

# As Larp Grows Up

*- Theory and Methods in Larp*

**Knudepunkt 2003**







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# Foreword

This year marks the seventh holding of Knudepunkt. It originally started as a pioneer project in 1997 in Oslo with the vision of bringing the Nordic larp communities together. Prior to the 1997 Knudepunkt there had been very little contact between the different countries and to many it came as a surprise that they were not the only ones to “do” larp.

Now, seven years after, the situation is quite different. Joint ventures between the countries have been undertaken and players are happy to travel beyond their own borders to participate in other countries events.

With this book we are trying to collect some of the Knudepunkt magic. Knudepunkt has always been a forum where innovation and creativity have flourish and where people from the Nordic countries have shared their

visions and dreams for the future of larp. The book, like Knudepunkt itself, is about trying to move on from yesterday into tomorrow. The aim is to help the Knudepunkt newbie up to date - as well as spawn creativity, innovation and ideas. There is nothing as practical as a good theory. That is the foundation for this book. In a good theory, you can find ideas, advices and practical solutions to your problems and questions about larp.

The book has five chapters. We start by going back to old memories, telling the tale of the modern Classics of Knudepunkt. In this chapter, you will find some of the most influential and discussed theories and manifests of Knudepunkt - but you will also find up to date comments on the theories from the editors of this book.

In the childhood of larp theory, most

texts have been very normative. In *That's larp!*, we bring you some descriptive theories, describing what larp is and the processes and interactions taking place at a larp.

In *The Real World* we will use theories from other sciences in a larp context. *larp'ers* apply academical theories to larp and thus gives us new insights.

By then, you've probably had enough of the theory. So in the fourth chapter, *Just do it!*, we focus on methods for a better larp.

Finally, the fifth chapter is a Dictionary of Nordic larp. Petter Bøckman has collected the concepts and words we use, and written down their meaning. Maybe we can understand each other with his help?

We would like to say thank you to all the people who have helped us in the making of this book.

Thanks to Hans Peter Hartsteen who helped layouting the book.

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Jesper Donnis, Caroline Enghoff, Taika Helola, Caroline Kasten Koren, Brett Rodgers, Sunniva Saksvik and Ingrid Storrø.

Thank you to DUF, who have sponsored the printing of the book.

And first and foremost, thank you to everyone who has written an article for the book.

Line Thorup, Mikkel Sander  
& Morten Gade  
Editors

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# The Three Way Model

## Revision of the Threefold Model

### 1 Prologue

The Threefold model for RPG was developed by the debaters on the newsgroup `rec.games.frp.advocacy`, and subsequently written down in FAQ form by John H. Kim. As a model it has several things going for it: It is short, concise, uses lay-mans terms and restricts it self in scope. It has therefore been tempting to convert it for LARP-use, LARP being closely related to RPG.

The Scandinavian forms of LARP and RPG differ on some points.

The emphasis on game-mechanics in the original RPG version is not really applicable to LARP, where most actions are done in person, not through simulation. The rule-part of the original »Simmlationist« category has been omitted, the category renamed »Immersionist« to avoid confusion. This model is thus not the original one, and has been renamed the Three Way Model. I strongly suggest looking up John H. Kims original. It is found together with other highly interesting material at:

<http://www.darkshire.org/~jhkim/rpg/styles/>

Petter Bøckman,  
Oslo, 8th of April, 2002

### The Author

Petter Bøckman (35) grew a beard at 19 and is a zoologist by education, teaching school classes at the Museum of Natural History. He was one of the founders of the Oslo LARP-scene in the mid 80'ies, and is still around. Having done the »LARP theory for dummies« last year, his current project is making a comprehensive catalogue of LARP-terminology. He has a weakness for dark beer and scientific squabble.

### 2 What is the Three Way Model?

The Three Way Model is one way of grouping many aspects of playing live role-play into logical categories. The model addresses how the game is played, particularly the style of gaming, but also how setting are constructed, how game style influence players style, level of authenticity and so forth. The Three Ways divides up many of these into categories known as Dramatist,

Gamist, and Immersionist.

An important part of the model is recognizing that there are valid different goals for gaming. Live role-playing games don't simply classify into good and bad. The exact same game which one player enjoys, another might dislike. Rather than say that one or the other has bad taste, it is more useful to try to make sense of patterns of what different players and organisers enjoy.

### **3 Which one am I? A Dramatist, a Gamist, or an Immersionist?**

Most likely, none of the above. Your individual style cannot be pigeonholed into a single word. More to the point, live role-play depends on all three to function properly, and you probably go for a mix of different techniques, and work towards more than one goal. You may tend more towards one corner of the triangle, but you probably value a mix.

### **4 Stop beating around the bush!! What is it already?**

OK, here are the short definitions:

»Dramatist« is the style which values how well the in-game action creates a satisfying storyline. Different kinds of stories may be viewed as satisfying, depending on individual tastes, varying from fanciful pulp action to believable character drama. It is the end result of the story that is important.

»Gamist« is the style which values solving a plot, or setting one up if you are an organiser. The challenges may be tactical combat, intellectual mysteries, politics, or anything else. The players will try to solve the problems they are presented with, and in turn the organisers will make these challenges fair and solvable to the players.

»Immersionist« is the style which values living the role's life, feeling what the role would feel. Immersionists insist on resolving in-game events based solely on game-world considerations. Thus, a fully immersionist player will not fudge rules to save its role's neck or the plot, or even change details of background story irrelevant in the setting to suite the play. An immersionist organiser will try to make the plots and setting such that they are believable to the players.

### **5 Don't those categories overlap?**

True, these goals are not at odds. A given conflict or plot might happen to be both a fair challenge and realistically resolved, every game will have dramatic aspects, realistic aspects, and competitive aspects. However, The Three Way asks the players what bit is the more fun and the organisers how much comparative effort they put into making these.

Even a perfectly immersionist or gamist LARPs will have dramatic

scenes in them. After all, the players are playing a role, and a certain bit of drama is needed to convey the roles feelings and actions. Similarly, a dramatist LARP will have some conflicts that are a fair challenge for the players, and some events that are realistic. But an gamist organiser, who doesn't put effort into drama of the roles, will be able to make more challenging plots. Similarly, an immersionist player, who focuses only on the roles reactions and feelings and ignoring playing drama to the other participants, will act more realistically in that setting.

**6 But I always try to feel what my character feels and act it out. Don't I play both fully dramatic and fully immersionist?**

Immersionism is not defined in terms of believability, it is defined in terms of method. Rightly or wrongly, an immersionist isn't simply trying to play in a way that is believable. She is trying to actually do what would »really« happen by trying to put her self in her roles shoes. Of course, it is impossible to perfectly feel what a different person feels, but she finds interest and value in the attempt.

Such devotion to the internal logic of the game must go about ways to work. As a dramatist organiser, you could have a dramatic storyline in mind, and set up the background and characters so well that during the game, the drama unfolds without you having to noticeably intervene in

the game. A very immersionist player might not notice that the events were constructed to produce that story. However, if you use blatant means of making the story happened, she would feel frustration: Her and your ways of play are not compatible.

How the game will run is also dependent on the player's style of play. Take for example, a player playing the wizard's apprentice, facing a horrible monster with the local guardsmen. The dramatist player would perhaps take a stand, deciding this would be a fine time to make a dramatic scene and sacrificing him selves for the town, without regard for the roles agenda. The immersionist would most likely turn tail and run, or possibly faint. The gamist might decide to try to engage the monster in conversation, knowing the organisers have put the monster there for some reason and that the guardsmen don't have a chance against it. These decisions will influence how the game turn out. Thus, incompatibility of style may alter and potentially ruin an otherwise well made game.

**7 So dramatism is ham actors playing through arty nonsense, gamism is munchkins who want to win the game, and immersionism is introspective realism-suckers?**

No, those are rabid stereotypes. Even if the stereotypes have some truth to them, the Three Way model is not about just the lowest common denominator. There are good and bad

examples of each type of game and each type of players.

A pure dramatist might play a gritty, low-key role that perhaps concentrates on her work. In this case, the drama of the story might be framed around how she relate to each others and the tension produced. Dramatist may also enjoy comedic games, where the in-game action is tailored for humorous effect rather than classical »drama«. The key is that in-game events are tailored based on how satisfying the storyline of the game is.

Games for gamist could be a mystery game where the roles are challenged to find the killer based not just on physical clues, but also on the personalities and motivations of the suspects. Note that this is similar on the surface to a dramatic story, but the emphasis is on solving the murder, even if the methods are a bit theatrical. A purely dramatist mystery might make a better story, but a purely gamist mystery will be a fairer test of the player's wits.

Immersionism by definition is going to try to be »realistic« within the game-world, although it may contain magic or other unrealistic phenomena. However, the players are not necessarily obsessed with pictorial realism. An immersionist game could just as well focus on political discussion between important figures, or power-full wizards plotting against each other, where game-mechanic

necessarily play an important part. A purely immersionist murder-mystery game is not really focused on the solving of the plot, but on how such a mystery is experienced. An ardent immersionist player will refrain from using information gained in a manner not true to character to solve the riddle: Solving it is really not her prime aim.

### **8 OK, but what's it for, then?**

The Three Way model is meant as a sort of checklist for recognising player's motivation for attending games, and how they play out their roles as a result. Organisers too have preferences, and it is when the preferred style of play by the players collide with that of organisers, or that of other players, that things may go wrong. This model may hopefully prevent a few such mismatches.

Different plots too, fall into this three-way form. Different plots demand different solutions, and players who prefer the style in question will solve the plot in a way that serve the overall game. Recognising the different types of plots and storylines and mating them with appropriate players should be an organiser's priority. The same apply the other way around: Finding the live role-play that suits your particular style of playing is preferable over trying to force your style of gaming where it is really not appropriate.

### **9 But, I don't recognise myself in**

### **these categories, what's wrong?**

The Three Ways is not intended as a be-all and end-all of LARPing, nor is it necessarily complete. One might suggested a fourth styles, called »Social«, where out-game considerations is a motivating force, or divide the immersionist category into immersionist and simulationist, and the dramatist into dramatist and narrativist. However, this discussion is outside the scope of the model.

The modified Threefold model in this form is meant to describe the prevailing Scandinavian style of LARPing. Many aspects of gaming are not covered by it. For example, any of the three can vary from »Light« to »Serious«, and there are other ways of analysing LARPs not touched upon in this work, and LARPs who fall outside of forms for which this model is appropriate. Shoehorning everything into the model may lead to some really funny results.



### **Comments to The Three Way Model**

This theory is probably the most classic of them all. Heck, it's hardly a theory anymore, as the concepts of gamist, dramatist and immersionist have gone into our daily larp vocabulary.

In the foreword to this anthology, we write, "there is nothing as practical as a good theory." And if any theory can prove this to players and organisers, it is the three-way model, which most players can actually relate to. Oh, I could go on about the beauty of this theory.

However, we should be aware of the bias in the theory. Or perhaps not in the theory itself, but in the readings

of the theory. Because more often than not, this theory is used to legitimise an attitude about 'good' and 'bad' players. Some places, dramatists are seen as the best players of all. Other places, its the immersionists. Very seldom, it's even the gamists. But we should be cautious about this.

There is not a 'true' form of larp that is better than the other forms. There are however different objectives in different larps - and hence, one playing style is more suitable for a given larp than another. There is not one universal truth, but a different truth in every example - and this truth is decided from the organisers.

### **The Author**

Morten Gade is 22 years old and lives in Copenhagen, Denmark. He is a 4th year student of communications and business administration at Roskilde University and in his spare time he works as an editor of a student magazine.

He has been larping since 1996, and has organised five larps in different genres since 1998. Also, he is the editor of the Danish LARP portal [www.liveforum.dk](http://www.liveforum.dk). This year he is an organiser of Knudepunkt.

## **Comments to The Three Way Model**

The three-way-model is very different from the two other theories in this chapter, in the sense that it is not a manifest. It does not put itself in a position where it points out rights or wrongs, it only explains. The goal of the model is to group aspects of playing-styles of larp into logical categories. The model is very successful in this. It manages to form three categories that all are relevant and very well explained: The dramatist, the gamist and the immersionist.

Who successful this model have been, can be seen in the way that these categories now are becoming a part of the normal larp jargon. Where I

think the model is not so successful is in examples where it connects the different types of writers and players. This is a point where I would like to see more work put into the model, because I think that a lot of people would benefit from it. As it is now it is an admirable attempt to do more than defining the categories but it does not bring about more clarification, on the contrary, I find it a bit confusing. Besides this one point the three-way-model is very well thought out and is by far one of the most useful models in larp, because it provides a common jargon that makes it possible for larpers to communicate about some of the more abstract terms in a non-prejudice way.

### **The Author**

Line Thorup is 26 years old and lives at the moment in London, where she is a master student in archaeology, specializing in field techniques and contract archaeology.

She has been involved in larp for the last 6-7 years and has been co-organiser on several larps. She was one of the organisers of Knudepunkt 1999 in Copenhagen and is also involved in this year's Knudepunkt event and one of the editors of the Knudepunkts book 2003.

# The Vow of Chastity

I hereby submit to the rules of the Vow of Chastity, as developed by Dogma 99,

1. It is forbidden to create action by writing it into the past history of a character or the event.
2. There shall be no “main plot”. (The story of the event must be made for each players character, not the whole).
3. No character shall only be a supporting part.
4. All secrecy is forbidden. (Any participant who so desires shall in advance be shown all documents that pertain to the event).
5. After the event has begun, the playwrights are not allowed to influence it. (Any use of staging and ad hoc organiser roles is forbidden).
6. Superficial action is forbidden. (The playwrights may not in any way plan or encourage the use or threat of violence as part of the event)
7. LARPs inspired by tabletop

role-playing games are not accepted.

8. No object shall be used to represent another object. (all things shall be what they appear to be)
9. Game mechanics are forbidden. (rules to simulate for instance the use of violence or supernatural abilities are not permitted)
10. The playwrights shall be held accountable for the whole of their work.

Furthermore, I swear to regard myself as an artist, and any LARP I write as my »work«. I stand open for criticism and wholesale slaughter of my works, and promise to apologise to my players for all that is imperfect in the LARPs I write. My highest goal is to develop the art and medium of live-action role-playing. This, I promise, will be done through all means available, and at the expense of good taste, all conventions and all popularity amongst the so-called LARPerS. Thus, I take the Vow of Chastity,

Lars Wingård  
Eirik Fatland  
Erlend Eidsem Hansen  
Kristin Hamnerås  
Anita Myhre Andersen  
Kalle Toivonen

Hanne Grasmo  
Atle Steen-Hansen  
Morten B. Gunnerud  
Margrethe Raaum  
Lars Munck  
Pasi Huttunen

Tommy Finsen  
Jon Ree Holmøy  
Erling Rognli  
E. Cath Røsseland  
Hilde Bryhn

# The Dogma 99 Manifesto

## The authors' commentary to the Vow of Chastity

### Why Dogma 99?

The Dogma 99 Vow of Chastity aims at the development of LARP as a medium and a form of art. We seek to oppose the pitfalls of conventional LARP, the dominance of the mainstream genres, and the refusal of the general public and some LARPer to recognise the potential of LARP as a medium of expression and form of art.

The Conventional LARP methods of today, those methods most often developed when adapting the tabletop role-playing medium directly to live action, are insufficient for the creation of quality LARP. The conventions, pitfalls and clichés of conventional LARP are only a first step, an infant stage which it is now time to abandon. The Conventions are the current ingrown patterns of thought about what and how LARP is, that are hard to see and even harder to avoid. The Clichés are the banal simplicities that work and are therefore repeated ad infinitum instead of inventing something new. The Pitfalls are the obvious mistakes that are repeated, by experienced and inexperienced organisers, usually because things appear differently from the organiser room than from the LARP.

While a few LARP scenes and troupes, especially in the Nordic countries, have managed to progress beyond the pitfalls of conventional LARP, most have not. Hallmarks of conventional LARP are: an emphasis on game mechanics, a high level of secrecy, structures that automatically discern between »important« and »unimportant« characters, and a dependence on gamesmaster control and intervention for the LARP to work.

Conventional LARP is based in the »gamist« style of role-playing. The gamist style creates structures that, intentionally or not, allow for a LARP to be won by some, and hence lost by others. It encourages the use of game mechanics, to create fairness, and the use of secrecy and combat, to create challenge. While we are not opposed to LARP being used for this purpose, we seek to develop the potential of LARP as a medium of expression, not as a glorified game of strategy. We also observe that the methods of conventional LARP are insufficient for fair gamist-style events.

The supreme demonstrations of the weaknesses of conventional LARP are the commercial products of the

Anglo-American gaming industry. By aiming at a lowest common denominator, these publications achieve nothing beyond the infant stage, which has long been surpassed in quality and diversity by LARPer who have innovated independently. Yet, their marketing strength is so vast in comparison, we risk seeing the medium defined in the eyes of the public, not by the independent LARP artist or craftsman, but by the gaming industry and the proponents of conventional LARP.

The current mainstream LARP genres, the LARPs of fantasy and science fiction, combat, horror, mystery and magic – commonly use conventional methods. This, however, need not be so. The mainstream genres are not dependent on conventional methods, and may be enriched by the development of new methods, without the clichés and pitfalls of current convention.

While entertaining and full of potential in their own right, the current mainstream genres are too narrow in their confines and the expectations of their participants to explore the full potential of LARP as a medium. Developments in the crafts, genre adaptations, game mechanics and narration are not enough! We seek to explore and realise the full potential of LARP as a form of art, and for this to be possible the borders the medium so far has developed within must be transcended.

We therefore launch the programme of the Vow of Chastity, which aims at

creating a series of new LARPs that will be unlike any seen before. The Vow of Chastity aims at widening the borders of the medium by excluding the traditional methods of LARP creation and especially the ones used by conventional LARP. To strengthen the Dogma 99 project, the list of signatories will be permanently open. Those who wish, may take the Vow of Chastity and thereby commit themselves to organise or co-organise at least one LARP that follows the rules of the Vow of Chastity.

Dogma 99 is primarily a manifesto for LARP playwrights. Playwrights who take the Vow of Chastity place much of the freedom to form the LARP in the hands of the players. The Vow of Chastity does not say anything about what players should or should not do with this freedom.

While we certainly do not believe that the Vow of Chastity is the only way to develop the medium, we are of the opinion that resorting to such radical means is necessary to accelerate the development and diversification of LARP.

Oslo, 13<sup>th</sup> of December, 1999

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### The Essence of Larp: A Definition

LARP is often erroneously called a »genre«. LARP is a form and a method of individual and collective expression; LARP is a medium. This medium, as all other media (television, tabletop role-playing, theatre, the Internet..) works according to its own, unique, laws. The lack of development of the LARP medium is easily explained in organisers' lack of ability or interest in using the medium on its own terms. Instead, LARP has too often become lost in the inspiration from other media and sought to become as similar as possible to the movie, the theatre, the book, or (most often) the tabletop role-playing game.

To see the possibilities inherent in LARP, we must find these unique laws; the essence of LARP. What is it that makes LARP different from other media? Let us remove what we may without LARP ceasing to be LARP, and see what is left.

Monsters, historical settings and such associations can be avoided without problems. A LARP may take place in the present, and without occurrences of the supernatural. Individual character descriptions may be removed, the role may be that you are a member of a group who behave in a certain manner. Written material is easy to do without; oral agreements may be made as to how the LARP will function. The organiser may easily disappear; every player can write his own part. We can rid ourselves of game mechanics; everything can be improvised. You can, however, not

remove the fact that the participants play roles in a fictional world. For the event to be a LARP, there must be an agreement that whatever happens is a play, and that this is something else than real life. You cannot remove the physical meeting between roles. If all players are at different locations, and never meet, they are not at a LARP together, although they are still role-playing. For the same reason, you cannot LARP alone. It is not possible to LARP together with someone who does not know that this is a play. That's trickery, not LARP, but probably loads of fun. What we are left with is:

»A LARP is a meeting between people who, through their roles, relate to each other in a fictional world.«

This is hard to see because game mechanics, riddles, background stories, superficial action and other elements divert the focus away from the essence of LARP; the meeting between participants. With a foundation in this minimum definition it is easy to identify the conventions and clichés in LARP.

That LARP is a meeting between people also implies that a LARP is not the sum of all character descriptions and handbooks, but rather the sum of everything that happens from a LARP begins until it ends. LARP is action, not literature.

## The Vow of Chastity explained

### 1. It is forbidden to create action by writing it into the past history of a character or the event.

From the point of view of an organiser, the LARP may appear to be good because every character has an exciting story in the written background. This is a typical pitfall. From the point of view of the player, only what happens in the LARP has reality. LARP is not literature, LARP is action. The use of retrospect in the character description forces the player to relate to incidents that are not real. The Vow of Chastity forbids all action in the written character descriptions past; all action of the story must take place during the play.

Examples as to how this may be solved, is to use fates, to leave it to the players to agree (and role-play) upon conflicts between themselves, or to use static conflicts in the backgrounds. It is not in conflict with this rule for players to invent a more detailed background, if they find this necessary for their immersion into the character.

### 2. There shall be no »main plot« (the story of the event must be made for each player, not the whole)

With main plots we here mean conflicts that are meant to touch the entire LARP, but does not directly involve all characters. Main plots are another typical pitfall; the conflict is important for the organisers and those players directly involved in it,

but reduces the roles of characters that do not play a part of this plot to the position of an audience. The use of main plots almost universally leads to a division between important and less important characters.

This convention probably comes from organisers seeking to replicate movies, literature and theatre. A story in the non-interactive media necessarily has a limited amount of active characters. In LARP, an interactive form of art, the amount of actors and stories is theoretically unlimited.

### Examples of alternative ways to bind a LARP together:

- The LARP may contain many smaller intrigues, where the intrigues are thematically connected.
- The LARP scenario may be a slice of reality. In real life, there are no main plots.

### 3. No character shall only be a supporting part.

Not only must every character be directly involved in the conflicts that touch it; the character must also in its own way play the lead part of the conflict. It is therefore not permitted to write a character whose most important function in the LARP is to help or support another character.

### 4. All secrecy is forbidden. (Any participant who so desires shall in advance be shown all documents that pertain to the

**event).**

In conventional LARP, organisers often attempt to create tension by preventing the player from knowing what the organiser has planned for the character. Actually, things are often kept secret so that players or organisers are to feel important – I know something you don't know – or out of habit.

The reality of the LARP is what is acted out, not what is kept secret and becomes known only after the LARP is over or for a minority during the event. By removing secrecy, we also remove part of the competition aspect of LARP. Some players may wish to know everything before the event starts, whereas others will not. Dogma #4 implies that all plans must be made available for the players who wish to know them, not that these must be published to all players.

**5. After the event has begun, the playwrights are not allowed to influence it.**

**(Any use of staging and ad hoc organiser roles is forbidden).**

Organisers of conventional LARP use a number of methods to influence the LARP after it has begun. They do this to entertain players and to steer the event in the »correct« direction.

As organisers take control during a LARP, the players become passive. This leads to players learning to expect organiser control, even demanding it. Only a LARP entirely without organiser influence will place the real initiative in the hands of players,

where it belongs. As we learn how to makeLARPs work independent of organiser control and influence, it will become possible to develop more constructive and activating methods of organiser interaction.

**6. Superficial action is forbidden. (the playwrights may not in any way plan or encourage the use or threat of violence as part of the event)**

The LARP medium is quite fit to create tension through the simulation of violence. The medium can, however, be used for far more than this - something which is often overseen in favour of combat. At the time of writing, it is for many LARPer difficult to imagine a combat-free LARP. We are of the opinion that it is about time playwrights and players learn to createLARPs without using these simplest methods to achieve thrill and suspense.

**7. LARP inspired by tabletop role-playing games are not accepted.**

LARP and tabletop role-playing are different media that, despite some similarities, work on different terms. In the tabletop role-playing game, the action is played out as the roles (players) and the fictional world (storyteller) meet. In a LARP the focus is on the roles (players) and what happens between them.

**Some of the pitfalls that come from the tabletop heritage:**

- The idea of “game balance “ (all players must have the same opportunity to find the treasure)
- Focus on solving the riddle/ completing the adventure.
- Organisers wish to control the game.
- Division between important and unimportant characters (“PC” and “NPC”).

Most conventional LARP is inspired by tabletop role-playing games both in form and content. It is no longer original to make a LARP of a new kind of tabletop RPG. We also register that a majority of the clichés in current LARP, are inherited from tabletop RPG’s.

The most important argument, however, for not being inspired by tabletop role-playing games is that only through these means are we able to find out what LARP as a separate medium may achieve.

**8. No object shall be used to represent another object. (all things shall be what they appear to be)**

In conventional and mainstream LARP a number of signs and substitutes are used, swords are made from latex-covered styrofoam, cordial is supposed to be wine, the curtains are drawn because windows weren’t invented in the middle ages, a rope is used as a city wall, tents in stead of houses, make-up and masks are used to signify supernatural creatures etc. Signs are most often an ingrown, but

unfit, solution to the problems of transferring settings from other media to LARP. Exaggerated use of signs easily lead to absurdities in the play, as it is difficult for players to remember what the different signs represent. The focus of LARP disappears in the signs. Human beings are, in this context, not to be considered »objects«. A player may still be used to represent a character..

What we wish to end is the absurd certainty that for instance Styrofoam sticks are swords, and the assumption that this is the only way it can be done. The signs are not a part of the essence of LARP. Though they occasionally may come in handy, we wish to learn how to create LARP without their use.

**9. Game mechanics are forbidden. (rules for the simulation of for instance the use of violence or supernatural abilities are not permitted)**

By »game mechanics« we mean all rules used to simulate situations believed not to be possible to do for real inLARPs: violence, pain, intoxication, magic, poisoning et cetera.

LARP has developed from tabletop role-playing, which again has developed from strategy games. The use of game mechanics merely a fossile remnant from the strategy games, and is unnecessary and generally impractical in both LARP and tabletop role-playing. Game mechanics may be easily replaced with trust in the players’ ability to improvise.

Dogma #9 does not exclude rules for

other purposes than simulation; such as security rules and fates.

### **10. The playwrights are to be held accountable for the whole of their work.**

LARP has often been perceived as a hobby. In pact with this thought, players applaud their organisers no matter the product because the organisers anyway do a good job for their hobby. To the extent criticism has appeared after an event, it has often been for purely practical matters – food, fire security and such. We are not opposed to hobbyists in this way honouring the will to do something, but it helps little when one desires to develop the medium and art form. Which criteria LARP is to be criticised according to is another discussion. Playwrights of a Dogma-event therefore refuse to wear the Emperors New Clothes. We will be held accountable for our production, slaughtered for anything bad or imperfect, and merely receive positive criticism for what was original, well done and progressive.

### **The Future**

We appeal to LARPerS who share our goal of developing LARP as a diverse medium of expression to consider the following broad aims for the future: The abandonment of conventional LARP – the current conventions of LARP are merely an infant stage and should be abandoned. In the future, it should be impossible to speak of »conventional« LARP, as

no conventions should exist. What we in the Dogma 99 manifesto term »conventional« LARP might one day be called »primitive«, »fallen« or »corrupt« LARP.

To this end; training and handbooks must be made available for new scenes and troupes of playwrights, lest they fall into the pitfalls of convention.

Diversity – LARP playwrights and scenes must diversify the genres and methods of LARP events. We seek the death of »mainstream« LARP, in that the diversity of LARP events should be so vast, no single genre or group of genres may be called »mainstream«. We certainly do not want the current mainstream genres to disappear, but they should lose their dominant position.

We therefore appeal to the playwrights of the current mainstream to organise new and different LARPs, experiment with new methods, and explore or create other genres.

Publicity - LARP must become well-known in the eyes of the public as a new medium that takes diverse forms, not as a curiosity. To forward this end, LARPerS should be conscious of the media attention they receive, and steer this away from »feature« coverage towards in-depth journalism.

Fundamentalist and moral-panic critics must not be allowed to choose the battleground. Active and well-planned relations with the media are the best way to achieve a good, steady and objective coverage.

Recruitment – LARP must lose its profile as a young, slightly geeky, white

middle-class activity. Recruitment should aim at all levels of society, and especially at groups from which recruitment has previously been scarce. We must abandon the misconception that conventional LARP is the best way of introduction to the medium; it is not.

Communication – The links between local, regional and national LARP communities must be strengthened. Forums (including magazines, the internet and conventions) must be opened for the exchange of ideas and know-how. LARPers must document their work, experiments and experiences, and make this documentation available to the international LARP community.

An exchange of knowledge with related media (drama, theatre, movie-making, storytelling, tabletop RPG) should take place, although the differences of the media should always be taken into consideration.



### Comments to Dogma 99

It was so hot back in the nineties. Making dogmas. Restraining yourself. Finding the core of your art form. The Danish Dogme '95 was a great success for Danish film. Not only did the movies win great critical acclaim – they even sold tickets. So ein ding muss wir auch haben, Lars Wingård and Eirik Fatland seemed to think. And then they made “Dogma 99 - a programme for the liberation of LARP”.

Dogma 99 takes its offset in the conventional larp methods of 1999. Based in the gamist methods, these larps had a great number of “conventions, pitfalls and clichés” that a dogma larp should be free of. In order to do so, the authors wrote a Vow of Chastity with ten rules, hence showing what things they considered “conventions, pitfalls and clichés”.

#### The Author

Morten Gade is 22 years old and lives in Copenhagen, Denmark. He is a 4th year student of communications and business administration at Roskilde University and in his spare time he works as an editor of a student magazine.

He has been larping since 1996, and has organised five larps in different genres since 1998. Also, he is the editor of the Danish LARP portal [www.liveforum.dk](http://www.liveforum.dk). This year he is an organiser of Knudepunkt.

It's an odd mix of things Wingård and Fatland doesn't like. And that is probably the greatest weakness in Dogma 99. They argue well for all ten rules - and all rules seem just. But they don't really argue for why they have chosen these exact ten rules - and not ten others. We can find hundreds of things we do without thinking about them: Writing roles, making websites, having practical organisers, making rules, doing fantasy and making main plots. Only a couple of these are mentioned in Dogma 99. Hence, Dogma 99 seems to be an unfinished document.

However, Dogma '99 did one really good thing for larp theory. All of the sudden, it was probably noticed by more than a selected few.

The idea of making a Vow of Chastity for larp isn't bad. Because there are many conventions and pitfalls that don't necessarily make a larp any better. And as such Dogma 99 was a good framework and a good starter for the discussion: What is the core of larp? Now, let's hope someone picks up the ball and fill out the framework.

### Comments to Dogma 99

With strong parallels to the film-world, Lars Wingård and Eirik Fatland, created the Dogme99. The goal was to find the essence of larp by removing all the unnecessarily components that inevitable caused all the »conventions, pitfalls and clichés«, which the two authors, felt conventional larp possessed. The Dogma definition of larp is »a meeting between people who, through their roles, relate to each other in a fictional world«, nothing more and nothing less! The thought was that by restricting oneself from the use of all the different conventional game-mechanics whose purpose is to superimpose action on larp (secrecy, supporting characters, game master control, rules etc.), larp would become a medium in its own rights; A medium of expression. Wingård and Fatland define the »vow of chastity« containing 10 rules that the dogma-larper is to obey. The rules are not entirely transparent in the aspect of why these particular elements have been chosen. Rules 1-2, 4-6 and 8 concerns the restrictions on »creating action« for the play writers. The rest of the rule however, seems to me, to be a mix of the author's own irritations over larps they have participated in and the desire to distance larp from tabletop role-playing. The problems with putting up rules are that it has to be made clear why these rule are so all-important e.g. I do not understand, in connection with the definition of larp,

why no restrictions has been made about the creation of a setting and why fate-games not are considered to be action-creation?

This aside, I do think that Wingård and Fatland make a good case. It is also important to remember that they never propose that dogma-larp is the only way to make larp. Dogma is a way to experiment with larp as a medium, where all »normal way of conduct« has been erased in order to give room to creativity, self-reflection and diversity. I think that Dogma99 was and indeed still is one of the ways that can be in the never-ending ongoing attempts to extend larp too become much more then it is now.

#### The Author

Line Thorup is 26 years old and lives at the moment in London, where she is a master student in archaeology, specializing in field techniques and contract archaeology.

She has been involved in larp for the last 6-7 years and has been co-organiser on several larps. She was one of the organisers of Knudepunkt 1999 in Copenhagen and is also involved in this year's Knudepunkt event and one of the editors of the knudepunkts book 2003.

# Foreword to the Manifesto of the Turku School

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”  
- George Santayana, “Life of Reason, Reason in Common Sense”

The Turku Manifesto was first published in Solmukohta, roughly three years from now. It was published online a year later. This 3rd Edition is pretty much the same as that second, online one, but to be clear and pretentious, we call it third.

The Turku School made its first appearance in late 20th century on the mailing list of Finnish Live-Action Role Players’ Association where the school emphasized the meaning of eläytyminen and simulation over dramatism and gamism.

In Chapter VI (shamelessly plagiarized from the Communist Manifesto, by the way) we call out for a Turkuist revolution: “Turku School supports any and all revolutionary role-players’ movement directed against the current gamist and dramatist circumstances.” A fancy way to say we want you to focus on character eläytyminen and society simulation.

Since its first appearance in the Finnish scene some five years ago, the Turku School has achieved pretty much all it

set out to achieve. This does not mean all role players consider themselves Turkuists, but that the ideas are pretty much accepted, or at least considered before discarding. Role-playing is seen as art, the importance of eläytyminen is understood. Sure, there’s work to be done, but the Revolution is on its way. And not all the thanks go to the Turku School, but for all the role-playing manifestoes and dogmas out there.

We haven’t been alone in our struggles. There have been those that stood behind us and our ideals from the very start, and there have been those that joined us after heated discussions. (Just those heated discussions that the provocative style is there to create.) And yet again there are those who’ve managed to combine our ideas with gamism and dramatism.

The truth is, that with all this going on, the original four-way divide is fast losing significance, at least among the avant-garde of role-playing. The most interesting dramatist concepts have evolved just as much as those of the eläytyjists and simulationists. So much so that they’re all transcending into something much bigger.

What the next step is, it’s hard to say yet. Perhaps we’ll focus on making the

role-playing media popular again, now that we can roughly agree on what that media is. And that it is a media. Or perhaps role-playing will continue evolving for a long time.

Clouded is the future. Still, it seems clear the “Age of Manifestoes” (1999-2002) helped make it happen. Here’s one of the makers of that era, perhaps for the last time in print: The Turku Manifesto.

Mike Pohjola  
1/19/2003, Turku



### **Terminology:**

a game: a role-playing session, not a game in the sense of somebody trying to win.

the game master: the organizer and/or writer of the game, in table-top games also the players’ medium for interaction with the game world.

to eläytyä: (verb) to immerse yourself into a character, to think, experience and feel through the character.

eläytyminen: (noun) character immersion, see to eläytyä.

GM: the Game Master.

Larp: Live-Action Role-Playing game. A RPG where most action is acted out, not described.

to larp: to play in a larp

RPG: Role-Playing Game.

Table-top: A RPG where most action is described, not acted out.

Turku: a city in South-Western Finland.

# The Manifesto of the Turku School

The criticized and feared, acclaimed and admired Turku School is here to tell the world what role-playing is, how and why it should be done, and why everybody else is wrong. The Turku School has been named after the home town of its chief provocateurs, but living in Turku is no guarantee of quality - living somewhere else doesn't mean that you can't understand and support the Manifesto.

## **I - RPGs and role-playing**

Role-playing is immersion ("eläytyminen") to an outside consciousness ("a character") and interacting with its surroundings.

Most traditional mediums are either active (the part of the creator; writing, singing, acting etc.) or passive (the part of the audience; reading, listening, watching). Role-playing, however, is a truly interactive medium - and the best and most useful of such media - because there the creative side and the receptive side are no longer separate. The experience of role-playing is born through contributing. No one can predict the events of a session beforehand, or recreate them afterwards. Also,

most of the expression takes part inside the participants' heads (in the process of eläytyminen), which make role-playing games (RPGs) a very subjective form of art.

