be experienced in the players' bodies and in the physical space of the game location, its geographical distances, the solidity of the set and props, and in the real-time logic of the game's temporal dimension (because time is central in producing physical effects such as boredom or hunger).

Since the 360° aesthetic requires simulation to be dispensed with (except where it would be dangerous not to), this style of game design had not traditionally been applied to high-fantasy narratives including magic, monsters and other elements difficult to achieve for real. For Dragonbane, the organisers entered on an implicit contract with the players. In exchange for putting an uncommon

effort into their props and costumes, the players would be rewarded not only with a hands-on, three-dimensional gaming environment – but also with the holy grail of 360° fantasy escapism: (seemingly) unsimulated magic, and a "real" dragon to interact with.

The novelty and magnitude of this promise, and the effort invested by the players, were what made the breaches of the illusion especially jarring in this specific game. The problem was not that larpers are not able to edit out disturbingly modern elements from their experience of the game – they do that quite routinely in all kinds of larps. And at many other games, the relatively few problems with modern objects within the fictional environment would have been considered an

Most impressively, the area was one plagued by forest fires, including one earlier that same summer. The terrifying grandeur of a newly burned forest is difficult to describe to one who has not seen it: the coal-black surfaces, the scorched stumps, the insistent patches of vibrant green were vegetation is starting the slow re-construction process, the unreal nuances of night and blood that moss takes on when the earth it grows on is fried dry. What it looks like, most specifically, is like a place where a dragon was recently fought and killed.

achievement. But at many other games, the players would not have spent €100 on boots, or a week on embroidering some elaborate ritual garment they would only wear once. Regardless, the degree to which the illusion was maintained overall was astounding.

Game Location

Heiko Romu, Scenographer and the Dragon Designer

One of the biggest production issues was the game location. We did not want any apartment buildings, traffic noise or 400kw electric wires in sight. It was also obvious that the game was not going to happen in Finland. Since the project was international, it was important that it not seem a game made by Finns in Finland. The obvious choices were our two closest neighbours – Sweden, with its great larper population, and Estonia, a fresh member of the EU and with low price-rates.

The first meeting was with a Swedish forest owner in 2003,

Scouting trip #4, to Estonia. On this trip we also took over 1,5 tons of wool for DB costume team.

but we did not find a good location, even though we scouted hundreds of hectares of forest. In southern Sweden, wherever you go, civilization is just too close by. Then we received promising news. In the area of Viljand in Estonia, there was a great area available, and the local authorities and schools were interested in the project. According to maps the area seemed promising and an exploratory trip was made. We found the location excellent and beautiful. Everything seemed to be perfect.

Then troubles arose. The site was located just at the edge of a nature protection reservation, so we would not have been allowed to build anything after all. Another scouting trip was made, and again we found a useful site. All the plans we had already made were possible to adapt for the new site. Then the land ownership law caused an issue impossible to overcome: the authorities were not permitted to tell us who owned the land we wanted to use.

Since contacting an anonymous owner was impossible, we could not get a permission for land use.

It was time to return to Sweden. We found a huge military-owned practice area in the region of Älvdalen. And the military was willing to co-operate. Yet another scouting trip resulted in the discovery of the grand and beautifully rising hill for the village, with an amazing view on the surrounding hilltops. Alas, here too negotiations stopped just short of the final permissions. During the process we had ended up in discussions with the representatives for the Ävdalen region and had received a very positive reception. The local forest attending association Besparingsskogen let us know it was willing to lend us a game location, for free, if we could find something suitable on their grounds. We received great

support from the municipality of Älvdalen, and local businesses promised us discounts and co-operation.

After studying the aerial footage and the maps we noticed a location near the lake Gryveldammen with no electricity wiring close-by, with no buildings, and the closest highway miles away. The approximately 10 square

In the spring of 2006, this miniature of Cinderhill was on display in for instance Älvdalen, Sweden, and Turku, Finland.

Longhouse (living quarters)

kilometre area was surrounded by a sand road, which would be easy to close and use as the border of the game area. One more scouting trip was arranged. A Cinderhill location was found at the end of the forest road, although we would then need to cut down some trees. The forest association gave us the green light, and allowed us to use the trees as building material. Now we signed the contract as fast as we could.

The Plans of Staging

Heiko Romu, Scenographer and the Dragon Designer

Big fantasy games are typically arranged either at various camping centres, where things not belonging to the fantasy world cannot be avoided, or in the middle of a forest, where there are no distractions, but nothing to support the imagination either.

We understood, that even if the organisation provided a grand location with a village, the player-made – whether skilfully or not – clothes and props might not necessarily match the environment

or each other. It would also have been impossible to ask players, travelling from all over Europe, to bring huge and expensive items with them. For Dragonbane, we decided to solve this issue by making dress patterns with detailed instructions for all in-game clothes available online for the players, and that the organisation would produce the rest of the set and props. Now we could begin the planning of the village, the discussions about the chassis of the dragon, and the search for a shop that could build the sets.

We knew, that important though the physical quality was, producing good support for the plots of the game was equally imported. We believed this was possible to achieve, since we knew there were people who felt working in it would be worthwhile. We had two years, plenty of time, and all seemed well.

We only began to grasp the actual amount of the work at the beginning of the year 2005, when we had to postpone the project a year. Too many things were not

yet finished. An odd psychological phenomenon now came into effect: it seemed impossible to me to motivate people to work if you had less than few months to go. This "Fluctuating Activity Pessimism" was underestimated too many times amongst the team leaders.

Cinderhill

The single necessary setting was the village of Cinderhill. We had known since the first draft of the plot that the story was located in a village with a dragon ruler.

In designing it we wanted to avoid clichés, just like in the whole project. There would be no tavern! In discussions between the architect Petri Ultramarine and yours truly,

we developed the idea of a society where people lived in big communal houses, and would work in smaller "farmhouses". This was a result of several factors. The collective dormitories would differ from much previous fantasy literature. To build large houses was financially more viable than building several mid-sized ones. And it the longhouses were likely to offer more opportunities for interaction during the game. All this worked very well with the story schemes Mike and Timo were cooking up.

In the winter of 2005 we went to the building site to cut down few hundred full-grown trees. We sold the trees to a timber mill and received build-ready timber for the village.

The actual building work began in June 2005. We managed to get some Swedish professionals on site to design a platform –type way to build the houses, a method very easy to teach to amateur builders. The plan was to construct big ready-made elements, which would then be assembled on site. We had a few different kinds of elements, to make sure we would not need any additional training. The first round would set the floor, the second the walls, and the last one the roof. Each round would also enhance the precision of the building, first the horizontal, then the vertical and last the rooftop in a straight line.

The foundations for the long-houses were built during the first month. When we got more volunteer builders, we were able to start building the walls using several teams. When winter came, four long houses were set to roof-height. Almost 30 cubic metres of timber and a hundred thousand nails had been used by the forty builders from six different countries.

The next spring – in the game year – building was continued. Roof felt was spread on the roofs and work on the small buildings and the temple was begun.

At the beginning of July it was obvious that some of the builds would not be finished. All resources were focused on finishing the temple, as it was essential to the game plots. Builders were working long hours and the general fatigue was beginning to show. In the first year of the building, most of the builders came from Italy; the last year a ten-head Spanish team worked hard to salvage the situation. The other big group

May, 2006: Anna Nummi cutting fabric for the tents at a work-shop weekend organized for youth in the North Calotte area.

Peaceful living in the Cinderhill village. The ceramic bowl was manufactured by the Dragonbane crew in one of the work bees.

were the Finns, with occasional Swedes.

The building continued hectically until the first minutes of the game. In comparison with our plans, details were lacking, but luckily the absence of all modern distractions and the solidity of the walls put most of the players in the right mood – created the feeling of being in real fantasy world building.

We did not manage to finish it all. We came really close: in one more week the village would have been flawless. It is easily said we took too big of a bite, and it is true. But the plans were realistic, although very tight. Without the equipment theft of the first year (about 5000 euros worth of tools were stolen), the village would have been finished on schedule.

Making a project like this is always about risks. When you aim very high you cannot achieve your goals without stretching it to the limit. But luck is not always with us.

DB News 18.9.2005: Building site targeted by thieves

In the night, the Dragonbane building site in Älvdalen was robbed by thieves. One generator, two compressors, two nail guns and some other electrical tools have been taken along with the most expensive cables.

Arriving at the building site on Sunday morning, the team could not immediately see that somebody had visited the area during the night. The chain sealing off the area from car traffic looked untouched. The chain had not been broken, but the post to which the chain is attached had been cut.

Ingrid Fahlgren was the oldest Dragonbane participant.

A **player forum** is a good tool for organising the players for group activities like work bees and for group orders of necessary products. After a bunch of players had signed up for an order in the forum, medieval-looking toothbrushes could be cost-efficiently ordered in bulk online.

I'd say it was a professional job, since the thieves only took the valuable tools and left the cheaper ones, says Sören from Denmark on location in Älvdalen.

The building site has been empty of equipment for two weeks. The builders only returned on Saturday for the last week of building. The robbery took place during the first night after the return of the team.

The team of approximately ten people continued building on Sunday by more traditional means, since the thieves had left the non-electrical tools at the site. Building will continue until Saturday, September 24th. Local police is investigating the matter.

The equipment will take some time to replace, which means that the results of the last week of building this year probably will be less than anticipated. The robbery is naturally a regrettable blow to the project both financially and time wise.

Work was begun by clearing the area. We made a bonfire to warm us up since we feared it was going to rain all day. We started burning away small sticks and pine needles to make the area safer. Everything is pretty wet now

but once pine needles dry those become a fire hazard.

Team Italy, arriving later, had been stranded near the Österdalälven bridge due to lack of fuel and had to be rescued. They continued building the floor of longhouse #3 which was almost completed. Gian Andreas had some bad luck: he fell off the platform twice. Luckily he was not seriously injured. Ermanno and Bruno were on kitchen duty.

A few new D modules were constructed. Work on the elevated floor of longhouse #3 was continued. Pieces for special modules of longhouse #2 were made. Our inexperienced module makers had certain difficulties. Our day ended at 20.00. We took our most precious tools to Åsen in the trailer. - Building-camp report, August 9th, 2005, Esa Arbelius

At 10:00 we had a meeting with the municipality of Älvdalen. At the same time Mikko arranged copies of the gate keys, and got the special saw on loan from Besparingsskogen.

The whitepaper [Dragonbane presentation material. Editor's note] was updated by Timo, while Elge and Sören met with Besparingsskogen. That meeting also went very well. We will get three truck loads of gravel delivered to Cinderhill in week 38.

In Cinderhill we noticed that last night's storm had been very powerful indeed. Some of the tool shelters etc were tilted/broken or had fallen. It took some while to get the camp back in order. During the afternoon, Mikko made paths and Elge cleaned the kitchen and wrote texts, while Timo and Sören built supports structures for longhouse #1. The first pieces of roof structures were also laid out for longhouse #1.- Builder's diary, August 30th, 2005, Timo Multamäki

Costuming

Heiko Romu, Scenographer and the Dragon Designer

The importance of costume design is often forgotten in game design. But when you think about an immobile setting, and participants moving about drawing most of one's attention from it, you will get an idea of how much the clothing inevitably affects the final visuals and mood of the game.

We wanted to unify the design in this area as well, but it would have been impossible for the organisation to produce all costumes for all players. Instead, we decided to design the outfits for all the factions, and provide sewing patterns to the players, with as detailed instructions as possible. This would give each faction a unified look. We also wanted the factions to be

About camouflaging plastic things and wires.

You can make big plastic containers to look like used wooden or ceramic objects by painting them with adhesive paint mixed with dirt.

The resulting object will be ugly but will not be as attention-grabbing as white or transparent plastic. This kind of camouflage is irreversible, so ensure you can afford to "ruin" the equipment.

If you cannot dig a hole for the wires or cover them under sand/sawdust/dirt, get some dark green and brown fabric shreds, moisten them in glue, roll them around the wires and sprinkle with dirt.

The aim would be to make them look more like tree roots. Wires on the wall can be hidden under wall hangings, or painted green and disguised among real or fake plants.

The designs began with conversation about what would be done.

Then came the sketching. (Example of first long house sketches right).

Small scale models of the most important structures as well as the dragon were produced. These communicated the visions better than any paper version would have done. Unfortunately some of the small scale models came too late.

It was found that small scale models took less time than proper computerized 3D models to create and were generally better understood.

Sadly, the resource conflict caused the building of small scale models to hinder production in other areas. A project of Dragonbane's size would have benefited of a dedicated small scale model builder.
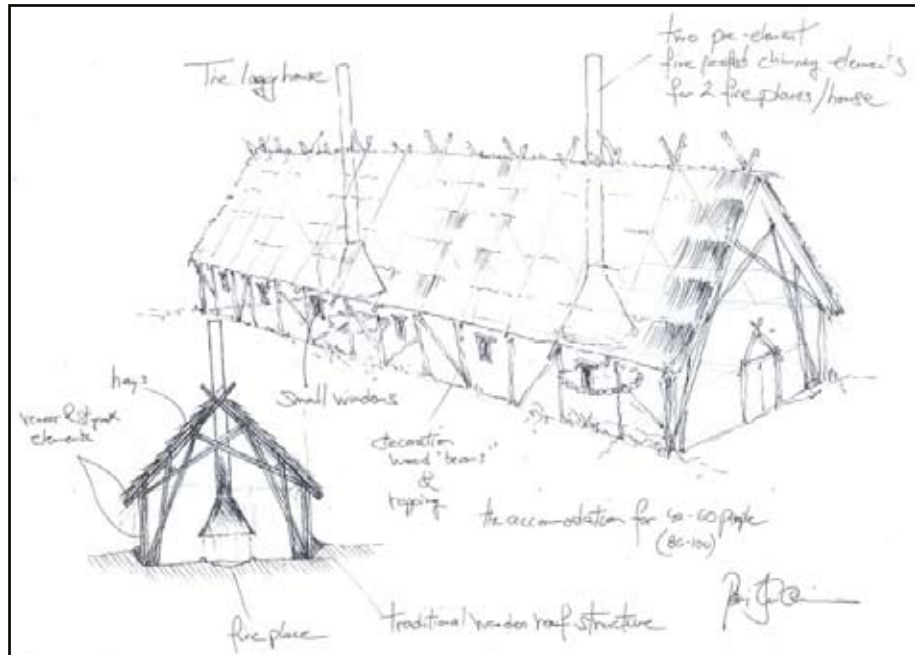
different enough for everyone to know at first sight to which culture the character belonged.

The grading (making patterns for people of different sizes) was more difficult than we had expected. Eventually, with the help of a vocational school, we managed to produce 950 different dress patterns, which were published with directions on the internet.

We also provided detailed instructions for what colours, fabrics and materials should be used, how to make shoes, and similar questions. These were published online about 6 months prior to the game. All in all, the costume part was one of the best successes of the whole project.

The forums were used very constructively by participants and players to discuss ideas, and share tips and ideas. Participants were able to post pictures of their costumes and accessories, and to ask the organisers to evaluate whether their solutions were acceptable within the frame of the game cultures. Some players felt these decisions were not always consistent, especially as the game drew close and an organiser criticising something severely had perhaps
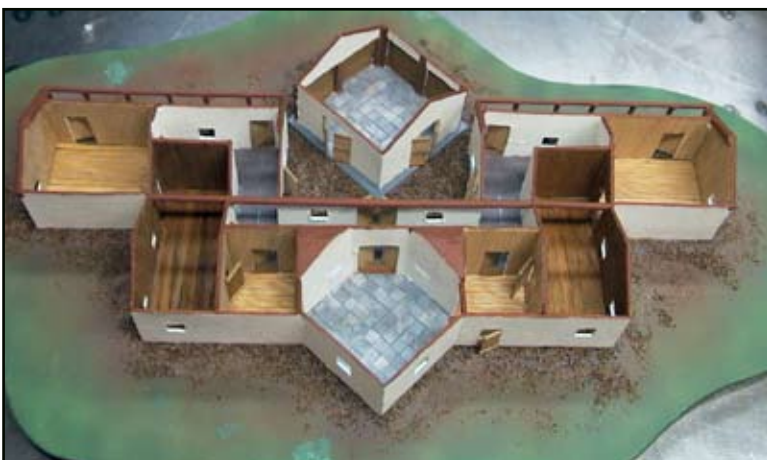
not followed another part of the discussion, in which another organiser had given a similar object a green light.
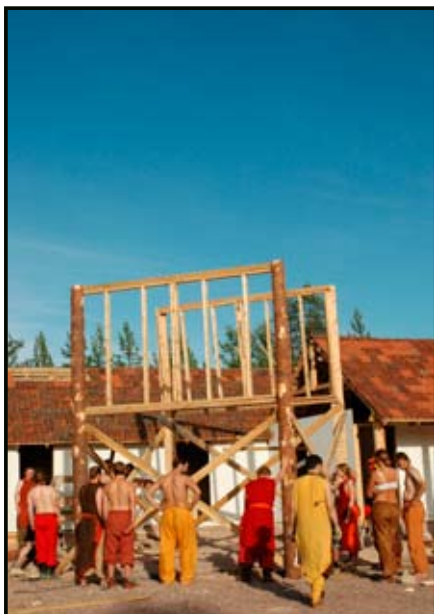
Propping

Heiko Romu, Scenographer and the Dragon Designer

We wanted the world of Valenor to look, feel and taste real to the last detail. We though it would compromise the coherency, if we trusted the players to take care of all of the props. So we decided to arrange most of the props within the project.

We produced or acquired over 2500 items, some of which were made at the 30 volunteer workshops or working bees over a three-year period. There was also one ongoing workshop in Turku producing the bigger and more

that of the others. We needed to create suitable instruments, which were fully functional and fit the in-game fashions. The props team made drums, bull-roarers and flutes for the game, and the instructions on how to make one for yourself were published on the website.

We had a shared document on our intranet, which contained an active list of items needed for the game. After an item had been acquired, it was marked on the list. That was a good way to keep track.

difficult items. Some of the most exotic things were an early 18th century sledge, and a 4 meters long ballista.

One special area was all the different kind of musical instruments. It was established that the in-game culture of each faction included a musical culture separate from

We did not manage to get all the items on the list, but in retrospect the end result was quite good. It was a joy to hear how the players had noticed – in the middle of a summer – the old skis lying

Diana from spain and other artists were decorating the houses of Cinderhill with dragon motifs

against the wall, or that the ink bars were decorated with dragon ornaments.

The most cost-efficient method proved to be making stuff ourselves. Getting 5-6 people working efficiently in working bees worked well. Another good cost efficient method was purchasing the mass materials from Asian stores. You can find many modern Chinese products roughly equivalent to medieval ones. Flea markets in the big cities proved disappointing, since the quality is often low and the prices high. But when you get further from the cities you can get quite good deals in second hand shops.

I especially enjoyed the pottery work bees. The prop team arranged three weekends for making pottery. We managed to produce about 300 ceramic items for the game. No wonder that some of the participants of

these workshops are planning to become professionals. The items were exquisite!

All in all the propping succeeded well. The most serious failure was that we were not able to finish the furniture: the library scrolls would have been so much more astonishing if they were stored in proper shelving. And the healer's

herbal bottles would have looked so much better, if she had had a table. But there were many items of high quality.

Result: What Became the Village

"Definitely a fun event. Brilliant atmosphere - I don't think anything can quite match the powerful scene of walking into the fully working village for the first time. The attention to detail throughout just takes the immersion to a whole new level." -Dhosein, a Witch player from United Kingdom

Fantasy villages for larp purposes are typically a cluster of simple constructions with earth floors. That the buildings in Cinderhill were designed to stand for 10-15 years added to the solidity of the illusion. It was possible to crawl in under them to listen to conversations inside; it was possible to

hang things on the walls and to climb up onto the roofs. The village had a bakery in which bread was baked all day; cooking took place at the fire-pits in the longhouses. There was a working smithy, and craftsmen such as carpenters were creating genuinely useful items for in-game use with period tools.

The villagers lived in longhouses, one of which was prioritised for families with young children. The children had dedicated minders creating age-appropriate game experiences for them, although each child player had to be trusted to be able to handle some intense moments such as the appearance of the dragon and interactions with threatening non-villager characters. Even to those who had no interaction with them, the children and animals of the village added immensely to atmosphere and realism. Especially when the sheep escaped and the overjoyed children chased after them, followed by a trail of grownups scolding them for spooking the animals further.

"We indeed had a working village! When we bakers found out we had bread and cheese, but nothing to slice the cheese with, one of the village smiths made us a perfectly good cheese-slicing tool!" -Anonymous Cinderhill Player

The village had two washhouses with big heated outdoor tubs, and two outhouses with rows of earth toilets facing each other in fine rural Nordic tradition. (One toilet was cordoned off with curtains for players who could not handle the communality, as well as for the privacy of women who had defied the instruction to make sure sanitary protection was historically appropriate). For legal reasons, it had not been possible to construct actual earth toilets. Instead, the plastic buckets beneath the holes were emptied nightly by the temple adept players (or, arguably, by their characters as part of their service to the village). This was in the interest of fairness, since temple adepts were exempt from the very real village chores that kept the other villagers busy in day-time.

The dry summer that had caused a recent forest fire was still a problem during the production. Exceeding care had to be taken with fire until the rains finally started. Unfortunately, this left an eyesore in the village, where the shell of one small building had been erected only for the purpose of being burned down before the start of the game. On this assumption, building debris had been stocked in its exposed belly. When weather conditions made the burning impossible (and illegal), it had to be left intact. Instead of a powerful reminder of a magical battle fought in the village just days before, the husk of a house became a visual reminder of the problems faced by the organisation.

The drought also provided organisers with an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment

to the illusion ideal. When the village well ran dry, a less ambitious organising team would have called a break in the game to solve the problem. At Dragonbane, it was instead arranged for the entire village to be performing a water ritual at a site further into the forest at the very moment a water truck drove in to refill the well – a spectacular way of generating functional magic through sheer logistics.

"One of the most amazing moments was when the people in the village noticed there was no water in the well. The Adepts then decided to take the whole village outside Cinderhill to perform a ritual to pray to the dragon to fill the well. In the meantime the organisers drove a fire truck in Cinderhill and filled the well. When the villagers returned

astonishment arose: 'Our prayers have been answered! The well is full again!'" -Mörötti. A Cinderhill Adept player from Finland

The effect of the solid realism of physical props were at times stunning. One sub-plot centred on a big treasure chest. What sounds like a fantasy cliché was rendered enormously impressive by the sheer mass of the object, which required six men to lug around. Four great wrought-iron keys were literally required to open its four ornate locks, which incidentally led to a demonstration for the need for flexible dramaturgy in a hyper-realistic setting.

In what could have become a big reveal, the Dragon demanded the chest to be opened as part of the ceremony in the village. Unfortunately, one of the keys was at that moment in a tent in the witches' camp, fifteen minutes' trek away under optimal conditions and rather more in the middle of the night. The witch ran, but the wait became intolerable, and the restless dragon yielded, and moved on without having seen the treasure. In a larp with less solid props and less functional locks, someone would probably just have stepped up at that moment and opened the chest "by magic".

Setting-Created Content

As typically happens in multi-day village games, a feeling of true community soon developed in Cinderhill. The depth and nature of such communal feeling is obviously impossible to measure, but it is experienced as very real by the players. The reason for this is probably that the player chooses to interpret his increasing trust in the co-players as the character's trust in his community. Ensuring that large groups of players share experiences during the game is a way to contribute on purpose to the emergence of such communal feeling.

The culture of Cinderhill involved many kinds of collaborative doing, ranging from morning tai chi, over music, dance and religious ritual, to physical labour. Even when they happened just once during the game, these events

were understood to represent recurring activities. This probably made it easier to project a shared feeling of common history than if the villagers had been – as otherwise often happens in the genre – sitting around in an inn, stiltedly reminiscing about unshared pasts, waiting for something to happen.

In Dragonbane, this feeling of community was also necessary from a game design point of view. The village needed to feel like an almost cultishly committed utopia, since the cathartic twist at the end was the dragon setting his followers free – telling them that

though they had been his children, it was now time to grow up. And even if you disregard this specific plot twist, almost all village narratives, in any game, no matter how trivial, involve interaction by the village as a collective against a perceived threat of some kind (symbolic or actual, internal or external).

Acting truly collectively, rather than as a group of strongly individuated characters in physical proximity to each other, is likely to slightly lower the relative importance of the single player's choices in any given situation. Collective actions also deflect social focus from the individual, and most players – not only those with a pathological need for attention – do have a need to be seen and validated as they are playing.

This need for validation is actually a need to feel truly "in character". Since the character is not as
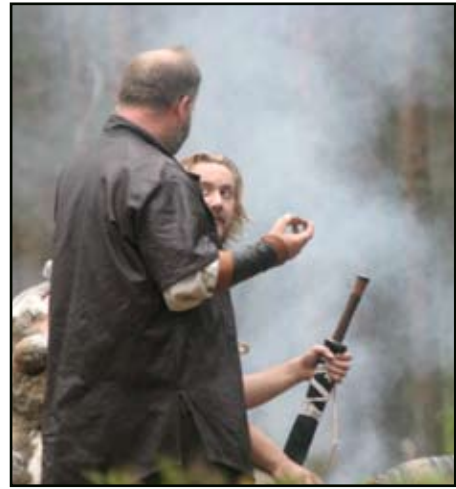
fully actualised a subject as most of our every-day roles, its limits and nature need to be confirmed through action and interaction. Sneaking off on a private adventure is an easy way to enhance the player's feeling of immersion (feeling in character since one is making a series of active decisions from the character's point of view). Of course, players can also make collective scenes more intense by concentrating on thinking of it as interaction within the group and not just against the outsiders that the collective is interacting with.

Although the borders of the character subject are usually defined through such action or interaction, it should also be possible to get and remain in character through a strong identification with an institution, a collective or indeed a physical environment. This is probably how the physical environment and culture of Cinderhill helped create a game environment

in which staying still was just as satisfying as showing off.

Sound Design and Sound Effects

Janne Särkelä aka Sarana

The sound design of Dragonbane included two main area different areas: creating and realizing the sound for the project's film material, and creating the entire soundscape of the fictional world.

While fantasy allows for unbounded creative freedom, everything must also be believable and coherent within the limits of the fiction. Larpers can be a demanding audience, as both over- and underdoing the sound environment can affect their immersion into character. As the entire project strove for a flawless, plausible and coherent fiction, the soundscape too was to be an essential and seamless element of the game.

Imagine:

The corpse of the bronze dragon lies lifeless under the village tower. One of the buildings still smokes, set on fire by the bronze dragon trying to escape the nets and hooks of the tamers. Scents and smells – natural and magical – of the recently ended battle linger in the air. One can hear the fading whispers of magic mixing with the wind the and sounds of upset animals in the surrounding

In the end, all sounds and most of the music were created by one man alone.
The very same Janne Särkelä also performed heroic efforts during the game on maintenance of audio systems. The hardest stunt was repairing the "Egg shrine" 'from the back', involving a 10 km trek through the forest while carrying truck batteries.

forest. Eventually the sounds become calmer, and the magic vanishes, fading like an echo.

The initial concept was to base the game structure on three emotional moods: sorrow and confusion at the beginning, reorganisation of values in the middle of the game, and a passionate climax at the end. I designed the sound world to support this story structure. On the ambient track (background sounds of which the players would not necessarily be actively aware), the fictional forest animals would react to the situations by making distressed sounds, scratches on roof and inside the very building structures: unnoticeable sounds, which make you think something is wrong, but not able to pinpoint why.

Originally the game area was meant to be surveyed by hidden cameras. The event sites and buildings were supposed to be connected to a wireless sound system network, which would have allowed us to control the ambient sound and effects live in three dimensional space. We were also to make a remote control for the magic user players – camouflaged as a magic book or something similar – with which they could have triggered suitable sound effects to backup their magical actions. The technology is available, but this is one of the parts of the project that was not put to realization.

The temple, though, was filled with magic and mysteries through use of a constantly running ambient sound. It was played at a low enough volume to only be a subliminal, unconscious, yet powerful mood element in the temple. It was later commented to have worked well. One of the players asked me if the sound was actually there, or was it just a figment of her imagination. I also produced several special sound effects for the special in-game events, like the water fairy soundscape and the pyra (fire-demon) attack.

The sound design work begun by familiarizing myself with all the written material and visual designs of the game, in order to adopt the project's vision of the reality to be created. The sound team later grew also to be responsible of dances and musical cultures. As the Cinderhill rituals were without rhythm in themselves, they turned out to be impossible to base choreographed dances on.

Not enough dedicated specialists were found for the sound team, and because of the lack of time and resources the work concentrated on the most essential areas like important ritual-related structures, and the dragon. We were also originally to provide all the musical instruments for the players. I would have preferred the instruments to be completely different and original for the world of Valenor. Unfortunately this too had to be dropped because for financial reasons. So I picked the instruments for each in-game culture based on parallels between their real-life cultural connotations and their uses in the game.

Cinderhill

The blissful villagers had gradually fallen into a trance-like state, connecting emotionally and physically to the dragon god. With the dragon's breath, the villagers breathed – this was the basis for using wind instruments. In my mind I saw a picture of the villagers, whirling the bull roarers as the other villagers were playing a single tone on their ocarinas. I had

> Use the game forum prior the game to interact with the players. Get them to take an active part in creating ingame stories, songs and lyrics, to make them feel that the fictional culture is their own.

For the video depicting Dragontamer life, the soundscape of its life was brought to life for the first time.

defined the Cinderhillian melodies to be simple: child-like and happy, or sorrowful and melancholy. The music like all action in the village was to be one intuitive ritual, sprung out of the feeling of the moment. Cinderhillian instruments were human voices, hand claps, drums, whistles, flutes and horns.

Dragontamers

Dragontamers are individualists adventurers. Their culture and personal traits have been developed in battle against monsters in the far land of Gethar, which had attracted random combinations of adventurers from around Valenor. I saw their culture as a mixture of Scotland, Northern France, Native Americans and Scandinavian Viking traditions. This was to be reflected in their musical culture. Tamers had many possible instruments, like drums, mouth harp, bagpipe and lute. The tamer songs were influenced by real folk songs and contained lyrics of playful mockery towards the rival groups.

Witches

The witch culture was even more about the individual than the tamer's. This was caused by the decades long persecution by the wizard tower, causing deep distrust and paranoia towards non-witch peoples. The witches are austere creatures. I was thinking they were from the far north when I designed their musical culture. The selection of instruments reflects their cold and contradicted inner natures. The only melodic instrument was the top-record harmonic series flute. The best material for such a flute was thin-walled copper tube. The metallic structure made the sound of the flute even more cold and eerie. The witches also had drums and different kinds of bells and rattlers.

Dragon

One of the most essential elements in the game was to be the realistic dragon. There are of course no such things as dragons in the real world, but everyone has an idea of what a dragon should be like. The dragon in Dragonbane was to be a plausible living being, with a heartbeat and the ability to express vivid emotions through its voice. The biggest challenge was to create a real-time voice morphing process, which would turn an actor's voice into the dragon's without any lag or notable transitions between moods. At the beginning the dragon was designed to be a

female, but it was later decided to make it genderless, which helped the voice design. Both something female and something male was to be heard in the voice, together with lizard-like hisses, and reflections of the massive size of the thing. I found a reference for the heartbeat and the frequency of breaths from those of an elephant. The dragon had also several sound effects designed, varying from snoring to terrible roars and fire-breathing sounds.

In the end, very few players were actually interested in the musical aspect of the game. However, although few of us are musicians in real life either, most of us will sing along should someone else initiate the singing.

A major portion of the original sound design was not realized at all, but the players and organisers

were content with what was achieved – especially with the dragon. Its sound reproduction system, its voice and sounds, were among its most successful and functional components. Besides the sound effects the players were grateful for the

In retrospect its easy to say that much of the confusion within witch players would have been avoided if the witch video would have been done in time.

comprehensiveness of the musical cultures.

What was realized for Dragonbane was still the most that has ever been done to create a larp. Sound design can be used, and has proved itself as a powerful tool in deepening the larp experience. But it needs to be used wisely. A successful larp sound world is surprising, yet natural, something a player can adopt, experience independently and use to immerse into the reality of the game.

Special Effects

Working Magic

Heiko Romu, Scenographer and the Dragon Designer

As many of the organisers of the Dragonbane project had the necessary licenses, experience and enthusiasm for making special effects, it was natural to have quite a lot of special effects in the game. We knew the players - and perhaps also the characters - would be disappointed without a few impressive effects. So we prepared some. But we wanted the focus to lie on other than "big" effects – the main effort was put to the development of "subliminal" effects instead.

The burning of the wickerman was one of the thematic effects requested of the SFX team by the game designers. Unfortunately, the schedules of the special effects preparation and the game itself were not yet synchronized, and another wickerman had to be built.

Special effects are not just explosions. For instance, our chemist made dozens of different scents intended to support things that were visible in the world. These ranged from the smell of decay from the battlefield, the scent of cinnamon and camphor from the hut of the village healers, through to the dreadful and sickening stench used to express the witches' curses. The witch players themselves were surprised at the power of this effect in emphasising magic.

Technically, all went well. Unexpectedly the flow of information between the game management and the effect group during the game proved to be a problem. Effects requiring staff and preparation had been designed to happen according to a specific schedule, but events in the game world were controlled by player choices and proceeded sometimes more slowly, sometimes faster than had been designed. The effects team had no efficient way of monitoring the progress of events within the game to time their efforts more appropriately. This was in part because many of the larpmakers had been expected to participate as players and to be able to communicate relevant information on to those outside the fiction. Of those some were busy finishing the dragon, some compensating for the last-minute loss off off-game staff, and some too exhausted to play after the last crunch of the production.

At the best special effect moments, the earth shook and players staring in open-mouthed awe at such perfect realism-boosters to the game. Unfortunately, these moments

The thunder god talks to its children, the tamers. The thunder sound effect was a surprise for most of the players, creating a stronger emotional impact.

could receive information about the game. These individuals did not receive enough guidance in the routines surrounding these phones (not even as the most obvious – that nobody should see them use them). The use these phones was not as helpful as it could have been.