Interactivity and subjectivity are typical to RPGs, but everything else can vary greatly, depending on the game. In some games all action is described verbally and the events happen in the players' imagination, while in others the goal is to visualize everything as concretely as possible.

In some games the players focus on the story and the action, in others the purpose is to simulate the world in as much detail as possible.

There is an infinite number of ways to role-play, but one of the most popular is to divide them between live-action role-playing games ("larps") and traditional or table-top RPGs. Although it is impossible to draw an exact line, a typical larp is a game where you try to do everything as concretely as possible, and do your best to avoid any means that are not part of the game world ("non-diegetic means" or "off-game"). In a typical table-top game the game master ("GM") is the players' medium for interacting with the game world, and most things are

only described, and take place only in the players' imagination.

Another way of dividing the different ways of gaming is to group them into gamist, dramatist, simulationist and eläytyjst styles. The gamist players ("munchkins") try to somehow win the game by making their character as powerful as possible - in a way turning the role-playing into strategy-gaming. The dramatist people have no true grasp for the meaning of interaction, as they think the purpose of the game is for the game masters to tell a story using the players as actors - but with no audience to tell the story to! The simulationists try to create a working society or even a world which is simulated through role-playing. The eläytyjst set the goal to becoming the characters, to experiencing everything through the character.

While the division between the mediums of larp and table-top games does not provide any difference in quality, the second division certainly does - not all of the above styles are as well thought-out as others. As is obvious to most role-players, the dramatist and the gamist styles are inferior to the simulationist and eläytyjst styles. For the sake of objectivity, they will, however, all be here introduced.

## II - The styles: Good and Bad

Strategy games are often fun and educational. They can be a measure of your intellect, strategic thinking and ability to stretch resources to their very limit. It's fun to try to win the

war at chess. It's fun to rule a nation in Civilization. It's fun to command an army unit in Necromunda. Wouldn't it be fun to try to win with just one person whose actions you could guide? No! Not unless that person is a robot with exact orders and no personality. Real people don't aim to win at the "game of life"; in fact, there is no such game! Real people aim to enjoy their life or further their personal goals, but they also have all sorts of doubts and weaknesses, which come into way of their wanting to do what they want to do: "I was going to run for the parliament, because I want to make the world a better place, but I ran into some old friends and went out for a beer, instead." That is why the gamist style does not work. Stories are fun and interesting, they can have a huge impact on mankind. Movies are often entertaining, and a good book can really make you think. And if you want to tell your own stories, nobody's keeping you from writing a short story, or a novel, or a drama, or a movie. Nobody's keeping you from composing a song, or directing a play, or choreographing a dance. But note that in those cases you are the auteur, the creator. And when your work is finished the audience will get to see it. RPGs don't work that way. If you want to tell a story (as the dramatists do), you must have the players as the audience, the auteurs, or both. If the players are the audience, you'd somehow have to stop them from interfering with the story - and thus they would become passive,

and you'd have a form of theatre or story-telling. If the players are the auteurs, you can't tell a story. If they are both, as they effectively always are in RPGs, then the story is told by players, not the game master. And then there are an infinite number of little stories, all inside the heads of the players. You will have no way to know what will happen beforehand, and no way to re-create it afterwards. (This same observation can also be found in the very definition of role-playing.)

It is said that man is a social animal. This is true, for most people define themselves at least partly through social ties (job, school, hobby, nationality, social class, religion etc.). As all existing societies are imperfect and flawed, this poses a problem: people do not know themselves - they have defined their image of themselves at some early developmental stage, and can't see how it could be anything else. It would be so much better if they could try to live in a different world, or a different society, for a while, and then try to see themselves in a new light after that experience. Well, they can! Through the simulationist way of role-playing - which is, or can be, social philosophy and behavioral psychology put to practice. It can have many positive effects on players, and it's also one of the two styles the Turku School promotes.

Apart from societies, what most dictates a person's behavior, is his personality (which is in part a product of the society). It's easy to think you know yourself when you live a very

sheltered life and never have any reason to leave your room - or, heaven forbid, question your own way of thinking. To find out your true self - or to check if this is really what you want to be - you need to have an outside view on yourself, or an inside view on somebody else. Living the life of another personality, another character, is just the trick to accomplish this. Another name for that is the *eläytyjisti* style of larping, and it is the other style of larping the Turku School promotes. You, the reader, have probably already made your mind about what styles are acceptable and what are not. Now, read on, as we further elaborate the ideals of the Turku School.

### III - Role-playing as art

Art can be broadly defined to be use of a medium with precision and individuality (which is creativity combined with personality). Thus it is possible to create art, as well as pointless entertainment, with RPGs.

When creating a game it is important to know what you want to say with the game, and how it differs from other games. If you're having hard time finding the answer, you should think again if you really should organize the game at all. If you want to tell a story, don't attempt to tell it as a role-playing game (and definitely not as a larp); think about other easily accessible mediums, like short stories instead.

Art is a very delicate thing, and certainly not all role-playing games should be classified as such. Not all even want to be! Most art today is

story-telling in one form or another. But often the art is not in the story itself, but the way it is told. And although RPGs have no actual plot, the way that the many personal experiences are taken, is, in a way, up to the GM. In effect, although the content can not be predetermined, the form can be. And as the form affects the content (in the same way that the content would in active mediums also affect the form), this gives the GM a way of guiding the experience of the players. That is the GM's art.

Eläytyjst role-playing is the best currently existing method for creating experiences and emotions, and allow you to see things from a truly personal point of view. Although this, like television, is often used as a substitute for life or to allow some people to have any feelings at all, it can be much more. It can give great, subjective insight into difficult topics - and allow you to see things from different points of view. In this sense, role-playing can be called an art.

On the other hand, simulationist role-playing is the best currently existing method to simulate the actions of a small society in diverse situations. This can be, for instance, used as a tool for experimenting with different social models. I myself intend to create a working Utopia and then test it with larps and fix it where it didn't work. In this sense, role-playing can be called a (method of) science.

#### **IV - The cause**

These days, role-playing games of all

kinds are organized and played for the most obscure reasons. Many people want to sacrifice the GM's workload on the unholy altar of social relations, playing only when it coincides with meeting friends. In the same sense, some people write their games for just the same reasons, without ever asking themselves why they're doing it.

Good reasons to express yourself are telling a story (or in the case of role-playing games, creating an interesting starting point and setting for possible stories), delivering a message and developing the medium you want to express yourself with. In this sense, RPGs are as good a way to express yourself as any other medium.



Telling stories has always been important for mankind. When you have an idea for a great story, you should think about which medium would best support it - e.g. a story of the development of an anthill from creation to destruction might not work as a larp, but rather as a work of prose, a computer game or as an animated film (The above chapter

was written before the movie Antz --ed.). If the story has a few obvious main characters, but you only know the beginning (if the middle and the end are, as of yet, open) then it might work as a table-top RPG. If the story's middle and end are open, but you know it's about a small society of people and the time-period it encompasses would be relatively short and twist-packed, then you might even use larp as its medium. Notice, however, that the last two methods are not strictly about telling stories via RPG, but rather giving the world and the beginning of a story to the players and seeing what comes out. It is NOT POSSIBLE to tell pre-determined stories through RPG. In delivering a message you should remember the same thing as with story-telling. The difference is, this time the starting point should be your message, not the idea for the story. Delivering messages through RPGs takes some skill, but when successful - thanks to the subjectivity of RPGs - gives more empiric and precise insight than any other medium. There has been relatively few experiments in this field, but larps are extremely well suited at least for criticizing the society, and table-top games for commenting on the behavior and psychology of the individual. Developing a medium is never unnecessary - often even the worst failed attempts can teach a lot about the inner structure of the medium. Often it's not advisable to start by thinking what kind of a game you want to organize, but in these cases

you must go there. When you have a wish to organize something weird - like a larp where causality doesn't work, or a table-top game where the players will try to communicate telepathically with each others - you should think about what type of a game this experiment would benefit most, and create the situation and the world around the experiment. (All the better, of course, if some particular situation or message requires this approach, but it is not condemnable to do it for honest curiosity, either.)

### **V - The absolute rule of the game master**

The role-playing game is the game masters creation, to which he lets the players enter. The game world is the game master's, the scenario is the game master's, the characters (being a part of the game world) are the game master's. The players' part is to get inside their character's head in the situation where the game begins and by eläytyminen try to simulate its actions.

The object of the player should be to obey the game master's every wish concerning the style of play.

This does not mean that the game master should tell the players what their characters should do. When it comes to the things that have to do with the game, the game master has the ultimate ruling power. Not the enjoyability of the gaming session, not cell phones, not hunger, not anything. Sometimes it might be fun to do something that is not in strict

accordance with the character, but - unless the GM has specifically asked you to do so - THAT IS FORBIDDEN. The player's position in an RPG session is further elaborated in the following Player's Vow of Chastity.

## **VI - The relationships between the Turkuists and the opposing schools**

After what has been said above, it is obvious what the relationship between the Turku School and any other schools and ways of thinking is - that is, the relationship between the Turkuists, the gamists and the dramatists.

The Turku School struggles for the immediate and long-term goals of the eläytyjist and simulationist role-players, but presently it also stands for the future of all role-playing. In Norway the dramatists are trying to re-invent theatre, but there the word of the Turku School still brings hope to the oppressed simulationists. In the United States the gamists are trying to de-evolve role-playing back into moving little pieces of plastic on a board, but even in that world of darkness the Turku School sheds light to the eläytyjist movement.

The members and friends of the Turku School are spreading the radical views of the Manifesto all around the world - lately including Stockholm, New Jersey, Helsinki, Istanbul, Vienna, Oslo and Paris. In London the local gaming store refused to sell the Manifesto because it didn't have any pictures.

Yet, despite its international

achievements, even in its native Turku the school is struggling against the short-sighted, the conservative, and above all, the gamist and dramatist schools.

The Turku School now has its eyes mostly set on the Nordic countries, because they live the dawn of role-playing revolution. Compared to the Nordic countries of the early and late 1990s, this revolution is characterized by the more advanced role-playing community and especially the ever-increasing number of newbies.

Thus the role-playing revolution of Northern Europe can only be a prelude to the Turkuist revolution.

To put it shortly, the Turku School supports any and all revolutionary role-players' movement directed against the current gamist and dramatist circumstances.

In all these movements the Turkuists put the question of character eläytyminen and society simulation above all others.

The Turku School thinks it despicable to hide one's views and intentions. Turkuists openly admit that their goals can only be achieved by taking down by force the current system of role-playing. Let the gamist and dramatist classes shiver before the Turkuist revolution. The simulationists and the eläytyjists have nothing to lose but their chains. But they have the whole world to win.

**TURKUIST ROLE-PLAYERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!**

# The Larper's Vow of Chastity

## Turku 1999

As a live-action role-player I hereby vow to submit to the following rules, included in the Vow of Chastity published in the Manifesto of the Turku School.

1. When playing a character and immersing myself in it, my foremost goal shall be to simulate what happens inside the character's head, and how it affects his behavior. Hollow pretence I leave for the actors.
2. I shall use no non-diegetic (out-of-game world) methods (such as background music or unrelated off-game comments) while playing, if there is any other way to play



the situation. (E.g. unless the game material specifically says otherwise, when the character hits, I hit.)

If I think I see something like this in a

game, I will assume them to be diegetic methods, and that my character experiences them exactly as I do, unless the game master has instructed me otherwise. (It remains the game master's duty, however, to make sure I know what level of physical and mental safety and suspension of disbelief is in use in the game.)

3. I shall learn and understand the character's person by building the self image, personality, world view and other things that make it an individual from the subconscious outwards (i.e. not via manners or such). I expect others to do the same.
4. When attempting to look and act like the character, I shall avoid stage acting. I am aware that I and my character might have different ways of speech, manners or other outward features, without them forcing me, the player, to over-act or otherwise call for undue attention.

5. I shall immerse myself in the game with the assumption that if a character or other game element seems out of place in the world or in the game - such as comical, over-acted or badly played - it is still a part of the world,

not a stupid idea the player had.

6. If forced to improvise or add to my character during the game, my first and foremost goal shall be to do this by thinking about the big picture I have of the character and the game world, not trying to add surface dramatics or theatre methods. While playing, I will focus on immersing myself in my own character, not trying to improve the gaming experience of other players. I will try to be true to my character without trying to spot a story-line which I should act out. I accept the fact that as a player my part is to see only a small part of the whole.

7. I shall assume that the game master has told me everything I need to know about the game world, and what he wants his players to know about larping. I shall not attempt to use any general larping conventions in any one game, but the exact conditions given to me by the game master: if for example the off-game sign has been defined to be something, I will not substitute anything for it.

8. When attending a game, I shall not consider it to be a member of any particular genre or see its events as larp-plots that have a certain solution. Unless the game master tells me otherwise, I shall see each game as a unique work of art, which should be treated accordingly.

9. I shall not let any non-critical

factors from outside the game (such as entertaining the other players, advancing the plot, guiding the newbies, off-gaming etc.) affect my playing in any way. During the game these things do not exist for me.

10. As a player I shall strive not to gain fame or glory, but to act out the character as well as possible according to the guidance given to me by the game master. Even if this means I have to spend the entire game alone in a closet without anyone ever finding out.

Furthermore, as a role-player I vow to refrain from any personal style of gaming! I do not try to play, but to mold myself after the game master's wishes. I do not try to create myself a perfect gaming session or give others short-lived pleasure, because I consider the game as a whole to be much more important than any single player's experience of the game. My greatest goal shall be to fulfill the game master's vision, forcing myself to immerse in the character as truthfully and realistically as possible. I swear to do this in all ways possible to myself, regardless of any concepts of good taste and the convenience of other players.

**Comments to the Turku School**

The tone, the elitism, the tone. Mike Pohjola probably won some people over with his provocative tone and viewpoints. But he probably lost many more along the way. Where Dogma brought the larp theory out of the closet, the Turku manifesto shouted its message to the entire world. And the world responded. On its way Turku gained a lot of followers, but it annoyed a lot more people. E.g. in Denmark where 'Turku' has almost been a curse, and to be called a Turku-organiser or -player isn't a good thing...

This rumour can probably be blamed on two things. One is the terrible normative tone, in the Turku manifesto. The other is the general way people get an impression from only reading half a text, and hence lines as this: "I do not try to play, but to mold myself after the game master's

wishes« has made a bad impression. And that's a pity.

Because Turku is a lot more than just the hailing of one kind of larping and a few fancy Finnish words.

Contrary to Dogme, Turku gives the impression of being a complete larp theory - or at least being more than an ad hoc framework. However, many of the good ideas, thoughts and concepts are drowned in retotics. As you can read from the foreword to this edition of the Turku manifesto, Mike Pohjola has come to this conclusion too. And that's probably a good thing, because the best part of Turku isn't the famous attitude. It's the theoretical framework. And that is worth building on. So my advice to you, the reader, is to read the Turku manifesto again. But this time, ignore the tone and ignore the elitism. And discover some true insights.

**The Author**

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He has been larping since 1996, and has organised five larps in different genres since 1998. Also, he is the editor of the Danish LARP portal [www.liveforum.dk](http://www.liveforum.dk). This year he is an organiser of Knudepunkt.

## Comments to the Turku School

It is so refreshing to read something where someone actually has the nerve to claim that they are right (and that everyone else is wrong naturally). The language in the turko-manifest reminds me of the unconventional theorist within my academic field, whom people either love because they pinpoint the hypochondria in “common practise” or hates for the very same reasons. And oh my god, the turku-school is not ashamed of claiming everyone else wrong. The main aspect is the abandonment of the dramatist and gamist style (see the “trevejsmodellenn« in same chapter) of playing and organizing larp in favour of the simulationists and the eläytyjists way. The creators tell us, that larp is not a storytelling medium, and honestly; I BELIVE. The Turku-manifest is not a proposal; it is a demand for total revolution of the common way of thinking.

I have hear many that distances themselves from the manifest because they either don't understand or because the feel that the tone is to elitist and hard. The main trend in larp has always been that »there is room for everybody«. This is not within the Turku thought. Either you see the light or you stay away.

The Turku-school has sins it came out been the target of some ridicule. Often I have hard a Turku-larp being one where all the players are in their separated closets and they do not speak or have contact the whole larp, but that they are very much immersed

in their role! When reading the »The Larper's Vow of Chastity” I see where this comes from. The 10th rule is: “As a player I shall strive not to gain fame or glory, but to act out the character as well as possible according to the guidance given to me by the game master. Even if this means I have to spend the entire game alone in a closet without anyone ever finding out”. I'm not so sure I like to be in a closet the whole game, but then again this is not what this rule is about. The Turku-manifest has often been the target of many misunderstandings and I suspect this is the outcome of people that cannot see thought the very elaborate and provocative language. Reading the Turku-manifest with some form of distance it contains many very well thought out points and ideas, that even non-followers can have much use of. But now there is only one thing left to say: “Let the gamist and dramatist classes shiver before the Turkuist revolution. The simulationists and the eläytyjists have nothing to lose but their chains. But they have the whole world to win«. Let the revolution come!!

### The Author

Line Thorup is 26 years old and lives at the moment in London, where she is a master student in archaeology, specializing in field techniques and contract archaeology.

That's

**LARP!**



# Why do Bad Larps Happen to Good People?

A Swedish friend of mine recently described somebody as “A pretty bad larper, the sort of person who doesn’t understand why you need to make your own shoes for a fantasy game.” As an experienced all-genre larper, yet to put one stitch to a piece of leather, I was pretty rattled. The most talked-about larp theories like the Turku

Manifesto have been normative; describing what larp sometimes is and what the authors think it should be instead. Descriptive theory, like the Meilahti Model, focuses on what all role-playing always is. No larp theorist so far has seen the goddamn shoe norm coming, and to the ones that might have, like my friend, it was too obvious to write about.

## The Author

Joc Koljonen is 24 years old and lives in Stockholm, Sweden. She works as a film critic and as the editor-in-chief of a digital TV station.

She was introduced to larping in the Helsinki Clan Raven in 1995, organised ten bilingual larps and served as chairman of the national larp society before moving to Sweden in 1999.

She has since contributed character work for several Swedish larps and played in several, as well as a few in Norway and Denmark. Her favourite larp activities include editing the nordic fanzine Panclou and overdosing in a bathtub in Martin Ericsson’s Hamlet.

A gaming culture to me is a group of players who share the same assumptions about what a larp is and what measures are relevant in describing its quality. If a gaming culture takes its assumptions and writes them down in instruction form, that’s a normative larp text right there. You can find one, headlined either “Introduction” or “Vision”, in the source material of almost every modern larp. Those texts usually concern themselves with the conceived purpose of larping in general and the game in particular. Sometimes instructions are also given on gaming method and style.

If the makers of a game consider their vision to be far from the player group’s every-day assumptions on

these matters, the game will be called “experimental” and all of its requirements described in great detail. If it’s considered standard fare, the most you get is probably something like “we have high ambitions for the quality of equipment”. Sometimes, in Norway, that means they have a genuine 40s fishing boat but pierced noses are still OK, and sometimes, in Sweden, it means all goddamn shoes should be hand-made.

You don’t even have to go abroad to find a gaming culture different from your own. Any metal bar in your town will probably shelter a community of vampire gamers with character sheets, hit-points and all. I will make only one normative statement in this article, and this is it: everybody should participate in a larp from a different culture. It will change your understanding of your own games and show you how several of your most basic assumptions about game quality are really opinions and subject to change.

Non-negotiable: The lowest common denominator

Role-playing = people creating and sharing a story through the process of assuming characters and imagining actions, feelings and dialogue for these characters in interaction with each other and their surroundings. Some or all players can assume different characters at different times within the story, and will to different degrees simulate the surroundings, including

natural laws and fate.

Larp = form of role-play that fulfils two additional criteria:

### **Representation of space**

Larp always has a geographical dimension. Live bodies traversing actual distances represent movement of characters through space, although not always to scale. (In other forms of role-playing games, describing the movement is generally enough: I walk to the door). Exceptions occur when a physical representation of the diegetic truth would be boring, dangerous or complicated – like when players aren’t actually dead or invisible.

### **Representation of time**

On the scene level, character time advances in real time, although cut techniques are sometimes used between scenes, and time freezes within a scene can sometimes be necessary to portray supernatural speed or simultaneous events. Although a game where all players would move and talk very fast in some segments is conceivable, I can’t say I’ve ever heard of one. (In many other forms of role-play, conversations and actions are routinely fast-forwarded through gamemaster input: And they talked about the plans for an hour, drinking beer, while you...)

Only this, I believe, is true for all larps all over the world. Everything else is negotiable. Americans run very advanced historical larps in

ordinary classrooms, and can play fantasy games in public parks with only symbolic character apparel, like a tunic and jeans. In their view the kind of highly mobile free-form tabletop-role-playing popular especially at conventions in Sweden would probably count as larp. Sometimes it fits my definition too.

The Meilahti School, in its functional description of RPG, argues that RPG always requires a gamemaster. I agree. I believe, however, that further study of the uses of the gamemaster role in different kinds of RPG could identify a distinction between larp and other forms. Since this article has a practical focus I will use the wider term organiser instead. A larp organiser is often a gamemaster, but the term also includes crew that is not involved with decisions about the diegetic framework of the larp. A player wielding gamemaster powers temporarily is not an organiser, but an organiser can be a player.

Different gaming cultures differ in their basic assumptions of at least the following topics: Player-organiser relations including division of labour; relative status of the individual and the collective experience; and the acceptable amount of abstract representation or simulation. I will elaborate on the less obvious ones briefly.

This isn't a complete set of scales to measure the type of a larp (and it

is absolutely useless for measuring quality). But I hope it can be a tool in avoiding confusion, at Knudepunkt, around strange shoe statements, and most importantly at games. One thing is certain about gamemastering larps: What is not specified in game instructions is left for players to decide. If the game includes even one participant from another gaming culture, the organisers are likely to be very surprised with how freedom on any of these listed issues has been interpreted.

### **Organisers and players**

Division of labour of the game organisers and the players, especially in regards to plot composition and character creation, and the physical representations of the game world.

Defining story limits or the diegesis is usually known as “the writing” and is done by organisers in the role of gamemaster. They will choose a setting and a theme, and usually a general storyline, often including fairly specific plots and character ideas. In some games players are encouraged to make up plots as they go along, often forcing odd choices upon their characters to create interesting conflicts. In others the whole plot is painstakingly constructed by the gamemasters as a framework that marks the borders for experimentation with character psychology – an experiment that is automatically ruined if the player decides to remove the character from the situation.

In very broad terms the first game might be a five-day fantasy game with several hundred players, in which the organisers leave it to the players to create and submit their own character descriptions. The sheer scale makes it highly unlikely that a game that big could be centrally plotted to make each player feel like the star in a movie about his or her character. The second

in accordance with organiser instructions. In some cultures these instructions are wishes. In other they are laws.

Ownership of the game, including material and immaterial game elements, control of the game once it has started and rights to game information once it's over;



kind of game could be a tightly plotted murder mystery, played for 36 hours in a basement in Turku. Here each participant would receive a character description of nine pages detailing his past, personality and ambition, and the meetings of these individual readings of those characters would unravel the plot.

As for creating physical representation, it is normal that the organisers, with more or less help from participants, create location and sets. Although some organisers provide outfits for a fee, players are normally required to prepare their kit and costume

The authorship of a Turku game is fairly obvious: somebody wrote it. But who owns the fantasy game of the first example? If each group wrote all characters, created its own society and culture? Are they allowed to introduce new elements that spring naturally out of their playing like, say, a kill-em-all-cult to complicate the game? Or should they hand gamemaster powers back to the organisers? And after the game – who has the right to organise more games within the same “world”? Who should decide what is diegetic in each game, and what isn't?

Artistic ambition of the organisers

and players, political content and awareness thereof.

Artistic ambition is intimately connected to genre and style. A classic Finnish example was the Post-Björneborgian war game *Valokaari*, which by the participants, mostly Turku style adepts, was understood to be (and played as) a psychologically intense low-key portrayal of fear. The organisers, it turned out, had wanted it to become a study of people snapping under pressure and turning internal tension into an all-out conflict. The



artistic ambition of the players was so different the organisers were bored to tears by their own game.

And politics? Politics are everywhere, even when organisers forget.

Patriarchal villages morph into housewife democracies; people protecting their homes give some players an ugly nationalist vibe. These reactions are fairly predictable, yet they are often overlooked, causing unnecessary conflict during and after games.

### **The gaming experience**

Whether larp is an individual or a collective experience, and whether the construction of the game should reflect this. The relative status of different gaming styles and the objectives of the single player. The relative status of character logic, plot logic and game dramaturgy where these are in conflict. Genre and style: awareness thereof. Acting and directing.

On a theoretical level, the individual-collective divide is often about where the larp actually exists – in the physical room, in the interaction between immersed players and their surroundings (“interimmersion”), or in the mind of each player separately. Players don’t need to agree to be able to play together, even though some games are more easily adapted to some preferences. The tradition of going to larps in groups tends to make each player responsible for the experience of the whole group. Abandoning the group, even where this would be

logical for the character, is a form of treachery, robbing the group of all potential plot-related action represented by the character.

In Finland, where organisers write nigh-all characters, and games are generally smaller, the focus is usually on the individual. That makes the divide between gaming styles much more obvious. Regardless of character personality some larpers will play for the emotional experiences, some for the actual experiences and some to win. In a fantasy scenario these groups are glaringly obvious. The first kind will enjoy sitting around at the inn, whispering to his trusty companion or no one at all, living the life of the character, as boring as it may seem. The second kind will react to any rumour strongly, lead the villagers in vocal protests and organising a team of swashbucklers to go out and fight something, anything. The third kind will never brood, but sometimes sit around at the inn for networking purposes, taking action only when he's certain the group he tags along with will perform the coolest actions – or take power over the game society.

Not all gaming styles are appropriate in all games. As the awareness of these issues has heightened, it has become obvious that most players are comfortable in many styles. Even the ones who cannot leave their gamist urges behind can deliver their performance in many ways: low-key and naturalist, or highly theatrically.

Although it is not always explicit in the written game material, organisers generally have a very clear idea of both the genre they want their game to represent and the style in which they wish it to be played. It makes sense for organisers to step into the role of director, treating the player output as an acting process that needs instruction to avoid meta-level conflict. Conflict like a slouching king, with the speech patterns of a Budweiser commercial, facing down a poker-straight innkeeper, who talks like a king.

### **Simulation and representation**

The acceptable level of simulation in representations of physical contact, psychological conflicts, intense experiences, and the supernatural.

The acceptable level of simulation in representations of physical objects and surroundings.

Use of non-diegetic elements and other experimental techniques.

Physical and psychological safety issues, including awareness thereof.

Attitude towards and use of meta-game commentary and off-gaming (including game breaks and safety words).

In most Nordic larp cultures a low level of simulation is admired and respected. A game, where very few things or actions represent something they are not, is considered to be “good”, “ambitious” or “advanced”, whereas a piece of cardboard with “this is a door with a security lock”

penned on it is considered “bad”. The trend towards gradually less simulation has appeared in all gaming cultures I’ve come in contact with, to an extent that it is today considered something of a natural law. There is an understanding, probably false, that groups veer towards visually purer styles because they understand that these are “better”. Especially in collectively oriented gaming cultures, like most of Sweden, the quality of costume and equipment is very important. I believe this is no coincidence. If you do not look like part of the fiction, you remind the others of the off-game world at all times, and risk spoiling the collective experience. But as long as you do not speak of off-game matters no one will know whether or not you are immersed. Needless to say, a majority of larpers from different cultures, wearing ordinary army boots in fantasy games, will view this as hogwash. Yet, having observed naturalist tendencies in all larp cultures I’ve been in contact with, a short discussion of where this inevitably leads is in order.

The ambition to remove all simulation will at its logical extreme create games devoid of all physical and almost all psychological conflict. These are indeed very naturalistic, and often (unless placed in rare genres like situation comedy) very boring, even to immersionists. Actually, one might argue that some of them are not larps at all, rather life, just somebody else’s.

One way to address this boredom is to add “artistic expression” through surreal or symbolic elements, often through non-diegetic means. It can be a very effective way to add levels to character narrative. It is also, technically, opposed to the original ambition. The techniques used by the players at experimental Knappnålshuvudet to not “see” the angels walking around are of course the exact same ones used by all Vampire players to not “see” invisible vampires. But you would be hard pressed to get an Artistic Larper to admit it.

Another way is to bring the action and conflict back, but keep simulation at minimum levels (what is popularly, and critically, known as hard-core gaming). Full-contact, low-impact fighting is not uncommon, actual sex occurs occasionally and players regularly place their characters in psychologically taxing situations. After-effects of these, from bruising to trauma, always carry into the off-game world. To limit the damage, complex safety systems are usually installed. When they are not, the danger is a constant reminder of the outside world. When they are, the very borders that allow us to play will be one. Again, to remove all game-like qualities, all borders of the fiction, is to make the larp a non-game. Whatever comes just before that level, though, will probably be a very interesting larp experience.

One consequence of – and, I believe,

reason for – all cultures gradually lowering their tolerance for abstraction is that once you get used to not having to imagine something like medieval shoes, you forget how to do it. Or maybe the efforts of your internal imaginators are just directed at something else.

### **Agreeing to disagree**

This is I: Larp happens through a psychological process of immersion into a character (eläytyminen). Since the game exists only inside each player's mind, all physical representation remains symbolic. Good gaming is acting as is logical for the character in the established situation. Larp for the player is his individual experience ("deep feelings") of the interaction between his character and the others as well as the game surroundings. Choosing to larp scenes alone enhances the overall game, if solitude is a logical character choice.

And this is my friend: Larp happens

though a physical process of acting like a character. Since the game exists at the juncture of diegetic reality and the physical truth, the physical representation of objects and places should never be abstract. Good gaming is when the action is never in conflict with the fiction. Larp for the player is helping create a collective experience ("cool scenes") through being a part of the physical fiction, constantly in interaction with the other players. Choosing to larp scenes alone will diminish the overall game, since solitude prevents interaction.

Spelled out that way, I get the shoe thing. I don't agree, but I get it, and having tried several kinds of games in the Nordic region I can describe my idea of perfection. It is a larp written by the Finns, produced by the Swedes, infused with meaning by the Norwegians, and enjoyed as though all players were Danes. It is taking my eläytyminen and sticking it up her, uh, footwear.



# The Meilahti School Thoughts on Role-playing

## Foreword

This revised essay is an attempt to create a model describing role-playing games (RPGs). Even though there has been some writing on RPGs, so far no other serious, descriptive models attempting to define what RPGs actually are and how they are created exist. We are not interested, at this stage, in using tools created for theatre studies, organisational communication, ludology, or any other discipline. Before we can successfully use a tool from another field of study

we need to know what it is we are actually examining.

The purpose of this essay is to help define a theoretical framework for discussing role-playing and role-playing games. Any discussion needs a language shared by the participants to be meaningful, and sadly such a common language often seems to be missing when attempts to discuss role-playing are made.

We have attempted to define role-playing in a way that encompasses

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the different forms of playing that we know of and shuns normative choices that define the right, or better, ways of playing. Our wish is to encourage further and more detailed discussion of the subject, not declare one method of playing superior to others or try to limit the scope of role-playing based on our own preferences. We want to cover all games from classic Dungeons & Dragons games to post-modern Turku-school live-action games, and from table top games to computer assisted gaming.

It is important to note, however, that this model is necessarily an abstraction, and as such addresses ideal role-playing rather than role-playing culture in general. We have not been interested in examining the social structures underlying various gaming situations or the real-life dynamics between a game's actual

participants.

In short our attempt has been to create a descriptive model that covers and uncovers all the games that we intuitively call role-playing games on a theoretical level.

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Helsinki, January 15th 2003

Henri Hakkarainen  
Jaakko Stenros

### The Author

Henri Hakkarainen is 23 years old and lives in Helsinki, Finland. He studies communications at the University of Helsinki.

He's been larping since 1994 and has organised several games since then. He has also done his time in the governing bodies of numerous organisations, including SuoLL, and helped in organising Ropecon on a couple of occasions.

These days he prefers to concentrate on theory, and playing in the really good games.

# The Meilahti Model

## Definition

A role-playing game is what is created in the interaction between players or between player(s) and gamemaster(s) within a specified diegetic framework.

Role-playing a role-playing game requires four things, a gamemaster, a player, interaction, and a diegetic framework. By “gamemaster” and “player” we are referring to roles assumed by participants. It is possible to switch from one role to another during one gaming session, and there can be a number of gamemasters and a number of players, but at least one of each is needed.

Diegesis is what is true within the game. Usually this means the game world. The diegetic frame is composed of what is true in the past (history of the frame and the characters), what the present is, and the expectations of the characters regarding the future. The gamemaster creates the diegetic frame and enunciates it in the depth that is necessary and possible.

Once the diegetic frame has been created, the gamemaster need not participate actively in the game, even though she has (and indeed must have) the possibility to jump in at any time. The gamemaster has total control

over the situation created, but she has to surrender part of that power either implicitly or explicitly to the player in order for meaningful interaction to be possible. Surrendering part of the creative control is necessary in order to make a distinction between role-playing and telling a story.

The gamemaster has the final say - nothing is true in the diegetic frame unless the gamemaster approves it (gamemasters usually implicitly approve all that the players have their characters do). This means that new elements cannot be incorporated into the game without the conceit of the gamemaster.

The player assumes a role, a subject position within the diegetic frame, approved by the gamemaster. The game is created in the interaction between the players or between the player and the game world. This process of interaction is defined as role-playing.

## Role, Character, and Player

A role is any subject position within a set discourse, an artificial closure articulating the player within the diegetic frame of the game or in a real-life situation. There is no need to differentiate between the roles the

player assumes within the diegetic frame and the roles assumed outside of it (in fact “player” is a role as well). They are all equally aspects of the participant’s fluid self; specific tools for interacting in certain situations according to a specific set of rules, and based on assumptions defined either explicitly or implicitly. (For an introduction to post-modern thinking on identity and the self, our basic framework for dealing with the concept of roles, see for an example Hall, 1988 and 1996)

A character is a framework of roles through which the player interacts within the game, and for which she constructs an illusion of a continuous and fixed identity, a fictional “story of self” binding the separate, disconnected roles together. It is important to note that the word “fictional” has a double meaning in this case, referring not only to the fictional nature of the diegetic frame, but also the illusionary quality of any notion of a fixed, stable identity. (Ibid.)

Usually the character is an anthropomorphic construct, a human-like being, but it is possible for the character to be anything from an inanimate object to a group of actors, such as a household, a corporation or a family. The only requirement is that the character needs to be able to communicate somehow - it needs to have the potential for interaction.

The term “character” has a double meaning in common usage. Character means not only the collection of roles played in a given setting, the interpretation created by the player, but it is also often used to refer to the actual concrete text given to the player by the gamemaster that describes the history and personality of the character. In this text we use the term “character” exclusively to refer to the collection of roles within a framework.

A player is a participant who assumes said roles within the diegetic frame. She usually plays one character at a time within the game world, but this need not always be so. The player can influence and even determine the events in the game within the boundaries set by the gamemaster.

The player has her own interpretation of the events of the game. The internal processes of the player are beyond the gamemaster’s control, but as soon as they are expressed, as soon as they become relevant to the game as a whole, the gamemaster has control over them again.

### **Diegesis**

Diegesis is what is true within the game. A diegetic frame is usually the game world, but as a game doesn’t have to take place in a world the term frame is adopted. The diegetic frame is composed of everything that is true in the game world (past, present, expectations of the future).

In practise this means that a written description of the history of the world is diegetic, but the rules of the game are not. Or to be more precise, what is described is diegetic, but the form of the description or the object where the description is stored may or may not be diegetic.