"The communication was calculated to work on cellular and radiophones. As it happens, the cellular phones did not have reception in all of the area, and the radio phones we had were really unreliable and cumbersome to use. We also had too few of them. The radio phones we were supposed to have on site, as a loan, never arrived. In retrospect a set of PMR phones would have been a good solution for the sfx team's needs. We had plans for potential situations, where the effects turned out not to be needed after all, but because of this technical issue word could not be sent to the sfx team." -Timo Multamäki, Executive Producer

also happened at the wrong times - and players struggled to explain as part of the fiction effects affecting the environment for no visible reason.

We had made the decision, that the game should not be made more complicated for the players by burdening them with off-game information about how the effects worked. But eventually a radio telephone had to be given to a few trusted players so the effects team

The development of dragon breath became a spin-off from the project. Even the first prototype produced impressive flames, but time to implement this for the dragon was not found until long after the game.

Eero Af Heurlin, a SFX team member, explains some of the issues related to special effects:

"As for the obviously off-game clothing worn by the technicians, this was decided upon after much consider-ation. In retrospect some things could have been done better, but the main question was whether it is more harm-ful to the fiction to have obvi-ously off-game people around than having people who look in-game but are actually not? Off-looking people of course require active ignoring, but the wrong kind of people creeping in the woods look-ing in-game can be much more of a problem. First you react to the situation in-game, possibly alerting others to investigate, only to find out that it was nothing after all. Not only do you then have to ignore them, but your char-acter also has to "forget" everything about your reac-tions up to that point too.

In other circumstances in-game costume is often more appropriate. For example I was in Cinderhill in charac-ter costume preparing some effects (but that was possible due to the fact that I actually had a character to play there

– one I would have liked to play more, but could not as the SFX team was short staffed). A tamer or witch creeping around the shadows of the houses would of course definitely have gathered un-wanted attention.

We came to the conclusion that next time something like this needs to be done (supposing we cannot do it "in character"), we will use full camouflage and carry signal vests in our pockets to be used when the "these things do not exists AND you don't want to be anywhere near them" -rule needs to be invoked. That way one is less likely to be detected in the first place and no major confusion is caused with not-quite-in-game mysterious people.

Also, for the next time, one would need a more reliable (and especially a faster) way to communicate with the trustees within the factions without actually walking into the midst of players in what-ever clothes we are wearing at that moment." -Rambo, SFX team

For the witches, all magic required long periods of preparation. Players managed to make the time meaningful for themselves through deep immersion into the interaction between themselves and their element.

Each witch pair was dressed alike to emphasize their fundamental unity. Each pair was matched by fate according to magical element, not personal preference. Even a disagreeable partner was better than none at all, since a sole witch could not perform magic and would eventually go mad.

Magic made simple

Johanna Koljonen, a witch player

One of the key challenges in creating larp magic that does not feel simulated is that of how to communicate extra-textual information between two players – basically the cause and effects of magic – without either of them needing to step out of character to process it. (Stepping out of characters is, I would argue, required with any kinds of statistical magic system). In Dragonbane, this challenge was beautifully solved by making all magic a speech act, identifiable by a code word – in this case veritas, Latin for truth.

Many characters in the game could work magic, and for their players a much greater part of the game experience was focused on the working part than the magic part. Valenor was understood to be a world in which magical energy was available to anyone with the talent and diligence to use it, but exactly how to channel it was determined by culture, not any kind of natural law. Witches could only work magic in pairs highly attuned to each other and to the highly specialised element which they were most in resonance with

("the magic of moss and lichen", for instance). Creating, designing and preparing a simple potion or spell was a painstaking process, but it was left to the players to decide exactly what that would entail. In Cinderhill, on the other hand, magic was religious and controlled by an institution. But the process of making the scrolls in which spells were encased was at least as complex as that of the witches.

The game rules set only two limits on magic. One was the rule of its effect and duration, specified at 1:1. A magic user working for six hours in game-time on a spell (an eternity to be mumbling over a cauldron, no matter how deep your immersion into character) could create six hours of magic – for instance a mind control spell of that duration. But if the effect was shared among many, the time would be proportionately shorter, so that controlling six people would only be possible for one hour. The other was a function of how the magic was communicated – verbally – which limited the range of a spell to targets within hearing distance.

Players were allowed to design their characters' acts of magic freely, but were also encouraged

to be fairly dramatic – to involve gestures, props, and special effects. The only rule was, that just before the exact moment of the spell being attempted – the moment when the scroll was torn or the potion poured into the circle or the talisman placed on a person – a special, channelling speech act would be performed. This speech act should always start with the codeword "veritas" and include a concise description of the effect and the duration of the spell. A simple example could be "veritas – truly you will not speak of seeing us here until the sun rises". Crucially, this utterance contains a player instruction, but it is not a player instruction. It is an act of fictional magic because the words are only uttered when the player and the character have loaded them with meaning. According to the game's rules, every veritas-spell should be obeyed by its victim without question.

"I thought the spell: 'VERITAS: you are unable to move a muscle, as long as you hold this stone' was very cunning" -Leo, a Cinderhill Adept player from Austria

If it seems unrealistic that a word could have such power even in a fictional world, consider the effect of suddenly yelling "look out!" at a stranger in ours. The words will have a physical effect almost completely independent from normal strategies of interpretation, and we have a very strong cultural taboo against uttering them when no danger threatens. This could be conceptualised as social magic: we have culturally agreed, for our own safety, to allow other people a certain amount of "mind control" over us in very specific situations. In Valenor, "veritas" functioned

much like that – except for the fact that it channelled supernatural powers in addition to social ones.

Since the words of the instruction sentence are what literally produce the magic effect, they will also become the key to the spell's success. If the other player does not understand the instruction, he cannot obey it; if it is unclear, the effect will be unpredictable. Formulating and memorising the veritas phrase for each spell thus became a key part in its creation.

A magic system like this is obviously primarily based on trust. To avoid an over-eager player endowing his character with super powers, only adults could play magic users. But in the Nordic larp scene there is no overall tradition of policing players, and besides,

the effort involved and the difficulty of forming a complex task into a simple instruction makes this magic very difficult to exploit. A very specific spell is most useful in a very specific situation, and predicting the exact situation in which the spell was to be used proved maddeningly difficult.

Magic performed as an instruction to its victim obviously has very little effect on inanimate objects, and does not look very impressive in itself. That is why the special effects team equipped magic users with things like glow-in-the-dark potions, powders that burned with flames in a range of colours, and liquids that, when mixed together and agitated, would dramatically change colour between black and white, or between the different colours of the spectrum – special effects that, when demonstrated at the boot camp, frankly felt like magic to the players too.

Among the chemical effects were also strong scents, an easy and underused resource in game design. Witches could lace their potions and ritual spaces with seductive or repulsive odours, creating an immediate physical response in nearby players. The swamp witches heroically acclimatised themselves to a retch-inducing stink by dripping it on their clothes, making their presence distinctly unpleasant to all other players – generating a non-stop cavalcade of dramatic and entertaining scenes.

"The extremely smelly stuff I poured on your clothes were supposed to wear off after 2-3 hours (many say it didn't :) Me and my shadow had that smell on clothes for the entire game, and were so used to it that we did not feel it unless we smelled the bottle. The smell was a chemical that generated the smell of rotten cabbage, a part of the witches' SFX kit.

We also had a four component smell mixture that if poured on the ground would make the entire game area impossible to use for a week or so. Our plan was to use some of this and pour it into boiling water to make it all evaporate at once creating a cloud of stench that would fly with the wind but not stick. This could we planned to send over Cinderhill to empty the village and scatter the villagers. But we never got a reason to use it, and it was also a bit to insecure to use as some people could have had allergic reactions to the smells.

At least one person vomited only by standing close to me and my shadow!"

-LoveErsare – a Witch player and coach

Players use special effects both to enhance their own playing experience as they created magic, and to make the performance of the magic itself more dramatic. Unfortunately, the most impressive effects required perfectly clean mixing bowls and ingredients that needed to be stored in plastic bottles. Because of a communications breakdown, almost all witch players arrived at the game without mediaeval-looking vials, bowls or gloves. This made it impractical to make use of some of the chemical magic. Some players also chose to forgo all special effects that involved the use of off-game containers or tools, on the principle that they were in conflict with the aesthetic premise of the game.

Special effects were also provided by the organisers during the game. Terrifying sounds were heard in the night, fireworks and explosions simulating the dragon's pain. Waters started to fume and bubble. Ritual was punctuated by lights and thunder. Had the dragon itself been available during the game, it would have been possible to call out by performing a ritual at a specific place. And at the moment of the dragon's death, an astounding pyrotechnical extravaganza erupted – including two pillars of fire rising to twice the height of the temple. The moment was hugely impressive, but some players were startled or scared out of character; they did not know, or remember, that most of the flames employed by the special effects team were not hot enough to burn a person through her clothes.

Impressive though they were, many non-player effects suffered from the players' inability to decode them. Unlike the magic users' effects, it was not

An image of the dragon by renowned Portuguese fantasy artist Ciruelo Gabral. This painting was the goal for the creature design of the dragon. Today's dragon 2.0 is fairly close to this drawing, vastly improving the first iteration seen in the game.

immediately obvious what they were meant to symbolise. A mystical burbling at the pond could at least be interpreted as a general ill omen, but explosions in the night prompted further investigation. If a player sneaking up to spy on the ruckus only sees pyrotechnicians in orange coveralls, the visual information prompts an off-game conundrum. Do they represent the dragon? Fire demons perhaps? Or are they completely invisible? But if so, does the fire shoot up from the earth for no apparent cause?

"From previous experience I've found that if it is necessary to have off-game personnel on site, it's better to have them looking as off-game as possible.

It's actually easier to ignore someone walking around blatantly in hi-vis yellow than someone who's in costume pretending not to be there. Perhaps because it IS so off-game, your eyes just look past them, or perhaps its just that

someone trying to not be there in costume picks up your attention as someone acting suspiciously in-game." -Dhosein, a Witch player from United Kingdom

Sometimes the organisers' commitment to deliver the coolest possible game turned against itself, as when the Dragontamers, having performed a moving wicker man ceremony for their fallen, were insensitively instructed to repeat it the following day to be able to experience it with the proper special effects. The organisers simply had no time to stop and realise what a powerful thing the environment was in and of itself – they did not seem to realise that the players, sucked into the fiction, had certainly not felt anything lacking in the first ritual.

A major problem with the effects were the lack of effects team. A majority of effects crew preparing Dragon or doing other tasks, also a vast part of expected team vanished during the latter part of the project

The final "Dragon Death" effects at the Cinderhill Temple.

Eero "Rambo" Af Heurlin, a special effects team member, explains why there had to be a second wickerman:

"The problem as usually was communication, either mis- or lack of. For example, we had been informed that the wickerman ritual would be on the second night because it rained heavily the first. Later I heard they had gone ahead with the ritual anyway and had already burned a wickerman. Since a lot of special effects preparations had already been made by the time we met with the "trustees" from the tamer camp the following day, we asked them if they could make another one (before it got raining again). We had some duds that had to be destroyed as soon as possible, and were trying to organise an in-game reason for firing them. But that just could not happen in time (thanks to all who tried to make it happen anyways). For this reason we just had to bite the bullet and fire them anyway.

We didn't like the lack of a proper in-game reason for the effects, either, but they were simply not safe to leave lying around."

Rambo, along with very few others, has done games and events over 10 years with Timo Multamäki. In the end these oldtimers became the essential backbone of the crew that finished Dragonbane.

The Dragon

The last evening of the game was to be the culmination of dragontide, with the creature expected to appear to its followers. Not only the characters, but also the players looked forward to the spectacle, which for many of them had been the very thing they had signed up to see.

When any larp nears its end, players typically start to pay attention to the approaching temporal limit of their story: the time they have to conclude their personal plot in a satisfying manner is running out. To achieve a satisfactory dramatic arch for everyone, many fantasy larps end with a great battle. But this one had started just after one, and the main action centred on avoiding another one. The end of the story would instead involve a re-evaluation of the characters' relationship to the dragon deity. As the finale approached, the villagers expected a religious ceremony shadowed by the death of the other dragon. Simultaneously the Dragontamers, still not convinced of the creature's benevolence, had spent quite some time building a giant ballista and dragging it close to the village.

The characters – all of whom had seen dragons before – had visions in their minds of what to expect. The players, on the other hand, had to construct this vision for them, and the sources ran as much to technical specifications as to mythical beasts.

This is what the players knew about the dragon called Red. Red was constructed by an international team of volunteers at building locations in Loimaa and Turku, Finland. Its body was built around a Ponsse S 15 harvesting machine – this was a dragon with off road capabilities – sculpted, given a latex skin and painted. It moved on wheels, which should not have been very visible, given the movement of the front and back paws before them. Its pneumatic and hydraulic muscles allowed it mobility not only in the limbs but also the head, allowing facial expressions.

The dragon would speak with an unearthly voice and "hear" those addressing it through microphones on its front. To simulate the sense of touch, 14 tiny cameras would be fitted on the body, allowing the operator to see in all directions, respond to threats and attacks, and make sure nobody got run over. Inside the torso, there was a control room with space for a driver and an actor. The dragon was not expected to spread its wings, but it was expected to breathe flames.

From reports and rumours at the beginning of the game, the players already knew there was some kind of problem: the dragon was late. The witches, having the most up-to-date information on account of joining the game last, knew when they started playing that the dragon would not have full capabilities. The dragon's neck had broken at the first transport attempt. Later a hydraulic pipe had burst, and there was no time to fix the problem. Before the last day of the game, witches and Dragontamers were discreetly told that they would not be able to attack the dragon physically if worst came to worst – it would just not be safe.

Just like with the houses of Cinderhill, a small scale model (1:10) of the the dragon was built. There was also a fairly good 3D model. The practical constraints of actual reality sometimes restricted building what the model showed.

About the Dragon

Heiko Romu, Scenographer and the Dragon Designer

For out "perfect fantasy game", a dragon was one of the first things we wanted. The perfect solution also seemed to exist - a walking forest machine built by a Finnish company. That machine was ultimately not made available to the project, but fortunately we had prepared an emergency alternative plan.

During the first year things had seemed to go well. The company considered our project interesting

and we even got the question "where shall we send it?". At quite the last possible moment, however, the company decided that such unique technology was too valuable to be given away outside of the company.

The plans had been designed so that other forest machines of the same size also could be used as the base of the dragon. Through the hydraulics laboratory at Tampere University of Technology, we got in touch with Ponsse, another maker of forest harvesters. From them a six-wheel, ten-ton S-15 tree harvesting machine was obtained.

The body modification began in January 2006. The cabin, the crane and other structures were removed from the forest machine and replaced with a heavy steel frame, into which the building of a cabin big enough for two drivers was begun. One would be the driver, who would operate the vehicle, the other an actor to talk as the dragon's voice and control its head and limbs.

As early as the summer of 2004 the special effects team had tested a flame-thrower which uses sawdust for safety reasons - flaming tree dust goes out immediately when coming into contact with another surface. Now a production version double the size was being built to be installed in the dragon (although ultimately it was not used in the game). Further pyrotechnical effects were prepared for the dragon's death, and three smoke machines acquired "for normal use". In co-operation with a partner, the project was able to rent a big smoke machine from the navy; since the dragon was late, however, this was never used for the special effects for the dragon's death scene.

The Dragoon production was done in a hurry, always. The gravest problem was supervision and explaining what needs to be done.

A total of around 100 persons were involved with building parts of the dragon either in the Turku workshop or in Loimaa.

event! In late winter it still seemed that everything was well. As with the village, the schedule was tight but realistic.

In April volunteer work sessions were held every weekend. At the beginning of June, the makers moved to live "in the dragon cave" to work full time. As the game drew closer, the working days grew longer. In June about ten people were building the dragon full time, right according to plan.

The building schedule was designed to fill the spring of the year 2006. This might seem late, but the schedule was determined by available personnel resources and financing. Motivating people to the volunteer working bees is incomprehensibly difficult with two years to the date of the final

But the fatigue of the builders increased as the work progressed. Few days off had been reserved, and the builders were so enthusiastic that the drills would ring and the hammers bang even on these rest days. We decided to let

Welding and building was tough work in wintertime. Luckily the most active dragon builders got winter gear from Ponsse (or perhaps Santa Claus) for Christmas in 2004.

the group continue work if they wanted - which, in retrospect, was the wrong decision.

The hectic building process did not result in a well-honed animatronic dragon. Construction was marred by one catastrophe

after the other (read Sanni's 'Just a flesh wound' for more details of the main disaster). We had to disassemble the whole neck of the dragon and hire professional welders, which was not cheap! We also required professional help to re-calculate tensile values, mass and stress.

At that moment we made a major error, which we would pay for later: putting computer and electronics professionals to work fixing the machinery. This was based on our need to have the dragon in the game, regardless of the cost. 24 hours after its collapse, the dragon's neck was fixed and the rest of the "flesh" was assembled.