Non-diegetic factors should not ideally influence the possibilities available in the diegetic frame. This implies that the gamemaster must have the potential to actively influence the game while it is taking place, as full virtual realities are not yet available.

The player of course has her own interpretation of the diegesis (see Montola 2003, in this book), just as a reader constructs her own reading of a book or an audience member, or even an actor, of a play. However, once her interpretation is expressed and becomes relevant to the diegesis itself it is subject to the gamemaster's approval. Through this process the participants constantly adjust their readings of the game, and the gamemaster functions as the gatekeeper of the diegesis.

### **Gamemaster**

Gamemastering is a role adopted by a participant when defining the diegetic framework of the game. Usually one person assumes this responsibility for the entire duration of the game, but this does not need be so. There can be more than one gamemaster and

the participants can go from being a player to being a gamemaster and vice versa during a gaming session, as long as not everyone is a gamemaster at the same time.

Gamemaster has a number of synonyms in circulation: Game Moderator, Storyteller, Dungeon Master, Narrator, etc. We use the term gamemaster as it is very widespread and because it nicely underlines the fact that this role carries power.

The gamemaster has many tools for creating the diegetic frame. When describing the frame, the gamemaster not only describes what is currently in the frame, but also what is possible within the frame. As such the gamemaster is the highest authority in the game, but she must also surrender a part of the power to the player.

The gamemaster also defines the limits of the power passed to the players. Often this takes the form of defining, implicitly or explicitly, the medium (e.g. role-playing, live action role-playing), the narrative form (e.g. integrating or dissipating, see Montola 2002), the genre (e.g. fantasy, cyberpunk, see Stenros 2002) and the style of play (e.g. soap, immersionist, *ibid.*). The player has the possibility to define things inside the diegetic frame, but only to the extent condoned by the gamemaster.

### **Role-Playing in the Diegetic**

**Frame**

If the gamemaster doesn't release some power to the player, there will be no interaction, just the gamemaster telling a story. Usually the player is given control at least over the actions of one character. This control is subject to gamemaster approval, and if necessary the gamemaster can take the power back.

The gamemaster is hence the gatekeeper of the diegesis. This power is tied to the role of "gamemaster", is arbitrary in nature, and stems from the conventions of the discourse. In practice underlying social dynamics often affect the power structure of the gaming situation, and a player can choose not to participate in a game if she dislikes the gamemaster's methods of controlling the events, but this is irrelevant to studying role-playing on an ideal level. In order for role-playing to take place the player must accept the gamemaster's power over the diegetic frame.

When a game begins the gamemaster defines the diegetic frame. This can be done for example by stating that the diegetic frame is similar to the real world, by referring to a commercially published game world and rules, or by defining the frame from scratch.

When a character is created it can be created by the player, by the gamemaster, or as a group effort, but the gamemaster has final say on what characters are possible or suitable in a

given diegetic frame.

As the game proceeds the gamemaster describes the diegetic frame and usually plays the part of everything but the player's character. If the player oversteps her authority, attempts to do something that is impossible inside the diegetic frame, or for whatever reason, the gamemaster can override the player's actions.

If there is disagreement, on for example what the surroundings are like, or what exactly has happened, it is the gamemaster who negotiates and in the end decides, what is true. The role-playing game can be seen as series of incidents that the participants use as a basis for their individual narrative readings. If and when conflicts in these readings are expressed, the gamemaster defines what is true.

**Further Thoughts****Forms of role-playing**

Role-playing can take many forms. Traditionally they are played in a shared space, where most of the communication is verbal, but there are a wealth of possible tools and methods available. It is possible to communicate through email; Internet relay chat (IRC) channels; the diegetic frame can be created with a computer game; communication can be bodily, text based, or verbal and so forth. As long as there is interaction in a diegetic frame through roles, the activity can be called a role-playing game.

The traditional method of playing, “the tabletop game” based on verbal communication and often incorporating heavy game mechanics and dice as random number generators, has tended to hold something of a monopoly on the term role-playing and all the discussion surrounding it. In our opinion, the mechanics used for simulation are not the all-important defining aspect of role-playing. Trying to limit the term’s use merely to the type of game played

is transformed into live-action role-playing, as live-action games often use some amount of abstract simulation and most other games tend to have at least a small amount of bodily expression in them. The term is still useful in communicating the gamemaster’s expectations to players, especially as there has traditionally been a strong call to differentiate (or even exclude) live-action role-playing from the other forms of role-playing. There are, however, fairly notable differences in the level of simulation



originally (or often the type of game played by the person defining the limits) is a narrow-minded approach severely limiting the potential for further progress with this form of expression.

One clear sub set of role-playing is live action role-playing (LARP). In larps, the level of abstraction is lowered and roles are expressed bodily (see also Sihvonen 1997). However there is no clear cut line where role-playing

used in larps around the world. The vague distinction between larps and “traditional” role-playing games is thus underlined.

Computer-aided or even computer-based gaming has also tended to be a matter of heated discussion. Mostly this has been due to the limitations computers as a medium impose on the potential for interaction and the freedom enjoyed by the players (or even the gamemasters) within the diegetic

frame. In our opinion computer-aided gaming has potential, but at the moment the technical limitations are far too severe for it to be an especially interesting form of role-playing, even if the requirements for role-playing are met (and they usually aren't). As the technology develops there will be a need to discuss the computer-aided and -based games more extensively.

### Alternative Definitions

Our definition of what role-playing is hardly the first of its kind. Various

advocates of the systematic approach (Various, 2002). Their definitions of role-playing include the need for a rule system, character identification, and the possibility to think in context. We have not placed emphasis on a system of rules, since some form of a system can be identified within almost any human endeavour. Most rule systems we encounter in life are of course implicit. That explicated rules exist in some role-playing games, is not a very good basis for a definition as long as some or all of the rules are implicit in



role-playing source books have attempted to define role-playing, as have a number of different schools of thought (Turku, Iirislahti and Roihuvuori to mention a few, see for example Pohjola 2000, Lojonen 2002). These definitions have been largely normative, not descriptive, and they have usually concentrated on either traditional role-playing or live-action role-playing.

One vague definition is used by the

others. Character identification and thinking in context are unsatisfactory defining aspects at best, as books, movies, and theatre all have systems and offer the chance of character identification.

The closest approximation of our definition comes from Norway. Eirik Fatland and Lars Wingård define live-action role-playing in their manifesto Dogme 99 as »a meeting between people who, through their

roles, relate to each other in a fictional world« (Fatland & Wingård, 2002). In the Norwegian tradition, larping is associated strongly with performing arts and a clear distinction between traditional role-playing and live-action role-playing is made. We disagree. The idea behind both forms of expression is the same, even if the methods do vary.

Another difference is that we see gamemasters as a necessity. Somebody needs to define their »fictional world« and our diegetic frame; somebody needs to decide what is accepted into the diegetic frame. Our, or actually the post-modern, view of roles is also a bit more complicated than the one usually taken in discussing role-playing, but the inherent idea is the same.

### **Criticism and Questions**

There are a few questions regarding role-playing, which often turn up in theoretical discussions. Is it possible to play a role-playing game alone? Is it possible to have a computer-based role-playing game? Can a computer be a gamemaster? What separates child's play and make-believe from role-playing? What is the difference between improvisational theatre and live-action role-playing? What separates storytelling (in the sense that narratology uses the term) and role-playing?

According to our definition, it is not possible to role-play alone; a role-playing game is created in the

interaction between players or between a player and a gamemaster. What one does alone we call daydreaming. We do not want to imply that it is in any way an inferior pastime; we just do not consider it role-playing.

We also do not see most of the computer games that are advertised as role-playing games as actual role-playing games, because at the moment we are not aware of a computer that can satisfactorily fill the role of a gamemaster. There are a number of computer games that can be played as role-playing games, just like Monopoly or Risk can be played as role-playing games if proper characters are created and a GM is introduced. This we call computer-assisted role-playing. Some computer games nowadays are created with this object in mind (e.g. *Redemption*, *Neverwinter Nights*). Most massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) could very easily be played as role-playing games, but this possibility is seldom taken advantage of.

The distinction between role-playing and a child's play is the presence of a gamemaster. The same goes for improvisational theatre and larping, as well as storytelling and role-playing. Also, if everyone can be considered a gamemaster (as in improvisational theatre from another point of view), the activity ceases to be a role-playing game by our definition. Thus a role-playing game can have a number of gamemasters as long as not everyone

is a gamemaster all the time.

These are conscious choices we have made. Although we strive to be descriptive instead of normative, at some point choices have to be made. In order for the term »role-playing game« to have any meaning it has to exclude something. Otherwise we end up in situation where someone says that life is not just a game but also a role-playing game and we all nod our heads in unison.

This is where we have decided to draw the line. We have created a model that includes all activities that we recognize as role-playing and still creates a clear distinction between role-playing and other similar pursuits. In the process we have excluded solitary role-playing and storytelling games where everyone is a gamemaster all the time.

On the other hand our model includes some things that might not fit the most narrow-minded traditional definitions of role-playing games. For example sufficiently advanced S&M role-play would meet our criteria for a role-playing game. The same applies to some forms of therapy –some sessions of psychotherapy probably can be considered role-playing for example.

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# Interaction: The Key Element of Larp

This article is a description of larp. In the article I try to describe the different levels of larp, and the role of interaction in a larp. The article starts with a general introduction to how I see larp, and then go on to introduce the model of interaction. This article is an edit of an article previously published online (Gade, 2002).

## Introduction and definitions

I see larp as a media, i.e. a

medium for communications. However, in a larp the participants are not passive receptors of communication, but also transmit and create communication with other participants. Hence, larp is an interactive medium.

As we all know, a larp starts with the participants taking roles upon themselves, so that they function and act as an independent personality, which does not correspond with their personality outside the larp.

In a larp it is important to distinguish the participant (outside the larp), the character (the idea for the role) and the role (the participants' physical manifestation of the character). Where the role is diegetic, the character and the participant are both non-diegetic (Andreasen, 2003). The role is a result of the meeting of the participant and the character. Two different participants playing the same character wouldn't result in two identical roles.

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He has been larping since 1996, and has organised five larps in different genres since 1998. Also, he is the editor of the Danish LARP portal [www.liveforum.dk](http://www.liveforum.dk). This year he is an organiser of Knudepunkt.

An essential part of being a role is interacting with the immediate surroundings. The role will like or dislike other characters and have certain desires, and in correspondence with these, the roles will interact with each other and with their immediate physical (e.g. a staircase or a gun) and social surroundings (e.g. the social structure of the larp).

However, a role does not only interact with the immediate surroundings. The role also interacts with parts of the larp that are not represented at the scenario, which we can call the world of the larp.

Both the surroundings and the world of the larp are diegetic, the difference being the representation at the larp. However, the roles also interact with game mechanics (such as rules) and other non-diegetic objects. However, this type of interaction is not necessary at a larp, since non-diegetic objects can (theoretically) be excluded completely from a larp.

I define a larp as: An interactive medium where one or more participants take on roles. The roles interact with each other, and with the surroundings and the world of the larp. In this interaction many

improvised stories are created and told.

### **Let's go deeper:**

#### **The elements of a larp**

More often than not, the world of the larp is different from ours. Typically the organisers of the larp describe the world, and you can see descriptions of for example culture, norms, history, and geography. The world of the larp is a simulation of a world, often our own with some modifications (e.g. in a different time or place).

If the world is very different from our normal world, the roles can often perform actions that the participants can't normally do (such as magic). These actions are represented by non-diegetic objects, such as game mechanics. Game mechanics are the rules and concepts that allow the simulation of actions that are allowed in the fictional larp world, but impossible or unwanted in the "real" world. It is not the role that interacts with the game mechanics, but the participant, in what Andreasen calls an Orwellian Double Think (Andreasen, 2003).

The world is the general idea of where the roles interact. The roles can interact with the world, but it is usually only on a psychological

level, for instance interacting with the metaphysics of the world. This interaction is usually seen as the role interpreting the world and acting in accordance with this (for instance if the world is our world of 1350 most people would refuse the notion of “a round earth”). Also, the role is shaped by the world. The writer of the character would describe a character that makes sense in the world.

If interaction should go beyond the psychological level, the role should interact with its surroundings. The surroundings are anything that is present in the larp, be it physical or social. That includes other roles, i.e. for role A, role B is a part of the surroundings and vice versa.

The difference between the world and the surroundings is the representation at the larp. Where the world is only represented as an idea or a concept, the surroundings have a direct impact on the roles.

The surroundings for one role consist of:

- The physical reality of the larp (e.g. a town or a room)
- The social structures
- The other roles
- The situation (or ‘background’/ ‘plot’/‘history’)

At a larp you can typically divide the surroundings in two:

- The description of the surroundings (typically made by the storyteller (Hutchison, 2003)).
- The actual physical surroundings (typically made by the practical organisers and FX group (Hutchison, 2003)).

### **Interaction!**

Action and progress in a larp happens when interaction happens, otherwise you have a complete standstill. We can separate the following distinct forms of interaction:

- World interaction (World interacting with world)
- Macro interaction (World interacting with surroundings)
- Meso interaction (Surroundings interacting with surroundings)
- Philosophical interaction (World interacting with role)
- Practical interaction (Role interacting with surroundings, and as a part of this: role interacting with other roles)
- Non-diegetic interaction (Participants interacting with non-diegetic objects)

World interaction would usually

be caused by the organisers, and is not necessarily experienced by the roles. World interaction is anything happening to the world, but not happening to the surroundings, such as a war in a distant country.

Both organisers and roles can cause macro interaction. In the above example, the war in the distant country could have meaning to the surroundings, e.g. by reducing the imports from this country. But interaction can happen the other way around as well. In a larp set in Sarajevo 1914, the murder of a prince could have big importance for the world.

Meso interaction has two different meanings. In one, it has much in common with world interaction, being something set off by organisers. But for the individual role, two other roles engaging in practical interaction can also be seen as meso interaction.

Philosophical interaction is an important part of being a role. As the name says it is of a philosophical nature, for example if the role defines itself in relation to major institutions in the world, such as metaphysics.

Practical interaction is probably the

most important form of interaction at a larp. Whereas the other forms of interaction are not necessarily in use, practical interaction is used at all larps. This type of interaction can be divided into three different kinds of interaction:

- Personal practical interaction, where the role interacts with other roles, typically in a conversation (or in some physical manner, such as fighting)
- Physical practical interaction, where the role interacts with the physical surroundings, such as opening a door or reading a letter.
- Social practical interaction, where the role interacts with the social surroundings, such as the institutions of society, but not with the actual roles. For instance this could be a role kneeling for the king, because she (from interacting with the social surroundings) knows that if she does not do this, it will be lack of respect for the king.

Non-diegetic interaction is a much discussed phenomenon, at least in Danish larp. A number of people (especially those seeking the adrenalin factor (Gade, 2000)) believe that rules and other game

mechanics are an essential part of larp. Other people believe that non-diegetic objects at a larp harm the interaction. This normative discussion is essentially a question of what kind of larper you are: gamist, dramatist or immersionist (Bøckman, 2002).

To sum up, a larp has the following elements:

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	<b>Diegetic?</b>	<b>Interacts with</b>	<b>Created by</b>
<b>Non-diegetic objects</b>	No	Participants	Organisers - sometimes also by participants
<b>World</b>	Yes	Surroundings, role(s), world	Organisers/storytellers (sometimes also the roles)
<b>Surroundings</b>	Yes	Surroundings, role(s), world	Organisers/storytellers and practical organisers (sometimes also the roles)
<b>Role(s)</b>	Yes	Surroundings, other role(s), world	Storytellers or participants
<b>Participant(s)</b>	No	Non-diegetic objects	n/a

# Relation Theory

During my work as an organizer of larps that had few participants, I have come to recognize the importance of the relations between characters. Trying to take this a step further I have developed a theory that uses the scientific concept of emergence to describe what it is that really happens during a larp. As the basis of this theory is the relations between the characters, which is aptly named relation theory.

Relation theory builds on successive theorems to achieve a better understanding of the workings of

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a RPG. The first theorem describes when a thing actually is a RPG. It is important to keep in mind that in relation theory there is little difference between traditional RPG and larp – it is only a matter of means.

(1) A RPG is an emergent phenomenon arising from the individual player's interaction with the other players

Emergence is a scientific term for the complex global behaviour that can arise from the interaction of simple local rules<sup>1</sup>. Translated to RPG language this means that the RPG is the total sum of interaction from all players – but it is more than that. It is not possible to determine the RPG just from the interaction of the players. The RPG itself has other unique attributes. Just like a flock of birds can split into two but cannot flap its wings, a bird cannot split into two but can certainly flap its wings<sup>2</sup>.

Another interesting aspect of emergent phenomena is their predictability over short time scales but the lack thereof in long term. This coincides nicely with the behaviour of RPGS where the organizers is, more or less, able to foretell the next step of the players, but has no way to know how

the RPG ends. The point of emergence is that it arises from the behaviour of the individual entity. There are no rules concerning the behaviour of the flock but only of the individual. This leads nicely to the second theorem:

(2) A RPG depends solely on the players mutual relations

First it is important to know that the term relation is broadly defined. It includes prejudices, rumours, exact knowledge and everything else that determines a player's attitude towards another players. To ease up the understanding relations are separated into two types: active and passive. Active relations are relations that force the player to take action. This is typically the type of relations described in the character created by or given to the player. Passive relations

is the attitude towards other players given by the other player's background and/or status. The carpenter's distrust towards hunters is spawned by his prejudices and he is likely to respond negatively towards a hunter greeting him. No relation has explicitly been described between the two players, but they still have an attitude towards each other. This gives another theorem:

(3) A player has relations to all other players in the RPG

Most relations are not described in particular in the character (history?) but is generated by the player as he/she is playing the RPG. To take the carpenter example again, he probably would not have 200 individual relations described in his character but would have a remark about those distrustful hunters. This remark



makes it possible for the carpenter to spawn passive relations to all hunters. But if the carpenter at some point is rescued by a hunter it becomes a active relation as the carpenter is forced to revise his attitude towards this hunter and probably all other hunters. This indicates another important aspect of a RPG:

(4) The emergence arise as the relations of the players change

If no relation has changed, no RPG has occurred is the simple extrapolation of this theorem when combined with the first theorem. And is it possible to think of a RPG where nothing changes? Even the avoidance of communication should force a relation change.

How does this all apply to the making of a RPG? Well, first it is important to accept that no organizer is able to control the development of a RPG so there is no reason to try. During the



RPG the organizers most important role is to keep the frame of reference intact. This means acting as the outside world<sup>3</sup> the RPG takes place in. But there is another important point in this. All RPGs have an initial state. It is contained in the description of the world, of the characters, and of course in the relations stated beforehand. And the organizers/authors can do much in the preparation of this initial state to ensure the success of the RPG. When the relation theory becomes more evolved, it is probable that relation patterns will reveal themselves. Patterns which are easily recognisable and can be deemed positive or negative for the development of the RPG.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This definition comes from Craig Reynolds' homepage, <http://www.red3d.com/cwr/boids/>, the man behind Boid's algorithm.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from the article »E Pluribus Unum«, American Scientist, January-February, 1999, volume 87

<sup>3</sup> The word outside world is used in the sense described in »Interaktionsteori« by Morten Gade, February 2002. The word is a translation of the danish word »omverden« used in the paper.

# The Diegetic Rooms of Larp

In this article I will argue that during a larp there exists two different rooms at the same time. These rooms are respectively diegetic and non-diegetic. The object of this article is to identify which persons, ideas, objects and artefacts are present in the two rooms. And what are the consequences of the co-existence of those two rooms. To ensure the players' understanding of the diegetic affiliations of artefacts and people in the game is important to avoid breaks in the players immersion in their roles.

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But first I'll define the meaning of the term diegetic. In movies you often see both diegetic and non-diegetic music. The diegetic sound is the sound, which both the viewer and the persons on the screen hear (ex. a passing car). The non-diegetic sound is sound only heard by the viewer (ex. the movies soundtrack).

Even though the Dogme95 manifest by the two Danish filmmakers Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg does not use the word 'diegetic', the second rule in their "Vow of Chastity" is a rule against non-diegetic sounds and music: "2. The sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa. (Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot)." (Dogme95, 1995). This is a classic example of a definition of diegesis.

In the paper "The Meilhti School" by Hakkarainen and Stenros diegesis is defined as that which is true within the game (Hakkarainen & Stenros, 2002). I will use the definition of diegesis as being the framework of the game universe and an diegetic object as an object that is present (e.g. exists) within the diegetic room. This last definition focuses on presence, which

is a little more precise than true, since a lie present within the diegetic room also is diegetic.

Markus Montola argues that all diegesis is subjective and that a player can only experience her own diegesis (Montola, 2003). I will argue that two forms of diegesis exist, the subjective and the objective. The subjective is created by the player's subjective interpretations of background information, rules, media normalities and genre normalities and interaction between the players. The objective diegesis is created by interaction between the subjective diegesis' and as such is a product of all the subjective diegesis'.

### **The two rooms**

At a larp there co-exists two rooms. The first room is the physical location where the larp is played as it exists in the normal world – This is called the playground. The second room is the fictive universe where the larp is played – This is called the game universe.

The Playground - As mentioned above the playground is the physical location where the larp is played. Everything that exists on the location of the larp exists on the playground, i.e. players, building, first aid kits, costumes etc. This room is the non-diegetic room, as an object existing in this room does not necessarily exist in the game universe.

The Game Universe - The game universe is the fictive universe set up by the larp's organizers. The diegetic framework defines the game universe (Hakkarainen & Stenros, 2002). An object or person from the playground (where all physical objects are present) may also exist in the game universe if it is included in the diegetic framework. This means that objects can cross over from the playground to the game universe and thus exist in both rooms at the same time.

How a given artefact or person from the playground is perceived by the player in the game universe is defined not only by the organizer, but in many instances also by media- and genre normalities. That means that a person dressed with a pointy hat and a staff will be recognized as a wizard in a fantasy larp even though the organizers may not specifically have told the players to have this given understanding. The genre normalities both helps and limits the organizers as they help her not having to define and explain every little bit of the universe, but also limits her in his creation of the game universe as there is a risk that the genre normalities will confuse the creative work of the organizer.

### **The diegetic state**

Any given person or object present in both rooms will have a double state of being. At the same time the person will be present on the playground; i.e. the normal world and in the game universe. This double presence is

called double diegetic state.

An object (most often a artefact) can be present in the two rooms at the same time, but not be the same artefact. In the game universe an artefact can be a real deadly gun while at the same time it is only a toy gun on the playground.

If the object with a double diegetic state is the same in both rooms it has a homogeneous double diegetic state, while an object that is different in the two rooms has a heterogeneous double diegetic state.

Objects without the double diegetic state will always be a distraction and as such hurt the illusion. Non-diegetic artefacts, may serve a purpose depending on the type of game:

1. Practical necessities (ex. first aid kits, a persons glasses)
2. Atmosphere (ex. background music)

It is a matter of taste, and as such not within this article area whether non-diegetic artefacts are allowed on the physical location of the game.

### **What is present in the two rooms?**

In understanding in which rooms that persons and objects are present we will need to follow a set of guidelines:

- All persons and physical objects are present on the playground, but not necessarily in the game universe.
- Physical artefacts can have a symbolic meaning and as such be present in the game universe as another object than on the playground.
- All diegetic knowledge about the game universe, such as background stories, is only present in the game universe.
- Rules are present in both rooms. On the playground as non-diegetic knowledge about the game and in the game universe as “laws of nature”.



Using the above guidelines the table below shows examples of presence for persons and objects.

**Orwellian double think**

Besides interaction and the narrative, immersion is one of the most important qualities of larp. Immersion can be seen as the process of stepping from the playground into the game universe. I'll argue that it is absolutely necessary that the player never leaves the playground but keeps the double diegetic state.

This is necessary for two reasons:

1. To understand the simulated objects. This means that a person not present on the playground will not be able to understand
2. To cope in the right way with potential dangers

Being present in both worlds at the same time is not only a physical feature, but also a question of mindset. This mindset I will call the Orwellian double think. Orweillan double think comes from the novel '1984' by George Orwell (Orwell, 1949) where people are forced to have two

Person or object	Playground	Game universe	Diegetic State
Persons ingame	Present	Present	Heterogeneous
Persons offgame (Organizers, public)	Present		
First aid kit at a fantasy larp	Present		
A river on the location	Present	Present	Homogeneous
Music played by a flute	Present	Present	Homogeneous
Music from hidden ghetto blaster	Present		
A toy gun symbolising a real gun	Present	Present	Heterogeneous
Background stories		Present	
Rules	Present	Present	Heterogeneous

coexisting mindsets to cope with the nearly surreal inconsistencies of the government. In this context, Orwellian double thinking is the feature which a player while being the great berserker warrior Thorbjørnwulf still is able to act in a way that is safe to his surroundings; still able to understand where the game starts and ends. Thus I will argue that a player is fully able to immerse into a role while still be present on the playground.

Spencer-Brown describes the possibility of flexible changing between the two rooms. This flexible changing is called oscillation (Spencer-Brown, 1979, here Walther, 2001). Oscillation describes how a person changes her focus between the two rooms and it that way becomes present in both rooms.

The Orwellian double thinking and the player's active state of being in the two rooms make a unique possibility for making and understating art (Andreasen, 2002). It is possible for the player to experience the larp in three simultaneous ways:

1. To experience the larp as life in the fictive world of the role inside the game universe. Thus being object within the artwork.
2. Secondly as a subject viewing the artwork as the player on the playground (receiver).
3. Thirdly as subject actively contributing to the piece of

art, thus being artist herself (sender).

This is a unique characteristic for interactive arts and only possible when immersion is strong. If the immersion element is not strong the Orwellian double think will not be present and as such not all three elements will be simultaneous present.

### **Why is it almost never a problem to resolve where an object belongs?**

It is very seldom that confusion arises at a larp regarding whether an objects belongs to the game universe. This is because of the player's implicit understanding of the genre and the characteristics of larp as a media.

But what happens when it is a problem? - Illusion is broken because the player needs to be aware and is no longer able to maintain the Orwellian double think. They will have to leave the game universe and decide how to relate to the person or artefact. Sometimes this decision will be based on analysis, discussion with fellow players or maybe even the games organizers. This will off course lead to a massive breakdown of the illusion.

One of the main objects of confusion is the border of the game. For an example a door to a non-game area is a potential object of confusion. This is if not either clearly marked (which could be a danger to the illusion) or clearly stated before the game starts (rules,

briefing etc.). If the players do not know whether the door exists within the game universe their roles cannot relate to the object. Is there anything beyond that door? Should we care?

### **Conclusion - the consequences of the diegetic rooms**

Being present in both rooms at the same time is essential for the larp'er. Without this double presence she cannot relate to both the diegetic framework and the necessities of the playground (borders, rules, national law etc). The Orwellian double think makes immersion possible while being aware of the playground.

The larp's organizers need to ensure that the players have a complete understanding of the diegetic affiliations of artefacts and people. If this is not clear to the players, the illusion will be broken and the players will be forced to step out of the diegetic framework to consider their actions. When the player steps out of the game universe immersion is no longer possible and the game's spell is broken.

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# Role-Playing as Interactive Construction of Subjective Diegeses

What is role-playing? Some five guys sit in a room, rolling dice and chatting about stuff. On the physical level, this is very true, but what is the important thing happening at the same time? Every guy in the room *imagines*. They imagine their characters from first-person perspective, listening to other participants communicating

what they imagine, adding that to their image. Occasionally, they spontaneously imagine their character doing something, and communicate this to the others. As I'm going to explain below, using the academic vocabulary, they *construct diegeses in interaction*. After discussing the nature of role-playing, I'll explicate what is the small but crucial difference of a larp and a tabletop game.

## The Author

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He is a member of the Finnish rpg-theory clique; in Ropecon 2002 he presented his adaptation of the chaos model of organizations for role-playing, introducing the concepts of integrative and dissipative role-playing.

During the last couple of years, the concept of "diegesis" has become increasingly important in building the theories of role-playing. Speaking in broad terms, a diegesis means a fictional world or the truth about what exists in a fictional world. Something within a diegesis is called diegetic, something outside it is called non-diegetic. What is a diegetic gun in the diegesis of Pulp Fiction is a non-diegetic prop in the hand of the real-world actor. Usually every movie creates one diegesis (though Matrix or Truman Show can be seen creating a layered diegesis or two diegeses), which is then interpreted differently by every watcher.

Many people, such as Pohjola (1999) and Hakkarainen and Stenros (2002), use diegesis to mean an objective truth of the game world. I believe that understanding a diegesis as a subjective truth proves more accurate and fruitful. Every participant constructs his or her diegesis when playing, the crucial process of role-playing being the interaction of these

of the participants constructing the diegeses. A lot of what we imagine into our diegeses never comes up; single character's personal plans or well-hidden emotions for example. They exist only in the diegesis of that player, though the he may communicate them to others' diegeses, either by diegetic or non-diegetic means.



diegeses. The difference of players' diegeses is essentially larger than the difference of different interpretations of a movie diegesis. There are four reasons for this: a) role-playing diegesis contains very different kind of stuff than a movie diegesis, b) diegeses are shared by communication which is never perfect, c) participants of the game have greatly different viewpoints, and d) in an rpg, there is no audience, but the co-creators do interpreting.

*The contents of a role-playing diegesis and a movie diegesis are different.* When it comes to role-playing, it's important to understand that a diegesis is much more than a fictional world with characters running around. There is a lot happening in the heads

As a diegesis includes everything we know about the world, it's the sum of the background information, the laws of the fictional reality (guided by natural sciences, rules and genre- and style definitions), the explicit symbolic feedback from other participants (both players and gamemasters), and one's original creation (thoughts, emotions, actions). In addition to facts about the diegetic material reality, it includes the perceived history, the expectations of future, hidden knowledge, and secret feelings. When you are scared when playing, the relationship of your fear and your character's fear is quite like the relation of a prop gun and a diegetic gun. In a movie diegesis, emotions and intentions exist and have meaning only as interpreted by

the watcher.

Genre, style and rules are often overlooked but very essential elements in a diegesis; they decide whether charging a hundred orcs is sensible choice for the toughest paladin in the kingdom. Player's diegesis almost always includes information his character doesn't know, and almost always it includes information the player doesn't realize he knows. Both gamemasters and players construct their diegeses from the same elements.

*Diegeses are shared by communication.* Communication is never perfect; no meaning is ever perfectly translated to symbols, and no symbol is ever understood perfectly. There can't be an "objective diegesis shared by all participants", because an "objective diegesis" cannot be shared. When the gamemaster declares "there's a big rock on the field", how big is the rock? Can my character hide behind it? Can he lift it? Throw it? By testing the diegetic object I learn many of its qualities, but even if the GM shows me a picture of the rock, the interpretations of the rock differ. We'd need telepathy to understand what kind of a rock the characters are facing.

While the most of the stuff we create into our mental landscapes is our own creation, the most of the feelings and thoughts experienced by the other participants are never announced. We believe we share a static, objective

world, where we all run around killing dragons together, but actually we all have our subjective little worlds, which are subject to change without warning. After the game has started, no-one knows everything going on in the realities of the game. When the diegeses are found to be in conflict, the gamemaster generally arbitrates between them, sometimes using tools (such as rules or dice) to help him.

*The different viewpoints.* When a book is interpreted, the different interpretations are made from same symbolic material using the point of view implicated by the material (who narrates a book?). Interpreting a rpg-diegesis every participant intentionally interprets the symbolic material differently, using a strongly different point of view – usually either using the subjective lenses of a character or the "objective and omniscient" view of a gamemaster. Often the players' diegeses are constructed contradictory on purpose by giving every player different symbolic material. This is what happens when GM takes some players to another room to play secret scenes. In a larp the difference of viewpoints is even more essential, as no-one can hear or see everything going on in the game.

*The interpreters are co-creators.* This boils down to the very basics of adapting the film'n'literature research on role-playing. When interpreting a movie diegesis, readers' interpretations differ. In role-play, the

interpretations of co-creators differ; there can't be "an objective game-master's diegesis" because the game-master is not the sole creator of the fiction. Though the GM often is the judge when the diegeses are found to be in conflict, his subjective view on

be watcher can interpret from the audio-visual feedback. As pointed out above, the role-playing diegeses contain uncommunicable ideas and feelings, which can't be translated into symbols. When interpreting a movie, the watcher uses an outsider's



the game is lacking and partial; he has no access to what happens inside players' heads. The choices the players make when producing their diegeses are dependent of their perceptions of the surroundings. The character moves close to the big rock because the player believes the rock is big enough to hide behind.

Due to the restrictions of media, the diegesis constructed watching a movie contains only stuff that can

viewpoint to interpret the emotional expressions or to analyze a piece of art. In role-play, interpreting the symbolic material is only used to assist in the creation of one's own diegesis. While a book is a piece of art we interpret to enjoy, a role-player creates his own piece of art, interpreting symbolic feedback to augment the creation he makes for himself.

**Larp is where diegeses meet**

**reality**

Now that we have come this far, defining the larp is surprisingly easy. In larp there is just one more element to diegesis-construction: physical reality. With the most definitions of role-play, the difference of larp and role-play can be defined like this:

rock. There is always some arbitration in larping, like when the larpwright rules that pointing a guy with a plastic gun and saying “blam” equals shooting the guy within diegeses. Not all these arbitrations are explicated; it’s implicitly clear that modern underwear, if used in a medieval larp,



*Larp is a role-playing game, where the actual physical reality is used to construct diegeses, in addition to communication, both directly and arbitrarily.*

The physical reality is directly used to construct a diegesis when the physical reality equals the diegetic reality – the size of a diegetic rock in larp equals the size of the physical

represents medieval underwear (even if its faux pas in the game). All larps use both the direct and arbitrary methods of representation – even though Fatland and Wingård declared in Dogme ‘99 that “No object shall be used to represent another object”, they accepted players representing characters.

In a tabletop game, we use physical

reality only as a medium of transmitting symbols. If I point another player with a finger, it often symbolizes my character pointing the other character with finger. However, I'm not using my body to represent my character's body; the symbol is well understood even if my character is hanging from a helicopter while I'm sipping tea on a sofa. In practice, many larps still use tabletop methods and vice versa.

The fact that reality can affect diegeses leads to an interesting consequence. In every larp, the physical reality contains significant potential for meanings not anticipated by or known to anyone in the game. When playing in a real medieval monastery, there's the slim chance of players actually finding an unknown secret passageway, which then becomes a diegetic element – until potentially overruled by the gamemasters. Just as the subjective diegeses contain many things known only to the players, the physical environment contains things no-one knows, and has a similar potential to interact with the diegeses.

Defining the larp as role-playing plus physical reality also answers the theoretical position of MUDs and all kinds of everquests. As with larp, all the following expects there to be role-players willing to role-play and construct diegeses in the game. Not all playing of *Neverwinter Nights* qualifies as virtual role-playing, just like not all wandering around the physical reality

qualifies as larping.

*Virtual role-playing game is a role-playing game, where the virtual reality is used to construct diegeses, in addition to communication, both directly and arbitrarily.*

Usually the virtual reality is used to construct diegeses mainly directly. If the gamemaster wants to make some door locked, he might announce that no-one may open the door, but usually uses the virtual reality directly to make it impossible without a key. Still, the element of arbitration always exists, beginning from the moment when GM declares that some bunch of pixels represents a door. It has been said that playing *Everquest* is not role-playing, because the virtual reality restricts the player in very unrealistic ways; virtual reality does not allow character to change his socks, for instance. This virtual restriction is very similar to the fact that I can't see blood when stabbing someone with a diegetic dagger in a larp. Just like in larp, arbitration can go around these problems if a sentient GM is present (or players arbitrate without a GM). It is also possible to role-play in a diegetic framework where changing socks is impossible, though it is true that this kind of a framework is simple and far from ideal.