The way all builders pulled together to ensure the final delivery of the dragon lent its failure a heroic quality. At the last possible moment, the dragon was transported to the game site with the driver, the actor, and three technicians, at work fixing electronic devices broken as a result of assigning builders to wrong tasks. In the end, the only test drive we had before arriving at the game location was the short way from the shop onto the trailer.

The spikes on the dragon's spines were removed for transportation. Otherwise the load would have exceeded the legal maximum height by approximately 5 cm.

Just a Flesh Wound

Dragonbane Diary, August 9th, 2006 by Sanni Turunen

I hardly remember anything from the few days before D Day, except trying to keep awake all night, welding in a cold and wet welding mask, sitting on the top of the dragon. In the morning I slept for two to four hours and then carried on making phone calls to the media and trying to arrange for the last missing pieces to be in place in time. The day before the departure, the dragon's head came from Turku along with Heiko and the rest of the head team. By that time we had the hydraulics, hoses, pipes and electric cables in place but no skin on the legs, the neck or the tail - and no installed software. We prepared for finishing those in Sweden while the actor was getting to know the machine. But! There had been no test driving, as the hydraulic system hadn't been ready until now.

So there we were, standing around the Ponsse with our hands crossed and the transportation trailer waiting. Dozens of neighbours had also come to see the event, standing next to the drivers of the alert

cars, which were supposed to escort our dragon on the road. There was nothing more for the builders to do. We went to pack our stuff to be ready to leave for Sweden, which felt quite distant at that point.

While I was inside I heard noises and yelling: "NO MORE! It breaks"! I went outside to see what had happened. It was the neck, as many of you might have heard. The dragon's neck couldn't carry the weight of the head while it rested on the ground and the powerful side cylinders were moving the body. One of the thinnest middle pieces had turned into a sad saddle-shaped figure. For a short while there was only stunned silence, but in few minutes we had come up with a plan for how to fix the neck and still make it to the game.

the body. One of the thinnest middle pieces had turned into a sad saddle-shaped figure. For a short while there was only stunned silence, but in few minutes we had come up with a plan for how to fix the neck and still make it to the game.

The next day we started working harder than ever. Even though we had had a proper night's sleep, everyone was so

tired that it took a while even to solve how to design a simple joint. We started taking down the neck for strengthening all the same. At the same time, the legs were being covered with scales. During the day after the breakdown we got an "emergency kit" of six people from Sweden. It was really good to have David back with us with his girlfriend Mauge, who both did great work on finishing and painting the dragon. We also got professional support from Heiko's relatives who helped out with welding neck support pieces in daytime. During nights we others carried on with the same task.

Our next planned departure time was on Sunday night - but only if the transportation company could make it. They told us that they had a minute schedule that day, and that if anything went wrong we wouldn't be able to catch the evening ship. I woke up at seven on Sunday morning to do as much as we could before leaving. We were manically covering the neck with skin when they called to tell us that there was a delay in a previous transportation. I must say that I felt more happy than sad about getting more time. This time we for example took

down the spinal scales of the dragon since their height exceeded the free transportation limit in Sweden.

During the night everything seemed to be quite ready even though we still hadn't been able to test the hydraulics. About one o'clock in the night, the programmers Pauli and Vesa climbed onto the top of the Ponsse with their computers and connected all the wires to control the hydraulics. The test driving began carefully with nice results - the neck held and the cylinders could lift the head with their computer control! Everything seemed fine and we also got the tail moving - until something happened. We didn't hear anything special but in seconds one of the neck cylinders started to pour out hydraulic fluid from both cylinder and table sides.

It was a continuous flow and we needed to shut the engine down. In a quick check we saw that one of the hoses was broken and needed to be changed.

By the time the hose was repaired the merry men of Priuska were already present. They took a calm glance at what we were doing and told us that they would be sleeping in their trucks until we need them.

We carried on fixing the hydraulics and tried to run them again. What we noticed was they weren't responding. At all. Something had happened to the controller valves, even though we had restrictors prohibiting just that. This unexpected damage in hydraulics led also to other problems - such as not leading any pressure to the brakes because

the compressor gets is power from the same source.

Imagine driving a violent 26 meter device onto a trailer in the night, seeing only through cameras, and WITHOUT ANY BRAKES. Would you volunteer? This was a turning point for many of us. We didn't have spare parts to fix whatever was broken inside the dragon. We did not even know what it was. The window of opportunity for getting to the game was closing fast - the evening ship on Tuesday was the last possible option. To reach that we would have needed to get the spare parts from Turku and fix the hydraulics within few hours. People had now been awake for 21-26 hours in a row. We also had ferry trip booked for the Swedes, so they had to leave immediately to catch it.

During the early morning we began to ponder the situation of the dragon with Vesa Solonen. What would happen if the dragon wouldn't appear in the game at all? Having a game called Dragonbane but no dragon in sight… But what could we do with the resources we had at the moment? And who could drive that thing with everyone this tired? When Vesa looked at the control devices he started saying "I could drive this. …if we only had brakes". We only needed them on the way onto the trailer, so we figured we could take the pressure from an external source for that small while.

The sun was up again and the night was over. Suddenly we knew what to do and started to organise everything in a big fuss. When Henkka and Vesa Noroviita heard what was going on they came too,

and began to do as much as they could. We still needed to separate the obsolete hydraulic table from the circulation, so we woke up Epa too. After that everything happened really quickly. When I saw the quick fix was working I quickly called the media again and booked us a place on the evening Finnlink ferry. The Finnlink staff sounded really happy for us when they heard that we were moving at last.

In the morning the dragon cruised slowly to the road where the trailer was waiting. The neighbours started to gather on the road again. The trailer wasn't small (it had 32 wheels) but when driving a big machine onto it a large amount of care is needed to avoid falling off. When the Ponsse was about to roll onto the trailer's thinnest part I was really, really excited and hoped for the best - after all

Vesa hadn't driven this kind of machines before and this isn't one of the easiest ones for sure. I jumped in and waited in the cabin until there was only safe red trailer bars under the middle part of the machine. That was a marvellous moment. I climbed again into the cockpit and hugged Vesa. After that we tied the dragon tightly to the trailer with chains. We were finally ready to go.

On the game site the dragon came off the trailer quite nicely – until its batteries lost their capacity for unknown reason. The machine was stuck at the end of the road that leads to Cinderhill. Luckily we were off the trailer so the transportation company was free to leave.

There we were again, in middle of a hectic repair moment. We tried to get the dragon into the game by six o'clock in the

evening but we had to push the limit a little forward because the repairs took still more time than calculated.

After all we got the integrated compressor to work, so now we had brakes without needing to have an external compressor hose connected. This still demanded some sacrifices on the pneumatics side: we couldn't make the legs move, but were able to get them to hang in the air when the dragon was moving. Fixing the hydraulics was still an unrealistic goal while we had this little time on our hands. We just put some cylinders into certain position with a hand pump.

While the engine side was being fixed, all the others re-painted the spots on the skin that had got hit by gusts of wind or by tree branches,

and mounted the spinal scales on top of the dragon. The pyrotechnics team quite happily greeted the amount of saw dust we brought with us and filled their empty fire pots with it.

After many exciting hours, the engine was standing by to go. It was darkish already so the infra red cameras of the dragon were already on. The voice was calibrated and we started proceeding the two kilometre route towards the village. I lead the dragon by checking where its wheels went and running backwards in the middle of the road so the driver could see where to aim. That is something to have nightmares about when I'm old: the dragon moved pretty fast, since it used its biggest gear, and the driver didn't have a speed gauge of any kind.

When we reached the border of Cinderhill, me and the others in mundane clothes backed up and stopped by the road, listening the noises of dragon heading to Cinderhill. First we heard moaning, crying and dragon talk. Then there were sounds of running, screaming and branches breaking. Very soon the Cinderhillians started to dance around the dragon and sing tunes for it. Finally the dragon was in. I was really glad about that and felt like my task had come to an end. At that point we would have wanted to see the flames of the dragon death, but were too tired to follow the scene any more. We drove to Åsen and went to sleep. I wished the moment welcome, since I had been awake for more than sixty hours in a row.

Read the full version of Sanni's story on www.dragonbane.org

Red Arrives in Cinderhill

Johanna Koljonen, witch player

We were all gathered in the village at dusk, in tense expectation, and could hear the dragon approaching up the road long before it was in view. Its sound system certainly worked – crucially, since the engine sound was also audible. The thing was enormous, 26 meters long, its weight several tonnes. But it didn't have wings at all, which made its torso look comically bald and elongated. Its feet were hiked up and immobile, and saddest of all, its head was still too, stuck at the end of the stiff neck at an unnatural angle. The face had no mobility. When the dragon spoke, the eyes did not move – nothing did – and there was no fire in its mouth. Not even the tiniest whiff of smoke.

Nobody laughed, or reacted in any obvious manner, but it was like everyone's shoulders slumped at once. The scenes with the dragon signified the culmination of almost every plot in the game, and making the most of them was in everyone's interest. After a collective breath, we all just went on with it, interacting with the dragon as though it was not obviously a machine, but a living being, a deity, and a co-player. And at certain angles, especially as the sun went down, it was not too bad.

With the light of bonfires playing on its skin, it sometimes seemed to shift or squirm. And there was a reason it looked pained, after all: it soon told us it was dying.

Then the dragon gave out a heart-rending shriek, and the sky exploded, and the pillars of fire shot up behind the temple, and it died. And curiously, at that moment Red became real. When it was not expected to move, its clunky motion could not distract us. The odd angle of the head looked like the twisted position of one who has died in pain. And its skin, when we rushed in, wailing, towards it, felt slightly warm to the touch – although this might have been my imagination.

A life-size dragon that can see, move and speak is not an achievement to be scoffed at. Building it cost a fortune, and involved specialist knowledge in fields as diverse as creature design, welding, hydraulics, and programming. It also required the persuasive powers of Timo Multamäki, who may well be the only person in the world to be able to talk an

industrial company into sponsoring an arts and youth project with a timber harvesting machine.

The Dragonbane team delivered something completely astounding, and it is typical of their perseverance that not even the dragon's neck buckling and brakes giving up at a point where most of the builders had been up working for far more than 24 hours straight could stop them from getting the thing back together, across an ocean and into a far-away forested valley on time.

"*As for the dragon, I think anyone who wants to ridicule it should have a look inside it, at the inner workings and controls. That thing is a mighty construct. It might have looked silly with its crooked neck and big wheels, but it could have been a monster, if it hadn't been brought down by an unlucky accident on the way from Finland.*"- Lizzard, a Dragontamer player from Denmark

"*OK, I don't really have any information at all, but I heard somewhere that the idea was instead of a cave (since there was none no where) they were going to put a smoke-machine up at the dragons den which would cover everything there with a really thick smoke that's impossible to see through, but then only a couple of days before the larp something messed up with the machine and they*

didn't get it there as planned.*"- Lelyonna, a Cinderhill player from Sweden

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"*Almost correct. Yes, we intended to use a smoke machine which would have nicely created enough smoke to hide the dragon. There was just one major hitch in this. There was a forest fire alert in the area and we were not allowed to use it since it would have looked like a fire. More rainy days would have helped with this particular dilemma. It was hard to predict that summer of 2006 will be the driest in a decade.*" -Timo Multamäki, Executive Producer

Cinderhillians keeping their village lit during night times. The village was alive all day long.

PR and Media Contacts

In this pioneering project, the media work too would become pioneering. Never before has a voluntary larp project been marketed actively in more than ten countries and exposed to this degree in the daily press, magazines, radio and TV in nearly ten languages. The largest challenge in marketing Dragonbane turned out to be not the scope of the project itself, but the different views on larping hobby in the different participating countries. Dragonbane will not only be remembered for its pioneering work in creating the village and the dragon at the centre of the game, and for the exposure its ambitions got, but for its attempt to bridge these international divides and to find a common platform for communication and interaction for all larpers in all countries.

Marketing and Media Strategy

Niki Bergman, PR Manager and a player

From the beginning it was clear that a project of Dragonbane's magnitude would need a clear media strategy and, above all, a clear external media profile, not only in Sweden, but in each of the countries participating in the project. As a professional journalist,

my feeling was that this project would be interesting for many media consumers if only presented in an appealing way for each of these consumers and the media in question. But which was the right way to address target audiences in each country? Solving this became a key question, closely related to the great differences within the hobby in each country. How were we to market the same project in more than ten countries, when the concept of what larping is differs so much in the participating countries? It was obvious that, to market a project like Dragonbane internationally, we could not rely on traditional PR, but must also take time for serious research into how larping is understood in each country.

As there is no European larp organisation to turn to with questions, we primarily had to rely on personal connections, and on rumours spreading between larp societies across borders. As soon as we made contact with a local larp organisation in countries that were unfamiliar to us, we first tried to get an idea of what the hobby looks like there. On this we would establish our strategy. The members of the project's core group had quite a good understanding of where larp is discussed and which media channels to use in the Nordic countries. Outside the Nordic sphere, ambitious co-

operation like that for Dragonbane, has previously been scarce, not to say non-existent.

Selecting Keywords

As this research progressed, certain keywords emerged. International, pioneering, dragon, purpose-built village, seven days, one-off event – words which had never been particularly interesting for marketing purposes in the Nordic countries, but were definitely so abroad. As an example, in the Nordic countries games are usually stand-alone stories, and not yearly recurring events. Some foreigners said they were interested, but would not come to a "first" event – only when the organisers had proved themselves would they consider signing up. "We'll come next year", they typically responded, until the concept of the one-off event had been firmly established.

From the start, we realized that game magazines in the Nordic countries were interested enough to feature Dragonbane, as was the regional newspaper in Älvdalen, Mora Tidning. Larger media, however, usually want more to show than just ideas on paper to catch their interest. Most of the publicity work towards the target audience in the beginning was done on local and national larp debate forums on the internet. These quickly became very hard for the organisation to monitor.

The Best Way To Kill Off Rumours is Efficient Information

In some countries, online discussion about the upcoming event quickly veered onto peripheral issues concerning the project. Such debates could flame on for quite some time before Dragonbane organisers found out and could enter the fray to rectify astonishing misconceptions caused by cultural differences (and in some cases sheer mischief). For instance, the requirement that all clothes including underwear needed to be cotton and of an historically appropriate design, was misconstrued to mean that no underwear would be worn at the game – by some indeed to mean that ladies would play entirely topless. As a result of such rigid rules, one hysterical debate forum concluded, players would get infections because of

poor hygiene, and promiscuous sex was also likely to feature. We had to rely on our national contacts to monitor debates on such national forums and to clarify any questions as best they could from their personal points of view on the project.

The largest problem with the media work, as with every aspect of the Dragonbane project, was the lack of people and time. Or rather, of people with time to devote for this special task. The media and marketing division could have employed one person full time for three years, had one been available.

The Effects of The Postponing

The largest PR challenge during the project was the Postponing. I mark it especially to underline the severity of postponing a project of this magnitude by one year less than six months before the actual event. To our knowledge, no other larp project similarly postponed has ever actually been realized. The postponing was discussed intensely by a group of key individuals in the project and agreed upon with heavy hearts after long debates.

Personally, I found the presentation of the postponing to be crucial, as the project still depended on people not losing faith in the project or the team members. A press release was crafted, almost identical for internal and external use, and published on a rigid time schedule, first internally to the whole Dragonbane team, then on the external website and in an email to the players, and finally distributed to the press. Our firm argument for the postponing was

Swedish television, along with many reporters from other media, covered the Dragonbane event. The public recognition was the result of the hard work of the seriously understaffed Dragonbane PR group.

that we wouldn't jeopardize our common dream for lack of time. We didn't want to compromise the quality of the project at that point. This dream we had needed more time to prosper.

Responses were quick on the whole scale. Many a "why?" and many a "no!" came to us, but also answers showing understanding and support for our decision. Over all, the response was more on the scale neutral to positive than really negative.

Having bought ourselves one more year to prepare and one more summer to build, marketing too became easier in many ways. Now we had actual progress on the building site to show – not only plans on paper, but physical houses rising and pictures of work being done. But time was moving fast and running out at light speed. The website demanded huge efforts for handling all the information, updating and correcting, cross-referencing and fixing. My original job – actively approaching media and offering Dragonbane material – ended up primarily covered locally by team members, as the part I personally had committed to do became the part I had least time for. Many media that could have been persuaded to take an interest in the game, unfortunately never did.

For the Benefit of the Hobby

We still feel that the amount of international publicity the Dragonbane project has received in the participating countries is historical. The project has been covered by daily press, magazines, radio and TV in close to ten languages over a period of almost three years. This is a mile stone not only for the project but for the larp hobby as a whole. In the case of media coverage, too, time will be reckoned "before" and "after Dragonbane".

The daily rituals of Cinderhill included the fetching of washing water from the nearby pond.

A fully loaded cart required some six to eight people to comfortably move. On hot days a wagon-load lasted only hours, requiring additional trips down the hill.

Case Helsingin Sanomat

Jussi Ahlroth/HS Arts

People sometimes have strange thoughts about how ideas get accepted in mainstream media. There is this image of a Byzantine power structure, in which anything wacky, weird or wonderful is too thoroughly scrutinized ever to make it out alive at the other end.