### **Conclusions**

The basic difference of a book and a role-play is that the role-players are both co-creators as well as an audience.

This text addresses the difference from the angle of interpretation. Interpretations are generally constructed from nearly identical symbolic material, while diegeses are constructed from different symbolic material, adding one's creation to the top of that. Meanings encoded into the building blocks of a role-play are interpreted, but the true meanings rise from the diegeses constructed using the interpretations.

Many gamemasters fancy themselves storytellers, creators of great plots unfolding as the game progresses. In larp, the problems of this approach have been widely recognized as the game is different for everyone, and only few witness the pivotal scenes

of the grand narrative. As Fatland and Wingård (1999) put it, *"This convention probably comes from organisers seeking to replicate movies, literature and theatre. A story in the non-interactive media necessarily has a limited amount of active characters. In LARP, an interactive form of art, the amount of actors and stories is theoretically unlimited"*. From the perspective of this article, grand plots are a common symptom of taking one shared and objective über-diegesis for granted. In role-play the amount of diegeses equals the number of participants, and telling a story by larp requires successfully communicating the story into every diegesis in game.

The problematic elements of diegesis-



construction are the ones that are difficult to classify as diegetic or non-diegetic. In larp, music is generally interpreted as diegetic, even if it's produced by an electric bard in a medieval game. In tabletop music sometimes represents diegetic music, but usually is only symbolic feedback assisting the construction of the diegeses. Playing the score of Crow and lighting some candles definitely makes my diegesis more

in the examined phenomenon, concealing some other elements in the process; for example, the ways of constructing a narrative with the game can't probably be fruitfully examined from this perspective. This model tries to explain the way role-playing is communication and creativity, but does not say that role-playing wouldn't be immersion, thrillseeking or storytelling as well.



goth and scary, but does my character recognize the gothness and scariness of the game world, if he does not hear the music? If a prop map represents a map in tabletop, does my tearing the map represent my character tearing the map? What if the diegetic map is in some other character's backpack? In larp the relation of a non-diegetic signifier and a diegetic signified is generally less arbitrary. Carsten Andraesen takes a closer look on these issues in his article in this book.

All in all, the view of diegesis is only one perspective for examining the role-playing. Every metaphorical approach opens our eyes for some elements

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the real world.





# The Use of History in Larp

Following article is based on a promotion of the importance to understand and acknowledge the positive effects use of history can have on larps.

In writing articles and discussing the subject larp, it often comes to my attention that many larpers do not take time to reflect upon the thought

of where the ideas for a larping event arises from.

This lack of reflection may contribute to a doubtful communication of what many larp concepts are built upon.

It is common knowledge that many individuals outside the larp society lack insight on the subject of larp. Most of them may therefore gain a preconceived opinion towards larp based on the image presented by the mass media. Unfortunately this seldom compliments the larping environment and can be somewhat prejudice.

It happens that larpers themselves are asked what aspects of larping they find interesting. And when describing larp, their motivations and interests of it, the word 'inspiration' tends to be used remarkably often.

The question that remains is: »Where does the inspiration really come from?«

When thinking about it, there are many answers to this question, but I have chosen to direct my attention upon one great inspirational source:

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She has been a roleplayer since 1988 and a larp'er since 1998 and was recently involved as an organizer of »Zombie« larp. Xenia is devoted to developing larp and larp settings. She is connected to the larp magazine »Sabbat« as a permanent writer about historical implications in larp costumes.

Furthermore she is an active debator and moderator on the Danish LARP portal [www.liveforum.dk](http://www.liveforum.dk)

## History

Most of us gained interest for larp, after many years of playing ordinary role playing games and reading fantasy- and historical literature. In the 1980's input for ordinary role-playing was primarily based upon a fantasy world where historical elements in one way or another took part. The story and setting were very often based upon the Viking or medieval period, and this trend continued in early larping. Therefore, the known environment with common guides of reference was a popular source of inspiration for the earliest larp events.

Fantasy settings for larp games have mostly been set in a time of superstition where the social structure in many ways was quite simple compared to later periods.

This, combined with many unanswered questions about the historical period of interest, gives flexibility to combine our own fantasy with historical factors.

One advantage of using the viking or medieval period in a larp setting is that the simple creations such as costume designing are somewhat less demanding to the player's competency in craftsmanship.

Social interaction of role-playing in a historical setting and in a different social class is not a new "invention". Back in time it was merely a way of amusement reserved for the nobility. In the late 1700's France, the outrageous Queen Marie Antoinette

caused a fury amongst the French people when she dressed up as a simple shepherdess and role-played with her court ladies.

Another example worth mentioning is that of the Russian nobility who in 1907 held a ball in the winter palace in Moscow where they had great pleasure in dressing up as nobility of the 1600.

Today re-enactors, at Lejre Experimental Centre and The Medieval centre of Denmark, still dress up and live as they did in the past. Even though it can be debated whether the previously mentioned nobility and today's re-enactors would be considered as role-players, fact is that history is the provider of a still increasing amount of inspiration that is used in larp by players and larp organizers.

But what are the advantages of implicating historical facts into larp today? And what are the future prospects of the historical larp?

## Historical Larp

When we discuss Historical larp it is worth to distinguish between Historically correct larp and historical inspired larp.

Historical correct larp implicates all-important aspects of the specific time, from events that happened, clothing and weapons to the past structure of society and socially correct behaviour. Unless having a limited amount of players in the game, this type of larp is

very difficult to obtain. One must bear in mind, that most larp organizers create a larp from the supposition that players immediately have a common reference.

Historically inspired larps tend to be closely related to historically correct larp, but can also be based on having only a starting point in the historical time.

This means that the timeline may not be correct and that the historical information is limited. In other words, historically inspired larp is a semi-correct larp, where many aspects beneficial to the game are included. This gives the player a choice of which aspects she or he wishes to implicate in the game.

A reduction of the demands and an increased amount of freedom tend to aim at a broader player crowd.

### **Benefits and Disadvantages**

Implicating history in larp has many benefits. To begin with, it heightens the knowledge of a specific period in time. For the organizers and the ambitious player it demands a great deal of research and is very time consuming.

It is important to know that this can have the disadvantage that, if the larp is historical inspired and not historical correct, the players are misled to believe that some nonhistorical parts of the larp concept are historically correct.

Of other advantages, a historical larp can have a more interesting and challenging gameplay, because of the richly faceted social situations history brings with it.

Different cultures contribute with many society structures, professions and a tremendous



amount of possibilities regarding a setting (costumes, weapons and the surrounding environment.)

The visual benefits are without doubt some of the most rewarding aspects of using history in larp.

Despite all the benefits of using history in a larp event, there are also reasons why historically correct larps can be difficult to obtain.

The primary reason is that there are a great amount of practical necessities that must be fulfilled to create a historical correct larp.

A correct setting, a good economy and a serious amount of research, hence a lot of time, are among the most important factors.

As very few individuals are involved with larp as profession, previously mentioned factors are limiting to the amount of comprehensive larps that are held. And when it comes to historical correct larps credibility is of greatest importance.

### **The Future**

Today we are already witnessing the growing interest of finding alternative inspirational sources in History, and the interest is swiftly spreading to implement other cultures such as the Japanese, Chinese and Russian.

So the future for historical and historical inspired larp seems very promising.

Many dedicated larpers who have been in the environment for years still have the drive and devotion to advance and

develop the concept of larp.

My assumption is that we in the next few years will tend to experience more »luxury larps«, where an example of this type could be an event where everything is pre-arranged for the player, and all she/he has to do is study the material and learn her/his part.

For example a pre-French revolutionary event where 20-30 players play parts as nobility and the entire setting is arranged when they arrive at location.

Furthermore we will tend to experience a situation where larps that have communication and social interaction as the center of attention to some degree will replace physical larps.

The »fight« will in other words become a verbal character trait. More intrigue larps will appear.

And regarding the fantasy setting, we will here experience far more versatility.

So as speculative one can get when thinking of what the future might bring for the larp, one should always bear in mind that thinking, understanding, expressing and working from inspirational sources can be a helpful tool for creation and further development of our great interest for larp.

# Institutional Development of Larp in Oslo

In the past 10 years the Larp (Live Action Role Playing) community in Oslo has undergone large institutional development. This has led to improved practical organisation and increased flexibility, but also a new hierarchical structure.

What is New Institutional Larp? As a tool to analyse the institutional development in the Oslo Larp community I introduce the theory of New Institutional Larp (NIL).

NIL is inspired by New Institutional Economics (NIE) and Douglas North's theory claiming that institutions

play an important role in economic development. According to NIE, economic development is achieved by increasing economic investment. Institutions reduce the transaction costs of investments, i.e. reducing money wasted on transactions and securing larger outcomes for the investments. This increases the incentives for individuals to invest. Individuals and groups create institutions as a response to political, economical and cultural impulses, but these also influence each other.

In NIE institutions are the formal and informal rules and organisation of economic activity. In NIL, institutions are the formal and informal rules and organisation of creative activity. Improvements in the Larp-institutions will make it "easier" to organise Larps because the transaction costs are reduced. Examples of Larp institutions are the players, storytellers, FX and the practical organisers.

In Larp, economic development is not the issue, instead creative development is. The "money" we invest is human capital i.e. the knowledge we bring, our creativity, energy, and ideas. By increasing human capital investment,

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Larp will experience creative development and the individual increases her status in the community as well as her personal satisfaction. Institutional change is essential in this development.

### **History of institutional change**

Larp in Oslo started in 1989 and has since then developed an increasingly complex institutional system to attempt to solve the problems that can occur in Larp making, such as practical and communicational glitches. Much of the institutional development has happened on the practical side of Larp organising. However, lately changes have also happened on the creative side. Below follows a general categorisation of Larp institutional development in Oslo. Please note that there were and are exceptions to the categories.

1989: two institutions existed at this time: the players and the organisers. The organisational responsibilities consisted of storytelling (writing roles and background information), practical responsibilities (e.g. sanitation, the lease, permits and administration) and special effects (FX, such as monster-making and explosions). These responsibilities were more or less randomly distributed between the organisers according to personal interest, but rarely as specialised responsibilities. The organisational structure was flat and decisions made democratically. Storytelling was usually the main priority, second came

FX and third came the least popular responsibilities, the practical work.

The organisers often played central roles in the Larp. This made it possible to control and influence the game, as well as enhanced their status. According to Petter Bøckmann this practice ceased in the middle of the 1990's, around the time Larp-theory and the increasing realisation of GMing (GM= Game master) as a highly skilled proficiency, or even art (some of the younger groups practice it today). The debriefings and after-larp-parties, where the plots of the game are reviewed, were also places where honour was distributed, e.g. prizes for "Most funny" or "Most heroic". The type of ovation, which the organisers received, signalled the players satisfaction.

1994: three institutions can be identified: the players, the organisers and the FX group. The FX group had by then become a separate institution. The practical responsibilities were often placed on one of the organisers, often the visionary or one of the driving forces behind the Larp. This person still participated in storytelling.

1998/9: four institutions can be identified: the players, the storytellers, the FX group and the practical organiser. The practical responsibilities become a separate institution and given the responsibility of coordinating the work and the other institutions involved in the Larp, as well as the practical and administrative work.

2000/2: four institutions are still identifiable, however the institutions are unclear because some have spawned subgroups. “The players” as an institution remain unaltered. “The storytellers”, however put out part of their work. It is primarily the writing of roles, which is put out. This type of work can be called piecework because individuals take on writing 5 - 30 roles to which they have been given guidelines. The storytellers keep control of the overall setting and plots (mysteries and tasks) by writing these.

The practical responsibilities have also been split and outsourced. The organising committee still has one person responsible for coordinating. However, much of the work is on the administrative side of the Larp, such as doing accounts, mail and planning. This work, which is mostly done before or after the Larp. External, independent groups perform much of the visible practical work during the Larp, such as security, sanitation and the organisation of the camp. The same type of specialisation and outsourcing can be identified in FX.

### **Results and challenges**

One of the major things that the institutional development in the Oslo Larp community has led to, is specialisation of Larp organisation. This has especially affected the practical side of Larp making, and is generally understood as a positive development. Roles now usually come about 4 weeks before the Larp,

sanitation has improved, and were we before hauled out bags, we now get them driven to camp. Putting out work such as administrative tasks, writing roles and doing FX has reduced parts of the organisers workload and made it possible to focus more on other tasks.

However the increase in specialisation has also brought new problems. One is that the institutional development has created a new hierarchy in Larp. The concept of “payment” from the players is important to understand the new hierarchy. The Larp community has no money to give; instead we pay in status and social standing in the community. The “pay” is distributed based on the visibility during a Larp and in the community.

The practical organiser and coordinator today receive much respect and thus pay because of the memories of badly coordinated larps. However, this area of responsibility is not very visible because much of the work involves institutions outside the Larp, such as police and landlords and also because most of the work is done before and after the Larp. During the Larp, the practical organiser is not very visible. An interesting question is therefore: will the “pay” given to this institution be reduced over time as the players come to take well organised Larps for granted?

The “pay” given to the specialised outsourced groups is presently high. They are given status as skilled

based on experience. They are well organised in small groups, visible both in the community and on Larps and advertise their services. Comparatively, the pieceworkers in storytelling receive low “pay”. They are not organised and there are many willing to take on the work because it gives a “taste” of organising, yet not the full responsibility. The pieceworkers are less visible because their work is done before the game and involves few players and other institutions. These pieceworkers do not have full control over what they produce because they have not participated in creating the setting and the mysteries that gives the overall view of the story line. Instead they work within a structure dictated by the storytellers.

The storyteller is the institution that is most visible to the players, and thus receives the most pay. They have created the story line and coordinated the pieceworkers. It is the storytellers, not the piece-workers who sum up the Larp and hand out honours at the debrief.

Curiously the institutional development in the Oslo Larp community can be compared to the development of the labour hierarchy in the Industrial Revolution. Organised groups of labourers took on jobs e.g. mechanics, claiming they were skilled, and thus received high pay and status. Another group, mostly women, neither organised nor claiming they were skilled, took on piecework at low

wages. The employers (in the Larp-community the storytellers) dictated the production and cashed in the profit.

Larp in Oslo has undergone many changes in the institutional structure. It has gone from a primarily flat organisational structure with glitches to a more hierarchical structure working more efficiently. The development has led to great improvements on the practical and perhaps also the creative side of Larp making, thus aiding creative development. The increasing complexity of the institutional framework has also made Larp organisation more flexible. Individuals can invest as much of their human capital as they wish, without actually becoming full time organisers. This may have a positive impact on recruitment of new organisers by giving a soft introduction as well as experience. However, the institutional development has also led to the establishing of an organisational hierarchy and systems where functions and tasks are separated and loose touch.

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# Play is Political

The 77:th wealthiest country in the world is Norrath<sup>1</sup>. If you have never heard about the place and can't find it on the map, it is not your fault. It does not exist on Earth. Norrath is the name of a land in Everquest, an Internet-based roleplaying game (also known as MUD, Multiple User Dialogue) and owned by Sony. However, by estimating the worth of all imaginary treasures that are bought and sold for real dollars by the players in Everquest, Norrath would be ranked in-between Russia and Bulgaria on the World Bank GNP index. An average Bulgarian citizen generates more

economic values when spending an hour playing Everquest, than he does by working an hour in his country.<sup>2</sup> Norrath demonstrates, that play is not merely a fun pastime anymore. Culture has economic value in post-modern capitalism and is therefore a potential field for political struggle. (Jameson, 1991). Jeremy Rifkin goes so far as to claim: "Play is becoming as important in the cultural economy as work was in the industrial economy." (p. 263, 2000). Consequently, play deserves a serious examination. I wish to locate live roleplaying in this politico-economical context, in an analysis influenced by situationist thought.<sup>3</sup>

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## Live roleplaying is a counterculture

Music/style-based youth cultures are commonly interpreted as resistance identities. (Hebdige 1979). Even when the subcultures express no political views, academics analyse them in a socio-political context and conscribe to them some, often unconscious, agendas. The discussions concerning live roleplaying, however, are curiously deplete of this kind of a perspective. The attention given to music/style-based subcultures by 'the non-practitioners', might correspond to economic importance of these

subcultures to the culture industry. On the other hand, the negligence and absence of academic discourse on live roleplaying could be interpreted as a consequence of it not being recuperated<sup>4</sup> by economic forces. To put it more poignantly, it is the successful resistance of incorporation, that has prevented live roleplaying from having become acknowledged a resistance identity! The fact that the media coverage of roleplaying has predominantly been hostile,<sup>5</sup> following the well-known pattern of folk devils and moral panic (Cohen 1972), seems to strengthen such a claim.

As to other 'alternative' subcultures not defined by any political program, to live roleplaying "the struggles are at once economic, political, and cultural - and hence they are biopolitical struggles, struggles over the form of life. They are constituent struggles, creating new public spaces and new forms of community." (p.56, Hardt and Negri, 2000). Roleplaying can be recognised as a struggling entity only when set against the dominant society, from which it has emerged. Like its music/style-based counterparts, roleplaying is mushrooming in the dawn of youth unemployment and the expansion of higher education, i.e. - in the absence of wage labour relation.<sup>6</sup> The abundance of spare time is the point of naissance of all contemporary subcultures. Desire leads these bodies to enlarge the condition of their own well-being, labour-free time, and thus to renounce the contemporary

work ethic and the stigmatisation of joblessness, on which the current social order is founded.

Though being itself outside the sphere of direct production, the subculture is embedded in a social fabric that has been invaded by the logic of rationalisation, efficiency, and production. Every personal relation, cultural expression and reflective thought of this wider social



fabric is captured in the circulation of degraded wage labour and passive consumption. At its core, roleplaying is a reaction against this intensified commodification.<sup>7</sup> This definition

should be understood in its widest sense, not as a revolt against the real institutions, but as an emotional, unarticulated response to everyday boredom and the plasticity of life an existential alienation. It fundamentally differs from the activism of social movements, who subvert advertising, attack billboards and reclaim social space (Klein, 2000). Roleplaying could be said to reclaim social time. It objects the system quietly by devoting itself to un-alienated creativity for its own sake.

### **Fantasy is for Real**

My proposition on roleplaying being a political project will certainly meet objection. Roleplaying strives to leave reality for the fantastic: this could easily be disregarded as an escapist action. An observer holding such a view would reflect roleplayers as a generation, which has lost its faith on the possibility of transforming the shared environment (to constitute themselves as a collective, political subject). Instead they turn inward to imaginary utopias. This notion is probably correct, though its misgiving is to equate imaginary with irrelevant. The first step to re-form the world is to imagine an another one.<sup>8</sup> The fact that globalisation has deprived people of their sense of control over their destinies and the ability to comprehend their respective situations, has laden fantasy and play with a certain urgency. "Unlike the social world, the rules of play are voluntarily adopted for they delimit

the space within which the player can exercise control over meanings and events. [...] This voluntary adoption of player-chosen roles within player-chosen rules is liberating in that it inverts the process of social subjection." (p.236, Fiske, 1987). In the same spirit, Jeremy Rifkin holds that: "Mature play is also the antidote to the unbridled exercise of institutional power, be it political or commercial in nature". (2000, p.263).

Reality cannot be easily separated from fantasy in a post-modern environment were cybernetics, simulation and virtual reality merge and transform the planet. The function of Disneyland, Baudrillard explains, is to uphold the illusion of the real, to make us think that reality starts outside the gates of the theme park, while in truth 'reality' is just as simulated as Disneyland. Roleplaying can be located on the same field of play as Disneyland in this respect. However, rather than covering-up the vacancy of reality, a strophe by Guy Debord calls for a different interpretation: "In a world that really has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood." (p.14). Roleplay-carnivals could be therapeutical in coming to terms with the loss of reality, in a strategy of 'it-takes-a-thief-to-catch-one'.<sup>9</sup>

This therapeutical agency is stressed when focusing on the roles instead of the environment simulated in a live- roleplaying event. In post-modernity one's selfhood is a subject of questioning not unlike one's

surroundings. Where fixed classes and ranks once marked repression, today the permanent reshuffling of positions and expectations of good life, are a means for the generation of insecurity and subjection. It can be suggested, that by playing the roles of her own choosing, the individual is capable of embracing instability, taking control of it instead of being subjugated by it. To assume different roles, and to observe the ways in which the appearance, the gestures and the reactions of others make the pretended identity and emotions believable to oneself, is an eye-opener. This is quite similar to how our own 'authentic' person<sup>10</sup> is crafted, according to the philosophical school known as constructivism (ed Gergen, Davis, 1985). Feminist and queer theories have extended these insights, and concluded that some of the categories taken for granted (first and foremost genus and sexuality) in society are the outcome of social conflict, embedded with powerrelations. To challenge the white male heterosexual bourgeois powerstructure queer activism advocates playing with and transcending social roles and identities.

Play is the evasion of social rules enforced in the real world, argues John Fiske, and therefore play is a threat to the established order. The degree to which roleplaying is questioned, or for that matter, actively ignored and trivialised, could be taken as a measure of its potency. In the game

the subjects of transformation are the players themselves. Whatever norms, narratives and collective aspirations are temporarily summoned during an event, follow the participators into the 'real' world, and are sustained by the community between the events.

### **Live roleplaying, art and entertainment<sup>11</sup>**

Live roleplaying is created in communication between equals. The illusion does not exist in the mind of an individual (as is the case in hallucinations achieved by narcotics), but in the constant flow of language and expressions between individuals. It is in this sense that live roleplaying is genuinely a collective experience, and thus by necessity, all participants of it must take part actively. Being collective, participatory and dialogical by its characteristics, live roleplaying is set apart from the play offered by cultural industries. Commodified leisure is characterised by separation, passivity, and monologacity, because its mediums must allow for a third party to exercise control over it (in order to extract payment).<sup>12</sup> Control is instituted by the separation of user and producer, reader and author: this separation encloses a (labour-) process into a (consumer-) product. "Authors are the product of an economic system, not the product of creative minds" (p.123, Halbert, 1999).<sup>13</sup>

The institutionalisation of this "crevasse in leisure", the division into professionals and spectators, is not,

however, limited to cheap commercial amusements. Specialisation is generated and diffused to every corner of adult life, and nowhere is its presence felt stronger than in 'high art'. To mystify this productive relation, high art flatters itself with the idea of the artistic genius. (Bourdieu, 1989) Such notions are hardly credible in a collective artform like live roleplaying, involving hundreds or thousands of creators in an active, open-ended process. The radical amateurism of the roleplaying community challenges the notion of 'high art' that some have been touched by 'the Gift' to be artistic - and others have not. Roland Barthes's thesis about 'the death of the author' (Barthes, 1997), has usually been applied when contrasting traditional artforms with those found in the internet. "Whereas a printed book is linear, bound, and fixed, hypertexts is associational and potentially boundaryless. A printed book is exclusive in nature and autonomous in form. Hypertext, however, is inclusive in nature and relational in form." (p.206, Rifkin, 2000) It is peculiar that characteristics novel to virtual reality is reappearing in roleplaying, entirely non-digital, but emerging at roughly the same period in time.

### **Commodification of Live Action Roleplaying**

Will live roleplaying be commodified? In analysing, whether the commodification is a likely route and the ways in which it would change live roleplaying, the comparison of

the characteristics between different game forms can be of aid. Digital roleplaying is exceptional in that it is driven by industry, while traditional and live roleplaying are driven by the players. It is more usual that industry dominates the competitive game-forms, like trading card- and miniature-figure wargames, which have a clear objective - to win. Market circulation can favourably be liked to contest and powergaming, because the gamers are pitched into buying more equipment than the other in their mutual desire, to gain respect from his peer by beating him. Roleplaying, in which dialogue has disbanded any distinctive winner/losers, disables this process.<sup>14</sup>

It is for this reason I believe that live roleplaying with its present structure and norms, cannot sustain a mass market. Nevertheless, I am positive that live roleplaying will attract commercial interest, following a pattern of evolution similar to that of the hacker community. What the hacker and roleplayer identities have in common is that they are activity-based and devote themselves to un-alienated creativity. Curiously, both have been interchangeably condemned as morally dangerous or trivialised as freak folly. The difference is that while playing, the hackers have ended up with a by-product with gigantic economic values - code.<sup>15</sup> The unlimited sharing and pooling of creativity in a community has proved to be a model superior to paid, in-house labour for the development of

software. Technical successes, GNU/Linux over Windows, to mention the most famous case, has attracted multinational firms (IBM, Netscape, Oracle), to invest millions of dollar in the hacker community.<sup>16</sup> The attitude of Lucasfilm belongs to the past, as fans and volunteers will increasingly be manipulated to promote or even produce for companies. Analogies can be found in all walks of life, street fashion and music, film, computergames; more often than not, the ideas spring from marginalised subcultures rather than from advertising departments. Creativity and innovation are central to cultural economy, but these assets are hard to foster in alienated wage-labour. Thus it can be claimed, that communities will become a leading producer in the future.

It is possible that commercial interests will engage live roleplaying for productional purposes, while marketing the finished product to an 'outside' market. In the case of hackers, corporate involvement has led to increasing tensions within the community, as social norms are re-negotiated and the unpaid labour of many is taken advantage of by a few. In response to this threat, the Free Software Foundation has developed 'General Public License', an intellectual rights license that better accommodates collective production.<sup>17</sup> Live roleplaying has not been confronted with these issues yet, since the activity produces but a few end-products that can be exploited. Paradoxically, despite its 'progressive' agitation and good intentions, FutureDome could be the way-leader here: it was massive, focusing on the



installments rather than roleplaying; expensive, while not very demanding on preparational work, but most significantly, a film was recorded at the site. Consequently, the roleplayers had to sign over their intellectual rights over to the film, for which they had made the preparations, paid for and had participated in.

the labour market. Unfortunately, by simple maths, live roleplaying can only sustain a tiny fraction of the mass of roleplayers, since the rest have to support those few with their purchases. There is nothing 'morally wrong' about such aspirations, but if they are generated as a response of the whole towards outside pressure,



### **Live Action Roleplaying at a Crossroads**

If games can accumulate economic power on parity with countries (and a country that ranks the 77<sup>th</sup> is a force with armies, capable at least of threatening number 76), the gaming community will be under pressure to conform to dominant commercial and institutional, structures. A decision is will be forced upon the subculture.

Any movement towards commercialisation is closely connected to the ageing of its members (that no longer are provided for by state funding and generous parents). The prospect of making a living from live roleplaying becomes an attractive 'individual escape strategy' as an alternative, when facing

the escape route is illusionary even to the minority. There exists no individual flight, simply because one cannot constitute a community as a sole agent. The communal and social spirit, for which we sought to stand and maintain for in the first place, deteriorates into a contractual relationship, and live roleplaying becomes a market like any other. Play becomes work.

If we wish to be part of this bubbling, creative, exciting 'meltingpot', we must first of all work to preserve it intact in its entirety. The only way to achieve this is a route so removed from our belief system, that it hardly enters the mind. We have to start making political demands, (constitute a collective political subject), in alliance

with others, to produce more free time for everyone to enjoy. Reducing the working day is an obvious demand, but even minor reforms (improving student grants, generous social benefits, funding to cultural projects), will have an immediate effect as more people are freed from market constraints to contribute to the community. Daring to think this is a revolution in itself.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Guardian Weekly, 28th of March 2002

<sup>2</sup> The practice of collecting treasure in-game and selling them to other players, known as farming, has developed into a business venture. LA Times ( 20<sup>th</sup> of April, 2000) interviews a player 'Ebaid' who made \$6000 in a month and now envisions to hire students to play for him for wage: "We could have a sweatshop of online gaming, he gushed. I'm not joking. This could be very profitable." (article available at <http://www.kanga.nu/archives/MUD-Dev-L/2000Q2/msg00498.php>)

<sup>3</sup> The ideology of live roleplaying has been highlighted by recent political live arrangements (Amerika, Europe, OB7, Futuredrome). However, my interest lies in the politics embedded in the medium rather than in the message, implicit to live roleplaying in general.

<sup>4</sup> The term recuperation was used by the Situationists to describe

how adversary movements are incorporated by dominant society.

<sup>5</sup> Attempts has been made to blame roleplaying for suicides and even murder. The recent and brutal murdering of Marcus Norén was connected in media to his engagement in vampire live. Shortly after the police arrested two suspects and disclaimed any linkages between Norén's death and his hobby. (in Swedish: Expressen, 2 January 2003)

<sup>6</sup> Both work and the joy of working (its craftsmanship) are eliminated by automation. Non-work subsistence requires that some of the wealth generated in ever-more efficient industries is politically redistributed through general welfare systems. This might explain why Scandinavian countries have a particularly flourishing live roleplaying community.

<sup>7</sup> This process has been nicknamed 'colonisation of culture' (Mosco, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> The defensive slogan chosen by ATTAC; "Another world is possible", suggests that resignation has reached a point where just considering alternatives is a step forward.

<sup>9</sup> Judging from another comment of Baudrillard's, he might have endorsed this second reading of live roleplaying: "[...] It would be interesting to see whether the repressive apparatus would not react more violently to a simulated holdup than to a real holdup. [...] Transgression and violence are less serious because they only contest the distribution of the real. Simulation

is infinitely more dangerous, because it always leaves open to supposition that, above and beyond its object, law and order themselves might be nothing but simulation." (p20, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> The word person comes from persona, which was a mask. Such masks were worn by actors in greek tragedies (In Swedish, see Tiina Rosenberg, Byxbegär, 2000)

<sup>11</sup> I have earlier developed these thoughts in Swedish roleplaying fanzine, AlterEgo, available in pdf at alterego.sverok.net.pdf12

<sup>12</sup> "Spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another." (p.22, Debord, 1999)

<sup>13</sup> The clash between participation and passivity is elegantly illustrated in Jim Ward, Lucasfilm's vice president for marketing, comment on too enthusiastic Star Wars fans: "We've been very clear all along on where we draw the line. We love our fans. We want them to have fun. But if in fact somebody is using our characters to create a story unto itself, that's not in the spirit of what we think fandom is about. Fandom is about celebrating the story the way it is." (Quoted in www.poppolitics.org, accessed 2002-06-24, Alana Kumbier)

<sup>14</sup> As we know, social hierarchy is not absent in live roleplaying. Respect is sought by showing acting skills, proving a knack for organisation, or crafting equipment. With commercialisation, a subtle shift from appreciating the craft behind making a thing to the thing itself (in essence:

the amount of money by which it was purchased) must take place.

<sup>15</sup> I have written more on hackers in Copyleft vs. Copyright - A Marxist Critique, published by FirstMonday, ([www.firstmonday.dk](http://www.firstmonday.dk), March 1st 2002)

<sup>16</sup> Even Microsoft, though having been hostile to free software and called it 'un-american', are forced to experiment with it because the economic advantage is so strong. Craig Mundie, Senior Vice President of Advanced Strategies at Microsoft, give tribute to the economic clout of collectives: "Having a sense of

community is a good thing. It's one thing we've watched with interest. [...] The more of that we can foster in our community, the better." ([www.freeos.com/articles/4372](http://www.freeos.com/articles/4372), accessed 2002-06-20).

<sup>17</sup> GNP is jokingly called copyleft - all rights reversed. "Copyleft uses copyright law, but flips it over to serve the opposite purpose: instead of a means of privatising software, it becomes a means of keeping software free"; (Richard Stallman, in ed. DiBona, Ockman et al., 1999, p. 59. Free Software Foundation can be found at [www.gnu.org](http://www.gnu.org))



# Learning by Fiction

## **Theoretical perspectives on learning by participation in the fiction of a role-play.**

This paper attends the theoretical issues of learning by using the media of fiction based upon role play, focusing on how the facilitated event can help the participant in establishing new perspectives on a given object or phenomenon. The paper is motivated by the current, and most criticisable attempts of using role-play to meet the developmental and educational needs of the new economy.

The issues are attended in attempt to establish a theoretical foundation for the use of role-play in learning, focusing on the direction and validity

of the gain. Using the sociological-social psychology as framework for understanding our object perception, fiction is used for shaping the participants perception of an object or phenomenon, and thereby creating basis for the development of new perspectives. To test the established theoretical foundation, a role-play is designed for teaching business economics to high-school students (gymnasieelever), through which the theoretical understanding is assessed empirically.

Exploring the potential of the method for facilitating benefit, corresponding to a specific developmental need, and being valid to issues outside the fictional world, states a number of difficulties and dilemmas for effectively using the method as an educational tool. Of significant interest, is the dilemma in balancing the degree of interpretative freedom versus the desired direction of the developed perspectives. The understanding states an issue of similar significance by attending the issue of validity of the perspectives learned through fiction.

The purpose of this article is not to equip the reader with the tools to use larp as an educational tool; the purpose is rather to appoint the need for grounding the practice

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theoretically. This article is a short summary of my above abstracted publication »Hvordan kan man lære gennem fiktion« (Henriksen, 2002). The original publication is in Danish.

### **The need for a theoretical foundation**

During the last years, the idea of combining role-play and learning has grown increasingly popular within a wide array of Danish institutions. Within the educational system, the combination has been discussed under the doctrine »Learning by playing« (den legende læring), and has been met with diverse, but mostly critical perspectives. Other institutions have opened their arms to the combination, seeing role-play as an opportunity to make learning a bit more fun, and in some cases even more effective.

The increasing popularity of a role play based method, increases the risk of letting success undermine the theoretical foundation of the method, and instead of basing arguments on a proper research, merely basing argument anecdotically. This risk calls for the practitioners to hold their horses for a while, taking time to ask themselves for their reasons to use role play as an educational tool, especially whether it is the proper mean to meet the participants' demand, or if the use merely is based upon the practitioners desire for the media itself. To allow both the practitioner and the participant to make the distinction, a solid, theoretical foundation is required.

### **A lesson from history**

The argument for a solid theoretical foundation for using role-play as an educational tool is strengthened by events occurring during the late 1970s and early 1980s. During that period, role-play was recognised as a powerful instrument, which could contribute to a learning process (Høyrup, 1975). Due to a then increasing popularity, the market for educational role-play was outgrowing the scientific exploration of the media. As the foundation grew ever more shallow, and the use of the method became increasingly based upon anecdotes about successes, a bright group of journalists took out the flawed results out of the closet, proving that most practitioners did not have the slightest clue of what they were doing (Haslebo & Nielsen, 1997). The result was fatal, and combined with the recession of the early 1980s, the market crashed, and remained in that position for the 20 years. Question is now, whether we decide to learn from history and ground our work sufficiently, instead of repeating the same old story in mere desire for the media.

Throughout the following pages, I will introduce my contribution to such theoretical foundation, based upon a sociological, social psychological perspective on using fiction as a developmental tool. The introduced perspective is thoroughly described in my MA publication (Henriksen, IP), through which I examine a role-play, designed as a supplement for teaching

business economy for high school students.

### **Forming to meet the demand**

The studied form of role-play neither fits nicely into the larp or the tabletop category, but is a hybrid between the two (see Molbech (2000)). This hybrid form is due to the external goal of the educational activity, forcing the form to adapt to the need. Role-play is therefore seen as

»a media, where a person, through immersion into a role and the world of this role, is given the opportunity to participate in and interact with the contents of this world, and its participants.« (Henriksen, 2002, p. 44).

- covering both tabletop and larping (see also Hakkarainen & Stenros, 2002) Using a broad definition of role play, sends attention to the situation created through the media, and thereby into the very heart of the social psychological topic; the meeting between the subject and the structure. This definition therefore allows for a psychological exploration of the media, and its effect on the subject.

### **Role-play from the psychologist's perspective**

Role-play is interesting from a psychological perspective, as it alters the way we interpret our perception, and thereby the way we perceive the world. According to the social constructivist thinking, our discursive understanding, a process that in a modern society, weights the discourse

increasingly heavier than the object itself, shapes our perception of the object (see Burr, 1995). Objects are given meaning through the stories that surrounds them.

In a modern society, most objects are perceived as symbols, and are therefore subject to interpretation. Our discourse supplies us with the hard knowledge, which is required for the given object to become meaningful (Thyssen, 1991). Our discourses are negotiated socially, and we have a tendency to socialise in systems of similar thought (Luhmann, 1984).

Seeing role-play from this perspective, the game acts as a discourse, which the participants use for understanding and interpreting the game. The game is actually an ongoing, hermeneutic analysis of a simple object, made interesting by the discourses, through which it is perceived.

Role-play becomes a system of common interpretation, in which the participants uses an invalidated discourse to build and interact within a shared fictional world. We use role-play to alter our perception of the world, in order to facilitate an experience, which would otherwise be out of reach. The role-play thereby gives us the opportunity to participate in situations, and under circumstances, which are not commonly available, i.e. playing a manager in Magasin's organisation. And this might turn out to have an educational benefit.

### **The element of fiction**

Participating in role play, the

participant voluntarily accepts using an invalidated and temporary discourse, knowingly creating a different interpretation of the perception, from what the participant would normally make of it (Henriksen, 2002, p. 29).

The fictional discourse is used to alter the role player's experience, so that we perceive the participant, but experience the role. In order to do this, we add certain aspects of reality while overlooking others. This primary and secondary fiction is a major key to understanding the confusion, role play based learning can cause.

### **Learning by role play**

The main concern for psychologists is how a phenomenon affects the mind, and how to safely alter its effect. The perceptive alteration, that role-play produces, is therefore interesting, as the facilitated experience might be able to set its mark, and produce a lasting development for the participant.

In the mind of a social constructivist, learning is all about finding more appropriate ways of perceiving object. Learning in correspondence to role-play must therefore be seen as

»The acquisition of perspectives, developing the subjects experience of an object, in a such degree that it qualifies the subject's ability to interact with the object« (Henriksen, 2002, p. 53).

The qualification must be orientated according to an external teleology; otherwise the effort becomes a waste

of time (Lave (1997), Rasmussen (1996)). The ultimate goal is to qualify the participant's ability to take part in its contemporary society, and without keeping this goal in mind, the effect often becomes more fictional than the role play itself. When working with fiction, it is important to relate the development to an external goal, not merely to the content of the fiction or role-play itself. Learning how to get along within the fictional world is useless, if the development cannot be transferred and effect the world surrounding the fiction.

If precautions are taken to compensate for the above, role-play can be used as an effective tool, as it enables the teacher to place the participant under circumstances, which are not normally available to the participant. It is important to bear in mind that this participation not necessarily creates, but can function as praxis of learning for the participants (se *ibid.*).

### **Two common misconceptions**

The educational role play is typically met by two common misconceptions; from the teacher, only seeing limitations part from a few opportunities, compared to the role player, who only sees opportunities, part from a few limitations in the use of role play as an educational tool.

The teacher's misconception is typically built upon the misunderstanding, that all role-play is based upon Tolkien's universe. As the teacher is bound by a demand for facilitating learning, concerning the

real world, corresponding to a specific topic or criteria, it may be hard to bridge the gap between the two.

The role player is aware of this misconception, but is flawed due to his or her desire for the media. Despite the role player's more qualified perspective on the role play, it seems to lack a critical sense, in order to validate the effect of the planned intervention. The role player does not look for limitations within his or her use of the media in the educational purpose, and therefore sees none.

There is a common misunderstanding among larpers that you learn a lot, merely by participating in a larp. It is true, that participating in a larp holds a great potential for exploring self and social relations, but thinking that participating automatically evolves the participant, is naive. The fact that the larp holds the potential does not necessarily mean that the participant will benefit, and this is important to be aware of.

## **Pros and cons**

### **The methodical disadvantages**

There are 4 major points in the critique of using role-play as an educational tool; reliability, validity, the ability to use role-play, and the fictional element of the method.

Reliability here refers to the differences in the individual benefit from participating. It is hard to make all roles equally relevant for the topic, and nearly impossible to grant all players the same perceptual input, and the method is awful for delivering

hard knowledge.

Validity is closely related to the element of fiction. As the role-play takes place in a fictional world (Henriksen, 2002), the benefit is related to the fiction, and therefore not necessarily valid, or transferable, to the outside world.

The ability to use role-play is scarce, especially among teachers, making it hard to role-play a broad impact.

The element of fiction is the major concern, as it deliberately separates the experience from that of the real world, and is actively encouraging the participants to interpret their perception (see also Andreassen (other where in this publication)). It is difficult to give the player interpretative degrees of freedom, and at the same time orienting the benefit towards a predetermined goal.

### **The methodical advantages**

Despite the massive disadvantages, role-play holds a great potential as an educational tool. Its major advantage lies in its ability to place the participants in situations, helping them to develop an implicit understanding of situations, training social skills, and to help bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Though the method holds the potential, the potential is not unleashed unless the role-play contains something for the participant to learn, a payload, corresponding to the external teleos or goal. Unless this payload is present, and made available to the participant, the great potential will remain potential.

### A final recommendation

Throughout the above pages, I have stressed the need for a theoretical grounding of the role-play, used for educational purposes. My point is to stress, that the mere participation in a larp not necessarily causes a benefit, neither are we guaranteed that a potential benefit corresponds to the goal of the learning session, but also to say, that it can be done.

Role-play is currently unexplored within the educational field, and we cannot take an automatic effect for granted – if we do, it is most likely that we merely reproduce those inappropriate circumstances of the late 1970s. The practitioner must be able to re-evaluate his or her own desire for the media, before legitimating own practice as beneficial.

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# Phantasmagorie, Simulacre and the Danger of Dragonlance

What happens when you expose fantasy-larp to canonical fin-de-siècle concepts and postmodern cultural theory?

Does it come out as shallow entertainment, or does it survive with all its inner potential being a little more clear and palpable?

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## Introduction

This article is based on an exam paper on the subject of Modern Cultural History. In this paper, it was my main attempt to try my hand at imposing canonical modern cultural theory upon larp. As the relatively new phenomena larp is, it can hardly be said to be history yet, though most definitely an element within modern culture. Therefore my attempt to wrestle the big boys of modern cultural theory into a larp-related framework, to provide my tiny part to the process of a general recognition of larp as more than the somewhat suspicious hobby of rather immature young people. This article contains the main results of my research, the theoretical framework, and my further reflections in a larp-perspective. It is my hope that this work can participate to the understanding of the constitution, processes and potentials of larp; the theoretical body which in my view has one simple but noble overall goal: To provide us with better live action role play. However, it is of some importance to me to stress that I am not of the opinion that the larp-experience should necessarily hold the potential of being more

than simply entertainment. It is, in my view, perfectly acceptable to strive no higher than to entertain or be entertained when dealing within the context of larp. After all, as entertainment goes, larp is one of the most substantial and fulfilling genres you can turn to. This being said, the best entertainment is the best only because it draws upon something more than the quick fix. That is of course the case with larp, and it is this notion of “more” that I set out to explore.

In this article I will investigate the notion of space that larp generates, and the potential containments of this space. As a larp is a dialectic creation undertaken by both participants and fictive framework, the first part of the article will deal mostly with the part of the participant and the second with the fictive background of the larp. I will attempt to account for the constitution of the larp-space in between imagination and reality, by means of explaining the phenomena of larp through German cultural theorist Walter Benjamin's concept of phantasmagorie<sup>1</sup> (a concept which, fear not, will be explained later). This will lead to a discussion of whether there can be said to be a potential for remembrance<sup>2</sup> within the larp. I will seek to give a further perspective on this through the literary concept of the mythic method as stated by the modernist poet T.S. Eliot, as a part of the discussion of the main problem of my article: Can fantasy-larp be said

to contain the potential of profound learning and understanding? Or does it lead to nothing but the infertile codex remembrance of the simulacre (also subjects of later and further explanation), of which French post-modern theorist Jean Baudrillard<sup>3</sup> speaks?

I will focus in the fantasy-based larp, mainly because it is within that area my main practical experience lies. Furthermore, the fantasy-genre easily provides the material for an analysis of mythical elements as it draws so openly upon the structures and stereotypes of the myth. The theory can, however, be used on all genres of imaginative context and larp-processes.

### **Space of the larp**

As stated before, the space of the larp consist of both the real and the imagined: Initially, what we are dealing with in larp is an abstract space of imagination, a fictive world which »borrows« place, time and people from the real world in order to materialize. Firstly, we shall see how this abstract space is constituted, and then how it changes the concrete space.

The space of the larp is initially based upon to set, fictive elements: A certain »world«, complete with its own geography, ethnography, theology, history and present; and a set of rules which form the »natural laws«, without which anything would

be possible within the fictional world. By participating you forms a »pact«, promising to hold these two elements true as you take on the part of your character. You let the mind of your character –and thereby also a small part of your own- be moulded by this simulated world order, and you think, speak and act from these premises as soon as the scenario starts. This is of crucial importance to the constitution of the larp: everybody must join the game. Thus, fictional world and set of rules is transformed from fiction to fact though the common validation; facts which are so comprehensive that they contain the power to create a convincing illusion of reality as soon as anyone agrees to the premises.



Moreover, it is not only the consciousness of the participants that take form from the fiction, but the real surroundings undergo the same process. Through the participant, the fictive world order is weaved into the seams of the actual surroundings. Tattered plastic pavilions becomes the revered temple of a high deity, the din of the highway turns into the distant roar of a great waterfall. It is all in the (minds) eye of the beholder. Furthermore, costumes, setting and acting makes the fiction tactile and “real”. The more realities it is imposed upon, the fact-fiction seem to turn more and more to the factual side, and so the real world, which could be suspected to have a destructive effect on the illusory space of the larp, is in stead constituting it.

### **Larp as a phantasmagorie**

On to the theoretical framework: For further explanation of the dialectical constitution of the larp, we will turn to the concept of phantasmagorie. In »Paris, Capital of the 19th century«, Walter Benjamin writes of the phantasmagorie: A vision which society produces from a dialectical idea of both the new and a common ancient memory, in an utopical repression of reality. The similarities are already visible, as larp basically emerges from the common participation in imagining the fictive world. Furthermore, the vision of the larp can be said to stem from both the new and the elements of ancient

myth.

The structures of ancient myths are the rather obvious skeleton of the fantasy genre, on which the fantasy-larp is based. Their metaphorical and well-known existential conflicts are ideal when creating the »perfect« world of the phantasmagorie. By »perfect« I do not mean a world where all is good. Fantasy-worlds has dystopian as well a utopian features, as it is not the goal of this genre to offer an alternative to the real world. It only offers a repression of the real, and in this context a perfect world is a world where everything has meaning and is interesting. By taking on the universe of the myth, the fantasy-work obtains both: it offers a model for understanding life while at the same time entertaining the mind with these narratives, which have fascinated it for time beyond measure. In this form, the fantasy-larp make use of the ancient, »das veraltete«<sup>4</sup> as Benjamin puts it.

The utopian element of »the new« in Benjamins phantasmagorie-concept is similar to the present created by the participants in a larp. The action develops though normal, daily-life situations enacted by the normal, daily-life human being which is the participant.

But in the fantasy-larp, acts and actor has an aura of supernatural power. Firstly because every act within the fantasy-world is integrated in its context of mythic and adventurous

elements. Furthermore, the actor will participate in the form of a »mythical« being, such as elf, ogre, hero, fairytale princess, or just mythical in the sense that the character is born and raised in the surroundings of a fantasy. Any move in these surroundings has a hint of something exiting and interesting, because it draws upon the stuff that dreams are made of. Secondly because even the most innocent act of daily life in the larp matters enormously in constituting the fictive world, and those who do the acting become all-important participants in the manifestation of the common utopia. Thus the acts escapes the triviality of daily life and the actor becomes somewhat »more« than human in the common sense. He/she becomes a mythical being who possesses the power to both constitute and change the world around him/her.

When speaking of the phantasmagorie-ical larp and its attraction, one must also account for the psychological aspect of control. Whereas reality can seem confused and incalculable, the larp-world is after all oversee able. There will always be rules, books and game masters to consult, and no fatal surprises can occur. Moreover, the individual can freely decide on his role in society, as well as on the wished character of his/her person. All of this is a matter of repression of reality, of the trivial as well as the actually unpleasant, and there is no point in denying that this repression is for many a participant

an important part of the fascination a larp. This motive points to the larp a phantasmagorie: with Benjamin, it is the fetishized commodity which hides the reality of the market forces. With the larp, it is the utopia of an interesting life of adventure, power and control that hides a trivial and meaningless reality of daily life. But does this mean that larp is no more than a refugee camp for the victims of a confused world? In some ways, yes. But it would be a camp with a library, cinema, museums, art studios and a wrestling ring. The potential of gaining knowledge, experience and creative challenge within a larp reaches far beyond most other utopias. But before we enter this area of investigation, we shall have a look at the larp's means of communication.

### **Simulation –good or evil?**

What is at stake when entering a simulation so overwhelming as the larp can be? When something unreal is so fascinating, do we benefit intellectually from the freedom of imagination it offers or do we lose our critical sense in an easy escape from the real world?

In order to discuss this, I will introduce IT-scientist Bill Nichols's analysis of the risk of forfeiture when dealing with a simulated reality. Nichols uses the notion of adoption to illustrate the process: Two premises have to be present for a child to accept a surrogate mother. Firstly, a higher instance of power

must constitute and maintain to the child that the surrogate mother is in fact the real mother. Secondly, the child must experience that the surrogate fulfils its needs better than the real mother. The same process is present when dealing with a surrogate reality, such as that of the internet, the commercial or of course the larp. The individual is exposed to massive visual and intellectual stimulation/persuasion from the media of the simulation, who wants to step in as surrogate reality. I use the active term »wants«, because in the case of the commercial, the goal is to make the potential customer accept the reality of the commercial, a reality where the product in question is the centre of the world, and thereby egging him/her to invest in it. The result is, theoretically, that the individual loses itself into the simulation, forgets to reflect upon both itself and its surroundings, and lets itself be dictated by the doctrine of the simulation become surrogate become real.

The larp also wants to exist –but not (yet) in order to sell some commodity. Still, it has the same potential of selling a message, a view of the world or any doctrine on which the larp is founded. This makes the simulation of the larp such a powerful media: in a culture longing for something better, utopia is a popular product. But in order to have the product of a larp, one must live the product. To return to the adoption-figure, the participant of the larp becomes both the child and

the higher instance who consolidates and maintain the simulation. This positioning is the premises behind role playing as an educational tool, a method which is very frequently used in dealing with group dynamics and other psychological processes. Though the simulation, participants experience certain situations, and through further supervised work with the results, the individual gains new knowledge of him/herself. And this is why the larp will always have a stronger potential for generating new knowledge and active remembrance than a TV-commercial or any other pre-fabricated entertainment-narrative: larp contains the constant possibility of a meta-reflection which reminds the participant of his/her own part in the creation, and therefore his/her ability to change the simulation and the results. And when the participant remembers this, he/she also has the ability to subscribe the actions of the character to his/her own active reflection, and thereby take the acquired knowledge with him/her into real life.

### **Larp and the simulacre**

As we have seen, the simulation is a powerful tool. But since we are dealing with a media of this great potential for learning and creating, how come that so many a fantasy-larp ends up in 4 o'clock mayhem and general boredom? Where do we loose the connection to profound experience and active remembrance and end up bored, off-gaming by

the campfire. The answers are of course multiple, but to stay within the theoretical framework, we shall seek one explanation in post-modernity criticism, namely from Jean Baudrillards concept of the simulacre. Baudrillard speaks of how history and the historical object has been drained of meaning in the –the reaches further than the well known idea of the disenchanting world of Max Weber: The disenchanting object is re-installed into a simulated, enchanted context, a process which mocks whatever meaning the object might have contained once, in the name of entertainment and appearance. But through the media of the simulation we, the audience, is lured into believing that this shallow construction is identical with something original, something authentic. When a simulation is set with the accepted codes of cultural/historical thinking, our imagination locks upon these fixed structures. We do not remember or reflect, we merely reproduce –as Baudrillard says, we experience a codex remembrance. We forget that there is further thinking to be done, and simply accept the simulated version of the world. We become the dog of Pavlov: reacting in preset patterns to receive the prize; the prize which is in this case nothing but recognition within the cliché.

It should be rather obvious how to imply this thinking onto larp: The simulation is present as the ground principle of the larp, the

»enchantment« is almost concrete in terms of supernatural elements, and the object, installed into this simulated sense of wonder and truth, is –any one of us. It is the larp'er. For Baudrillard this image of a human being as the musealized object is an image of a living body caught in a giant ice cube. This is to say, that larp is at the same time both killing the player and preserving him/her as a fake proof of lived life. This line of thinking is perhaps a bit too abstract and dramatic for real-life reflection, but nevertheless it has its points. Larp has its tendencies to numb the edges of reason, to simplify conflicts to the verge of stupidity, and to promote stereotypes to the brink of nausea. These symptoms are those of man exposed to the simulacre in Baudrillard's theory. The problem that we will have to go about, is that

the concept of the simulacre is one of the main bricks in Baudrillard's apocalyptic vision of the modern world going down the drain with the laughing skeletons of museum directors (and, if he had known, I supposelarp-organisers)tearingmadly at the steering wheel. This vision is not exactly fertile ground for criticism any longer, as it seems the world actually survived both the coming of museum cafés and the development of home cable TV and other cancers of modern entertainment culture. However, the thought of the infertile simulation seems to remain a major point in criticism. So if we leave the apocalyptic vision and assume that the world will go on a bit, we can zoom in on larp from this point.

### **The danger of Dragonlance**

Popular fantasy, such as the much



picked-upon Dragonlance-series and similar products of more or less cliché-infused kind, is the base inspiration of many a brave new larp-world. This genre of reference has obtained the status of a sort of collective memory of larp'ers, in spite of the fact that it is largely recognized to be no more than rather shallow entertainment; the written equivalent of your average Hollywood action/romance commodity. The conflicts are extremely simple and the structures of race, gender and religion are stereotypical and reflective of a traditional white patriarchal Christian set of values. The attempts to turn right and wrong relative notions seldom reaches any further than chapter one in the psychological handbook, look under »Oedipus complex«, and the plot has an unrealistic unambiguous finality, but often paradoxically with loose ends left dangling all over. Larp worlds formed on this base tends to lack substance, framework and inner logic. The borders are terribly narrow and forces players to restrain themselves in their thinking and acting, as they are in constant danger of stepping into white spots on the larp-worlds map. The result is a stale and uninspiring larp, which nevertheless still carries the potential of forming the players mind. It is a waste of both life and larp.

But the solution is, as usual, right at hand, in a more serious approach to creating fantasy-framework for

a larp. To put it frankly, the works of J.R.R. Tolkien should be our first, last and only resort if we aim to work within a fantasy-frame. I do not mean hereby, that there should be no scenario which is not a Middle-earth-scenario. My point is that in order to create fantasy- worlds of substance and profound qualities for a larp, one needs to use the Tolkien-method: The mythic method. The notion of the mythic method stems from the great modernist poet T.S.Eliot, and it implies that the poet does enormous research of literature, myth and history in order to make use of reference, allusion, metonymy and allegory (and yes, I know of Tolkiens negative approach to allegory. But it is nevertheless present in his works). This method facilitates an active remembrance from its audience as it draws upon ancient sources and symbols without restraining their interpretation in either time or historical context.

For those who has the strange urge to dismiss the works of Tolkien as romantic nonsense, I can add that the artistic, intellectual and creative values of the mythic method has been overmuch proved though the works of Tolkiens contemporaries, poets Ezra Pound and the before mentioned Eliot. Their works are prime examples of how the mythic method can lead the writer down narrative paths much darker and ambiguous than the one Tolkien chose. A writer such as Umberto Eco is, on the other hand,

a modern example of how mythic method can serve to give a more plot-orientated work both depth and entertainment value far beyond the works of cliché fantasy.

As a bit of a Tolkien-fundamentalist I cannot deny that I am biased in this argument, but it is my firm belief that if we are to create better and more pregnant frames for fantasy-larp, we need to deconstruct the fixed fantasy, return to the real world with all the imaginative products it consists of, and draws upon these sources to create new, fresh fantasy to suit and stimulate the time present. I it also necessary to stress that it is not easy to create a world. It is long time ago when six days of inspired labour was all that was needed. The fiction of the larp-world deserves as much thought and work and artistic sense (whatever that is) as any novel meant for publishing, and the standards ought to be as high as any publishers. It requires more than fascination of Dark Elves to write a world. The writer needs vision and knowledge, curiosity and creativity. And most of all, he/she needs the dualistic ability to reflect upon his/her creation from both an off-game and an in-game view. The recognition of the world as a construction is necessary at all times in order to maintain a healthy critical sense and not fall in love with ones own creation.

### **Return to the real**

A final concluding remark must be

that certain factors have to be present if the fantasy-larp should be a space for generating new knowledge and profound understandings: Firstly, the participants need to be actively reflective of the part they play in constructing the simulated world as well as they must work with their larp-experiences beyond the space of the larp. Secondly, the fantasy-world of the larp must be original, thorough and carry more artistic value than what has been the usual standard. And above all, it has to be a conscious construction, where blind clichés are wiped out in favour of genuine inspirations from now, then, before and beyond.

To add a bit of illustration all the words and abstractions, I have personally experienced two examples of larp, where some or all of these elements have present –and have worked!

One is the Nemelego –scenarios of Aarhus-based larp-organization Einherjerne. The background of these three/four days-scenarios was so called »mythic middle-ages«, an original construction of elements from fairytale, mythology and fact-based history. In my experience, this gave participants enormous freedom as dogmatic stereotypes where somehow eliminated, and one seemed to start the larp from new, but somehow well-known ground. The other example is of quite another kind. It is the small Copenhagen-based larp-group of Tordenelverne.

The group is formed around a course which aims at building up children's resources through larp, and the fictive background is a combination of native American Indian shamanism and concept of fantasy elves. Both Nemeffregó and Tordenelverne are examples of how larp can avoid the danger of becoming an infertile escapism, but instead create a space of experience, education, remembrance and creativity. No big boy of modern cultural theory –or indeed anyone else- should scorn such a media.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin: Paris, Die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts“ in: „Das Passagenwerk“

<sup>2</sup> Remembrance and the practise of remembering is a very broad term within the field of cultural studies. I use the term as a definition of abstract socio-cultural memory; a sort of unconscious recognition of an original substantial content which transcends the presence of the remembered, and lends it a potential for a deeper understanding of the self within the socio-cultural spectre. Remembrance can thus be said to be the main factor in what we would in daily speech call a fulfilling and educational experience.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Baudrillard: “The Evil Demon of Images and The Precession of Simulacre”, in: Thomas Docherty: “Postmodernism –a Reader”

<sup>4</sup> »..das Veraltete.« ( Walter Benjamin: Paris, Die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts« in: »Das Passagenwerk«, s. 47)

# Larp as a Way to Enlightenment

As an introduction I want to discuss a phenomenon that I have called Post-Larp Charisma, PLC. Immediately after a larp most of us feel certain euphoria

## The Author

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in the aftermath where we meet old friends IRL, get new friends, exchange stories and telephone numbers, and fantasize about still wilder larps.

Sooner or later, though, the euphoria fades off, and we might succumb to the Post-Larp Depression, PLD. This is often a purely biochemical reaction, caused by lack of sleep and food. But I'm beginning to suspect that PLD also can be caused by a too fast return to the normal world, a point I will return to later.

But if you're lucky you find at your return to your usual life that you have been struck with Post-Larp Charisma! Some, or hopefully, many of you may have been surprised by a definite change in the world. Our dreams come true, beautiful strangers smile at us, we get the best table at the restaurant without any hassle, and suddenly we dare to propose to the king or queen of our heart, if he or she doesn't do it first. This is PLC.

What kind of phenomenon is this, how does it come about and what can we do to activate it when we are not larping? Most of us just larp a few times a year.

I say that PLC is a result of being divine for a certain length of time. When I say

divine, I mean it in a very literal sense. What you actually do when you're larping is that you create new reality. Creating reality is not the same as playing God; it is the same as being God.

I don't mean creating new reality in the trivial sense that you create things out of nothing, like magic, I'm not that mad. What I'm talking about is that the reality we live in is a social construction that we all together create for us. If this construction decides your actions it is real, regardless if it's true or not. The world was flat when you didn't dare to sail too far for fear of falling off the surface.

When you have been divine for a couple of days it's rather inevitable that you radiate a certain glory at your return to civilization. This is the reason for PLC; you have been living in an environment where you've been almost constantly creative (depending on how actively you've been larping), in the deepest sense of the word.

One reason for Post-Larp Depression may then be that you try to normalize yourself too fast and leave the divine state for an existence where you are not a creating artist.

### **How to be divine**

So, what are the prerequisites for being creative in this divine way? We can study a related phenomenon, namely the magical moment when the role comes alive in your own flesh and blood, when the larp reality becomes the one and only reality. There may be some who think this is not something

to strive for, that it may cause split personality, that it is antisocial or escapist, but I'm not writing for those people.

In the religious world there is a long tradition of experiencing "for real" what others regard as illusionary self-deception. Since time immemorial shamans, and mystics of all creeds, have done their best to meet God or Buddha face to face – is there something we can learn of their methods?

In the psychology of religion there is a roletaking theory that tries to explain how the religious experience actually comes about. According to this view a role contains also the context, the coplayers. E.g. the role of Little Red Ridinghood also activates the Wolf's role. Roles are thus patterns for our acting and perception, a frame of reference that makes the world comprehensible. A man with a hammer sees a world full of nails.

Now, the religious traditions consist



mainly of roles, where the coplayers may be gods or saints, avatars or devas. When you take a role from this rich tradition, you may activate the coplayer “God”, your world changes and the religious belief turns into reality.

What are the mystics doing to get this experience? These are the rules:

1. You are well read, that is you have the tradition at your fingertips. (Cf. the larper who has learned his world history.)
2. You are focused, that is your life is devoid of mundane disturbances. (Cf. the larper who is surrounded by likes, all dressed the same way, all talking about the same things – like in a monastery.)
3. You are often exhausted by fasting, very early and late praying etc. (Cf. the larper who often forgets, doesn't care or know how to cook in the middle of the forest, and only sleeps when no orcs are about.)
4. Response. This is the real crux of the matter. When a believer goes into the religious role where you have a “dialogue with God”, it's precisely this feeling of a response that makes the experience so convincing. The larper really has a big advantage here, since she is surrounded by real people who react to her actions. Real people of flesh and blood goes into a dialogue with the role and thus makes it come true in the flesh and blood of the larper.

This is the same process that creates

my personality when I'm a newly born baby. My identity, my self, is created by the responses I get from mom and dad. By their reactions I learn that I am a sweet little thing or a damned spoiled brat. In the same way the role is created as a real person in my body.

### **The true dialogue**

So what's the difference between the responses I get when larping and otherwise? How does it actually come about that dialogue creates new reality? What is the nature of it? Can new reality be created by any old dialogue? By Jove, we are in a dialogue almost constantly, what's the bloody difference?

The reason that we don't get the same kick out of getting our usual ego confirmed is that it just consists of our routine concepts and beliefs. Our everyday dialogue consists of a constant exchange of confirmations: “This is my picture of reality and thank you for supporting it.” That's nice but not very exciting.

What make a true dialogue creative are three things: it's 1) exploring, 2) egoless and 3) trustful.

### **Exploring**

The true dialogue is not a discussion where you try to convince each other, it is not about winning a debate. In this context we can think of Dogma's taboo against “gamism”, where you try to “win” the larp. The dialogue is rather a joint groping through a jungle of outer and inner facts and feelings, where the main objective is to discover what

you don't know and from that point work together towards new insights. True dialogue is more like scientific research, art or lovemaking.

When we fall in love, when we create art or do research we leave our fixation with the things we think we know and go exploring into unknown land.

### **Egolessness**

Egolessness means that we renounce

in my heaviest medieval larp costume and ask for some cheese, it will take a long time before my words reach through to them, since the subtext, my appearance, is blocking their ears.

Our ego consists mostly of defences. Our upbringing has made us believe that the world consists of different kind of threats and so we develop a personality to defend against them.

We define ourselves by the things we



all the habitual constructions that make up our identity. We should search for what the zen masters call "beginners mind".

It's like this: When we present ourselves to the world we are functioning on two levels. We have an agenda, an objective. At the same time there is a subtext where we choose a certain way to implement this agenda in order to convey a certain impression of ourselves. If we are too concentrated on the ego, the subtext, then no one will hear what we are trying to say. If I go to the store

are not: not boy/girl, not Norwegian/Swedish, not homo/hetero.

Egolessness means renouncing these definitions and enter into a relation where I get the possibility to be created anew, just as when I was a newborn baby.

### **Trust**

The egolessness of true dialogue thus means letting go of this subtext as far as possible. I don't know anything, I don't care for how you see me, and I let go of my defences and trust us to jointly create something new. This is

what's going on when we fall in love and of course it takes a tremendously big amount of trust in the world.

To create this trust you must have an environment where you are accepted almost no matter what. That's why people go to all kinds of retreats and new age-courses, and that's the essential point in a therapeutic setting: I get unconditional confirmation, I find what I should have been given as a baby – appreciation just for being there, not for performing in any way. These are the three critical factors that create new reality. I hope it's clear how these factors apply to larping.

1) Exploring is simple. We never know what is going to happen in a larp. We jump into the stream of events, react to them and create new events for other to react upon.

2) Egolessness. This is actually the heart of larping: you leave yourself by going into another character. We renounce our personal striving for coolness - gamism, dramatism - and

let the role do the steering.

3) Trust. For a larp to function there must be a high level of acceptance from all players. If I all the time question the actions of my co-players, i.e. not returning the ball, then nothing will happen. If I don't buy into the story from the teenager with the three-hand sword about all the orcs he will fight, then I actually kill the game (together with his confidence and enthusiasm). I also hope that you see that this is the natural state of healthy children. Thus, if you don't be like children, the kingdom of heaven will not open for you. (That's why off-gaming is such a crime: you close the doors to heaven.)

### **Conclusion**

By way of bringing this to a conclusion I will tell a very short tale: "In the Tree of Life there are two birds. One is eating of the fruits, the other is watching". End of story.

This simple allegory from the Upanishads, maybe the oldest existing



texts, gives a description of the relation of the ego to itself. There is a mental position from which you can watch the actions of the ego. Now who is the one who is watching the ego? If the word weren't so filled with religious overtones I would say it's the soul, but now I just call it my true self. From that position we can see that our neuroses and hang-ups are not our true identity, we can see that our beliefs, attitudes, and thinking patterns are nothing but accidental disguises that has been forced upon us by our psychohistory. Of course, it's still not easy to get rid of them, but it is only from that position that it can be made.

Most kinds of therapy consist of talking about your own behaviour, which only can be done from a position outside of the behaviour itself. E.g. in classical psychoanalysis you use about seven years just to recount everything that goes on in your mind. That means that once or twice a week you go into the ego-watching mode.

This is also the message from almost all religious traditions: you must lose yourself to find yourself. As long as you identify with the ego you will always be prisoner of your psychohistory. Larping shows us a way out of that prison.

Thus we return to the question of PLC. Is it possible to maintain that state between the larps? What I have tried to show here is the factors that support PLC – what now remains is only (only?) to activate true dialogue as far as possible in our everyday life. Can we do that, we can do anything – and then the only limits are the ones made by our imagination. Our larping is thus rehearsal for a truer way of living.

Please note – this is important! – that you need both parts; the true dialogue and your true self. By entering a dialogue from the ego-watching mode, you are in the unique position where you can free yourself from the constraints of upbringing. Isn't that what life is all about?

# Zen, Roleplay and Personal Expansion

## The Author

Denkyu Sebastian Gundel, a Zen Warrior Artist.

37 years married and father to 4 children from 13 to 5 years. Educated pedagogue and have a broad experience in personal development courses, as well with Zen and shamanism.

Runs a company (Legendernes Arena) that works with roleplay and personal growth, education and socialization.

One course is the Thunderelves - an Indian inspired elf tribe

<http://www.tordenkrigerne.dk>

Been in tabletop roleplay for 19 years and larp 8 years. Have experienced a lot of different scenarios and been project leader on 4-5 where half of them had a developing agenda.

I'm a Japan enthusiast and train Tai Chi Chuan and Zazen, and love being with and working with children and youth. At the moment I'm founding a roleplay theatre.

## Intention

My intention is to communicate the profound possibility of self-realization through the medium of roleplay. For two decades of my life, I have been deeply involved in roleplay, Zen and personal development. I have participated in numerous courses and sessions, and written continuously about my personal processes, in addition to spending many, many hours participating in live and tabletop roleplay. This article is based on my experiences and presents whatever wisdom I can distil from them.

## Zen

Shuzan held his short staff up and said: "If you call this a short staff, then you contradict its reality. If you don't call it a short staff, you ignore fact. Well, then, what will you call it?"

from Zen flesh, Zen bones.

You might call it Zen, but then Shuzan would probably say you were wrong. The point is that Zen is beyond language and the intellect. So what I write here is like a finger pointing to the moon: the finger is the word; the moon is Zen.

Zen (from Chan in Chinese) means 'meditation'. It is not that one does not sit cross-legged for hours and ask to be hit on the shoulders with a stick, but you are to do good in the world you have to be an active part of society. Be a living Buddha. (Not that you are not that right now – but that's another story.) The only way to be a living Buddha is to awaken and realize the Truth – that all of life and the world is one, it is you. In Japanese called Satori (I have not had this experience. I refer to the words of the master.) Then you have to forget all that, and be an ordinary person again.

This, at least, was a brief and feeble attempt to explain what is involved.

Zen is a way of being – a state of mind without attachment to the self-reflective and self-aware processes of the Mind generated by the Ego (or 'small self', as my Zen master puts it).

*Right here, right now. Right here, right now.*

- Fat Boy Slim

This is the objective of Zen: When you read, read. Right here, right now.

As Rinsai Zenji puts it:

*Within that 6 feet of flesh,  
There is a true person.  
Make it step forward now.*

### **Don't hesitate!**

Zen is what I recall from my childhood of sitting and drawing and becoming totally absorbed in it. Totally forgetting time and place. Being one with drawing. And there was no thinking, no little voice in the head saying: »That line is not straight. That boat looks wrong and ugly. Blah-blah-blah ...» Know what I'm saying?

So Zen is about being 100% present, alive, self-expressed and self-forgetting. No little voice – no judging of self or others, no stories, gossip, news or fantasies.

Zen is to be unconsciously conscious, going 100 % with the flow of the life energy (also known as Pranja, Chi or Ki) in all its manifested and unmanifested forms!

It is living life full out. Even when quiet, it is being 100% present in being quiet.

### **Roleplay**

- Well, Roll playing is playing a role.  
- Like being a father in 'Mummies and daddies'? Batman, a taxi driver? An Orc?

- Yes, exactly – pretending to be a person. The word 'person' comes from the Latin *persona* –which means something like 'to wear a mask'. Right now, you play the role that is given to you by your Ego. You play that you are the person you think you are. Determined by genes, history, soul and so on. When at work, you play

the role of the occupation you have. The doctor, baker, teacher or whatever. You can describe how doctors are. You know their archetype. So if I say I am a doctor, you automatically think I am so ... and so. Right?

So roleplay means playing a person, where 'playing' refers to the theatre/movie concept of play.

It is acting, dressing, talking, thinking, feeling like the character, and having what it has.

It is identifying with the role and the setting/world/scene.

- But that is unreal. It can't be done. I can't have \$3 zillion!

- True. But in a roleplay, we pretend and play by rules. So we do what we can to create that illusion, through the use of physical objects, texts (role descriptions, plotlines, scripts) and instruction of all the characters. (This is not used very much at the moment – but if you watch children's play, or your own, you will notice it, albeit on a small scale.)

Short and sweet: we pretend something is real and act on it as the role.

- In roleplay, who decides? Who has power and control over the so-called play?