In reality it is really just down to individual journalists and the head of the particular section of the media house the journalist is working for. Two people – and if the superior trusts his employee, that goes a long way.

"I got this idea for a story. These crazy guys are making a live action role-playing game for hundreds of people, with a mechanical life size dragon and real magic effects. I gotta go there and cover it. Just look at this concept art.

They're building it on a god damn 10-ton forest machine."

My boss, the head of the arts section, laughed and said, yes, you do have to go.

Enthusiasm is What Matters

Enthusiasm is what carried over in the first place. I was never there for the Dragonbane marketing speeches at Ropecon or Solmukohta or anywhere else. The word just reached me, I checked out the website, and felt the enthusiasm. These people were serious.

I had played a lot of tabletop role-playing games, and had some experience of larp. So I got personally fascinated by the concept of Dragonbane. Primarily the design concept. The plans for "more than fantasy" -level of realism aimed for. The sheer scale of it. The craziness of the whole endeavour.

It was something to write about, no matter how it turned out. I did have confidence that it would work. And I wanted to be a part of it myself. It didn't hurt that I got paid by my employer to be there.

I wrote three large articles on the game, as a series. The first was published 22.4. 2006, the second one 1.7., and the last one just after the game, 5.8.

In the first story I introduced the whole idea, and interviewed Heiko Romu and Timo Multamäki. Much emphasis was given to the dragon and the realistic building plans. I also introduced the readers to the idea that I would participate in the game and wrote about my initial steps in character creation. The second story was about character creation and planning and the third one was a report on the game itself.

All along I tried to introduce aspects of role-playing games to the readers, familiarizing them with the concepts, the terms and the motivation behind it all.

In terms of being a journalist, everything went really well. For example, it made my job very easy that there was such an extensive catalogue of high quality images to choose from - long before the game. This is something every live action role-playing game designer with ambition, with a wish to get the media interested, should get completely and utterly hammered into their heads: Get. Professional. Promo. Images. Out. There.

The Dragonbane team understood the importance of pr and media attention. They had such a range of sponsors that it made sense. Being media-savvy and shamelessly

market-oriented is very important in huge projects like this.

Whenever I called, there was a fast reply. The only slightly confusing thing was that sometimes the people in charge changed and I wasn't exactly sure whom to call. I ended up bothering Timo Multamäki often, which is a situation I believe he wanted to avoid. But here the fact that Helsingin Sanomat is so big in Finland probably helped. It helped me to get to him, I mean, but him it maybe only gave additional pressure.

To Be or Not to Be Noted?

I should think a few players came on board because of the published stories. How it affected the morale of the people working on the project, I can only speculate. Nobody patted me on the shoulder and told me that without the exposure, they would've given this thing the proverbial finger a long time ago. What ever was achieved was achieved because of what the hardworking people did. But if somebody who was stuck at a particularly dreary moment of work overload and stress then found his or her spirits momentarily lifted by the exposure in HS, it would be a great thing indeed.

Affecting the visibility of role-playing games in general is a grand aspiration which I think we all can sign up for. How much

we actually manage to realize it, I don't know. Mainly I think it's a slow process. You have to hammer the same things in, again and again.

I have for some time now been saying that it is not so much about big spectacular things - like Dragonbane - done once in five years. It is more about a constant presence - even if it was a low key presence. Just being there, among the other arts, every now and then. A piece of news here, a small review there.

But Dragonbane became a good vehicle for me to write a little bit more in-depth about role-playing games. One thing is that I wrote a series. The other thing is that I participated in the game myself, which really motivated writing a series. The third thing was the scale of the project, which motivated me in terms of a personal investment in the project.

Keep an updated and detailed list of each prop and set piece before and after the game. Include a short description of the looks, state and whereabouts of each item after each transport. When you clean up after the game, take the extra minutes to mark the exact content on each box

Above: The first tamer and witch costumes were created just in time for the Ropecon convention in 2004.

A three article-series gave me the opportunity to build on the previous parts of the series. I was able to assume that the readers knew what was written earlier. I could give myself the license to go deeper into what is actually happening in these games and the preparation. After the game I was able to write on the basis of my own experiences, my own experience of immersion in the world, of interaction with the other characters, of observing how the game was organised.

I think that point of view was valuable to many readers. I remember that summer some acquaintances upon meeting me asked about Dragonbane and role-playing games. The stories had caught their eye. Maybe it was the fact that I made it public that I'm going in myself that made them have another look at the thing.

Maybe it was the colourful photos. Difficult to say for sure.

The feedback from our chief editors, the topmost level of our paper was:

"We still think this kind of thing is a bit nuts, but at least now we understand why you or somebody else would want to do it."

So Dragonbane actually became an exception to the rule I put forward earlier – that a constant low key presence would be more valuable for visibility. Because if Dragonbane had not been such a big and spectacular thing, probably my boss would not have said yes, you gotta go to Sweden for five days to work, living this, writing a series of stories about it. And if I hadn't put in the personal investment, the story would not have been as noticed.

Logistics

The changes in schedule and location led to some team members leaving the project. One of the most sorely missed of these became Mikko Pervilä, who had been responsible for event logistics during the first year of the project. He did a complete handover, but his absence created cumulative issues throughout the project, as his valuable know-how was never fully replaced. No working logistics system was ever designed, and the problems with keeping track of project resources and when these were needed on the site led to significant losses of money. A competent full-time Project Secretary would have helped as well. After the loss of Pervilä, the logistics ended up on the shoulders of the secretarial team, whose workload and continuous personnel changes further hindered an overview of the resource and transport situation.

Transporting Goods Internationally

Only one thing was certain: there would be a lot of materials and people needing transport to the game site. One of the partner-companies was able to obtain a used truck for the project to use in the spring of 2006. We were also able to get few young adults to handle utility transportation during the building camps.

A month after getting a license

"The driving was pretty boring, especially in our jumpy state of mind, being high on coca cola just to stay awake. When we reached Sundsvall, the police stopped us for a raid. We were about as calm as overloaded electric bunnies, and had no disc in our drive log recorder, and it was more than suspicious to keep the engine running all the time. Oh and by the way: the police spoke absolutely no English. Just great.

Now if ever my skills in both Swedish and diplomacy were tested. Staying as calm as humanly possible I explained to them that we don't need a disc, since we are not professional drivers, just helping a friend pro bono. Also the fact that we cannot shut down the engine because the battery loading system was destroyed. As no drugs nor alcohol were found and we were in hurry to catch a train, they let us continue our journey. Of course I did not mention to them that we had been awake just over 25 hours straight and that the truck's electricity would fail at any minute…"

– Lasse Rautio, a volunteer truck driver

Cost of happiness

Fuel costs need to be monitored, but giving volunteers the freedom to drive to the shop for a bar of chocolate when they want to is cheaper than making them unhappy.

Everything requiring logistical know-how now rested on the shoulders of a few people, who did not have time to plan efficiently, and many things were left for volunteers further down the hierarchy to figure out for themselves. One of the things no-one considered was the cost of fetching "free" stuff. Driving 100 km to pick up a 200 kg donation of potatoes simply makes no sense compared to buying them in the local store, especially not if the driver needs to be accompanied by another person to act as interpreter. Fuel costs even for short drives do add up! Plan ahead so you can synchronise timetables and get by with as few drives as possible. And never drive an empty truck.

Beginner's mistakes aside, without these volunteer truck drivers the game would not have come about: they drove house elements and supplies for literally thousands of kilometres without complaint.

Several cars were renovated for project use. One contingency plan for a situation where the bootcamp would be unavailable involved using a bus as a service hub for the players. Luckily this plan never needed to be put in action.

Early Logistics

"I was summoned to take part in the project in an early stage, in the summer of 2003. The other members of the core team were Timo Multamäki, Mike Pohjola, Kalle Kivimaa, Coffe Sandberg, Jared Elgvin, Martin Ericsson, Heiko Romu and Arno Hahma. Kalle was responsible for the finances, Mike, Coffe and Martin were doing the writing and Timo took care of the unity. Heiko and Arno created the special effects for the game. My job was to take care of the project logistics.

It was decided that Dragonbane should be played in southern Sweden. We had a player goal of 1000+ participants. In the context of Finnish larps, this is a huge amount of participants, but it was nothing new for the Swedes. They had had large-scale events before, and Coffe and Martin had both been involved in organising such games. More important goals for the Dragonbane project included having well-written characters, that matched the ingame realm and the system for magic, on which creations of the special effects team would be based.

While I was part of the project I strongly believed, that organising Dragonbane with a Scandinavian production team and within the Scandinavian tradition would involve a steep learning curve, but that it was absolutely possible. At the same time, Dragonbane would, even should it turn out to be a failure, be an interesting experiment in organising and designing massive games. I also though it very important, that the makers of Dragonbane did not set out to reinvent the wheel. They paid serious attention to lessons from earlier big game productions in their countries.

The Dragonbane production team was formed by summoning people from within the role-playing community to take on responsibilities in areas of the project in which they had real-life expertise. This recruitment method set a good basis of strong know-how and built a hierarchy into the organisation.

In retrospect I think the biggest tangle became that the organisation grew too large too fast. The high-profile composition of the core team created a buzz around the project and dragged in vast amount of volunteers, whose talents would only have been needed in later stages. The fast expansions resulted in a situation in which a lot of work hours were squandered on ill-focused effort. The other root cause for this were the repeated troubles in the process of finding a suitable game location. I left the project on May 2004, at a point when it had been decided to move the game from Sweden to Soomaa in Estonia.

Thanks to marketing successes, a Nordic co-operation project was now turning into a Pan-European project. The production team had gone through several revamps, and while my good contacts in Sweden would have been useful there, I did not believe I could contribute equally to organising logistics in Estonia. Re-learning know-how for local conditions would have been too much of an effort in relation to the hours I had to spend on the project.

Similar challenges faced other parts of the organisation, and I think the later decision to move the game to yet another place, again in Sweden, was sound. The most important lesson from Dragonbane is one I had also had confirmed by organising the Solmukohta convention in Finland: You really need to find a suitable location for the event before you can start work on most other phases of the project." - Mikko Pervilä, logistics team leader 2003- 2004

Transporting Volunteer Help and Players

Finding people to help building a village is one matter, transporting them to the building site is another. Not many are willing to pay hundreds of euros to travel to Älvdalen (in the middle of nowhere almost regardless of where you start) for long hours of gruelling work. A shortage of driving licenses and cars among the organisers present at the building camp at the time, made it almost impossible to transport people the 217 kms from the local ferry to the boot camp every other day. The closer the tourist season drew, the more expensive the ferry tickets became, and the less willing the ferry companies were to give the project discounts.

The team learned with time, but usually too late, that there are many organisations willing to fund international travel for students and youth for cultural exchange purposes, that the new Interrail/Eurail cards with fewer travel days could have been an economical option for some of the volunteers, and that there astonishingly is still

The "badtunna", the Cinderhillian collective bathtub, was actually a wedding gift for Timo and Tiinaliisa, given to them some days early so it could also be employed in the game. The very same pool now serves its intended purpose in Sodankylä, at the Multamäki family's residence.

no such thing as an international student card that would allow for travel discounts in all of the EU. Information about relevant funds is difficult to find even on the internet: while the EU has a website about international schooling, for instance, this does not include information about institutes that fund bilateral cultural youth exchange. Similarly, there is no trustworthy non-profit website about budget travel options across Europe.

Even locally, transport turned out to be a problem. Moving the players from the check-in location at Åsen to the game site a short drive away became an enormous challenge, when it turned out that buses or minivans were simply not available to rent anywhere in the area. Frustratingly, a dozen or so minibuses – the local school bus system – did stand parked all summer in the school yard of the Älvdalen school, but the principal refused the project use of them.

Planning   the Logistics:

Make a list of all available vehicles and their locations. Make sure to note their licence plate numbers. You will need these for booking ferry tickets.

Make a list of all the available drivers and their driver's license classification.

Make a list of all the items needing transportation: their location, size, where they are going, when they are needed, and the contact information of the person currently in charge of each item.

Everyone working on transportations needs access to a call centre – at least one person available on the phone 24/7 in case of any problems.

A vast amount of props, tools and materials needed transportation during Dragonbane. Loading and unloading, using manpower to save money, took a substantial amount of time. The kitchen ovens needed four men to carry – yet one was stolen after the event.

Älvdalen supply run

Antti Oksanen, Dragonbane diary, April 23rd, 2006

Our supply trip to Älvdalen began on Wednesday, April 19th when we took our new truck to the registration inspection in Turku. The truck was in surprisingly good condition. The only real problem was that occasionally the pneumatic system sounded like Darth Vader making a sexual harassment phone call. We picked up Johannes, who was going to be the driver for the trip and then started packing our stuff. Three tons of plywood and 50 wooden barrels from shops in Turku found their place in the cargo hold. Then we went to the dragon workshop in Loimaa to load some props, cloth and an industrial washing machine. At 22:00 we had managed something amazing, we were in port on schedule and got on the ferry without incident.

The first breakdown of the trip occurred at 9:20 between Gävle and Falun. We stopped for a break and the car never started again. After spending three hours in the cold rain trying to start the car we decided that we can't fix it, so we called for help. After a while a friendly repairman came with a towing tuck and gave us some electricity for our battery. Arrival in Älvdalen happened at 17:00. By midnight we had unloaded the car and were cold, tired, miserable and wet.

The morning came and somehow we managed to get ourselves up and running. The truck failed to start again until Johannes 'McGyvered' the car battery with the cable from our inverter and we were ready to go on. First stop was at the Wedde's sawmill. We left the plywood there and prepared the truck for our wood load. Unloading the plywood was quite tricky since our trucks sides were solid, so that all had to be loaded from the back. The loading of the wood was much harder. The wood came in five meter long piles one meter wide and high. Finally we managed to load the wood to our truck using two forklifts to hold the woodpiles and caterpillar to shove it all in. All in all the loading took about four hours.

Our truck was fully loaded and we managed to do something like 30 kilometres per hour when going uphill. Then we discovered that the jerry rigging in our battery was failing and the truck probably wouldn't start again if we stopped the engine. At that point we had about one thousand kilometres to go.

Another screw-up happened at nine the next morning. We were running low on fuel so we drove to the gas station and Johannes lifted his foot from the clutch and stalled the engine. Luckily we managed to get hold of local repair shop and a friendly farmer pulled our truck so that we could start the engine. The fixing of the battery cost us about 10 euros, quite a cheap price when compared to how much pain and suffering it had caused us.

Three hours later we arrived to Timo's place where we were taking our wood load. The forest road was quite tricky to navigate, especially after staying up for 32 hours. But we got safely to our destination, had something to eat and a sauna.

Some statistics from our trip:
Total travelled - 1840 km
Time taken - 36 hours
Load: 4 tons in, 6 tons out
Consumables used:
Diesel fuel- 480 litres
Cola - 7 litres
Duct tape - 20 meters
Wire - 2 meters
Personal property damaged:
One left hand work glove
One Nokia 9210 communicator

Boot Camp

We were lucky to get access to a defunct school in Älvdalen, the building better known as the "Boot Camp". The conditions were relatively primitive, but included electricity, heating, a good kitchen, running water, and an escape from the insects that plague the area in summer. Without such luxuries the stress on the builders would probably have become too much to bear.

"We began our journey at May 19th. Since the truck was heavily loaded and it could not go over 80km/h even when empty, the trip was painfully slow. About 18 or 19 hours later we arrived in Åsen. The school where we were supposed to sleep needed to be resurrected: it had been empty, unwarmed and without water for almost a year. For a while my imagination took over, and I clearly saw the house as a dark space station that needed to be inhabited after its long solitude.

The space-station-likeness was even more obvious than I thought. The heating system had been down for a long time, since the authorities wanted to save electricity. Also the water system was shut down, and lights were removed from many rooms, including the one in which we decided to sleep.

The Boot Camp Floor Map v2

Boot camp manager Timo Leipold (and his crew of 2) worked over four days on practically no sleep at all, as four additional boot camp volunteers cancelled without warning.

In some rooms light fixtures and lamp remained, but were not necessarily working. The downstairs smelled like there was something decomposing in between the walls. The whole time I was wishing for a shotgun: the atmosphere at the school put extreme pressure on me and I imagined how at any minute I would get an Alien in front of me… Without water it would be very hard to live, so we took a hose from the sauna buildings water system to the kitchen and toilet and thus got something to drink and something to flush the toilet with.

After unpacking our stuff from the cars and having eaten something we decided to go to sleep. All were vastly tired and it was very hard to find our way to the sleeping room. When we finally reached it, Esa came to us and said, that according to a SMS he just had got, Lordi had won the Eurovision Song Contest. I thought once again to be hallucinating, and because of my tiredness it would not have been a great wonder. One can only guess how surprised I was in the morning when I heard the same fact again…
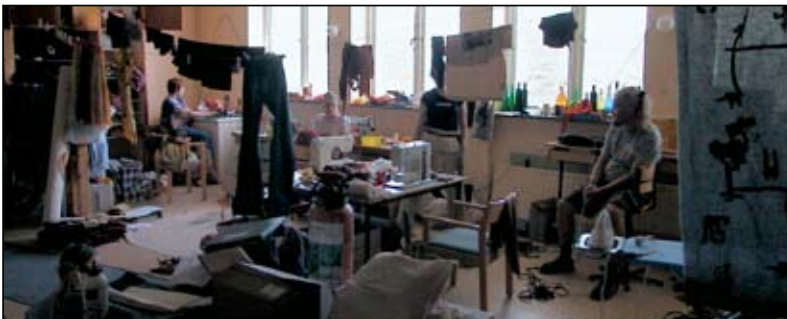
Sleeping in the school was like some kind of extreme voyage, for the room was, despite the time of the year, colder than refrigerator. My normal sleep attire (just boxers) was out of question. Instead I had jumper, jeans and skiing cap, plus of course extremely thick sleeping bag. We did have a heater too, but it was way too small: a doghouse could perhaps be heated with it, but tens of cubic meters … No way."