- The Game Master. The arranger, the instructor, the producer, the board of directors, the members, the players. They are all part of the organization of the game – and play different roles off-game as in-game. Everybody has responsibility, influence on the course of the game and preparatory work. But some have greater responsibility than others, and some are responsible

to the laws of the society if anything blows up. There are leaders at all levels and subordinates on all levels.

The better the system of organization and the personal level of responsibility, the better the result. Results are the measure of the organization!

- Results of roleplay? – What on earth are those?

- Experience and adventure. Witnessing and participating in an epic drama, mind-blowing action, tragic events, hazards, intense relationships ...

- It is being with a great group of people, playing like you did when you were a child and having fun (without getting drunk!). It is having a great time – that you will carry in your memory as a great experience.

- Got it!

- Okay. – So ... Are you ready to try it? I'm just ready to go. Coming?

- ALL RIGHT!! ... But does it cost money? Is it worth my time and money?

- You check it out for yourself, brother. YEAH! Hit it!

Here we leave the two roles of the roleplay guru and the newbie to roleplay and take a closer look at a central aspect of roleplay: IMPROVISATION.

### **Improvise**

Source; Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary:

1. to create music, a part in a play, etc while one is playing or speaking, instead of using music or words



The Carp ascends three roaring waterfalls and becomes a dragon  
Bū Shodo Harada Roshi

written previously.

2. to make something from whatever is available, without advanced planning

Creating spontaneously in harmony or accordance with what is present. This is improvisation, and without it the roleplay would be rather dead. But where do the impulses and inspiration come from? Most often from our personality. So we just react as

ourselves – automatically, so to speak. Often, we have a lot of persistent thoughts about what we could do or say; there is a lot of conversation going on in our minds. But other times, when we feel safe and/or if we train ourselves, we let go and let the action and words flow spontaneously. Afterwards, we are surprised by what we have done, and we experience a very strong sense of being alive and

present in the illusion of the setting. The cultivation of the fundamental characteristic of the role, so that we own the role as a second self and let go of self-reflection and enter into spontaneity, is the access to great roleplaying. As well as experiences, adventure and the joy and energy of the other players, that one gives oneself to.

### **Personal Expansion**

Do you have your limits? Do you know them? Are you a slave to your limits, or it is more a matter that there are things you don't do because you don't dare, or because you think you can't do, be, say or have that?

Personal expansion means active personal growth – like maturing, or learning a new skill, or dealing with personal relationships is a more giving way.

This is in contrast to personal development. The former is a natural, easy-going, joyful process. The latter is more serious, painful, and demanding. The first is the rich uncle, the second the strict father.

What if your life is just is an eccentric, off-game roleplay – with your personality given to you by God, karma or coincidence? You did not create your role in life by an act of will, the way you create your roles for a roleplay. But you can learn to be the

person you want to be, if you train and work on a role that is how you want to be. Then you can create your life to fit the role in life you dream of!

There are ways of personal growth and development for human beings that are common. Like playing roleplay and pretend games (as children do). Other ways involve learning from the experience of failure and success, and from second-hand knowledge, transmitted through communication of some sort.

Here is a special Indian way to use roleplay to personal growth:

Some Lakota Indians and a friend of mine played with the intention of gaining power. (Here, power resembles the 'Force' in Star Wars.) The player sets up a personal quest for power and invents a role in consultation with the Game Master. Then he and the group of players design, create, experience and grow through the medium of imagination, acting and communication. A tale of Power is told.

Just to make the power quest clear, I could mention the power to quit smoking, heal a deep sorrow, get a better concentration, bringing love into one's life, control ones desire or greed, being a successful artist, gaining a deeper relationship to the spirit world or being an everyday warrior, you name it.

## Conclusion

‘You are what you play.’

Louis Armstrong

Zen claims that we have an ‘Original Mind’ – a Buddha Mind – which is the source of who we are. This is overshadowed by the Ego and the attachment to the picture we (and others) have of who we are – and the role we play in real life. Through being present and totally engaged in what we do, we can contact or be one with that Original Mind.

This is connected with spontaneity and inspiration. When we create spontaneously, our creation comes from the source. It will, of course, be coloured by who we are, as we are the channel, or medium. What comes out is an expression of who we are and what we need to express to cultivate in ourselves or/and what others need to experience. It is a natural way of learning to cultivate our Mind.

Take a look at the different roles you have played and see if they have expressed some profound aspect of your personality, or perhaps expressed aspects of yourself you did not own or master. Maybe a repressed anger, traumatic experience, delusion or vision, mystic experience or miracle. Look!

The way to use roleplay as a tool for personal growth is to consciously work with the role and with improvisation. Then you can build yourself up to be/play the role and experience living it out in ways that are not your normal everyday role/personality. This gives you first-hand experience of what you also are, and you expand your expression as a human being.

You are a Buddha, and from this you create something inspiring. From this, you cannot avoid learning something about yourself, even if you do not do this with the intention of personal growth.

Gassho

(I greet you with my hands together in front of my heart – like a lotus bud – and then I bow to you.)

Denkyu Koji

Lay brother with Shodo Harada Roshi (Zen master in the Rinzaï sect) at the monastery of Sogenji, Okayama, Japan.

PS: Please remember that this text is like a finger pointing to the moon. It is not the moon. So if you see dirt on the finger, sorry about that! Please don't think that the dirt is the moon, either. Just follow your inspiration, which is the Truth anyway. Or forget my words quickly and forever.





# Fuck the Audience

- So my character is a redneck fighter? A stupid, mean motherfucker?
- Yes.
- Why is his courage 3 out of 10?
- That's because he's a coward.
- So he's this mean killing machine with a reputation for mayhem and destruction but also a coward?
- Yes.
- How can he even fight?
- Only in a frenzy, I would imagine.
- Of course. So he's such a wussy he just gives in to the Beast every time there's a threat.
- Yeah.

This is what you get when you have to explain random generated characters to players who assume that you've

## The Author

Juhana Pettersson is an example of a species known in Finnish as *enkälärppäaja*, a *l'mnot-a-larper*, or a larper in denial. He is 22 years old and lives in Helsinki, Finland.

He has been involved in the creation of a number of rather questionable larps and writes a column for *rpg.net* called *No Good*. He is a free journalist and an aspiring filmmaker.

actually written them. This is an example from a Vampire game where all this makes perfect sense.

I've never made or been involved in the making of a larp, which I sincerely believed to be a good game. Traditional rpgs, sure. Larps, no. All of the games I talk about here are old games. At least here in Finland, larp is dead. All progress is made in the field of games that don't rely as much on simulation. We've got a lot of good games. Stuff that's well organized, well produced by our standards, well written and so on. Nice little games, that are very safe. But not very interesting.

The problem with larp today is an excess of responsibility. The larps we have now are very safe. Safety rules. Safety regulations. Political correctness. After all, we wouldn't want anyone to get hurt. Just a bit of fun. A lot of effort has been put into making games safe, or even idiot-proof.

I want risk. The risk of offending, hurting, of being horribly bad or boring. I want cheap, innovative games.

This article is a retrospective of the weirder games I've made. These are not good games. They were all made by a younger man. They're all technically *WoD*. But they certainly were cheap.

## Back in High School

I've always wanted to do a larp in which the lines between the player and the character were deliberately blurred. Sadly, this is dangerous territory and I've only had the balls to try it once, in my very first larp ever. I was a second-year student at the Kallio high school. It was an art school, and I went there because my mother told me that unlike normal schools where I would

characters wouldn't be too hard to play. About half of the players had never played an rpg before, much less larped. 30 players, and 1.5 hours of game time. We figured that we'd market this as a fast forward game so that nobody would get too bored.

Because we wanted to have interesting relationships, we did a survey of the players, asking them to explain their personal relationships and attitudes



have to study stuff like chemistry, in Kallio I could study stuff like writing and spoken word.

In others words: easy living.

The game was called Kallion keijut (the Faeries of Kallio), and I did it with Pyry Waltari, also a student at the school. The idea behind that game was to have everybody play faerie versions of themselves during a normal school day. This way the rest of the student population and the teachers could handily double as NPCs, and the

towards the other players, individually. Based on this data we then created some fictional relationships. The idea was to base everything on fact, but twist it. Best friends became lovers or secretly hated each other, or both, and so on.

By the time the game was played, my first lasting relationship was on its second month. I can't remember if we lost our respective virginities before or after the game, but it happened around that time. Just to give you

some idea on how mature a basis things were. I reasoned that I couldn't ask of my players anything I wouldn't do myself, so I wrote a really festering, dysfunctional and repressed love affair for myself and the girl, who also played. She ended up screaming at me at the top of her lungs in the school lobby. She might have also hit me, but I'm not sure.

I remember a passing girl, a non-player, remarking to her friend, "This is just sad. A month ago it was kisses

and cuddling and now they're already making scenes".

I still have no idea how it worked for the rest of the players, but I suspect that most of them were just confused. I remember that Jukka Seppänen kidnapped the princess and carried her towards the place where the students gathered to smoke. Then I came onto the scene with my bad guy character and we had some sort of a scene. Or something.

Oh, those were the days.



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I still haven't heard of a game where the line between the player and the character would have been deliberately blurred with the intention of creating the best possible mindfuck.

### **My vampire speaks Klingon**

By the time I got onto my next larp project I was also being recruited into the narrative pool of the Helsinki Chronicle, a campaign Vampire: the Masquerade larp that's been running for something like seven years already. I lasted for three years, and based on that experience I think of myself as something of an authority on mediocrity.

Fortunately, WoD larps were very big in Finland at that time, partially thanks to the Helsinki Chronicle. This meant that there was a ready pool of people for whom the conventions of a certain style of gaming were harwired. Which meant that even games with incredibly flimsy concepts would attract players and get off the ground. Blue Rose Falling was the first larp project I did entirely by myself. It was promoted as a Vampire/Changeling game set in Moscow. It had a promo piece on the lines of "In the hills an ancient evil is starting to move. People have been disappearing..." and so on. It was promoted in the Web, under a fake name. Both of my fictional larp organizers were teenage girls because I thought that that would increase my chances of attracting my friends to the game. It's always more fun to fool those you know than those you don't. The game was a hoax. The idea was

to do a minimum of work, tricking the players into creating their own characters, ideally proocing them into bizarre excesses. The game was never meant to be played, although once the thing was over, some players wanted to do it.

Some of the players bought it line hook and sinker. One guy ended up creating a 9000-year old super-vampire, a Nosferatu child of Baba Yaga whose talents ranged from nuclear physics to the Klingon language. He was real exited about it. Another guy made himself something that actually resembled a character, even though it was an ancient True Brujah. I told him that the concept was fine but I thought he should also be the reincarnated Rasputin and a Tzimisce to boot. He said okay.

I changed a lot of proposed characters into clones of Lenin, and was dismayed when no one complained. I think the farthest we got was a character who was a noble werewolf channeling the soul of Rasputin, whose human form had somehow been replaced by a Lenin clone and who thus was something of a crucial character in this battle between historical figures. Many people quickly adopted a "yeah, whatever you say" sort of an attitude. More power to them.

Because I believe in standing behind my work, I revealed the game to have been fake on Christmas Even under my own name. Got surprisingly little flack. The lesson of this is that you should lie and deceive your players. Who needs friends anyway?

## Bugs in the program

The idea behind American Dream: Happiness was to create a completely random-generated larp. Since Vampire was a genre very familiar to me, I decided to do a random Vampire game generator, generate a game and play it out. To keep things scientific, I didn't tell the players. I created a website for the game adorned with images of Britney Spears, with pages and pages of backstory that didn't have anything to do with the game. Obviously, since the game didn't exist yet.

The game generator produced three things: character statistics, character history and relationships/plot hooks. I asked a friend to make a computer program out of it and generated 11 games, from which I chose the best one.

The game was a success in the sense that it was a very believable crappy Vampire game.

This was the very first Java program my friend wrote. It was full of bugs. This made for queer situations in the game. For example, about half of all characters had a taxi driver as a father. Antti Kanner always played the Bishop. Every character was either blessed with Multiple Personalities or was Manic-Depressive, or both.

Here's an example of the material the generator produced, in abridged form:

Vampire no. 4 Count Brass  
 Clan: City Gangrel  
 Generation: 10.  
 Age: 183

Negative traits: docile

Derangements: multiple personalities

Citizenship: Canada

Relationship with sire: knew, found out to be a fucker

Parents: boneless suburbanites

Twist: weird powers

Mortal life: a rapist, policeman, successful

Fortunately the plot generator helps to flesh out the characters:

1 is Bishop and 10 wants to have something to do with him.

16 knows the secret of 10.

1 is Bishop and 22 wants to have something to do with him.

16 has an object, on its way to 8. Without knowing about each other, 14 and 11 want to steal it. 11 works for 12.

I fleshed out the characters a bit manually, but they we're still bizarre and bad. I'm under the impression that some individual players, used to surviving in bad games, actually had fun. Probably took a bit of effort.

Buoyed by the success of American Dream: Happiness I had a sequel under development for a long time. It was originally called American Dream: Excess, and I had managed to recruit an actual production team and everything. It was to be randomly generated so that each character consisted of a group of six text blocks drawn from six categories so that every character would be a balanced individual. Every block would include

bits of history, ties other characters, personality traits and so on. The player, consulting a manual written for this purpose would then have deduced things like age and culture of origin from the text material. The great

My games have been bad for a number of reasons, so remember that only experimental lack of quality is worth anything. The world is full of games that are worthless because the organizers decided that instead of



thing about this game would have been endless replayability, character equality (since writing lead characters would have been impossible) and unpredictability.

### **No feel good**

Instead of making your next game a grand production epic with submarines and theatre costumes, make a game that's going to offend and disappoint everyone. I guarantee that if you do it properly, it's a lot of fun.

doing a real game, they'd do a "camp" game. That's what reruns of Batman are for.

Start with weird sex, real religion, offensive politics and personal space and you're on your way.

# The Development of Ideas

Everyone gets ideas, all the time, but never when they really need them. Therefore methods and tools to develop ideas are necessary when you are under pressure, because of a deadline coming up or a “writers block”. There are lots of methods and very good books written on this subject, but very few of them help people to find their own personal method, which is optimal for their kind of ideas.

Here are a few quick tips.

## **Inspiration – to find an idea**

Habits kill ideas. If you are repeating procedures, like your routes through the city, you will stop noticing

buildings, the street life and strange shops, and therefore stop the nutrient for your ideas, the inspiration. Try to think about all your uninspiring routines, the way you wake up, the way you bath and the way you eat your breakfast – probably habits all of them.

Therefore you should break some of your habits, especially those connected to your creative process: the route to the place where you are creative, the way you write your notes, the colour of your pencil, the format of the paper, the coffee you make, the table you put all these things on, the chair you sit in and the room you have meetings in. Your fantasy is a hungry beast that wants to be fed with other things than junk food, make sure it gets enough.

But it can also become too much. Too many impressions can become noise and you end up shutting everything out. Sometimes creative blocks can come from too much noise. Then turn off the phone and your stereo, close down the computer and start watering your plants.

Good and easy changes you can make: Have meetings in museums or go there alone with pen and paper. Drop

## **The Author**

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He is currently working as a webcommunity coordinator at the Danish National Broadcasting cooperation. He has been larping since 1999.



the computer and use a pencil instead. Write on coloured A3 or A5 instead of white A4. Sit on the floor or the table. Go for a walk in the city to get some fresh air and plan with stops with a



time limit to develop your idea. Draw the idea instead of writing it, build it in LEGO or clay, or sing it to your self.

Change senses. Just don't ask yourself how you write the idea down. How does it feel to touch, to be inside, listen to, smell, walk on or taste? Although it might seem silly, give it a shot, your words might bring something with them.

Finally there is nothing as stimulating for your fantasy as being bored. Very few people are bored in long periods of time, because you always turn on the TV or other make escapes. Do something deliberately boring without the possibility of escape, like a very dull lecture or film.

### **Making the idea solid**

How do you give your idea a solid shape and form? The best way is to tell it to others. Sometimes you have ideas that seems logical inside your own head, but when it meets the hard facts

of reality, it falls apart. A good test is to describe the idea with metaphors and choose a new metaphor every time you have persuaded someone into listening to your idea. It develops your own view of the idea and helps you to understand what the idea definitely not is.

If you explain your idea to a lot of people, you will at some point feel an urge to shorten the story. Partly because you won't feel like telling the same over and over again, and partly because people have better things to do than listen to you. Try to explain



your idea with one sentence – and still in a way that everyone understands. A funny way of testing this is to put a couple of your friend in an elevator and get everybody to understand the idea before it reaches the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. All ideas no matter how complex they are can be explained in one sentence. If you can't, you haven't found the core of your idea yet.

Another test is to explain the idea to a person with very few references to the context of the idea. If he doesn't understand your core sentence, its

back to the old drawing board.

### **Documentation of the idea**

Now your idea has developed from a vague thought to one core sentence and it's time to get it down on paper. Start out with your core sentence and explain what every word in the sentence means. Who is the idea important to and why, how can it



become reality and who/what can help, what are the costs, why is it a great idea for others than you. All of the “wh” words are your little helpers in this phase. If you don't ask the questions now (at the right time), someone else will later, at the wrong time. If you suck at writing, try to record it on a tape or get someone else to write it down

More helpful questions could be: what's the name of the idea, what's the idea about, who is involved, when is it happening, when is it over, who can be a part of it, can to few or to many be a part of it, why do you like the idea.

Use time in this phase, but not too much before you go public with the first draft. Get other people to read it, ask questions and give you response, it's the best tutoring you can get. And remember that even though you really love the idea, nothing good will come from only asking people whom you already know will love the idea. Ask people who you know will be critical you might be positively surprised. Take a chance – it's just an idea.

### **The Reality Check – can the idea survive in the real world?**

If you have asked a lot of people you might already have done sufficient reality checks. But you can never be sure enough, therefore do your research! Make sure that you are right about the things you write. Check the internet or books at the library. For



the fun of it: go to your bank and try to borrow money for the idea. The banks financial advisers are very focused on realism and profit – and it's completely free to use their time.

# Essentials of Project Management

The task of a project manager is a very exciting one. You become member of an exclusive club of people who can order others to do stuff while they themselves get the credit. Furthermore, you often get things the way you want them since you are the person in charge. On the other hand it's also your responsibility to ensure the project is on track and your ass is on the line if it goes wrong. It's also your job to make sure that your team is in high spirits and not on the edge of breaking apart (both as a group and as individuals.)

## The Author

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He has been larping since 1992, and has been involved in many LARP organisations and projects since 1994. He is one of the few people to have attended all Knudepunkts and he is the Project manager of KPO3.

## Four basic tasks

The project managers job consists of four basic elements: planning, communicating, coordinating and checking up. I will not go into very detailed descriptions of these here since you will find tons of books in your local store concerning these subjects. The basics of the four basic elements are as follows:

- **Planning-**  
Making and changing plans, from the first day with the vague idea to the last evaluation meeting, for the projects tasks.
- **Communicating-**  
Since you're the main profile of the project everything you say, concerning the project, in public forums are important. So think about it before you say it.
- **Coordinating-**  
To make sure the team is working and talking together and that there is nothing interfering with the team dynamics. It's extremely important that the
- **Checking up-**  
Making sure that everyone is working as planned.

This following is seven simple pieces of advice that I have picked up while managing larp and other cultural project. Some of them are directly related to the four basic tasks and some of them are crossovers or about the things that happen to you personally. It's not everything you need to know, but it's a start.

### **1. Do not do any actual work.**

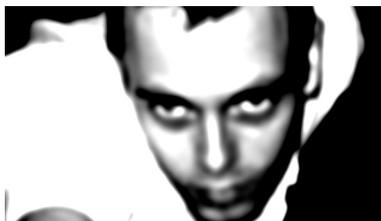
It's very important that you stay focused on planning, coordinating, communicating and checking up. Very hands on tasks with strict deadlines (like writing backgrounds or renting cars and toilets) will stress you and make you lose your focus.

This of course means you will have to rely on others to do the actual work. You have to convince yourself that others can do as good a job as yourself. Trust me they can! But don't be surprised if they do it in another way than you would have done it. People have different capabilities; that's what makes you a great team. The only thing to do is to accept and embrace it. This of course leads to you needing

to take the leader role. Don't be afraid of taking this role. It's often not very funny to whip your closest friends to make a deadline, but it's necessary. If you as a team have decided that you are the project manager, everyone should be able to accept it. And if you or anyone else has a problem with it, the conflict should be taken and dealt with, not avoided (see advice 5.)

### **2. Let the project be a part of you**

You have to involve yourself in the project. Let it get under your skin, let it in your dreams, be a part of it and let it be a part of you. Don't plan on doing much working or studying in the last weeks before a large project. It's vital



that you can use all of your mental capabilities to focus on the project. Tell your girl/boyfriend not to expect your full attention and remember to make up for it afterwards. Getting a project under your skin isn't something that happens from day one. It takes time, but as you're closing in on a project and meeting all of those deadlines you will feel it come creeping upon you. Welcome it.

### **3. Communication and Documentation**

Nothing can destroy a good project like bad communication. The

stressful situations you will have a plan to hold on to instead of nothing. If it never becomes stressful and you don't need the plans...well then you're a good planner. Remember that plans



members of the team have to talk to each other and you have to facilitate that. If they don't it will lead to bad chemistry as no one will know what the others are working on and it will lead to wasted or redundant work. Make everyone writes statuses of their work and distributes it through mail, icq, meetings and social gatherings. Remember that some people are not online all the time. These people will very quickly feel alienated from the group, so call them instead. Also remember to encourage the team members to speak to each other instead of through you; this will cause you less stress.

### **4. Everything can be planned**

Make plans for and write even the smallest and most obvious things down. Make lists of assignments: who is doing them, when are the deadlines and other important information. It might feel odd in the situation because the plans seem so obvious, but in

can be changed if the foundation of the decision changes. Also remember that very few people like being told in detail what to do. It's important that you involve the people who are actually going to do the work in the planning, since this will become a very big motivating factor for them. They are hopefully experts on their own tasks and are therefore more likely to make the deadline they themselves set.

### **5. Learn to like conflicts**

Before you really get started working make sure that everybody is in agreement on what kind of project you are doing. The first meetings should be about agreeing on visions for the project. A lot of energy and time consuming conflicts will be avoided if the team has taken the time to discuss the goals early. In the beginning of a project a disagreement will be about a certain specific matter. Later in projects disagreements will often turn

into personal conflicts, because a lot of blood, sweat and tears might already be put into this specific matter. The lesson learned is to deal with conflicts as early as possible; time will not make them go away! As the project manager the role as the peacekeeper naturally belongs to you, and this is why you can't be afraid of conflict.

### **6. You are working with amateurs**

It is likely that all of you are either studying or working and that the larp project is organized in your precious spare time. Take this into consideration when the group is deciding on the level of ambition and remember it when somebody doesn't make a deadline. Accept that people have other jobs and make the best of the time they want to give. Always remember to tell the team that they're doing a good job. They probably are and it's most likely all the credit they are going to get.

### **7. Show me the money**

You have to take an interest in the projects economy. Most of the time you will have a person assigned to the task of handling the money, but sometimes you won't and then you are stuck with it. Even though you might have someone to handle the paperwork you still need to take an interest. There will most likely come a time when there will have to be decisions made on how to use the little money you have. And since you have a special interest in the project, you are the most competent person

to do it. Sometimes, like if you get a lot of funding, you will also be legally responsible and then you must take interest.

Like a lot of other things, project management is something you learn by doing. Observing others behaviours in projects you're working on will tell you a lot even if you're not the project manager. The only way to get better is to do it again and again and again. And please do: all the hard working larp enthusiasts deserve a good project manager who cares and knows what to do. Plus it's a lot of fun!



# A Good Character Description

## Introduction

Understanding your character for a larp is essential for being able to play it properly, whether you want to immerse yourself or play for show. The key to this understanding is to have a good character description. This article will focus on what such a description should contain and which form and length is recommendable. Although most of the points presented

here should be generally valid the article primarily deals with character descriptions for »normal« larps, meaning that the setting is (more or less) serious, and that the duration is at least one day. Mini-larps, experiments, theme parties and games for children have other requirements and will get no mention here. The article is aimed at people writing character descriptions for others, but people writing for themselves will find that most of the guidelines still apply.

Everything in this article is of course based solely on my own experiences and ideologies, developed throughout my larping career.

## The Author

Martin Enghoff is a 24 year old Dane, currently residing in Amager, southern Copenhagen. He studies Environmental Chemistry and is on his fifth and (hopefully) last year. Also he is the co-owner of Situid a company using LARP as an educational media. Besides this Martin works at a youth school (teaching roleplaying) and at a day nursery. Other interests include soccer and a bit of theatre.

He has LARPed for 10 years, co-organized 4 LARPS, and assisted on an additional handful. Favourite LARP subjects are the writing of flavour texts and character backgrounds plus the actual playing of a role.

## Basics

On the most basic of levels the character background should contain three sets of information:

- 1) Who is the character
- 2) How is the character
- 3) Why is the character the way it is

“Who is the character” simply means the basic facts: Name, sex, age, occupation and so forth. “How is the character” is a description of the personality of the character. Which traits does it possess, how does it react under stress, what are its goals and motivations. Finally there is the

“Why”. This could also be called the background of the character – that is some chain of events that has led character to what and where it is now. Acquaintances of the character (if any) are contained in 1) and 3).

These three items can not, and indeed should not, be described completely separately. It is meant as a sort of checklist. All three should be described and text that does not go towards describing any of them should probably be discarded.

### Form

Choosing an appropriate form is an important step in character generation. The number of characters to be generated is a heavily weighing factor here. If this is more than a handful it is recommendable to choose a quite strict and simple form. This must be done to facilitate the writing process. At this point it is essential to realise that every character cannot be a piece of art and that craftsmanship is good enough. The less time you have the more this is true. Making 40 characters as art means 40 times of original inspiration, while you can use »standardized« templates (Desperate Businessman in Debt, Seeker of Forbidden Love, Wanting to Prove Herself) if you use the craft instead. By taking this approach the task of writing becomes not quite so insurmountable. Inspiration will most probably come to you during the process and when this happens you should put no constraints on yourself and instead apply all of your

creativity into making a character that is art - and which can perhaps act as a template at a later point.

When choosing the form it is important to keep the three basic items to be included in mind – the form must be able to include it all. The choice of form can be broken down to two major decisions.

- A) Writing style (First, second, third person or other, descriptive or narrative)
- B) List of contents

### Writing style

Different styles of writing all have their forces and weaknesses. First person character descriptions allow for deep insight into the characters thoughts. This, unfortunately, comes at the cost of one-sidedness, meaning that you only get the character's own view of things, which can be quite different from the general opinion. To understand a character fully one must know the character from both in- and outside. First person descriptions thus work best in conjunction with something else. Also they are, perhaps, the most difficult to make as one must create the language of the person in addition to everything else.

Using third person allows for an objective description of the character, typically presented as a kind of biography made by an undefined and all knowing author (unless the description is made by another character which really makes things both interesting and confusing). This

kind of description is often more easily accessible and complements a more diffuse kind quite well. Writing in second person gives a more direct form of communication between writer and player, but does not separate itself from third person in other ways. Some like one, some the other – I myself prefer third person.

Other ways could be a poem or song written by the character.

Descriptive writing means describing the character in a more or less neutral way while narrative could be writing a novel about the character or as mentioned above let another character describe it. This is as difficult to make as first person writing but offers great advantages in terms of mood. However it tends to get quite long if it is to stand alone and is generally best as a complement to something else.

### **List of contents**

By list of contents I simply mean which headers there is going to be in the description – e.g. “Name; Childhood; Now; Goals; Personality” - and an idea of what is contained in each header. For example it could be that Childhood should contain a description of all the characters birthdays, that Now should include a story of the last time the character was really happy and sad, and that Goals should contain at least two short term goals and one long term.

### **Example**

In the following I will give an example of a form along with advice on how to

fill out that form in the best possible way.

I must stress that the finest task of the writer is to make the character both as accessible and attractive to the player as possible. Often there is also some overall feel or theme of the scenario you are writing, for that should be weaved into the description to some degree. These points must be kept in mind during the entire process lest the description drifts off in a random direction.

The first part of the form will be the characters name – it is always nice to know the name of the person you are reading about.

Starting with the beginning I will make Background the first header of the body text. Writing the background can be a tricky thing. One often feels that there should be lots of information, but as I will come back to this can be very wrong. Instead one should choose a few main events and focus on these. It is also important to remember that an event in itself is of little value in terms of understanding the character. What really matters is how the character reacted to the event in question. E.g.: “Few days before his seventh birthday Richards father died”. So Richard has no father – that does not tell us much. But the reaction: “This made Richard so scared that he’d lose his mother too that he did not dare leave her out of sight for years to come” or “This made Richard hate his father for abandoning him, and his mother as well, for not being his father” tells us a whole lot about Richard.

So in the background I choose to include the following: A description of the character's parents as this is something that is important to almost anyone, one major event of the character's childhood (first day at school, breaking an arm, getting a favourite toy, parents getting divorced), one from the teens (first kiss, best friend stole girlfriend, not getting invited to an important party, meeting best friend, death of grandmother) and one event from the adult life (Wedding, getting fired, moving abroad, buying a Mercedes). This will be written as a continuous

story bound together by minor events. My next header will be Today. The character's current job situation and marital status will be mentioned as well as a description of what the character does on a typical day.

Following this there will be a Personality header. Included here is what really makes the character mad and happy, how he treats other people, his dreams and goals, plus I will try to put in at least three personality keywords.

Finally I will make a Facts section. All basic facts as well as a list of acquaintances, described briefly, and



the personality keywords will be listed here.

All of the text will be written in third person as I find it both easiest and most appropriate for this kind of description.

The form described is fitting for a large scenario but if I wanted to use it for something smaller or if I really was struck by creativity I would add a personal paragraph at the top, where I would put excerpts from a letter, a diary entry, a job application or something else made by the character as this really can capture its spirit.

### **Length**

Character descriptions are typically evaluated on length and it is often heard that »the longer, the better«. This is however, in my opinion, not the case. Two main arguments support this statement. The first is what I call the »Skeleton vs. Zombie theory«. If a character description is incomplete – that is, too short – a skeleton will be created. Firstly this means that the feel of playing a character disappears – there is simply not enough flesh on the character to make it interesting. Secondly it means that whatever intention the writer had with the character, it will probably not be realized by the player and in its place will be a conceptual skeleton with some random skin on it.

The other extreme is when too much information is supplied. In this case the player will drown in facts, leaving no room for character interpretation and joy of playing.

Instead of breathing life into a character the player will be a lumbering, dead body trying to do and remember everything that was written in the description – a zombie would be born.

Unless the character is a specific, historical person it is my opinion that a player should be allowed (even encouraged) to interpret it, within the given boundaries. This makes the character come more alive. The description should give the player a clear idea of how the character acts, and not a complete encyclopaedia of what to do and why in every situation. The second argument is the simple fact that most larpers are (more or less) ordinary people with no formal education in acting or text analysis. This simply means that too much text can defeat its own purpose by confusing instead of clarifying.

One could argue that more text only can be an advantage, since it provides extra information for the player but, based on the above arguments, I must disagree.

A good character description, including the three items listed under "Basics" but not detailed world description, has a length of about two to four pages standard text. Less makes a skeleton and more a zombie.

Using this on the sample form given above I would allow Background and Today to be up to two pages, Personality up to one and Facts up to one. This will give a character description that is well balanced and of fitting total length.



# Three Basic Concepts for Larp Organizers

In the following article I will attempt explain the three basic principles, or concepts, which have been widely utilized in Einherjernes Nemefrego larpS and the one-shot Efter Vinter Kommer Vår (“After Winter Comes Spring”<sup>\*</sup>).

The first concept is called “Kan-man-så-kan-man” (which translates directly into “If You Can, You Can” and will be abbreviated through the remainder of this article as KMSKM). It began as a general attitude towards rule-based Live Roleplaying, but has in time developed into a separate style of larp’ing in its own right.

The other two concepts encompass what we, as organizers, have experienced as worth paying attention to when creating plots for your larp.

All three concepts were created, developed and tested over a period of several years, in connection with the Nemefrego larpS. These were a series of larpS which began in the realm of common fantasy, and grew to become a separate and unique style dubbed Mythic Medieval (roughly translated). The main concept in this was that the

mythical element (the adventure or story so to speak) is more intense when experienced in small subtle doses, as well as when the story is framed by a well-functioning, believable society, where the full spectrum of a proper hierarchy is represented. In this fashion, the last three Nemefrego larpS had over 300 participants, playing parts ranging from king to page to peasant to beggar.

## **KMSKM: “If You Can Can Can”, or “Using Your Own Abilities”.**

KMSKM is a phrase which was originally developed as a counterconcept to rules, but has in time become a separate style of larp’ing. It boils down to playing with as few rules as possible, and preferably with no rules, plots or sets/props that can prevent players from using their given abilities. KMSKM can be used in several ways within the world of larp’ing, which I will account for in the following.

### **A. Counter-rules.**

In the past KMSKM was used to answer questions like “Can I climb over the town walls?” or “Can I steal the king’s crown?”. As an Organizer

you would simply reply: “I don’t know, can you?”. This created a focus on doing things for real instead of using rules to solve plots or play your part. Examples of these rule-based solutions could be winning the crown or the successfully wooing the fair maiden simply by having the rules on your side. There could, for example, be a rule that allows the player to charm other players, and thus allowing the player in question to gain power. This, however, creates a lot of disappointing experiences for everybody surrounding this player, because they were forced to act on something that never happened. You were never charmed or wooed, you merely had a rule thrown in your face that you were forced to accept. On the contrary, there can be parts that are played so charismatically that you are actually and truly charmed, and you probably won’t even realize until the game is over why you “allowed” that player to win, as it were.

What often occurs when playing with rules is that a lot of the larp is played off-game. By letting plots and parts be resolved and played through rules, results in the players not getting real experiences to react upon, but only rules. This gives a far less intense and atmospheric larp than if these things were allowed to happen for real.

One of the main consequences of demanding that your players do all the things for real is that you have to edit out a lot of the things that only

rules can make possible. For example magic, small boys playing great warriors (see section b) and other things that are not actually possible. But this does not limit play. On the contrary, rules actually create more limits than possibilities in a larp, while the absence of rules gives limitless possibilities.

The idea that rules create limits must be understood in the sense that every time you allow somebody to do something that they couldn’t in real life by way of a rule, you remove other players opportunity to do the same even though they are actually able to. This works both for mundane physical rules, such as climbing, opening locks, etc., as well as rules relating to magic. When you create magical rules, you subsequently give a group of players the possibility to use these rules, which naturally gives them an advantage over other players. This means that there are players who will lose their plots no matter how skilled and creative they are, because the opposition can use the rules to win. By using KMSKM as the foundation for play, you promise players that rules won’t inhibit them, that is, they won’t be fighting against metaphysical, abstract rules, but against other peoples’ real and true abilities.

### **B. KMSKM; accepting your own limitations.**

With KMSKM there are certain limits which our own physical reality imposes, and which we have to accept.

This has shown itself to be to the advantage of the mass of players, but to the disadvantage of the singular player. This is however only the players wishing to play a role which they aren't actually capable of, for example a little boy wishing to play a great warrior or an socially unskilled person wishing to play a leader – this is simply not possible with KMSKM. It is important to make this clear to the host of players before the larp, so as to avoid disappointment and moaning once it commences. But the advantage of setting these limitations outweighs the loss of individual imagined possibilities. When the leader is truly charismatic or when the great warrior is truly the best at wielding his sword, the play becomes much more believable, and moving, for everyone.

### **C. Getting to know your own abilities.**

In KMSKM you base your part on your personal abilities. This means that the resulting play obtained in the larp is much more valuable to yourself than if you had played based on rules. When your person is the basis of your role, it is in a sense also yourself being tested and challenged. Thus when you return from a KMSKM larp, you will often find that you have learned a lot about your own abilities, and probably also enhanced them through playing.

### **D. Greater responsibility to the singular player.**

KMSKM brings with itself a greater responsibility to the players; a

responsibility that most players should be capable of handling. It is important to specify to the players that “you can if you can” is not synonymous with “you HAVE TO if you can”. You should, for example, not steal just because you can. It is important to play your own part and keep your senses about you, as all it takes is one irresponsible and selfish player to ruin a good experience, and a KMSKM larp is easily wrecked if players abuse their absolute freedom. It is essential to respect the physical and mental borders of your fellow players and to respect the role you have been given to play.

### **E. Safety and economy - the limitations of KMSKM.**

Every larp, of course, has its limitations, and one should be especially aware of this when creating a KMSKM. You shouldn't let yourself be blinded by the concept, but rather remember what is possible. It is for example very important to respect that sets and props for the most part get re-used over and over again by the impoverished organizers, or are on loan, so this is one situation where KMSKM cannot be used in full (don't go burning the city even if you can).

Another situation is the physical and mental well-being of all players, which must be respected. KMSKM does, for example, not apply to battle, torture, physical intimacy or other such compromising situations.

With regards to economy and safety, KMSKM is often the heavier burden, while rules provide an easy way out.

Rules allow you to build a city out of white plastic tents and create city walls with rope, but that just doesn't cut it with KMSKM. Therefore it is a style of larping better suited to ambitious larps, where sweat and hard labour are a part of the bargain.

## **F. Conclusion and reflection**

KMSKM is all in all a rather simple concept, the aim of which is to ensure a free game, that is, with as few rules as possible. However, this also creates problems, which are important to address. At the same time it gives a lot of advantages, which are not mentioned here, one of which is that it is possible grade your larps according to how much you want to integrate the concept of KMSKM. Efter Vinter Kommer Vår ("After Winter Comes Spring"), which was held in Denmark in the summer of 2001, is an example of a larp which was made entirely according to KMSKM, which meant that both setting, roles, food, props and rules (or lack thereof) complied perfectly with the concept. But there have been many other larps which have had KMSKM as an aim only to the extent that genre, participants and location allowed.

### **The individual goal**

It is important for the organizers to consider, that the goal that the roleplayer is fighting to achieve should be actively included in the larp they are participating in. The quality of the playing is dependent on what goals you give the players and what

their motivations are, which basically means that you should give them goals that are worth fighting for. Some examples of goals that are unrealistic would be the fight for deed to a shire far to the north, or the secret formula to make gold, if you never get to make gold in the given scenario. The fight to achieve these goals can very well be entertaining, but it is a somewhat lax feeling to have fought for something that is of no real value within the game.

For example, if you have solved the mystery behind the old alchemist and have found his secret formula to make gold, and you discover that it is a ritual that takes far more time than you have in the game, that is, that it will never have any impact on your game. Or when you find out that you will never see your new territory in the north, it reminds you that you are only playing a part and that it is not a real world your part is reacting to. The illusion is shattered and the players feel cheated. On top of this, you, as an organizer, will have securely emphasized the holes in your ability to plan and construct a believable larp.

When thinking up goals for the players, one should instead think of what they'll need during the scenario, or what could be cool to achieve. This could be power over other players, for example being duke instead of the other duke, or to gain personal welfare, which especially becomes important once food is an integrated

part of the scenario. This means that you should always keep in mind how the achievement of the goal will affect the player during the timespan of the larp. It's not only the role that should feel the sweet taste of victory, the player should as well.

It is also possible to create a plot merely for the sake of plotting, or to phrase it differently, a goal for the sake of having one. This is not really preferable if there are other possibilities, but it can be effective. Especially if all the players are on equal ground, that is if, for example, you have a scenario where there is nothing of true value to be gained and where food and lodging is not an integral part of the scenario. I don't have a lot of experience with this type of larp, but my experience has taught me that this works best if the goals are timed so that they are not achieved until the game ends. If the players have to save the world, there is nothing more to do once that goal is reached; the game ends. What else is there to do? So if the goal and the ending are reached at about the same time, it is experienced as a happily won soccer match, rather than a disappointingly busted illusion.

### **The conflict at hand.**

This last principle is best explained with this example: "nobody cares who killed their mother when their pouch of gold has just been nicked". This refers to the typical plot where a player is informed in his prehistory that the mother to the role he is to play

has been murdered under mystical circumstances, that is, the player is to search for his mother's murderer. But the moment his pouch is nicked, the hunt for the thief becomes much more interesting to both the role and the player, while the murder is only "happened" to the role. This could perhaps be interpreted as sloppy roleplay on behalf of the player, who should remember that finding the murderer is much more important than finding the thief. But that train of thought misses the point that suppression of motivation cheats the player out of a fun experience, as finding the thief is likely to be much more exciting. This is because it is a turn of events that was instigated in the course of the game, and therefore all clues, all witnesses and the entire process of solving the crime are quite real, and not just an illusion laid out by the organizers. Most organizers should be familiar with how the players often rave happily on for hours about some event they actually instigated themselves, and which the organizers never even dreamed of could occur.

In this fashion, the third principle becomes a rule of thumb for all organizers to let the larp run its own course, and therefore concentrate more on creating good frames and relations for the players, rather than attempting to scheme out grand plots for them to play. The concrete plots are good enough if there's nothing else for the players to do, but if the framework and the relations are good enough,

there should be plenty of Conflict At Hand, which is what ultimately gives the players the best experiences. By framework I am referring to the society, the setting and the level of freedom given to the individual player. A good framework is equal to a well-constructed and functioning society, a scenography that is believable and durable and freedom to the extent where the players are allowed to act totally on their own accord. If you have based your larp on all the players uniting to defeat the demon army, you have given them very little freedom indeed.

It is possible to imagine the framework as a playground which can be used in two ways: either as an obstacle course to be completed, or a sandpit where you scatter toys randomly and let the children play with them as they please. A good framework allows the children to play as freely as they wish, whereas a poor framework demands that they complete the obstacle course. Conflicts At Hand in a playground are the ones that occur when two children want the same toy, whereas preconceived conflicts are the ones that occur when the grownups want all the children to play football against each other.

### **Conclusion**

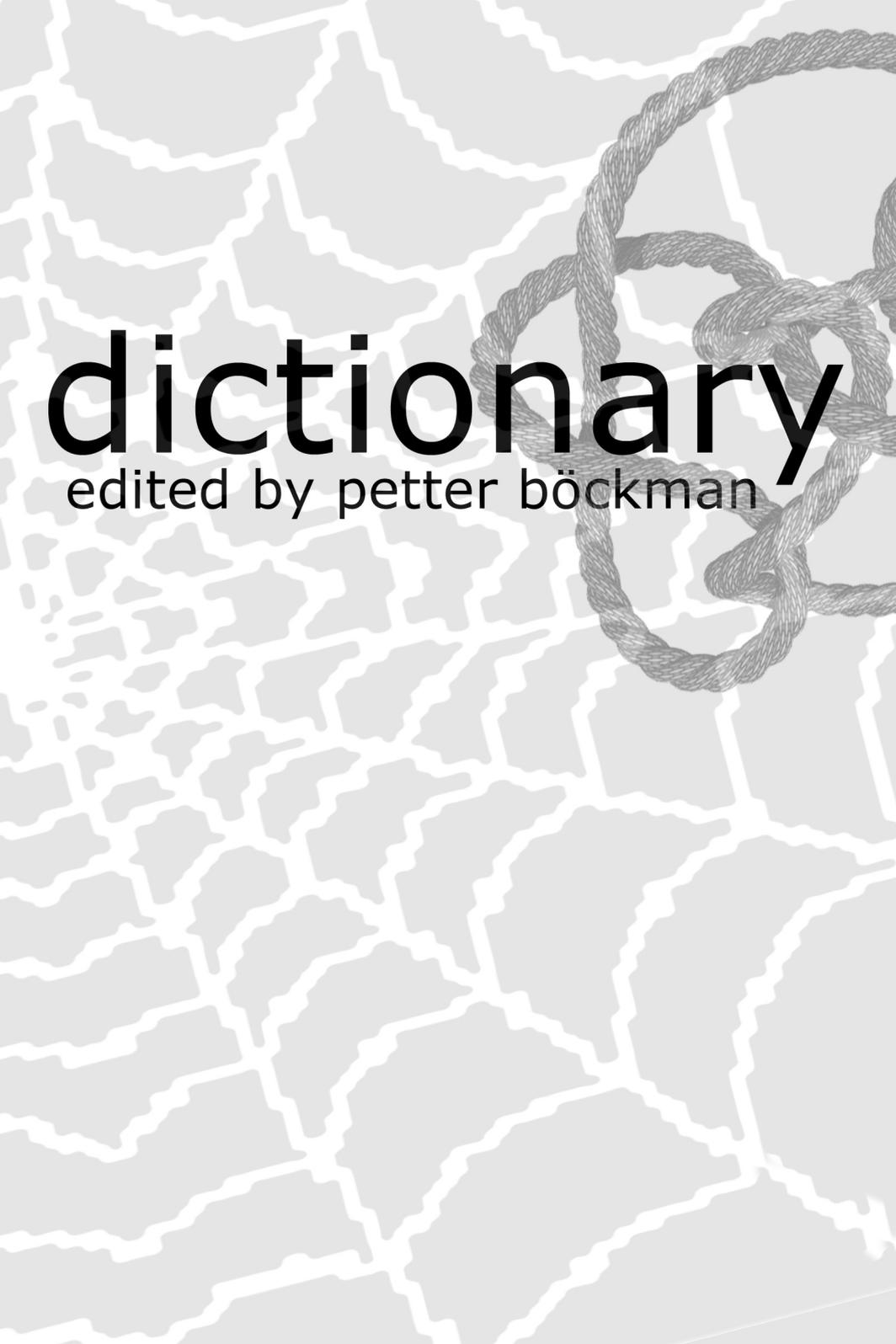
The three above-mentioned basic concepts can be used in a variety of ways. They can for example be used to inform the player of what kind of larp is in the works, or as rules of thumb when creating framework, goals and rules. They have shown themselves to be pretty fundamental to free roleplaying, being roleplaying which allows the players to be the instigators of their own experiences and story.

Apart from this the principles can be used to test your ideas while they are still at the conceptual stage, and last but not least to create larp. For *Efter Vinter Kommer Vår* (After Winter Comes Spring) the bearing concept were these three principles, and it was based on this that we found the setting, location, scenography and props that complied.

There are lots of possibilities in this style of roleplaying, so it's just a matter of getting started on it.

\* For those who are interested, the organizers behind *Efter Vinter Kommer Vår* have written and printed a fine description and evaluation of the scenario (only in Danish – sorry), which is available by contacting [runelippert@laiv.dk](mailto:runelippert@laiv.dk).





# dictionary

edited by petter böckman

# Dictionary

## Background

A set of instructions for the player, delineating the major vitae of the role (see this) and information necessary for the game. The background are made by the organisers, but may be developed in co-operation with the player. Some backgrounds are even made by the players themselves, with little or no alterations from the organiser. Backgrounds range from the bare vitae to lengthy epic pieces. In gamist larps (see this), the background will usually contain hints to one or more plots (see this), in a fate-play the background will contain the fate (see these).

Though backgrounds may in principle be given through any medium, is a written paper by far the most common form.

Source: Trad.

## Boffer

Swedish term used to describe medieval style weapons (swords, axes, spears etc) made from some sort of padding around a hard core. The object of such arms is to allow the players to resolve game conflicts with arms without actually harming them selves. Badly made padded arms are often rather lumpy and club-like. Well-made, realistic looking padded arms are often made from latex, and the Swedes sometimes use the term "latex arms" as an antagonist to "boffer arms". Boffer is also used in a degrading manner to describe players who come to larps solely to fight ("Boffertomte") or larps built on armed conflict ("boffers, "boffer larps" etc.).

In Norway, where the term "padded arms" is the general term, boffer arms specify heavily padded arms used for full contact fighting.

Source: Trad.

## Bøckmanian maxim

Maxim directed at the plot-structure (see this), and expresses the fact that

## The Author

Petter Bøckman (35) grew a beard at 19 and is a zoologist by education, teaching school classes at the Museum of Natural History.

He was one of the founders of the Oslo LARP-scene in the mid 80'ies, and is still around. Having done the »LARP theory for dummies« last year, his current project is making a comprehensive catalogue of LARP-terminology. He has a weakness for dark beer and scientific squabble.

is impossible to control the direction of a game as long as the plot-structure is hidden from the players, and that an action appearing the only logical step to an organiser don't necessarily do so for the players. See also Hidden montage.

For any given problem, there are an infinite number of solutions, and as an organiser, you may take for granted that the players will think of those you did not.

The maxim takes its idea from science-philosophy.

Source: Petter Bøckman, 1993

### **Cage**

An ingame mechanism that prevents the roles (not the players!) from leaving the game area during a play. Such mechanisms can have a multitude of forms: Physical, formal, social or magical, or a combination of these.

Source: Coleman, D. (2001). The Carrot, the Stick and the Box. The larper magazine 1, vol 2.

### **Character**

A term synonymous with „role“ (see this). The term is the one most commonly used in tabletop RPG (see this), and is on occasions used from Sweden and in Scandinavian texts from other countries written in English.

Source: Trad.

### **Context**

Term used when describing larp from a media scientific point of view. When seeing larp as an interactive medium,

it is argued that it must be seen as a medium placed within a context, the larp reality. It compromises not only the game world (see Setting) and roles, but also the player's prejudices, knowledge and abilities.

Source: Torstein Utne, laiv.org

### **Dekontextualisation**

Term that means that the role (not the player) have lost connection to the larp, so that the player is no longer able to relate his or her impressions through the role. This occurs not uncommonly near the end of a larp, when the plots (see this) are mostly resolved, overthrowing the initial social structure of the larp. The consequence is often, though not always, that the player falls out of role (see "Offing"). Dekontextualisation may also happen when the basis of the larp fiction is dramatically altered during a larp, so that the role no longer has a natural place in the larps dramatic structure.

Source: Gabriel Widding/Galadrim debattforum

### **Deus Ex Machina**

From Latin God from the Machinery, an expression from the theatrical world. In larp, it signifies all sorts of ad hoc efforts on the organiser's behalf to forcibly steer the course of plots (see this) within the framework of the game. This includes messengers with messages or letters from outside the sphere of play, monsters, instructed players, angry gods etc.

Deus Ex Machina-problems is likely

to occur in a larp with narrativist organisers and gamist players (see these). It is also a frequent symptom of a GM-controlled larp (see this).

Source: Axel Westlund

### **Diegesis, (diegetic)**

Expression from Film theory, denoting the totality of the story and possible truths within it. In a larp that will translate to „all that is true to the roles“. For the roles in the larp „Pinhead“, in Gothenburg, the city of Helsinki was diegetic (existing in their reality), while the debriefing session was not. See also „Setting“ and „Context“.

**Source: Johanna Koljonen/Eirik Fatland**

In this anthology, you could read the texts from Carsten Andreasen and Markus Montola to know more about diegesis.

### **Dionysian zone**

A concept from social science, the zone is a point in time and space where Dionysian urges rule the ground and normal social rules do not apply. The concept goes back to Antiquity. It's opposite is the Apollinarian zone, where rule of law and reason prevail.

Various authors have described larp as a sort of Dionysian zone, where the players through fictive personae may behave in a way not acceptable in the normal society without repercussions. The Swedish ethnologist Lotte Gustafssons have used the term “Fortrollad sone” (Transl. Bewitched zone) as a translation.

Source: Trad.

### **Dissipative**

A larp structured such that there are no set outcome, that the outcome is irrelevant to the larp as such or that the roles conflict in reaching the various goals is the aim at the larp, thus creating a branching plot-structure (see this). The expression is adapted from mathematical chaos theory, and its use in larp is controversial.

Source: Stenros, J.: Genre & style. Lecture at Knutpunkt02, Stockholm

### **Dogma 99**

A declaration on larp in the form of a manifest, written by Eirik Fatland and Lars Wingaard. The aim of the manifest was to set strict guidelines along the “less is more” principle for the organisers, thus forcing them to find new and creative ways of making larps. Though few true Dogme-larps have appeared, the manifest has stimulated discussions on the subjects it addressed, and in that regard it has been a success.

The original Manuscript may be found at: <http://fate.laiv.org/dogme99/en>

Source: Amor fati/laiv.org

Dogme 99 is printed in this anthology.

### **Dramatism**

A style of making or playing larp, which values how well the in-game action, creates a satisfying storyline. The dramatist player will emphasise acting out the role in a way that serve the story (see “Meta considerations”). The dramatical organiser will seek to

structure the larp such that it unfolds along his/hers storyline. Different kinds of stories may be viewed as satisfying, depending on individual tastes, varying from fanciful pulp action to believable character drama. It is the end result of the story which is important.

Dramatism is one of a tirade of larp-styles that make up the Three Way Model of larp (see this). The style is thoroughly denounced by the Turku manifest (see this). Several authors argue that dramatism, when seen from the organisers point of view, is synonymous with narrativism (see this)

Source: John Kim, The Three Way Model

### **Ekstatikoi**

A Greek term from theatrical science, used by Aristotle to describe a style of playing a role through putting one self in the roles shoes, as opposed to merely simulating (see "Euplastoi"). The expression is used by Mike Pohjola and others as synonymous with immersionism (see this) when describing style of playing larp.

Source: Mike Pohjola

### **Eläytyminen**

Finnish term, meaning something like "really putting yourself into the shoes of your character and his/her environment". The term is usually interchangeable with immersion (see this).

Source: Pohjola, M. The manifest of the Turku School/laiv.org

### **Euplatoi**

A Greek term from theatrical science, used by Aristotle to describe a style of playing a role through seeking to recreate all the minutiae of that role: The voice, gestures, dress etc. as opposed to simply try to put one self in the roles shoes (see "Ekstatikoi"). The expression is used as synonymous with simulationism (see this) when describing style of playing larp.

Source: Mike Pohjola

### **Fable**

The "grand line" of a plot (see this) played on a larp, in the abstract. The expression is often used in connection with Fateplay as a substitute for the term "Main plott" (see this). See also "Fateplay".

Source: Eirik Fatland/Amor Fati

### **Fantasy**

A literary genre where magic is a part of the diegetic (see this) framework and the technological development and aesthetic is comparable to that known from medieval Europe. This setting is enormously popular in larp, and most, if not all, larp-groups have on occasions done fantasy-larps.

Though fantasy-settings by definitions had magic as part it, magic does not need to be part of the larp. The setting may span from gritty realism, though in a fictional world, to glossy power-struggles between gods in a cataclysmic world. Fantasy is sometimes divided into "high" and "low", depending on the amount of

magic in the game. The high-fantasy setting has proven to be especially prone to the “Peasant problem” (see this).

The setting is known by its English name in Scandinavia. The literary genre’s original name is “Sword & Sorcery” (SS, as compared to SF).

Source: Trad.

### **Fate**

A list of simple instructions given to a participant in a Fateplay (see this) so that the player through following them will fulfil his/her part of the Fateweb (see this). A fate is written in such a way as to minimise the risk of misunderstanding and in such a way that the instructions may be acted out without obstacles. Every fateplayer is an instructed player (see this), but not vice-versa. The term “fate” is narrower than “instruction”. For instructions to be called “fates” they must be a part of the fateweb (see this).

Source: Adapted from Amor Fati

### **Fateplay**

A game event or improvised theatre play where a fateweb (see this) is interpreted and transformed into improvised acting by the fact that all participants follow their characters fate. Fateplay may be tabletop RPG or larp-event where all are given fates. An improvised theatre play, however, is held before a non-interacting audience.

Source: Adapted from Amor Fati

### **Fateweb**

A simple, stepwise story that forms the basis for improvisation in a Fateplay (see this). A Fateweb is made by reducing the larps’ desired fable (see this) to the simplest possible units.

Source/Kilde: Adapted from Amor Fati

### **Game master**

Expression from tabletop role-playing (see this) denoting the leader controlling the imaginary game world. In Danish larp, game master is used to describe an organiser actively partaking in the game, thereby being able to influence the course of the game by direct means. The role of the actively playing organiser is also known from the rest of the Scandinavian scene.

In Norway, the term has a slightly different meaning, see “SL”.

Source: Bruun, J. (2002), Sabbats Lille Liveordbog

### **Game mechanics**

Any system of rules made to allow players to act out aspects of the game that would be impractical, illegal or impossible to do for real, such as magic, cyber technology, armed conflicts or use of drugs. Game mechanics range from highly complicated systems of armour protections and disciplines of magic to a single-number all-round “toughness factor”. Historically, younger groups seem to rely heavier on game mechanics than older groups, and the phenomenon is often seen as an inheritance from the tabletop

RPGs.

Source: Trad.

### **Gamist**

Adjective describing a player enjoying beating a fair challenge in a larp, or setting one up if you are an organiser. The challenges may be tactical combat, intellectual mysteries, politics, or anything else. It may also be used to describe a competitive style of game. The gamist player will usually be concerned about solving a plot (see this). The term "plotter" is synonymous, but is mostly used in a derogatory manner.

Source: John Kim, The Three Way Model

### **GM**

Abbreviation of Game Master. The expression come from tabletop RPG (see this) and has seen extensive use as a general term for organiser in young larp-scenes in its original English form. GM traditionally signifies the organisers of the larp: Those making plots, writing backgrounds, taking care of the logistics etc. Other expressions have been devised, but as new groups form with their root in the tabletop scene, it is still encountered. Source: Trad.

### **GM-controlled larp**

A Norwegian expression from the first half of the 1990's, denoting a larp where the organisers want a strong narrative structure, but the players want a free structure. Such a larp is bound to run into problems (see the "Hidden

Montage"), and the organisers will try to put it back on tracks by a number of ad hoc actions in a Deus Ex Machina-manner (see this).

Critiques of the GM-controlled larps pointed to the player-controlled larps (see this) as an ideal, thus foreshadowing the story vs. the telling discussion in the Swedish scene in the early 2000's.

Source: Trad.

### **GNS-model**

GNS model – Model made by Ron Edwards seeking to describe the aim for RPG in general as a result of three styles: Gamism, narrativism and simulationism (see these). The model is aimed at both organisers and players, and covers all forms of RPG. This makes the model somewhat inaccessible and with limited descriptive power for Scandinavian larp.

The model deals with the reason for role-play through the concepts of exploration and premise. A player wishes to let the role explore the setting, and the elements the player find interesting constitutes the premise for further gaming. The premise is thus the players wishes, and as such a meta-consideration (see this). The role's actions are exploration. It is in the relationship between these two that the above-mentioned styles of play appear.

The model has seen some use in the more theoretically oriented circles. Particularly in the narrativism versus simulationism debate, hotly debated

in Sweden in the early 2000's.

Source: Edwards, R. 2001. GNS and other matter of role-playing theory, Adept Press.

### **Hardcore larp**

A rather diffuse term that has seen various definitions. The Norwegian group Weltschmerz defines it as an approach to playing where the players don't want simulate or pretend anything - not even the actions that bring real harm, pain and suffering. Other authors have variously defines it as any larp involving strong physical hardship, or as any style of play where total immersion (see this) in a physically challenging setting is sought

Source: Weltschmerz/Trad.

### **Harver**

Norwegian term, roughly translating to harrower (from the agricultural implement) meaning someone who go to a larp primarily for fighting. See "Boffer".

Source: Trad.

### **Hidden montage**

Expression adapted from film theory, where it denotes the common conventions that helps audience interpret the storyline behind the series of scenes that make up a traditional (i.e. Hollywood) film, thus making the erratically changing scenes appear as a smooth continuum. In larp the expression cover the numerous conventions that are necessary to make the plots (se this) of a larp run

smoothly. The montage may include such conventions as "all men in black cloaks are evil", "a bang and a bright light is magic being performed" and "if the smith is mentioned in your role you are expected to talk to him".

Martin Erickson claims that as there are no way of enforcing a perfect hidden montage on your participants, a game with hidden plots will always experience hang-ups (see also "the Bøckmanian maxime"). The only solution to this problem is either to not have plots, making a purely immersionist larp (see this) or force single solutions on the players, making it a fateplay (see this). The theory is controversial.

Source: Ericsson, M. The story versus the telling. Discussion on Knutpunkt02, Stockholm

### **Hobbyist**

Term used to describe someone strictly considering larp a hobby that should not be "theorised to death". Also used by Fatland to describe one opposed to view larp as a form of art.

Source: Eirik Fatland/laiv.org

### **Iff**

Abbreviation of In-live/off-live. Iff is a Swedish expression denoting a situation where a few players play despite that the other players are not, or play in an area not considered a part of the game, like an off-live area (see "Offing"). Iff occurs temporarily and spatially limited within a game, involving only a few players. When the Iff state involves all or most of the larp,

the situation is more properly termed “Onff” (see this).

Source: Camilla Mörn/Galadrim debattforum

## **IL**

Norwegian term, an abbreviation of Intrigue leader, an expression from Ravn (see this) still in use. It originally denoted the leader or the one responsible for making intrigues/plots and roles (see these) and the contact person for the players, both before and during the larp, as opposed to the “SL” (see this). The added responsibilities of contacts with the player separate the IL from the “Larpwright” (see this). Later the expression became synonymous with organiser.

Kilde: Ravn/Tommy Finsen

## **Immersionist**

Adjective describing a player who values living the life of the role, feeling what the role would feel. Immersionists insist on resolving in-game events based solely on game-world considerations. Thus, a fully immersionist player will not fudge rules to save its role's neck or the plot, or even change details of background story irrelevant in the setting to suite the play. An immersionist organiser will try to make the plots and setting such that they are believable to the players. See also Eläytyminen.

Source: Mike Pohjola. See also The Three Way Model

## **Impro**

Short for Improvisational theatre.

Movement created by Keith Johnstone. The foundation is Theatre sports, a high paced and hilarious form of improvised on-stage lunacy.

Source: Stafflund U. 2001, Glossary of interactive forms, Interactive Arts magazine.

## **Indrama**

Word coined in Norway by Eirik Fatland, to describe any structure that, with “artistic intention” allows for multiple participants to interact through improvising according to pre-determined characters, but without inter-player game or strategy elements. “Artistic intention” is to be understood in the sense of art theory, not as “intention to create art” but as a particular method and mentality on the part of the creator. This view must be understood as a reaction against the attitude “this is just harmless fun and games” (see Hobbyist).

Examples of structures that can support indrama include, but are not limited to: Larp, freeform role-playing, multiplayer online games, some drama techniques and some (but not all) applications of “environmental” and “interactive” theatre.

Source: Eirik Fatland, Postings on Laiv.org, 2001

## **Institutions of larp**

Assuming that like all human activity, organising larp is done for a form of reward, Ragnhild Hutchison, using economical science, has described the phenomenon of outsourcing various aspects of larp-making (monstering,

FX, larpwright etc). She argues that reward (e.g. personal gratification, honour and social standing) will increase as larps grow in complexity, but so will also the effort. By outsourcing, the organiser will be able to increase the reward per effort to the point where organisers receive a net gain, despite having to share the honour with piece-organisers.

Hutchison's writing mainly concern the structural development of the larp-scene as a result of the increasing complexity of Scandinavian larp.

Source: Hutchinson, R. 2002. Larp at a deaggregated level. Postings on laiv.org, 2002

Also see the article Institutional development of larp in Oslo in this anthology

### **Instructed player**

An "Instructed Player" (IP) is any player who receives specific and personal instructions on how to act after the larp has begun. The expression is sometimes used to describe tool-roles, like messengers and other "extras" that are not properly classed as roles.

Source: Adapted from Amor Fati

### **Integrative**

(adjective) A larp structured such that the plots (see this) of all roles in the game is aimed at one or a few common goal(s), thus creating a narrowing plot-structure (see this), the opposite of Dissipative (see this). The expression is adapted from mathematical chaos theory, and is used in larp is controversial.

Source: Stenros, J.: Genere & style. Lecture at Knutpunkt02, Stockholm

### **Inter-immersion**

Expression proposed by Swede Elge Larsson, to denote a higher state of immersion (see this). Stating that immersion is just a tool, he argues that the player will not experience reward without the role being confirmed. Thus larp is at its best is when two players succeed in sharing the illusion and thus create the larp reality together in mutual confirmation. The expression must be seen as a sort of Platonian ideal, a perfect state to be sought that may not fully come to reality.

Source: Larsson, E.: Lajv som väg till upplysning, lecture at KP01, Oslo

### **Intrigue**

Norwegian expression from Ravn (see this) used to describe a plot (see this) with only social components, to separate them from the more magic- and item-oriented plots of traditional fantasy larp. Later, the expression came to signify all forms of plots, and thus synonymous with plot in the general sense of the word, and was therefore abandoned.

Source: Ravn/Trad./laiv.org

### **Key Manifesto**

Manifesto published by Tomas Mørkrid March 2001. The manifest is directed at organisers and does primarily concern itself with creating the social structuring and hierarchy of larps. It is in the form of 10 "principles" and five sets of "keys"

(hence the name), following from the principles. The keys are fairly simple and straightforward guidelines and reads well as a simple checklist for even inexperienced organisers.

The Key manifesto lacks the provocative revolutionary qualities of the Turku Manifesto and Dogma 99 (see these), and has received limited attention despite its very useful nature. The original manifesto may be found at: <http://www.fabula.no/manifest.html>

Source: Tomas Mørkrid

### **Laiv/lajv**

Scandinavian approximation of the pronunciation of the word "live", used as an abbreviation of the full term "Live role-play". The term was coined in Sweden in the early 1990's and accepted as a simple way of separating the word from its original meaning. It has since come to dominate as a term for larp (see this) among larpers in Scandinavia, replacing earlier, more cumbersome terms. "Lajv" is the Swedish form, "Laiv" the Norwegian term. In Denmark, "live" and "laiv" are both used.

Source: Trad.

### **Lajvien**

Swedish expression covering the sum of conventions of a traditional larp (see this). On a fantasy-larp, with an underdeveloped setting, the players will generate the lacking information based on experience from similar larps. This fictional reference constitutes the so-called Lajvien. It is larp clichés

of the generic fantasy setting, the smallest common denominator and the foundation one falls back on where nothing else is specified.

Some authors, especially protagonists of the Sestia movement (see this), have pointed to Lajvien as a limiting factor in development of fantasy larps. They have proposed that a total break from fantasy is necessary to escape Laivien and renew larp.

Source: Håkan Hugsson og Jonas Nelson, Galdrim debattforum

### **Larp**

Abbreviation of Live Action Role-Play, a form of role-play where the participants (termed players) take on fictive personalities (called roles or characters) and act out their interaction in a predefined, fictive setting (see this). The form differs from tabletop RPG (see this) in that the players act the interaction out physically, hence "live action" Though the form may have some use in psycho-therapy and the setting may be virtually anything, most larping is done for fun, and the setting is traditionally fantasy or science fiction. See also "laiv/lajv".

Source: Dogme 99/Trad./Laiv.org

### **Larp contract**

Any social contract which – articulated or not – (a) defines a situation which necessitates the physical impersonation, and allows for the mental impersonation, of roles who may co-exist and interact in an ideally similar diegesis, (b)

defines the relations between this collective diegesis and reality, and (c) defines methods to resolve or avoid inconsistencies between individual diegesi creating a collective diegesis. Source: Eirik Fatland, postings on laiv.org 2003

### **Larpwright**

Swedish term for someone making the written materials for a larp. The larpwright is a result of outsourcing parts of the burden of organising a larp, making the organisers free to concentrate on other aspects of larpmaking (see “Institutions of larp”). Writing along strict guidelines from the organiser, the writer’s responsibilities ends with writing, and he or she may even not be present at the larp itself.

The larpwright is common in Sweden, and some Swedish organisers with a bit of talent in writing have made quite a name for themselves as larpwrights. The larpwright is rarely found in other Scandinavian countries and must not be confused with the Norwegian phenomenon of IL (see this). Source: Gunnar Fredrikson

### **Live-steel**

Live-steel – Term used to describe medieval style weapons (swords, axes, spears etc) made from (more or less), authentic material. The expression is also attributed to larps where these are used. Live-steel fighting is naturally tightly restricted, and several rule-systems allowing their use in larp in a safe manner exists, ranging from

pure game mechanics (see this) to full contact fighting.

A certain difference between Norwegian and Swedish praxis is found: Several Swedish groups use a system where arms are never even drawn, but the conflict safely resolved by comparing combat values. In Norway, live-steel fighting is mostly limited to re-enactment groups (see this) and larp fighting is done physically.

Source: Kongshirden anno 1308/Trad.

### **LK**

Abbreviation of Norwegian Laiv Kompatibel (trans: Larp compatible), a term from Trondheim. Something is considered LK if it does not to any great extent break with the illusion of the setting (see this). The expression is mostly used concerning modern items for use on fantasy (see this) larps.

Source: Håkon Mosseby, postings on laiv.org

### **Logistics**

A military expression, covering all the practical aspects of a larp as an arrangement away from home. As Scandinavian larps often are quite long, and with a strong outdoor tradition, these aspects may be rather important. Bad logistics have toppled several potentially fine outdoor larps. Typical topics are drinking water for the players, sanitary considerations, transportation, applications and notifications to the various authorities etc. Logistics are sometimes jokingly referred to as “boy-scout’s

knowledge”.

Though logistics usually fall to the organisers, it is sometimes outsourced to the FX-team or to groups that specialises in this trade (see “Institutions of Larp”)

### **LRP**

Abbreviation for Live Role-Play, see “Larp”.

### **Main plot**

The “main lines” in the plot-structure on a larp. These will usually be the same as the basic idea behind the larp, and is customary to tie most plotlines to these. The expression is synonymous with “Fable” (see this).

Source: Hellerud, H. V. 1993. Om å skrive plott. Lecture at Ravens Arrangers Course, Oslo

### **Meilahti school**

A Finnish school that seeks to understand larp and tabletop games (see these) as a single form. This is also true of the Turku school (see the “Turku-manifest”), and seems to be the norm among Finnish theorists, setting them apart from most other Scandinavian theorists. The School is dedicated to a purely descriptive approach to larp/RPG and wish to developed a language to describe it independent of those from other areas, such as film and sociology.

Source: Hakkarainen, H. & Stenros, J. The Meilahti school, Thoughts on Role-Playing.

The Meilahti School is printed in a revised edition in this anthology.

### **Meta-considerations**

Any consideration based on the player’s, not the roles interpretation and evaluation of the in-game situation. Dependent on the players aim for the game, such considerations may lead the player to take realistic or unrealistic decisions in the game. However, all such decisions are based on viewing the larp as a larp, not as a real situation.

Examples include, but are not limited to: Theatrical play to live up the game, decisions made against the interests of the role to further the organiser’s aim for the game, conscious play to include other players in the plot, conscious play to gain points and advantages in a competition between players (not characters).

Meta-consideration is considered bad form in immersionist games, but as a necessity in narrativist games (see these)

Source: Petter Bøckman

### **Meta-playing**

An expression covering a situation where a player is taking non-diegetic (see “Diegesis”) actions as a part of playing the role. This may occur when two players need to sort out technicalities of game mechanics (see this) or when play has broken down to such an extent that there is no longer is any point to playing in character (see “Offing” and Onff”). However, meta-actions are always taken in the interest of the role, so that normal play may resume as soon as the situation is

resolved. Meta-play is thus the direct opposite of meta-consideration, where the actions is diegetic, but the reasons are not (see "Meta-consideration").