—Sleeping in Swedish refrigerator by Lasse Rautio, a volunteer truck driver

Basic Needs and Safety

Heiko Romu, scenographer and dragon designer

The organiser must take care of the basic needs of the participants. The participant needs to be able to visit the toilet, get fresh water and food, and to know how to operate in the case of an emergency. One of the challenges for the organisers was to realise a medieval milieu and customs while still meeting the demands of modern health and safety legislation.

Toilets and Hygiene

To maintain as authentic a medieval atmosphere as possible during the game, it was quite clear that water toilets would not be available during the game. In addition to the game culture, modern legislation and environmental concerns needed to be taken into consideration. There was also an ambition to find a long-term solution that would serve in continuous use of Cinderhill.

To complement to communal culture of Cinderhill, "community toilets" were built. These were outhouses with two sets of seats (benches with holes) facing each other. Out of respect for squeamish players, but in conflict with the game culture, one of the seats in each outhouse was curtained off. The multi-seat outhouse is not historically unknown in the Nordic traditions, so some players had probably encountered similar solutions at summer houses in the countryside. In many other cultures, however, the idea of a unisex bathroom with people sitting in the same room is unthinkable. In some countries, the younger generation may not be familiar with

Include basic information about hygiene in field conditions in the material going out to your players! Even those who think the information obvious will be calmed by knowing you are thinking about these matters too.

The pond right by Cinderhill provided nice scenery, playing opportunities and water for safety measures. Its negative sides included distressing amounts of mosquitoes and a bottom of razor-sharp rocks under the shallow water, making swimming practically impossible.

earth closets at all. Some players, regardless of origin, felt that this kind of authenticity was exaggerated; others praised the way the solution made the fictional world feel more real.

The importance of hand-washing in field conditions cannot be emphasised enough. It is the organisers' responsibility to ensure a supply of washing water, but it is the players' to wash their hands after each visit. This was emphasized in the information given to the players, and participating organisers tried to keep hygiene a culturally important matter within the game, too.

Water

The original idea was to dig actual wells in Cinderhill and close to the other camps. This did not come true because we could not find a partner in this field. The drilling of wells would also have required considerable amounts of money. The well water would then have had to be analyzed and stated drinkable before the game start. We ended up with a compromise: using a rubber made well sock and water tanks. The well sock is a product meant for storage of water that is used in wells that have dried temporarily. In Cinderhill, we dug as deep as we could, then built hills around the well's concrete shaft into which the sock was inserted.

Finding water tanks that were big enough also proved to be surprisingly difficult. Generally speaking, such things are available at Överskottbolaget (in Sweden) or other companies selling army surplus. Unfortunately we were not able to obtain camouflaged water containers for the camps, so we failed to create ingame-fitting source for water. White plastic water containers were placed at the border of the game area, close to the witches' and Dragontamers' camps. Here guaranteeing access to water was obviously more important than fulfilling the game vision.

Because there was pure tap water in the containers, examining its quality did not become necessary. It was enough that ensure that it kept a relatively cool temperature. With the consumption of water estimated for the game, there was no worry about the water going bad. On the contrary, because of the exceptionally hot summer, the players' water consumption was higher than estimated. The water tanks had to be filled during the game.

This need was fulfilled in a way successfully adapted to the ingame reality. The boot camp called the fire brigade to fill the well. At the same time the organisers in the Cinderhill led the villagers elsewhere to make a ritual: to

The Cinderhillian kitchen was based on a wide variety of vegetables, spices and fruits. Out of the game cultures only the dragontamers' diet included significant amount of meat.

pray to the dragon for more water. During the ritual the well became magically full.

Food Supply

The organisers are responsible of food and it's preservation until it is given to the players. In Dragonbane, where the meals were typically cooked by the players, this involved storing ingredients before and during the game. The environment authorities also had to pronounce the village bakery a place suitable for

As part of the project's last stretch, detailed cookbooks for each of the cultures were produced. The recipes were constructed around the ingredients made available to the players and many were used in the game.

food preparation. Combining the pseudo-mediaeval Cinderhillian culture with modern health and safety regulations proved quite challenging, and required several meetings with the relevant local officials.

An attempt was also made to pay attention to the allergies and to other special diets. The ingredients included products (like soybean derivatives) that secured versatile nourishment for vegetarians too. But clearly, in a larp that has communal living as one of its main themes, it is not possible to provide an individually customized diet for everybody. In the case of people on very specific diets, it is sometimes necessary to say that a game is not for them. The organiser must also accept as a fact rather than a failure that everything cannot be offered to everybody at all times.

Dragonbane promised enough food to all the players. Many of them did not believe that this would be sufficient, and wanted to bring their own food. On the NEST Forum, it was discussed what could be brought and what was not allowed. But during the game, especially the witches were surprised about the food supplies which were given to them. They felt the foods in conflict with the game world. For some reason, the ingame differences in culinary traditions, long known by the organisers, had not been conveyed to the players.

One reason for this was the delay of the promised recipe book resulting from the serious illness of the leader of the food team. No substitute could be found to take on all her responsibilities, but someone took on the recipe book in the summer of 2006. The

booklet was finished at the beginning of July. So why was it handed out to the players only on the last day before the game? No good explanation has been found. Timely publication of this material would have redeemed one more promise given to the player and enhance their trust in the organisation.

Safety

The players' safety was a primary consideration during the whole project. Safety and security risks had been assessed in careful collaboration between the organisers and the local authorities. Issues relating to the special effects and the dragon were obviously dealt with very thoroughly. However, the biggest actual risks were terrain fire (either natural or caused by fires and candles) and an epidemic of diarrhoea caused by neglected hygiene. Avoiding these required players as well as organisers to act responsibly.

All organisers and the local authorities were given maps with coordinates of the game area, to make it possible to direct the rescue authorities fast to the correct place, if necessary. Even though the cell phones were forbidden on the game site in principle, there was at least one organiser with a mobile phone in every camp. The people who played healers in Cinderhill all had real first aid skills, and one of them was a real-life medical doctor.

The organization and local officials held many meetings about permits and security measures. Safety instructions were communicated to the players through the player manuals and in information sessions on location before the start of the game.

Later feedback made clear that there was not enough information: not all players had understood the many ways in which the organizers were prepared for potential problems.

Dragonbane Financing

The most important financial aid was the Ministry of Education of Finland.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

It was obvious from the first, that Dragonbane would be a very expensive project. The original budget was over 680 000 euros. This budget was re-evaluated during the project, leading to a sum estimate of approximately 500 000 euros, which proved fairly accurate. The cost of work is not included since Dragonbane was made possible only through countless hours of volunteer labour, the financial value of which is impossible to calculate. The project bought services from professionals outside the project for approximately 20 000 euros.

The Dragon itself cost the project only the price of the logistics involved (~20 000 euros), as the production costs of the Dragon were sponsored in their entirety by a private company. On the other hand, the production of the Dragon did tie down a portion of the limited human resources of the project, affecting the overall outcome more than the financial considerations did.

As to expenses, the project did follow the estimated budget. But the income financing did not come through according to plan. No youth programmes, including the EU's, granted support for the project, and the support from the Swedish state was lower than expected. Thus the project's income consisted mostly of support from our partner companies. All the goals for partner support were met, and more – over half of the project costs were covered by partners. One must remember though, that such support does not mean cash. It has a calculable value, but is realised primarily as donations in material, labour, work space, and help, as well as discounts.

The dragon chassis originally aimed for was a Timberjack walking machine. That, however, was a prototype and far too experimental and valuable to be so heavily modified. After a thorough study of the alternatives, a sturdy Ponsse chassis was picked as the best option.

The length of the chassis selection process cut a half a year of the effective building time.

The final accounting showed a loss of approximately 100.000 euros. 40.000 euros of this is debt to various companies in Finland and in Sweden. This is mostly the expenses of several kinds of logistic services, of landscaping on the game site, and the maintenance costs of the boot camp school building. 60.000 euros of the debt is to individuals, and includes loans given during the project and expenses that were meant to be refunded. Approximately 20.000 euros worth of debt is to compensate individuals for damages to their possessions. The transportation needs of the project were vast and in the end nine cars were exhausted. The financial losses to the owners of the vehicles were considerable. Once the financial situation of the project was clarified, the vehicle owners agreed to wait for restitution until the project was solvent or able to raise cash specifically for the purpose.

One Dragonbane partner was the Finnish producer of traditional paints Uula-tuote. The project received significant discounts on paints, and the company made Cinderhill a presentational case.

The props team made many experiments with things like bee's wax to waterproof the wool of the tents.

Surprisingly, the best results were achieved with a glue from the company Kiilto. 30 kg of glue were used for waterproofing, which wouuld have been enough with moderate rain. Unluckily the first two days were raining cats and dogs.

The Flipside of the Euro

Tiinaliisa Multamäki, Chief Financial Officer of the project since 2005

I ended up working on Dragonbane after a becoming acquainted with the producer of the project in fall 2004. Personally I had only minimal experience of larps. I had tried a boffer sword once ten years before, and remembered seeing funnily dressed young role-players on the ferry to the Suomenlinna fortress outside Helsinki one summer. But as a youth work professional I found both the phenomenon and this project intriguing.

The project was in full steam already: marketing had begun, the game cultures and the basic plotlines were ready,

and negotiations about the game site and the core of the dragon were in progress. And we had a long list of partners collaborating with us. The project already had funding from the Finnish Ministry of Education and the Nordic Culture Foundation. A funding application had been sent to the EU Youth Programme, but the answer was – to the great disappointment of the organisers – negative. After the first enthusiasm had faded, the project now had no one in charge of funding applications. Thus I found my place in the project very quickly: I became a fundraiser.

Finding suitable sources for funds was a twofold task. On the internet, I investigated what kinds of activities foundations sponsored. I also tried to keep on top of what people within the

project were actually doing, to figure out whether these activities matched any areas the foundations would support. It soon became clear that this work should have started two years earlier. On the other hand we regrettably often found, that even that might not have helped. Dragonbane was such a pioneering project in so many fields of international youth work, that even the foundations specifically supporting pioneering projects did not have suitable application criteria for it. The foundations in the public sector were not ready for Dragonbane. And unfortunately Dragonbane was unprepared for this possibility.

For the project to be a complete success, it would have required (in addition to a few dozen more volunteer

The heart of Dragonbane beat in the basement of Timo's apartment in Kirkkonummi, Finland: four to six servers and ample reserves of othersupplies were stored here.

There has been some speculation as to whether it would have been possible to produce this game for less money. Would it been cheaper, and would more of the work had been complete by the game date, if the players had brought their own props? If the village had been built by a small group of professionals? My personal conviction is that while the total cost could have been reduced, the economic outcome would have been the same. The examples mentioned above would have cut the possibilities for financial support to a corresponding degree. Using different production methods would significantly have lowered the project's income.

A game like Dragonbane costs at least half a million euros. With more precise planning and more active fundraising accomplishing it with no financial losses may have been possible. Yet it is important to remember that Dragonbane was a volunteer project for and by young people. As such it was, financially speaking, an amazing accomplishment.

organisers) a greater amount of actual cash. Although the project did receive about 90 000 euros from various foundations, funds from the public sector were seriously lower than estimated. The lack of "hard currency" caused the project finances to end up with a negative prefix.

In early 2004, it started to become apparent that although international team members were clearly an asset, negotiating distance and cultural difference on the management level was both challenging and time-consuming. A year later, the organization chart showed mostly Finnish and Swedish names, a sacrifice of ideology on the altar of practicality.

"Make a revolution" – Challenges of Public Funding

The financial basis of a project must be planned in parallel with the project itself. The funding criteria of the various youth and culture foundations are worth checking out in advance, only then to consider in which ways one's project is a fit. Most foundations only accept applications once or twice a year. Since one often has to apply before the beginning of the project itself, time for the application processes will also have to be factored in. Applying for funds, monitoring their use and writing final reports to the funding bodies require human resources.

Just making a larp does as such usually not fill the funding criteria of most foundations. They are interested instead in how the game will be organised. Workshops and different kinds of group meetings for players or organisers, if planned ahead, do in most cases fit the funds' criteria for youth work. A big project needs to be sliced into smaller ones and with separate funding applications for each. When applying for funds it is important to remember that it is not realistic to expecting full funding. The public sector always requires some funding of your own, but in many cases volunteer working bees can be counted as such.

The Dragonbane project applied for funds from 15 foundations and public sector funding organisations. In addition several applications for specific materials were made to business partners. About one third of the applications were approved, and the resulting sums were consistently lower than what had been applied for.

First scouting trip to the Soomaa area. The environment would have been good for the game, but building there proved too complicated.

One of the biggest obstacles on the path to public funding was the length of the project. Most of the foundations supporting youth work do not support projects lasting more than one year. Neither do the foundations necessarily support smaller sections of a bigger project.

Estimating and, when required, verifying the number of participants is challenging in a long project like this. As in any volunteer project, organisers came and left. And since the web tool NEST was developed in the last phase of the project, its otherwise useful statistics never reflected all participating personnel.

Even organisations ostensibly supporting new ways of youth collaboration are very organisation-centred. The financial support systems will assume that all activities are organised within existing, formalised networks. But many European countries do not even have role-playing clubs, let alone a nationwide central association. One goal for Dragonbane was to find role-playing organisations in the different countries and initiate co-operation between them. Yet the project could not be built only on organisational co-operation. To implement the game vision enthusiastic individuals were wanted and needed in each country.

The regulations for international co-operation are extremely strict. For example the youth programme of the European Union (2000-2006) supposed the international network to have at least four young people from each participant country in the project. Over the three years of the project, we had over 500 persons from 20 different countries with us. But they were not divided evenly; from many countries we had only one or two people participating. For instance having one Israeli involved in game design and another volunteering at the building camp is an amazing achievement for a northern European role playing event – especially considering the political situation in the world. But by most funding standards, these two did not count.

The most important public source of funding became the Finnish Ministry of Education. The leading civil servants of the youth department in the ministry told us that each generation makes a revolution of its own, and that the task of the youth department is to support it. Dragonbane was certainly a kind of a revolution within the role playing world. Without the support from the Ministry of Education it would not have come to pass.

Timo Multamäki's Guide to Corporate Partnerships in Larp

To get corporate partners for your game all of the following conditions must be fulfilled:

- You must know what you want. "Give me something" never yields anything.

- You must contact the correct level of management. It makes no sense to ask a janitor for donations, but the CEO of a stock-listed company is equally unsuitable to deal with small requests. Identifying whom to turn to takes some practice.

- You have to understand that there are masses of similar people requesting things. To get attention, let alone sponsorship, you need to be unique. A project which is similar to some other older project is harder to market than a project which is unique in all aspects.

- When preparing for a meeting, find the keywords that work for your target group.

Partner Income

Producing Dragonbane would have been impossible without good partner financing. The project was able to secure these partners thanks to Timo Multamäki's vast contact network and his negotiating skill, enabling him to convince a wide range of companies to join us in this youth project. Additional partners were acquired during the entire project. Many production processes were only launched after a suitable partner had been found, negotiations finished and contract signed. In some cases, this required one phone call, in others, a process of several months.

Partner financing was such a central part of the way Dragonbane was run, that in many cases nobody stopped to compare the value of the sponsorship to the

time and effort required to secure it. In retrospect it is clear that more planning would have made this financing strategy more cost-efficient.

Partner financing is always a contract between two parties. The applicant has to be attentive to and respectful of what the sponsor wants in return for his investment. Dragonbane was not able to promise anything apart from a mention of the sponsor's name, in the case of key sponsors also logos, on the project's website. Some of the sponsors did not want a mention at all, a request which was naturally also respected.

Relying on partner financing for a new project is unwise, unless you already have a strong network of contacts. This said, within your role-playing organisation you might have a better network than you expect – family members, friends' parents, work connections… Make sure to retain good relations to all such potential collaborators.

Over 200 partners were involved in the Dragonbane project – a milestone in corporate larp sponsorship. The received support was of four kinds: material donations, loans, discounts and cash.

Material Donations and Loans

It is fairly easy to get material donations, as long as you know what you need and are prepared to be a little flexible in your requirements. Many materials the project could use and acquired had no value for the donating companies, for example because they had broken packages, or were otherwise to be thrown out. Individuals and communities also contributed material donations. Most of the old tools and utility items in the village were gifts.

Some of the most important loans included the military tents loaned by the city of Espoo, and printers lent to us by Hewlett-Packard. We also got software licenses on loan, for example for making the costume patterns. In a complex long-term project it is important

to have someone keeping track of what is on loan from where and when it is to be returned. It is also good to have a written contract for all loans.

Working with material donation as a primary resource requires great creativity and compromises from the organisers. The plans for Dragonbane contained many items marked "if it can be obtained for free". Many of those things were not. On the other hand, many fun if technically unnecessary details came true because such support was available.

Discounts and Monetary Support

The discounts received varied from a few percent to several dozen. Even the smallest discount means you need less actual money. For instance, the Älvdalen grocery store gave the project a 7% discount on food supplies. That may sound pretty low, but given the amount of food required for the building camps, that worked out to over 3000 euros worth.

The partners, their products and the negotiated discounts affected how the project came together. For example, deciding on a roofing material for the Cinderhill long-houses involved a long process of googling, emails and phone calls between potential partners,

Guide to Corporate Partnerships (cont'd)

The majority of Dragonbane's income came through varying partnership channels. In our experience, partnership deals were almost as easy to strike in Sweden, Denmark or Germany as they were in Finland. Yet the concept of corporate sponsorship of larps is quite uncommon in for instance in Sweden.

Partnerships, be it with corporations, governmental or academic institutions, can yield positive results. But each of these groups typically requires a different person or persons to run the collaboration, since each require a different skill set, background and way of communication.

set designers, producers and the building camp leader. This also meant a lot of negotiations and re-planning. The original vision was to use bricks to cover the roofs. As these proved too difficult and expensive to obtain, it was decided they should be used on the temple roof only. The other buildings then needed alternative roofing, of a kind that would fit the tight budget and building schedule. The final piece in the puzzle was Trelleborg's offer of green roof felt. A collaboration with Trelleborg also solved the village water problem, as the company had a suitable product for storing water.

We got direct monetary sponsorship from three companies. One of these directed the support to environmental care and planning. The others did not earmark their funds.

Budget and Accounting

The budget for the project has to be made simultaneously with the project plans. When you finalize the grand design, remember that everything has a cost in time and effort if not in money. Every decision you make will affect project finances.

Expenses

You will need to be realistic and specific when considering solutions for different elements of your project. Food expenses vary hugely between, say, an educational event at a conference centre, and a larp in a camp where people prepare it themselves. Estimating costs involves establishing operational principles: will you pay "fuel expenses" or "mileage allowance"? Are you paying for food directly or covering expenses? Budget all expenses at the nominal value, not the discounted price; this will enable you to count the discounts as income from sponsorship and help you secure public funding. The value of the work, even when ultimately covered by volunteers, is also an expense to be factored in. If you

process. If a form asks how much the food supplies represent out of the budget total, it is also good to include a breakdown of what the estimation is based on. This can be quite simple: "Reserved €7 per person per day for food supplies. €7 x estimated amount of partaker x duration = estimated expense €".

In a long-term project you should be prepared for all consumer prices rising because of inflation and market fluctuations. One of the most significant changes during the Dragonbane project was the 25% rise in timber prices. Fuel expenses and the cost of food also rose during the project. This further increases the importance of general cost awareness and of centralizing purchases, as well as comparing prices between different manufacturers and retailers.

are paying salaries, remember to include the fees and taxes required by the state.

In a publicly funded project the budget has to be made in accordance with the requirements of your sponsors. Study the applications of the different funds early in the

Computer geek and music meeting at Kirkkonummi on Autumn of 2004

Expences =	Product A, total value	
Partner income =		Discount n %
Other income =	Needed/ used € !	

You can save a tremendous amount of money on phone bills, if you spend a little time on finding out which is the cheapest method for communication. To use at the building camps in Sweden, the project bought pre-paid mobile phone subscriptions, which allowed free phone calls between same operator. This simplified communication between the building site and the boot camp, and since they were pre-paid, there were no phone bills with nasty surprises. The solution also made it cheaper for the foreign volunteers to receive phone calls in Sweden.

The internet telephone system Skype was found to be a practical and inexpensive way to keep in touch across borders. Buying good headphones for the essential project members was far cheaper than paying cell phone expenses.

The largest single partner in dragon building was Festo, who provided all the necessary pneumatic cylinders and valves.

Income

"Anyone can create expenses, but creating income requires skill."

The income of a project is likely to consist of the following: cash from public funds and participant fees, investments by the organisers, discounts, donations, and volunteer work. It is very important to study the projected expenses and differentiate them into items you have to pay for with cash and items that can be covered by donations or volunteer work. This will help determine a number for the actual cash you will need to raise.

While considering how much can be covered by public funding, check whether the fund in question has defined a maximum amount for grants. Many of them only cover costs up to a certain percentage of the total project cost. Remember the sponsors usually grant less than you apply for. It is better to estimate the total value of the donations, discounts and volunteer work too low, than the public funding too high. Do not exaggerate the amount of participants in your application.

If you find that making the project come true is dependent on receiving all the funds you have applied for, it is time to rethink the expenses. Remember that the

organiser will be responsible for unforeseen expenses too, like things breaking down. Reserve an economic buffer for such items, and look into the possibility of using insurance to protect yourself against some or all of that risk.

Book-keeping

"If there is no receipt, the transaction never happened"

Book-keeping must meet with the specifications of the public sector sponsors. Some of these require duplicates of all accounting records. None of them accept alcohol or tobacco products in their projects – make sure such things do not show on the receipt.

If the applications for funds and the book-keeping are done by more than one person, it is important to pay attention to frequent communication between everyone to meet the requirements of the sponsors. To keep track of the expenses it is essential to mark on each receipt what purpose it was for. Everyone with the permit to make transactions for the project has to know how the marking is to be done. For this a clear written guide should be provided. There is no point doing the book-keeping by pen and paper. Good computer programs can be found for this purpose. If you scan all your receipts and use a networked revision management software you enable several people to keep track of things.

Remember that every donation has an economic value. If partner support is part of the project's financial model, such discounts and donations need to be documented. A discount does not lower the book-keeping value of a product. In order for it to be budgeted as income, the full value of the product and the value of the discount must be noted separately.

Financial Management

A larp project on a national scale can be organised without a proper, registered association, but having one makes financing considerably easier. Many of the funds are reserved for registered youth and/ or culture associations (or other types of non profit organisations).

It's highly recommended to establish the organisation well before the beginning of the project, as many of the funding sources will check the history of the association. No history can lead to the application being denied outright, and typically means that you will receive less.

For international project of Dragonbane's scale, it was practical to have two associations, one

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Golden Rules of Project Accounting:

- Every idea costs money – or time, which is worth money.

- Applying for financial support and accounting requires human resources.

- Summarise all expenses hard to find a sponsor for early on and prioritise raising cash to cover those.

- Be prepared for prices to rise.

- In a big project, small costs like paper clips can cumulate into vast sums.

- Save all receipts. Duplicating receipts is vital in a long project, both for book keeping and to make sure you can use the guarantees for tools and other expensive products. Ideally, receipts should be scanned so backups can be kept at another location.

- Avoid using cash; when you do, make sure you get a receipt for the transaction

In a Nutshell: Choose your aim well and overestimate the time it needs to do things! If time allows, you can do more, and surprise people positively instead of generating disappointment about things that were never finished.

in Finland where most of the partners and the project organisation could primarily be found, and one in Sweden where the game was staged. The Role and Strategy Game Association of Southern Finland (Etelä-Suomen Rooli- & Strategiapeli yhdistys r.y. – ESRSPY) was the Finnish link, while the Nordic Association of Participative Arts (NAoPA) was established just for Dragonbane in Sweden.

A big project should have a bank account with user rights for a few select people. Modern internet banking allows for several people to view account information in real time. At least the project accountant, the producer and the main organiser should have access to all account information. It is also good to compare banks before choosing, as all banks are not equal when it comes to expenses. You will probably need a debit card: paying by card is also better than cash since every transaction will leave a paper trail.

At the beginning of the Dragonbane project the game fees were collected through a private firm, Redbet. This was supposed to be the cheapest and easiest way to handle international transactions. Unfortunately the co-operation with Redbet turned to be troublesome due their technology solutions. When the game was postponed for a year the agreement with Redbet was terminated.

Although the project operated mainly inside the European Union, the different currencies caused some minor problems. Because the euro is not in use in Sweden, there is a charge for transactions between Sweden and other European countries. We knew that a majority of the players would come from Sweden, so we decided to open a parallel bank account in Sweden. This meant more accounting work, but was the cheapest way to handle the issue.

If the game would be made today, choosing a payment solution would be far easier due to breakthroughs in Paypal technology (and other similar payment solutions). Regardless of how you plan your project, you should always keep in mind that banking fees and fund transfers will involve surprisingly high expenses.

Conclusions - what did we learn?

"If I were to make this event again, I'd definitely think twice making the game into another country I live in. That is because of the sheer trouble and costs of the logistics" -Timo Multamäki, Executive Producer

Lessons In Project Management

It was inevitable that a project of this magnitude of vision would encounter some problems. In retrospect it is clear the expectations were too high, that there was too much work for too few people.

When considering the project as a whole, it becomes clear it actually contained several individual but overlapping projects. Each of those (making the dragon, building the medieval village, making the props, designing the game, producing the event) would have needed separate schedules and separated teams. Now the same people in the core team shared all the responsibility, and all the pressure. The fact that overlapping projects were run simultaneously by overlapping resources caused the project to have too small a margin for errors and setbacks.

Cleaning of the game location took four days. Luckily not all left right after the game, but tired game crew got some voluntary help.

Project Management

A project secretary is a person responsible for arranging internal communication and keeping track of all project information. A big project with participants scattered around the world must not guard its secrets too jealously! Everyone benefits from being able to follow the progress of different project areas.

Assign someone to be responsible for communications from the very beginning. Get this person access to everything and keep an updated database with all information. In a small project this can be a ring binder, in a larger one you might want to invest in software, or choose from free online solutions like Google spreadsheets.

If the group is too large or dispersed to meet in person, maintaining a sense of community online becomes especially important for

To have a strong vision is useful, but the ability to scale it down to the available time and resources is absolutely necessary. Plans must leave space for accidents and failures: some things will need to be done twice. A detailed and well-considered project plan is a great tool, but it cannot compensate for a lack in human resources, and the longer a project is, the higher staff turnaround will be – especially if your project is staffed by unpaid volunteers. A good, strong hierarchy in the organisation is also a necessity. Management styles differ in different countries and sectors, but regardless of which one you subscribe to, everyone will need to know in which direction the project is going and who is responsible for what.

"So, what have we learned? That having a few dedicated souls carrying out the work according to a plan is the way to achieve great things. If all the people repeating "it can't be done" during the project had spent the same energy on helping out, the whole project could have been much better still. Scepticism and fear of failure have the strength to slow down the ambitions of the many, and to quench the biggest dreams." -Niki Bergman, public relations

"The problem with volunteer work is continuity. Very few will stay doing something for a long time without compensation, unless the thing in some reason is extremely interesting or offer some kind of a meaning. If a volunteer, for whatever reason quits his/her work, there should instantly be someone to be able to carry on with the work. If such a person does not exist, the amount of work suddenly cumulates on the rest of the volunteers when you have to do the work and train the new arrivals at the same time." -Janne Särkelä, Finnish sound designer

CONCLUSIONS

Lessons In Coaching and Writing

Ferrous & Trina

"Some 3 weeks before the game I was told that I am heading to total disaster or to the most awesome game arranged in Nordic ever. This was told to me by the fabric shop clerk after I had told her that I need fabric for larp called Dragonbane. It appeared that this girl was actually rather experienced player and had been playing larps Timo had arranged previously. We had long discussion about larp games but she told me that as a newbie I should follow only one rule: "What ever happens, don't forget to play your own game".

I didn't have any plots because I wasn't given any. Maybe it had something to do with this "immersion" they where talking about. My occupation was to make paper. I just didn't have any idea how to do paper, because there where no time for workshops. I was feeling like being extra in Hollywood film. I'm here only because village wouldn't look like village without villagers. Only that I'm stupid enough to pay to be treated like this. I was getting angry. Probably there was some bunch of experienced players that had everything ready for tomorrow, plots laid out nicely and just waiting to execute them. This was game for them. Not for me.

Then it came to me. What it really means to play your own game. If you don't have any game plan, make one. Don't worry if you are bending rules or making small holes to consistency of the game world. Don't care about big storyline or plots. Just make yours.

My biggest turn on was to plan my characters story day-by-day in my head and hope that it would fit to the world that surrounded me. I didn't care about staying completely in the character all the time.

work efficiency. When a new person joins the project, the project secretary should make a short introduction of the person available to the entire team – and descriptions of the team available to the new arrival. Such descriptions should include name, tasks, position within the project hierarchy and contact information. Should any of these change, an update is required. If the project uses a mailing list as its central communication tool, this could be an appropriate place for the general introduction, but it is practical to also keep a simple web page with all this information up-to-date. A web page documenting all central decisions with a short explanation of the reasoning behind them will also save time in getting new collaborators up to speed.

I cared about the scenes I had created for my character story to complete. Someone could have even catch me mumbling my next replicas for scene I was about to enter. I was making little stories that joined the stories of someone else and that idea made me feel very good. Role-playing was about to give others good game experience as much as getting one for yourself.

After Dragonbane I agree with the girl who sold me the fabric for my costumes. Role-playing is not about fancy outfits or spectacular special effects or truck sized dragon that arrives a bit late. It's about stories we make together. And in Dragonbane there where so many of them. " - Ferrous, a Cinderhill player from Finland

"I was Ferrous's coach, and like many others, swamped in "more important" issues. If I had had the time, I would have made marvellous small-scale plots for him and all the other characters! As a matter of fact, I did involve him in various social loops, but I just think none of those were actually implemented in the game… Mostly because of the planned workshop and socializing day never happened.

I feel also bad about the paper-making hut lacked. That was also something I had everything to do with. I made interior setting plans, listed necessary items needed and also wrote a manual in paper making, written especially for the Cinderhill culture (you should be able to find that in the manual), with paper-making instructions also written as an easily-remembered song!

All this was cut away when compromises had to be done for the game to survive at all. And as he was a beginner player I was not sure about involving him in the big scale plots, so it was good that he was able to choose himself whether to engage in it or not. I am so proud of him how he did manage to "play his own game"! I have heard so many tales about his character bringing great spice to many situations. Ferrous, you are right: a larp is about making experiences to others, as much as to yourself".

–Tiina "Trina" Kuustie, a coach and a Cinderhill culture creator

GETTING READY FOR THE DRAGON DANCE

BY KIPPO 2006

Having the technology for something does not automatically mean people will use it. Not many of the Dragonbane coaches realized how much NEST could actually be used for. The system has plot development and cross-reference tools that would, with consistent use, enable coherent large-scale games.

The overall experiences of character development through coaching were positive. The hardest part was getting people (players as well as some coaches) to do the actual writing. Life, of course, has the tendency to distract from one's hobbies, but above all people who are not used to creative writing tend to make a big deal out of it, and wait for "the right mindset" instead of just writing something to start with and developing it gradually. In cases where writing tasks are distributed to a large pool of participants, it is very important to find methods of encouragement to deal with the keyboard shy.

Issues also arose with some of the coaches who lacked the energy to keep in touch with the players on a regular basis. This, too, is a side effect of virtual communication – writing an email or updating a character profile is easier to blow off than a real-world meeting.

Misunderstandings were generated when coach and player did not share their first language or cultural references. Although facilitating such meetings was one of the project's goals, no strategies were in place to help role-players with different backgrounds communicate. In future international projects, role-players with professional experience in intra-cultural communication could make the hobby a great favour by teaching

strategies used in these areas in other fields.

Also, with life intruding, there were some changes in the ranks of coaches, which resulted the new coaches coming in cold, often without a good handover, struggling to figure out what the previous coach had already completed. This problem has received a lot of attention after the game, but was not as wide-spread as the talk has let on. The majority of the coaches did a marvellous job, achieving good rapport with their players.

One real issue was the fact that coaches did not have a strong coherence in their work. For instance, the Cinderhill manual specified that only a small minority of the villagers had been born outside the village. When many players, independently of each other, wrote such a background for their own characters, coaches should have communicated and then interfered to upkeep the game world's internal logic. In their defence, absolute consistency in background info was never considered a top priority in this project, since most character interaction was to centre on the here-and-now. Still, a few rules on what and at which points in character development to cross-reference would be useful in the design of most larps. Emphasis should be placed on character detail that represents exception from a norm.

Most players need plot – pre-rigged ambitions, interests and conflicts – to guarantee a good gaming experience. Good writing can compensate for the weak initiative of the passive player. A character coach, like any other game designer, needs a good feel for the game as a whole to be able to work with plot construction and to prioritise in the background

materials to be given to the character. Writing more pages is not always a solution since most players will not have the time or inclination to read and comprehend it all. A full knowledge of a fictional world can only be relied on if the players are already familiar with the material from a book or TV series.