Kilde: Kim Thomas Siverstsen

### **Mixed fateplays**

A fateplay (see this) may contain traditional plots (se this) and still be a fateplay. In theory a fateplay may also be held inside the surroundings of a larp containing plots. This is called "a mixed fateplay". In mixed fateplays the fateweb is a separate and closed part of the action, which does not influence and is not influenced by the plots of the rest of the larp. See also "Fateplay"

Source: Adapted from Amor Fati

### **Monster**

A role whose function in the game is be an antagonist to the other players. The players doing monsterring is usually acting on the organisers instructions, and is only in the game for a limited time. They are thus not considered players as such. Commonly, the monsters take the shape of monstrous, powerful semi-human beings (orcs, werewolves, robots), hence the name. Exemptions do occur: Some games features monsters that have actual player roles either within or outside the game society for the whole game. Some monster may be perfectly ordinary people in a monstrous situation, like soldiers belonging to a foreign power. In a setting of two power-full groups fighting over a stretch of land, the scouts from the

two groups may be monsters for their opposites. The expression is occasionally used to describe other forms of tool-roles, like messengers and other "extras".

The Norwegian term "SIS" reflects a more strict view on monsterring, see this.

Source: Trad.

### **Mundis**

Finnish expression, from Latin mundanis (worldly), used to signify non-larpers.

Source: Trad.

### **Narrativism**

Adjective describing a style of playing or making a larp (or other RPG) that emphasises the experience of the epical story. The Sestia movement and the people behind Manifest Sunday (see these) have been proponents of the narrativist larp. Narrativism is further one of a tirade of larp-styles that make up the GNS-description of larp (see "GNS model"). Several authors uses narrativism as a more precise expression for dramatism (see this).

Larp being notoriously hard to control (see the "Bøckmanian maxime"), the narrativist larps must contain some restraining elements such as fates (see this) or severe limitations on space and information to keep the plots on track. Martin Ericsson has addressed the problem, see the "Hidden montage".

Source: Brodén, M. & al. 2001. The Manifest Sunday. The Book - Kutepunkt 2001, Red: A. Alfsvåg; E.

Eidsem Hansen, I. Storrø & T. Finsen.  
Oslo

## **NIL**

Abbreviation of New Institutions of Larp, see “Institutions of larp”.

## **Offing**

Abbreviation for “going off-live”, that is for the player to leave the role and distance him self from the play. Offing is considered bad form in all larps, and is generally due to boredom, badly written roles or plots (see these) or a failure to identify with the role or situation (see “Immersionist” and “Decontextualisation”).

Offing includes failing to respond to the roles name, bring up non-diegetic topics and using information gained in a non-game situation. Scandinavian larps, often being very long, sometimes have special areas set of for those needing a break from the game. See also “Utgård”

Source: Trad.

## **Onff**

Abbreviation of On/Off. Onff is a Swedish term denoting a situation where there is no set distinction or confusion of whether the situation is a part of the larp or not. It can also denote a situation where there is a mix of playing and not playing participants. The Onff situation occur when a whole game is breaking down, or when the game is actually over, but the participants do not want to break out of the game reality (see “Immersionism”).

When Onff occur temporarily and spatially limited within a game, involving only a few players, the situation is more properly termed “Iff” (see this).

Source: Carl Heath/Galadrim debattforum

## **Organiser controlling**

A Danish expression describing the phenomenon of organisers controlling the narrative structure of the game through influencing the players’ decisions. The expression is similar, but not identical to the Norwegian expression GM-controlled larp (see this).

Source: Bruun, J. (2002), Sabbats Lille Liveordbog

## **Padding**

Norwegian adaptation of the English term, used to describe medieval style weapons (swords, axes, spears etc) made from some sort of padding around a hard core. The object of such arms is to allow the players to resolve game conflicts with arms without actually harming them selves. The equivalent Swedish term is “Boffer” (see this).

Source: Trad.

## **Peasant problem**

A phenomenon often occurring when the roles (se this) ability to influence the game is highly unevenly distributed. The players of the lesser roles, often playing peasants (hence the name) in a fantasy-setting, will then out of frustration or boredom

fall out of role (see "Offing") or try to influence the game in a manner not planned by the organiser (see the "Bøckmanian maxim"). They may seek to amend the situation by playing the roles boisterously (trading influence for visibility), play contrary to the setting (see "Saklig") or even make an ingame revolt.

The problem is not uncommon in high fantasy larps (see "Fantasy").

Source: Trad.

### **Player**

A person participating in a larp (or other RPG) event. A player is normally not involved in making the larp, nor does he possess all the information the organisers have put into the game. A player is given a role (see this) with the necessary instructions, and is himself responsible for playing that role.

Source: Trad.

### **Player-controlled larp**

A Norwegian expression from the first half of the 1990's, denoting a larp where organisers make no attempt at steering the larp in any direction, making it a gamistic or immersionistic larp (see these). These larps do consequently allow for very little narrative structure and are frequently rather chaotic.

Critiques of the player-controlled larps pointed to the GM-controlled larps (see this) as an ideal, thus foreshadowing the story vs. the telling discussion in the Swedish scene in the early 2000's.

Source: Trad.

### **Plot**

Puzzle for players to solve on a larp, either as a general story-line, a more personal mystery or a as conflict between roles. The term is problematic: Several partly overlapping, partly conflicting definitions exist. The expression is also used in literature and film theory with different meanings. The one commonly used in larp is more closely related to the literary expression. Plots are normally initiated by the organisers, and form a major part of what the roles are expected "to do" on a gamist (see this) larp. See also "Main-plot" and "Intrigue".

Source: Trad.

### **Plot-structure**

A plot (see this) as it appears if drawn up schematically, so that the action A will produce an effect, which may again be altered by an action B. One differentiates between "open plot-structures" where several solutions to a given problem may exist, and the "closed plot-structures" where a problem may only be solved in one (or a restricted number of) ways. It may also denote the total amount of plots in a larp, and the way in which these connected to each other. In a larp where the plots are given in the forms of fates, the plot-structure will be synonymous with the "Fate-Web", see these. See also "Integrative" and "Dissipative".

Source: E. Eidsem (1992): *Plotteori*, *Guru Fanzine*, nr 1, Oslo and Amor

Fati

### **Plot-theory**

A theoretical approach to the way plots (se this) work in a larp. Plot-theory was forwarded by Erlend Eidsem in 1992, and was the first serious attempt at a generalized description of the workings of larp. The work describes various plot-structures (see this) and is still a valuable tool for larp-making. Source: Source/Kilde: E. Eidsem (1992?): Plotteori, Guru Fanzine, nr 1, Oslo and Amor Fati

### **Plotter**

A player primarily concerned with solving plots (see this). The term is frequently used as a deegratory expression for gamist (se this) players or larps. Source: Trad.

### **Postlarp charisma**

Expression proposed by Swede Elge Larsson, to denote a state of mental creativity that some experience after a larp, creating an aura of physical and mental well-being. Describing larp as an artistic creation where New Reality is made, Larsson argue that larpers are like gods in the creative act. The postlarp charisma stems from this New Reality and the player's godlike state in it lingering after the larp.

The expression is partly a reaction to the better-known "Post-larp depression" (see this).

Source: Larsson, E.: Way of enlightenment- lajv som opplysning, lecture at KP01, Oslo.

### **Postlarp depression**

Expression denoting the occasionally low emotional state players experience following a larp. Larps are often highly social, exiting and intense, but at the end the emotional rush is necessarily severed and the internal social connections of the game are broken. The resulting depression may be seen as a sort of emotional withdrawal symptom.

Source: Eirik Fatland, posting on laiv.org, 2001

### **Ravn**

Norwegian larp-organisation based in Oslo, erected in 1991 and still operational. Starting larp in Norwegian capital, Ravn has had a huge influence on the early years of larp in Norway. A number of common Norwegian larp expressions have its origin in Ravn.

Source: Ravn, <http://ravn.laiv.org>

### **Role**

The fictive persona through which the player (see this) act and experience the fictive world in a larp or any other form of RPG. As such, the role is essential to larp in all forms. The term is widely used in various other fields, and its use in larp (see this) is closer to that of the theatre. In tabletop RPGs the role is usually called a "character", and this expression is occasionally found in larp-texts.

The role is usually presented to the player in the form of a "background" (see this), delineating the major vitae

of the fictive persona and information necessary for the game. The nature of the role, the relationship between player and role and the way the role is interpreted is the subject of several major works, notably the descriptive GNS and Threefold and three Way models (see these) and touched upon in the various manifests, notably the Turku manifest and Key manifesto (see these). The relationship between player and role is a source of theoretical controversy and still not satisfactory resolved.

Source: Trad.

### **RPG**

Abbreviation for Role-Playing Games. The expression denotes all forms of role-play, bout games that are played out verbally and physically, often being divided into tabletop RPG (see this) and larp. All though interactive, multiplayer computer-games may be seen as RPGs, they are only rarely considered when discussing the phenomenon.

Source: Trad.

### **Saklig**

(Adj.) Norwegian expression, meaning “realistic” or “appropriate”. In a larp context it denotes realism, authenticity or historical correctness. “Saklig” embraces everything diegetic (see this) to the larp, both objects such as costumes, food, buildings, props, weapons, tools etc, as well as actions, events, statements, body language and other forms of communication. E.g. in a Viking setting, knitted clothes

and potatoes would be incorrect (“usaklig”), while coarse wool and gruel would be correct (“saklig”).

The emphasis on correctness (saklighet) will usually vary greatly between different larpS. An immersionist (see this) larp, for example, will usually have higher demands for correctness (“saklighet”), than a narrativist larp. Correctness (“saklighet”) will to a varying degree suffer from any meta-considerations (see this).

Source: Christian Fahlstrøm

### **Sestia**

Abbreviation of Second Stage – Interacting Arts, an expression coined by Swedes Nordwall & Staflund to describe a form of larp or other means of conveying stories that emphasis a feedback between the story as provided by the organisers (or director/actors) and the participants (or spectators). Though not necessary to the form as per definition, the Sestia-events so far has relied heavily on mixing level of abstraction and on mixing fora like larp, radio, film and theatre, at the sacrifice of realism for each forum. See also Narrativism.

Source: Adapted from Staflund U. 2001, Glossary of interactive forms, Interactive Arts magazine.

### **Setting**

The imaginative world within where the larp is set. It may denote diegesis (see this), but is more often used in a more restricted sense, either referring to the geography, metaphysics and

history of the larp-world in question, or to the general genre of the game, such as Viking-setting, western-setting, et cetera.

Source: Trad.

### **Simulation**

Term used to describe larp as such in Norway in the 1990-ies to the extent that larps by Ravn (see this) was actually termed summer-simulations, winter-simulation, horror-simulation etc. In Finnish terminology it is used to describe a style of playing with emphasis creating a believable setting (see "Simulationism").

Source: Tommy Finsen/Pohjola. M. The manifest of the Turku School/laiv.org

### **Simulationism**

A style of playing or making larps that focuses on exploration of the setting (see this) as the priority of play. The simulationists seek to behave and play as realistically as possibly within game reality. Note that setting need not be realistic in it self, but the simulationist player may be greatly concerned with the internal logic of that setting. Simulationism taken to the extreme will turn into re-enactment of a fictional society. See also "Saklig".

Simulationism is one of a tirade of larp-styles that make up the GNS-description of larp (see "GNS model"). Several authors see simulationism as synonymous with immersionism, and the Turku maifest (see this) sees simulationism at the only other valid style of play outside immersion.

Source: Edwards, R. 2001. GNS and other matter of role-playing theory, Adept Press. See

### **SIS**

Abbreviation of Norwegian Skummelt I Skogen (transl. Scary in the woods), an expression loosely translating to monsters (see this). The expression comes from Ravn (see this) and deviate from the more general "monster" in specifying a few important aspect of scaring players: SIS has to be 1) scary, thus mysterious, and it has to be 2) in the woods, thus outside the "tamed world", mostly unseen and not a part of the society. The SIS is a tool for the organisers, and as such strictly instructed and not considered players. The differences may be subtle, but basically translates into that a true monster, in order to remain scary, must never be a role with basic, understandable needs and affections. Confusingly, the expression is sometimes used to describe other forms of tool-roles, like messengers and other "extras" from lack of other relevant terms.

Source: Ravn/Trad.

### **SL**

Abbreviation of Norwegian SpillLeder (transl. Game Master), the one arranging and supervising a game. The expression comes from Ravn (see this) and is a direct translation of the "Game Master" (GM) as used in tabletop role-play. The SL is responsible for all "external factors", that is those not falling under the dominion of the IL

(see this).

See also “Game master”

Source: Ravn/Tommy Finsen

### **Tabletop RPG**

A form of RPG (see this) where the roles (usually called characters) are all fictional and the whole game is played out verbally, usually around a table (hence the name). A game master controls the world, apart from the roles being controlled by the players. Physical actions involving the roles are simulated through some sort of game mechanics, usually involving rules and dices.

Source: Trad.

### **Third-stage**

Phrase coined by Gabriel Widing and Erlend Eidsem. They regard larping in the traditional sense of the word as the first stage. When larp is using modern technology and themes to tell a story, it is considered a second stage (see “Sestia”). The third stage is where larp influences society, trying to awaken people to take an active part in society. This form does not take place in a fictive setting, and is thus not larp per se, nor is it seen as such by the creators. The form has some similarities with hidden theatre and performance art.

Source: Hansen, E. & G. Widing: Art, activism and third stage indrama, lecture at Theoriseminar, Kunsternes Hus, Oslo 2001

### **Threefold and Three Way models**

Two descriptive models of role-play.

The Threefold Model deals with tabletop RPG (see this), dividing styles of making and playing games into gamist, dramatist and simulationist (see these). Though the model cover tabletop gaming, it has formed the basis for works of larp, mainly the Turku manifest (see this). The model has been attempted converted to a model for Scandinavian larp as the “Three Way Model”. It divides larping into gamist, dramatist and immersionist (see these).

Sources: Kim, J. H.: The rec.games.frp.advocacy FAQ, Part I: The Threefold Model and Bøckman, P.: The Three Way Model, Revision of the Threefold Model for Scandinavian larp. The latter article is printed in this anthology.

### **Traditional larp**

Though no set definition exists, a sort of consensus exists as to the extension of the term. It cover a fairly gamistic (se this) larp, with a fantasy (se this) setting, 20 to 100 players lasting for 2 to 5 days, play going on continuously day and night. The larp usually focus on a small town or an Inn, and its problems with some sort of monster (see this). Though Eirik Fatland has augmented strongly against this type of larp being common, it continues to re-appear in newly formed scenes and enjoy enduring popularity. See also “Lajvien”.

Source: Trad

### **Turku-manifest**

A declaration on larp in the form of

a manifest, written by Mike Pohjola and named from his native city, Turku. The aim of the manifest was to form a corrective to the two prevailing styles of play in Finish larps: Dramatist and Gamist (see these). The manifest, while giving good guidelines for the Eläytyminen (see this) style of playing, has come under heavy critique on the international scene for being overly elitist, and has stimulated quite fierce debate. The original text may be found at: <http://live.roolipeli.net/turku/school/index.html>

Source: Pohjola. M. The manifest of the Turku School/laiv.org

The Turku manifesto is printed in this anthology with a revised foreword.

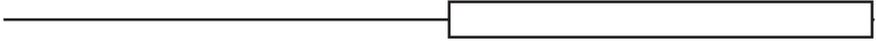
### **Turku-style**

- The style of playing or making a game, as delineated in the Turku-manifest, i. e. immersionist or simulationist (see these).
- The type of larps commonly played in the city of Turku. These usually last for 2 to 5 hours, involve a limited number of players and usually have a city- or building-based setting.

Source: Lars Wingård



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# Organisers of Knudepunkt 2003

## **Knudepunkt 2003**

Knudepunkt is an annual LARP festival, taking place in the Nordic countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark. Under the names of respectively Knutepunkt, Knutpunkt, Solmukohta and Knudepunkt it has taken place every year since 1997. In 2003 it takes place in Denmark, and at this occasion this book was published.

## **Knudepunkt 2003 was organised by:**

Mads Ahola, practical

Carsten Andreasen, communications and program

Jesper Bruun, A Week in Denmark coordinator

Lene Dam, program and funding

Jesper Donniss, communications and bar

Morten Gade, book editor, funding and communications coordinator

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Birgitte Hollegaard, program

Lynne Rahbek Dragheim, program and A Week in Denmark

Claus Raasted, communications and program

Mikkel Rode, financial coordinator

Mikkel Sander, project manager and book editor

Kasper Sjøgren, practical coordinator

Line Thorup, program and book editor

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# Funders of Knudepunkt 2003

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DUF granted us DKK 25.000 in "Initiativstøtte" for the printing of this book.

### **Nordisk Ungdomskomiteé (NUK)**

NUK granted us DKK 50.000 for the making of Knudepunkt 2003.

### **Hovedstadens Udviklingsråd (HUR)**

--- indsæt logo ---

HUR granted us travel cards valuing DKK 9.500 for A Week in Denmark.

**AsLarpGrowsUp**

**TheLostChapters**

*-More Theory and Method in Larp*

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# As Larp Grows Up

# The Lost Chapters

*-More Theory and Method in Larp*



# The multi-tier game immersion theory

## Premise

Despite what many LARP schools proclaim, it is not possible to simply define people as “immersion” and “non-immersion” players. Nor does the badly outdated Three-Way Model fit the current LARP paradigm. As a result, this theory proposes a new model based on the idea that each game consists of several layers of differing elements and player templates can be formed according to whether or not they are able and/or willing to immerse themselves into those elements.

At the core this theory owes heavily to the classic Hermeneutic Circle used in

literary criticism. It treats the game as “subject matter” and players as its interpreters, thus placing them on a circular field of approach to the matter at hand. Another strong influence is the way in which cognition theory is applied in science of religion.

The key purpose of this theorem is in providing an alternative to value-based gaming, in which an immersion-capable player is often considered “good” and a non-immersing player “lacking” or less skilled. Instead of that, I propose a utilitarian model matching certain player types to gaming forms ideal for them, and vice versa.

## Terminology and criterion issues

In all forms of LARP there are three possible levels of immersion. They are: 1) **Character immersion**, the layer commonly referred to with the word “immersion”. The ability to “become” a character, to assume its thought-patterns, ethics and personality. 2) **Reality immersion**, emplacement of oneself within the agreed-upon environment of the game. This includes acceptance of both a diegetic causality and the game’s level of potential for events beyond the mundane, such as the existence of magic or speculative

## The Author

J. Tuomas Harviainen is a Finnish LARP designer known for writing heavily immersion-experience based games that favor intense personal themes such as sexuality, social repression, prejudice and sanity. He is also the founder of the Post-Bjorneborgan LARP writing school, and probably the only person believing it to be a serious method for creating high-quality games.

technology as “truth” within the constraints of the game.

3) **Narrative immersion**, acceptance of the existence of narrative elements within a game, and the willingness to treat them as actual events instead of an externally imposed story. The most important of the elements are the game’s plotlines and the dramatic value of individual events.

*The key difference between role-playing games and other forms of role-playing is that in the former, a possibility for reality immersion exists. The latter may occasionally simulate the existence of a situation differing from the actual environment, but it is done to fulfill the needs of the characters instead of attempting to provide an immersion experience. Most of what this theory states is about players and games, but it can be extrapolated to describe the participants of most other forms of role-playing as well.*

### Player types

The basic player types are formed by combining the three immersion criteria and their negations.

#### 1) **Powergamer** (C- R- N-)

Powergamers use gaming as an excuse for self-gratification. The point of a game is in actualization of personal desires, not in experiencing an alternative situation. This level of (non-)immersion is optimal for basic S&M role-play, but dangerous and unpredictable in game situations.

Extremely goal-oriented as a player. Generally more unwilling than unable to participate in immersion.

Summary: “*I Want...*”

#### 2) **Actor-player** (C- R- N+)

Actor-players are able to immerse themselves into the plot and drama of a game, but not to their characters or the game’s reality. They are on stage, treating the other players as their audience. Their main goal is in enhancing the story with what they perceive as the most suitable additions to it. More at home in improvisational theatre (or a sandbox) than in a game, but may prove incredibly useful when cast as semi-autonomous players for important NPCs. Consistent to the game’s needs, but can end up doing things such as killing the characters of other players without a second thought for drama’s sake if left without close supervision.

Summary: “*The thing that would really fit now is ...*”

#### 3) **Simulator** (C- R+ N+)

The Simulator is immersed within a game’s reality and narration. Her character relation is nevertheless an external one, and is based on situational appraisal and basic assumptions of the game’s themes rather than on an understanding of the character’s internal motives. From an observer’s point of view the difference is usually minimal. A Simulator is typically able to fully enjoy most LARPs, unless the games in question are very experience-oriented.

A Simulator may actually often be a more reliable player choice for plot-centered games than a character-immersing player.

Summary: *"This guy would probably do this."*

#### 4) **Extension-player** (C+ R+ N+)

An Extension-player is fully immersed in all aspects of a game. He creates the character's personality out of the material given, and for the duration of the game becomes that person as a part of the story. His reactions are based on extrapolation from the material, and while experienced in first person they are essentially tied to the needs of the story. This means that he seems very "real" when in character, but is quite tied to predetermined elements, and thus often at a loss when a situation is not covered by pre-game information or its extensions. Optimal player for heavily pre-designed games, and by far the least likely player type to complain about general railroading.

Summary: *"I do this, because ..."*

#### 5) **Fundament player** (C+ R+ N-)

A Fundament player is in character and accepts the game's reality but not its plot or drama. Instead, she takes the given background information, analyzes it and then (re-)builds the character's personality based on that information. The end result is a "complete" person whose internal values and logic the player follows during the game. Problems only arise if the character's thought patterns and the game's designer's plans do

not match. In those situations, the Fundament player keeps following the character's "natural" reactions instead of external instructions. All stimuli have to be applied within the game's diegetic frame for them to apply for her. The player type most likely to be called "good" by other players and "problematic" or "dangerous" by game organizers.

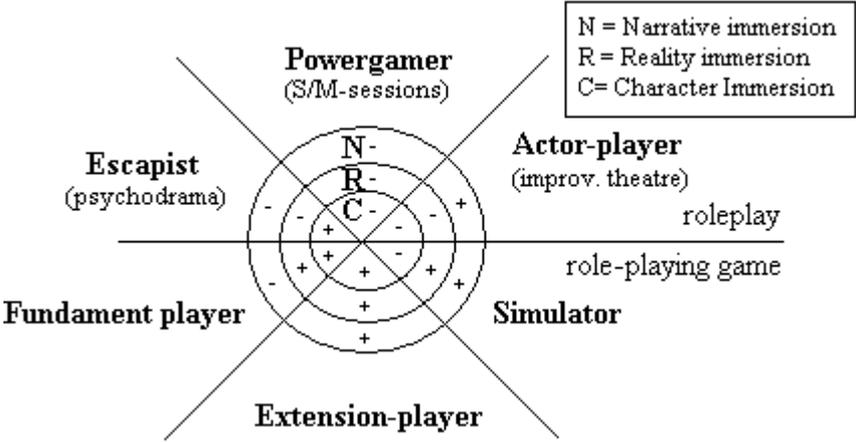
Summary: *"I do this, because it's my nature to do so."*

#### 6) **Escapist** (C+ R- N-)

An Escapist player fulfills his fantasies through a character. He may accept a game's reality and/or plot, but only if it fits the needs of the character. "Translates" game elements for himself so that they and the character match. Treats the character as a second personality, and its game appearances as an alternate life. Usually very attached to a limited scale of character types, and fiercely protective of the ones he accepts. When accommodated by game organizers in advance, preferably at the initial planning stage, the best player imaginable. If not, the most problematic. Capable of nearly psychotic character immersion of the kind Turku LARP school members have wet dreams about.

Summary: *"I want this to happen."*

These six player types are the most common to appear in an organized LARP. Two more combinations are possible, but are normally only temporary, transitory phases:



7) the **Explorer** (C- R+ N-), a player accepting the game's reality but nothing else. Common among people observing a game by playing a semi-present character (a character isolated from plots and only used as an excuse to avoid the presence of off-game people within the gaming area.)

8) the **Tale-teller** (C+ R- N+), normally encountered immediately after a game. The state in which character-immersing players are still partially in character, and trying to wrap up the plotlines left open when the game ended. Common even among players who are not character- or plot-immersed during the actual game.

can be combined into a procession, represented by an **immersion circle**. A player is placed somewhere along the rim of the circle, and for a game designer's purposes defined as a member of one group, with possible leanings to one of the two adjacent player types. If a player's type changes, it is most likely to be a shift to one of those two groups instead of a complete switch further away.

An exception to the rule is temporary **adaptive immersion**, the process of consciously choosing a less intense level of immersion so that it matches the requirements of the game or other form of roleplay. It can be typically seen in experienced immersion-players participating in games designed purely for entertainment's

The relationships between the six more constant player templates

sake. To do otherwise would be to disrupt the game.

In my opinion, this is the only real criterion for defining players as good or bad: the feel for a game's internal dynamic and the ability to adjust one's own behavior to match it. In the case of non-immersed players, a similar criterion can be found in the willingness to perform within the boundaries set for the game, supporting the illusion of an communal immersion even if they are not participating in it by themselves.

### Phenomenological typology

1) **Diegesis.** Of the six core player types, two (Extension and Fundament player) can be seen as diegetic, two (Escapist and Simulator) as semi-diegetic and the last two as either adiegetic or pseudo-diegetic.

#### 2) **Character/player relationship.**

Two of the player types are nature-creating (Escapist and Fundament player), two nature-indicative (Simulator and Extension-player) and two performing (Actor-player and Powergamer). Of these, only the first two can be said to experience things *as* their characters. The others, depending on situation, experience things either *through* their characters or purely as themselves.

### Utilitarian typology and conclusion

When choosing players for a game, it is essential to pick people capable of adjusting their immersion levels to meet the game's needs. If the game is not designed explicitly as an immersion experience based medium, Extension-players and Simulationists are interchangeably suitable for most roles. Escapists are a tremendous resource for any game if handled in advance, as are Actor-players who are given clear enough instructions. Fundament players are best utilized by giving them characters containing roughly equal amounts of nature-forming, plot-enhancing and apparently irrelevant information. Unless very substantial advantages can be gained, Powergamers should be avoided.

To apply these templates, look at every character of your game. They all have an analyzable **participation factor**, on a scale from "nothing to do" to "completely railroaded". When you see where on that line the character is, you have enough basic information to find a matching player type.



# Postmodernism

Sometimes the word “postmodernism” is used just to signify our own time, in which everything is in a flux, when politicians is overruled by impenetrable power structures, religious and cultural pluralism is in every little village and 100s of TV- and radio channels gives you as many life styles as they give you different kinds of soap. In such a time many people feel an urgent necessity to hold on to their given identity. If so, that would be very tragic, since the only secure way to handle this pluralistic flux is to roll with the waves, not standing as a pole in the middle of the stream where you slowly get eroded away by

the changes.

Yes, sometimes the word »postmodern« seems to mean nothing more than the world of today, with high speed economics, internet, globalism, end of the cold war etc. That’s a superficial view. The issue is much deeper.

For me the postmodern paradigm is primarily about transcending the cartesian dualism, realizing that the subject doesn’t exist outside of context.

## **Modernity is not modernism**

Let’s start with modernity – what’s that? First we have to get rid of a common misunderstanding. Modernity, the modern paradigm, is not, repeat not, the same thing as modernism, which is an movement in the arts that started around 1920. Modernity is much older, it’s the result of the 18th century Enlightenment. You may as well say that modernity began with Descartes/ Cartesius *cogito ergo sum*. Since then everything has been wrong.

Of course modernity has given us a lot of wonderful things, penicillin, computers, atom bombs, automobiles and aeroplanes; especially it has given

### **The Author**

Elge Larsson is 58 years young and lives in Stockholm, Sweden. He is some kind of academic scholar with wide interests in most forms of humanistic studies. A translator by profession and larper by interest, he divides his life between books and larping, which he’s been doing since 1994. He regards larping with an analytic mind, trying to convince everybody that larping is the noblest of arts. He is very serious-minded

us a certain feeling for the individual. Individualism may well be the greatest gift that the West has given to the world, although I would say that it's something that started already in the medieval 13th century, together with romantic love. But the supremacy of the individual's point of view, the individualistic perspective, really skyrocketed at the 18th century. The french revolution is just one example of the results.

The split between body and soul that Descartes created didn't confine itself to the mind, it's a gap that runs through all of existence.

### **Cartesian dualism**

The fundamental Enlightenment paradigm is known as the *representation paradigm*. This is the idea that you have the self or the subject, on the one hand, and the empirical or sensory world as the object, on the other, and all valid knowledge consists in making *maps* of the empirical world, the single and simple »pregiven« world. And if the map is accurate, if it correctly represents, or corresponds with, the empirical world, then that is »truth«.

One of the consequences of modernity is that this objectifying way of looking at the world spreads to everything – since it has given us all these marvels of science, it must be right, right? Like the ways women is regarded in our culture – as something to look at. The

outrage of the women is not primarily that men regard them as sexual objects (which I, being a man, think they should find flattering) but that they regard them as things. Things that consequently can be treated as things, sold and bought as things.

That's just one of the effects of cartesian dualism. Spectator arts is also a child of the cartesian, modern paradigm where the subject is split off from, different from the object. On the one hand you have a piece of art, a painting, a book, a film, whatever – on the other you have the spectator. The spectator is never involved, she is just tickled. That's why it's so difficult to produce anything more than shortlived emotional kicks with that kind of artistic expression, that's why the artists of our time is forced to use more force, more violence, more sex, bigger loudspeakers to arouse the audience.

What other problems have the objectifying cartesian dualism given us? It's easy to say that everything we see today is a result of this kind of thinking, this paradigm, but we need to be more specific. Exactly how is the problems of the world related to the modern paradigm?

The simplest way to state what's wrong with the mapping representation of »truth« is that it leaves out the mapmaker. When you think of the world as something outside yourself, some thing to act upon, you make it

difficult to have e.g. an egological view, since you don't regard yourself as part of the same system. You never have to count with what the economists call »externalities« – that is, hidden costs which are not immediately visible. Case in point: codfish. When you catch less and less codfish, the solution is of course to make bigger boats with more efficient fishing methods that make the codfish disappear quicker so you make bigger boats with more efficient methods...

But the mapmaker, that is the subject, the self, didn't just fall from heaven. It has its own characteristics, its own structures, its own development, its own *history* – and all of those influence and govern what we will see, and what we *can* see, in the supposedly »single« world just lying around. The self is up to its neck in contexts and backgrounds that determine just what it can see in the first place!

### **My world is not your world**

Based upon what the *subject itself brings to the picture* it will picture the world quite differently, more or less regardless of what is actually »out there« in some pre-given world.

For each subject the world looks different because the world *is* different and this is the great postmodern revolution. The »pictures« that one makes of the »world« depend in large measure not so much on »the world« as on the subject's personal »history«.

What are the consequences of this postmodern view? One effect of the postmodern attack on everything that is stable, is of course the fundamentalistic panic reaction. But to what question is fundamentalism the wrong answer? That question is: How can you find a world view, directions, morality when everything is in a flux? How to raise kids when what's right from one point of view is wrong from another? Are there any absolute truths?

One absolute truth is evidently that there are no absolute truths. This means that it is impossible to have a discussion about political, economical, social or religious issues without at first defining the terms that are to be used. Is »reclaim the streets« about a civil right to an environment free from pollutions and advertising, or is it about teenagers with no meaningful occupation, or is it about the limits of proprietary rights or is it about freedom of speech? **In the postmodern world every issue will turn into a question of who is master of the agenda, who get's to define the problem – that is: who got the power?**

E.g. we're not discussing if Bush is right or wrong. We're discussing how to define terrorism: is it underdogs fighting against a militaristic superpower or fundamentalistic fanatics who wants to go medieval (like larpers, huh?)? *Then* we can tell

if his tactics are right or wrong. And so on and so on for every single question.

Even the personal identity, my experience of being myself, isn't stable anymore. The sociologists and psychologists have of course known for a long time that my identity is dependent on the reactions I get from others, but that was just academic hogwash. We never noticed that, since we all lived in the same world. Now I get to experience that every time I pass from one part of the town to another: suddenly I'm not at home anymore. Suddenly I'm the minority!

It's evidently not easy to live in the postmodern world, but that comes with the territory. This is the future, and in the future there will only be tentative solutions, as soon as a problem is defined in a new way, we get a new tentative solution. In this meaning the ideologies are dead – there are only separate solutions to separate problems.

So we have defined the postmodern paradigm as the insight that everything is contextual, everything depends on everything, and wherever you look the only thing you see is your opinion of what is there to see. Das Ding an Sich is more elusive than ever, because now we know that it remains forever hidden behind the searching for it.

The world is not there to find anymore – it's for you to define it. The one thing

that is stable is the search for power to decide the agenda – which means that the fundamentalists have got something right: now more than ever is power the defining tool.

Now then, is larping just another form of escape from the frightening pluralistic world, like the fundamentalistic longing for a simple world with a God-parent who says what is right and what is wrong? Or is larping the only effective way to learn to live in this brave new postmodern world? You have to decide for yourself – that's a postmodern choice you cannot avoid.

### **Save the world?**

Suppose you want to save the world – that's what all our stories are about, aren't they, kill the dragon, save the kingdom, get the prince/princess – what are you to do? Since it is all about defining the world, setting the agenda, larpers have an definite advantage, because they are already used to define their worlds – and this is not just a joke, this is an important point.

To save the world you first have to decide which of all the things that are wrong you want to tackle, rainforests, Festung Europa, fundamentalism, right wing politics, species extuingishing and so on. That's easy, you just pick the issue where you feel your knowledge and talent can do the most. The second point is to realize

that the solution is on another level than the problem – you can't solve problems made by cartesian dualism inside that paradigm, you have to get out of it. How?

Watch me walking – it is impossible to talk about my movements without reference to the floor, the room, the environment. The same goes for everything. This is postmodern nonduality – subject and object is inseparable as dark and light, you can't have one without the other. This is an experience that you get very vividly by larping, where you get to feel in the flesh that reality is nothing more than what we collectively have agreed upon.

Thus the way to get out of the cartesian paradigm is to be a larper, or rather to engage in participatory arts. This is because participatory arts is the ultimate postmodern form of expression, since it in itself is carrying the nondualistic, anticartesian perspective.

As larpers we know how to live with many differing viewpoints at the same time; as larpers we know that we have the power to define what world we live in;

as larpers we know that »reality« is something that depends on context, you might as well say that reality is context. As larpers we know what it means to live in a world where everybody counts, where power to the people is acted out, not just talked about.

In spectator arts you are placed in a situation where you just can react but cannot act. You're once again back to childhood, subject to the wellmeaning intention of others. Spectator art is infantilising! Participatory arts is for grown ups!

Participatory arts reclaims creativity for Everybody. The socially isolated artist, the creative genius was a product of modernistic individualism. The creative collective and the collective creating of the larpers is an expression of postmodernity. The modern individualism was always something for an elect group, the elite. Participatory arts returns to an much older and more profound truth: You are the creator of your own world.

Elge Larsson

## As Larp Grows Up

Knudepunkt is an annual larp festival, taking place in the Nordic countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark. Under the names of respectively Knutepunkt, Knutpunkt, Solmukohta and Knudepunkt it has taken place every year since 1997. In 2003 it takes place in Denmark, and on that occasion this book is published.

Prior to the 1997 Knudepunkt there had been very little contact between the different countries and to many it came as a surprise that they were not the only ones to “do” larp. Now, seven years after, the situation is quite different. Joint ventures between the countries have been undertaken and players are happy to travel beyond their own borders to participate in other countries events.

With this book we are trying to collect some of the Knudepunkt magic. Knudepunkt has always been a forum where innovation and creativity have flourished and where people from the Nordic countries have shared their visions and dreams for the future of larp.

The book, like Knudepunkt itself, is about moving on from yesterday into tomorrow. The aim is to help the Knudepunkt newbie up to date - as well as spawn creativity, innovation and ideas.

There is nothing as practical as a good theory. That is the foundation for this book. Within these pages, you can find ideas, advices and practical solutions to your problems and questions about larp.