Costumes & Props - Vision vs. Realism

As a method to make costumes and props, workshops are a well-functioning model. They do require co-ordination and funds, if the organisers pay for materials, travel or food. Without the volunteer work bees most of the props would not have been made. People working alone at a distance from each other are not as productive as when they work together, working bees are the best way to make the team gel together and to create a feel of a community. Patient teaching of craft methods gives participating youths a sense of belonging and purpose. Many left the bees with boosted self-esteem – youth work in its purest form.

It is good for a game to have a coherent vision for how everything should look, but the dream should also be possible to make true with a bit more trust in the players. Dragonbane players were expected to appear in costumes of a very high standard and visual consistency, but since the same level of detail did not apply to every aspect of the game, less could have been enough. Authenticity would not have suffered if players had used rubber boots or some garments from previous games, if

As a rule of thumb, the more new and groundbreaking the setting, the more support for the imagination and aids for memory the material must include. A video trailer or other visual materials can aid communication.

This picture and many of the other excellent pictures were printed as posters by HP Printers. These posters have been since used as art exhibition, shown in galleries and conventions

instructions had been issued on how to adjust such items to fit the expected minimum standard of the game. Players can deal with common sense advice like "rubber soles are OK if they are black, brown or beige, but keep bright colours hidden, since red soles are visible from miles away."

"Mistakes were made, and I think the main one was not trusting that the players could fix things for themselves, less promises would have made a better game.

Had we been told to bring tents, cooking gear, food and taming tools the game would have been better. There were few who couldn't bring tents for example, no problem, then only a few tents would have had to be made = less work for the organisers.

I asked about making taming tools and was told to go to Finland or southern Sweden for a workshop... I would have been able to make them at home if that had been cleared beforehand..But *No* was the general answer to any Idea, everything had to be specially made for DB, that was the big problem, and you were not allowed to make anything by yourself without an organiser or a workshop " -Fundin, a Dragontamer player from Sweden

Casting and Troubles of International Larp Cultures

People of different cultures have different assumptions. If you give approximate descriptions, everyone will fill in the missing info from their own experience. This can range from the every-day to the highly technical. Most Finnish people, for instance, will have been taught to put sawdust in the pit after a visit to the outhouse, and to wash their hands afterwards. In countries that urbanised earlier, this is in no way obvious. The same goes for camping, fire-safety, local insects, etc. To avoid problems, detailed information must be prepared early – discuss the text with foreign players to make sure they understand it correctly. Include data about living conditions (housing, weather, bedding, toilets), hygiene (contact lenses, showers, menstruation, diseases),

safety rules and rescue plan (what to do in case of fire, accident, or if someone is lost). The more pages you have, the more important it is to have the main parts translated into the player's first language, or to publish the final version of the manual months before the event.

The descriptions of each DB faction could have been more exact, to help the players understand what they were signing up for when choosing between the different factions. Details on living conditions and the activity levels expected from the players relative to their characters' living environment would have helped the players get into the right mindset. They would have been better prepared and able to act on their own well-being on the game site, instead of waiting for the organisers to fix a leaking roof.

Even when practical issues have been clarified, the problem of assumptions related to game design and playing remains. Some players will see the story of the game as a riddle to be solved with the help of "clues" in the world material, others be entirely focused on experiencing a fictional environment with all their senses or on losing their every-day cares in the problems and priorities of their fictional persona. Problem-solver gamers can be easily bored, and see story-telling by the fire as a waste of time, while another kind of player may feel that moment is the best in the game. Both might view the other player's choices bad and implausible playing. Larp organisers should always address issues of tone, genre and playing style beforehand, and when the players have very different backgrounds, this should be done at some length – with workshops

and mini games to find common ground before the event, if at all practicable.

Live role-playing always demands initiative and motivation from its players, but all kinds of people sign up for all kinds of reasons – and some of them will not be willing or able to participate fully, enjoy the game, or do what they have promised to. With infinite resources, it would probably be possible to weed out the bad seeds through psychological testing or in-depth interviews. In the real world, however, we need to rely on available resources, face-to-face meetings when possible, and construct both games and projects to be able to withstand a certain degree of interference from substandard players and organisers.

"Maybe you guys could have eased your burden by stating early on that the plot lines for Witches would be suffering. Telling us this a month in advance (or even more) and we would have know where we were getting ourselves into. We could have also helped you make some of the props!"
-Ferdawoon, a Witch player from Sweden

Criticism and Documentation

When the last participant leaves, the organisers are left in ruins: sometimes personally and financially, always in the physical, textual and critical debris of their original vision and the game that resulted. Few games are complete successes in every way. But what most players ultimately care most

about is their personal experience of the over-all game narrative. Yet that is exactly the element of the game which in most difficult to lock down, let alone document. Dragonbane is a case in point. Regardless of its unique features, and the fact that a great part of the participants had a great time, it is widely considered to have been a failure.

Few larpmakers even attempt documentation of their games. While keeping tabs on the production process is possible, and potentially quite useful as a reference in preparation for other larp projects, the text of the game itself remains elusive. Arguably "the game" is the combination of all subjective player experiences during it – but those cannot be documented until after the fact, once the game has stopped and the player steps back from his character.

For the sake of convenience, "a game" is often talked about as an independently existing artwork, like "a movie" or "a novel". But if a larp is like a novel, it is a novel in which each reader reads different pages, in which the author does not know what the characters will do, and which dissolves the second its writing is completed. Perhaps it would not be possible or even meaningful to try to lock down the experience of reading/writing a novel like that,

but for the sake of understanding and developing our fledgling art form, the role-playing community should at least try.

The Dragonbane team was well aware of this need, and also had practical reasons to attempt experimental methods of documentation, since a record of the game would be useful in communication with sponsors and partners after the event. During the game, a crew of photographers were working the area. They were in camouflage, and moved discreetly, but in the stillness of the forest they were inevitably a distraction. The amount and quality of the resulting material is probably unique in the role-playing world. The pictures also look better, more like the fiction, than do photos of larps with a lot of symbolic scenography and props. But the question of where the events of game really unfold still remains: in the players' minds or at the physical location? In other words, it possible to

photograph a larp fiction? In the players' minds during and memories after the game, many small details that might seem distracting in the pictures have been edited to fit the game world perfectly. But if the organisers had completely succeeded in creating a 360° illusion, perhaps the photos would be a perfect window into a world of fantasy.

Quite apart from the difficulty in determining the text, larpmakers typically have little time, energy or money left for documentation after an ambitious event. Players, a potentially enormous resource in documentation, are difficult to re-involve after they have left the game area. And catching them at the end of the game has its own problems. In the subliminal space between fiction and fact, players are typically busy either enjoying the lingering atmosphere of the fiction, or turning their fragmented game experience into a

containable narrative but telling other players about their own game.

This need is well-known but not very well understood: perhaps it serves some purpose in reconstructing the player's private identity after a bout in a fictional role. But as all role-players know, listening to the subjective stories of other players is in fact almost never helpful or particularly interesting. One may want to hear some technical plot point to satisfy one's curiosity, but intense scenes, meaningful though they were to the players involved, seldom translate into captivating stories.

For this reason, conversation almost invariably immediately turns to the players' critical impressions. Did the physical reality of the game conform to expectations? Were the players satisfyingly surprised by events as they unfolded? Did the atmosphere that emerged support the personal narrative of the player?

Players can usually tell even as the game unfolds whether it is more or less than they hoped for. But that is only their personal game-narrative. To some degree, perhaps because of the collective nature of the form, most players will also try to construct an idea of whether the game as a whole has been "good", by combining their own opinions with those of others.

One of the issues left unresolved was the clearing out of building waste – vast amounts of wood.

Much of this was used as firewood in the game, but even today good timber in many forms remains in Cinderhill, waiting for future upgrades and events.

This is why larpers – including many Dragonbane players – will often say that the game was not very good, but that they personally had one of the best experiences of their lives. The community has not developed any terminology or measurements to decide whether such a game is then a success or a failure.

Some players hated the game, others loved it, and none of them can be objectively wrong. The irreconcilable nature of their in-character and game-participation narratives makes the game appear flawed in its design, and to the degree that expectation and experience did not meet, it obviously was. So why attempt documentation, and what should be included? Dragonbane will never be organised again – and it would only be partially possible.

For instance, all the Dragonbane character descriptions exist in the NEST database. But they were created by and for specific players, since that was understood to serve the purposes of the game; if another player were later to interpret characters written for somebody else it would result in a different kind of larp experience. Ultimately, the reason for documenting the larps of today is not to enable new productions of the same game. It is to ensure that the global larp community is left with at least some material traces of games that will affect how we thing about role-playing in the future.

The ironic thing is, that many of the organisational failures of Dragonbane could have been avoided, if larpmakers were better at documenting practical procedures and learning from experience. And the tragic thing is, that because of how the game has been publicly dismissed, its many successes risk being lost to the tradition.

All That Remains

The night rituals of Cinderhill gathered all of the Cinderhillians to worship the Dragon.

What exists of Dragonbane today?

A village in Älvdalen, an almost functional dragon, a big batch of news clippings, over 4000 photos, ten hours of video, over 2000 props, 12 GB of text, data and other material. A school in Åsen – the Boot Camp – that some dream of converting into a national centre for excellence in role-playing. €85000 debt, of which €70000 are to Timo Multamäki or his company. The fast-fading memories, experiences and insights of over three hundred players, who also have, somewhere, costumes and equipment of which some may find new use in other larps later on. A digital trace of discussion and criticism in role-playing forums on the internet, which will survive for a long time, but not indefinitely.

"After all this time, all the memories about some problems that we had are all fading, and what remains is the memory of The Fantasy that we lived in. And that is one unforgettable memory! I really miss the village of Cinderhill, full of life, all the people of the village and all the organisers that I met during those 3 years before the game. I cannot ever forget the beautiful summer nights when I walked in the village, sounds of laughter and singing came from the longhouses and all those moments when we all made food together or smoked pipes or had long disputations... Just living in those conditions, without modern technology or

luxury, just hearing, seeing, feeling and smelling the great nature that was around us was very healing and relaxing experience. Some of the strongest memories from Dragonbane are also the appearance of the dragon, great special effects, voices, dancing and singing in front of the dragon and the dragon itself. You could really feel the horror and the love for the awaited god that was among us when ey was there. So I didn't think for a second that the dragon was a failure in any way. Nor was the event, 'cause it gave me something to remember for the rest of my life. I want to thank each and everyone who made it possible". -Pallokala, a Cinderhill player and an organiser from Finland.

The story dissolves and the memories of lived experiences fade, but a legacy remains. This document is one way to pass on knowledge gained from the project. The accompanying DVD contains material ranging from character reports to costume patterns, which game designers and players may benefit from in the future.

"Well, I was there as a player. My experience was appalling for a great while, mildly satisfying for the last few days and, at moments, absolutely amazing. I do understand those who felt cheated of their investments of time and effort. My whole faction was cold and wet and miserable for reasons that could have been avoided and that is a real cause for complaint.

Somewhere in the middle of a forest near Åsen, a pseudo-historical village lies abandoned. The land owner has agreed to give the rights to use the area to anyone willing to upkeep the buildings and keep the village active. So far no-one has showed almost any interest. The Dragonbane organization does not wish to see the village left to decay, but does not at this point have any resources to keep it running.

But the majority were none of those things. I suspect that the dismissal of the game ultimately stems from the inability of the player collective to organise strongly differing narratives into a coherent whole. I suspect the players who really enjoyed the game did not want to risk compromising their experience by confronting the negative voices. After the game, they preferred to talk to players who shared their own views, and although they posted positively on the game's web forums after the event, they largely refrained from entering into arguments with the most critical voices. " -Johanna Koljonen, witch player

What should be retained from Dragonbane? We can only answer to what impressed us. The focus on the body, the solidity of the fiction, the huge potential of both simple and complex special effects to create atmosphere and realise the supernatural. The fact that large-scale fantasy larps for grown-ups can work. Family larping. The enormous impact of centralised visual design on the game design as a whole. The challenges of gaming with players from differing cultures. The charm of feeling an absolute trust for co-players from all over Europe. And at last, at least: that it is possible for a bunch of dedicated enthusiasts to build a dragon. Red very nearly worked, and it still exists. Even if it never used in a game again, it stands as a symbol for the dreams that we reach for.

"- - - I'd have more stories to tell from organising this game but so have all the others. Here are the adventures of our brave dragon and the team who was making it move with their own will. I want to thank you all for the working and talking with me all this summer. Special thanks to Heiko for teaching us all, to Epa and Henkka for putting all their time to this, to David and Mauge for great work on many areas, to my brother and dad for the welding help, to Essi and Fredrik for taking care of the head, to Pauli for being a multitalented programmer, to Timo and Tinsku for making this all possible, to the Priuska transporters and Finnlink staff for their extraordinary patience, to all of our partners that did all they could to help us and especially to both Vesas for not giving up when it seemed to be the most obvious thing to do." - 'Just a flesh wound', Dragonbane Diary by Sanni Turunen

J. Björklund photography

 With the village of Cinderhill closed for the winter, the project progressed on other fronts. Film shoots, character writing, prop building and other activities kept everyone busy.

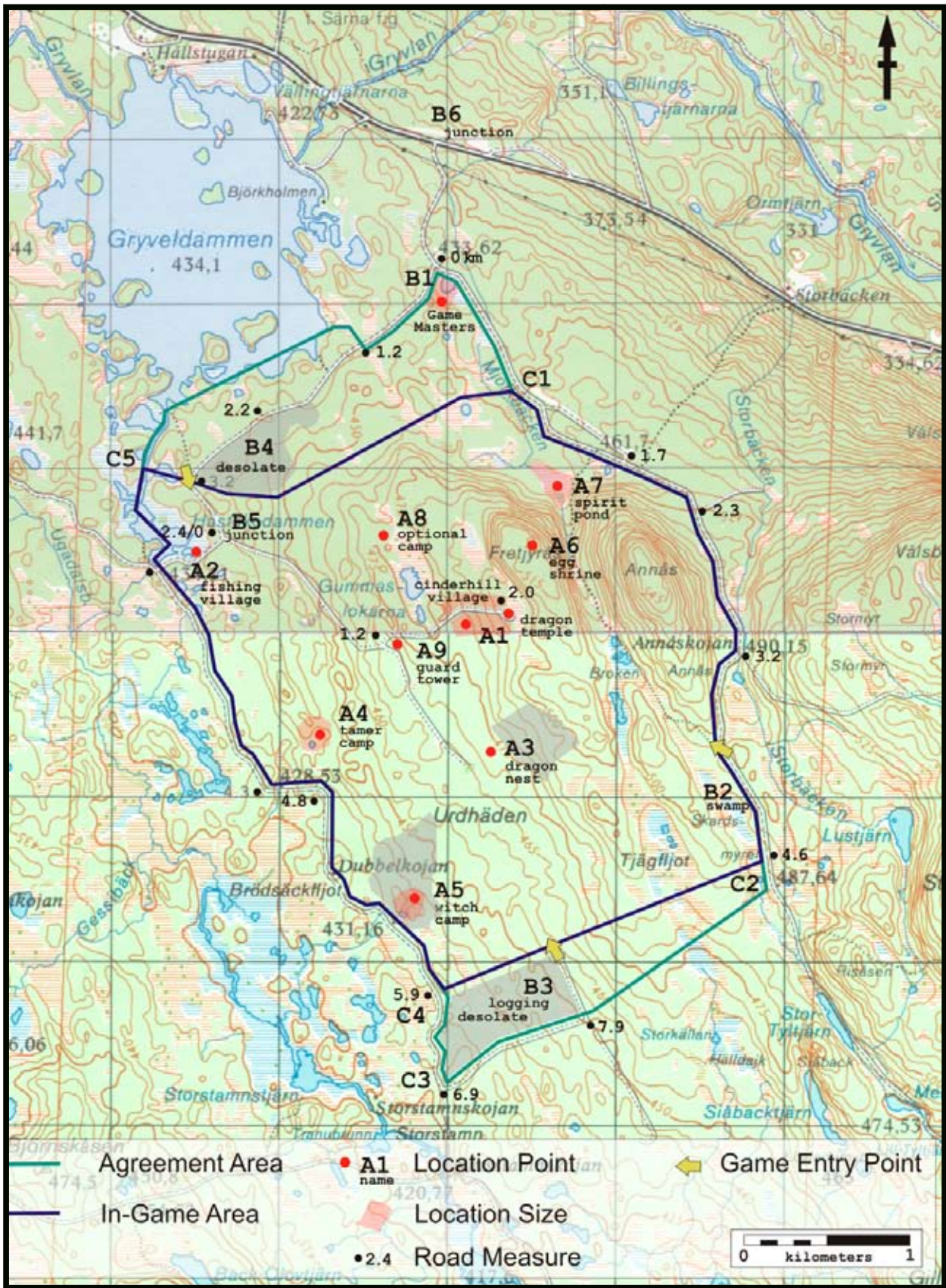Today, Cinderhill is still closed during winter time.

The dragontamer video was also intended to teach the tamers duelling culture. It took root, and the players eagerly adopted the fighting style shown.

J. Björklund photography

Dragonbane took place in Älvdalen, Sweden, after four years of hard work. The project would not have been successfull without our 200 partners and hundreds of volunteer workers.

Thank You!

Älvdalen
July 27th –
August 4th 2006

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