

PLAYGROUND

THE NEW WAVE IN ROLE-PLAYING • ISSUE #6 • 2012



KRIGSLIVE - FROM FANTASY TO MEDIEVAL

SOLMUKHOTA GONZO STYLE

24 HOUR LARP DESIGN

WE DELIVER FANTASY! LITERATURE

29⁹⁰ EURO

29⁹⁰ EURO

14⁹⁰ EURO

34⁹⁰ EURO



GAMES

39⁹⁰ EURO

39⁹⁰ EURO



FILMS & MUSIC

20⁹⁰ EURO

14⁹⁰ EURO

9⁹⁰ EURO



EQUIPMENT

9⁹⁰ EURO TO 39⁹⁰ EURO

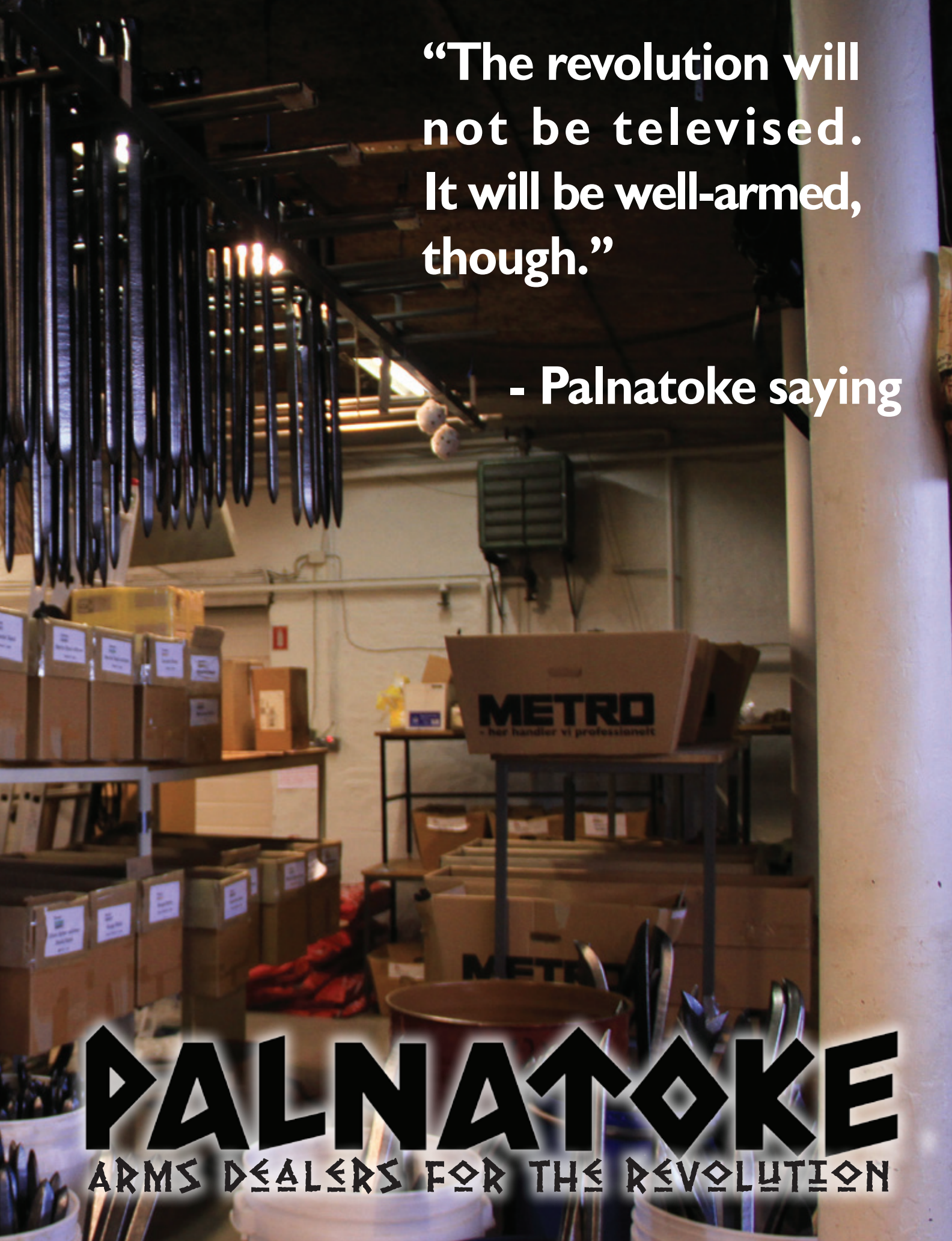
38⁹⁰ EURO



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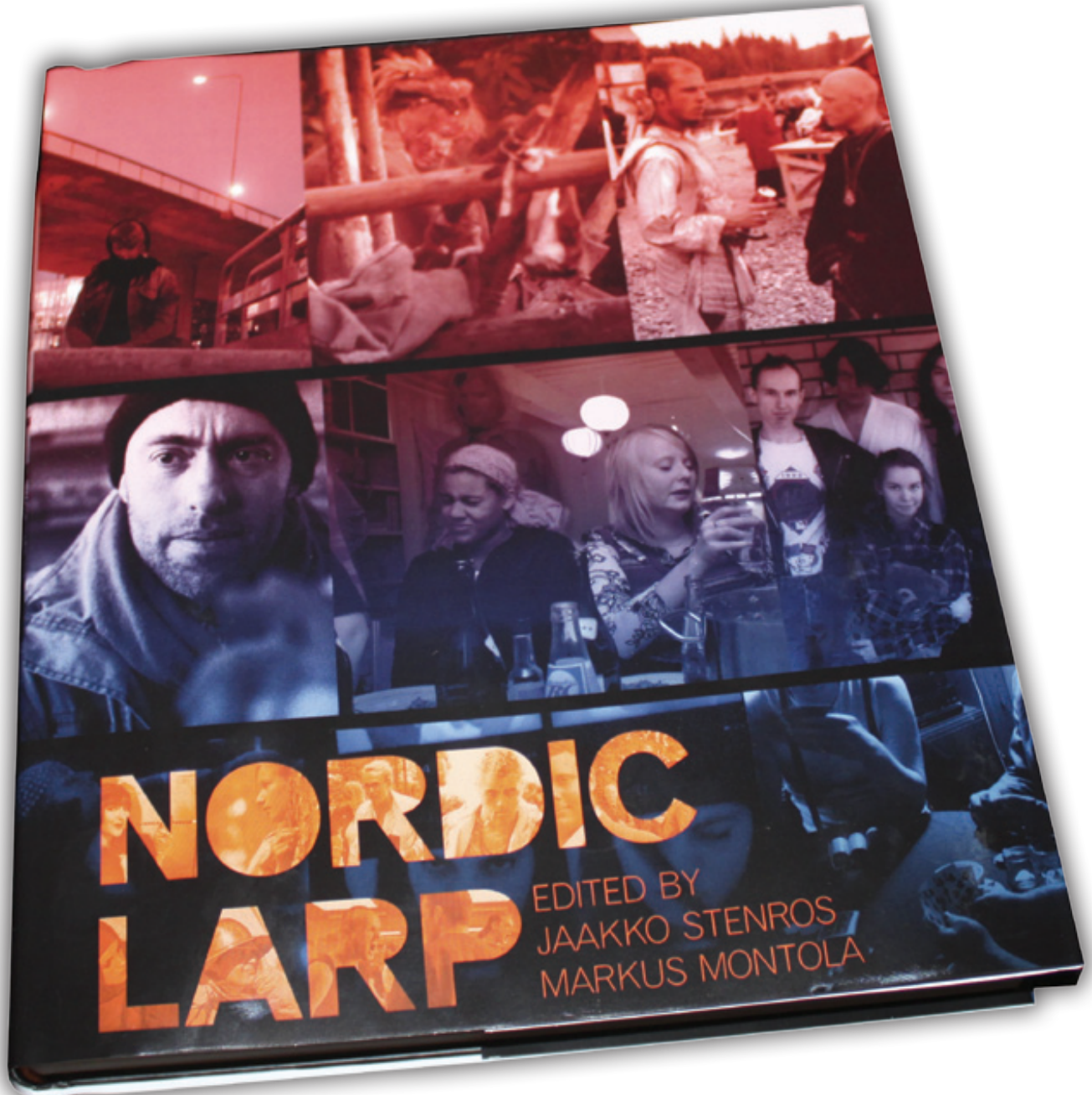


**“The revolution will
not be televised.
It will be well-armed,
though.”**

- Palnatoke saying

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We want MORE!



It's been a busy spring in Denmark: Fastaval. Solmukohta. Krigslive. We've met a lot of old friends, and gotten new friends from abroad. We've made some good contacts and we've put those contacts to good use. But we're not totally pleased yet. We know that there's a lot going on that we're missing out on.

In my daily life as an editor-in-chief, I sit near a Danish fashion magazine. A lot of tall blonde women talk about going to New York and Milano. About eating rather small amounts of sushi or Nordic Cuisine at fancy restaurants. And I've been sitting at my station thinking: "That's what it should be like to make a magazine!"

"Hey Kasper, I'm going to Connecticut with Brody and Bjarke to cover their project. And I'm swinging by Aaron in LA to see what's going on!"

"Shouldn't we all visit GenCon to do some interviews with different designers this year?"

Anyway. There's a reason for me volunteering to be part of Playground. It's not just that I get to do a magazine about something that really interests me. It's also the joy of getting to do a magazine with no regard to potential earnings, ROI's and stuff like that. Fortunately, the role-playing industry isn't like the fashion industry and there's no representation or alternative funding for us. It's simple: nobody gets paid! But then again, we're not being pressured by economic interests and there's no one to satisfy other than our readers. And that's where you come into the picture:

We know a good deal of what's going on in Denmark. And we have some contacts all over. But between projects, daytime jobs, larps, partying and living the rock n' roll life as big time publishers, Kasper, Claus and I have our shortcomings. So we need a little bit of help. We need you to tell us what's going on! What's hot right now in Finland? Who's rocking the boat in America? What crazy ideas are coming out of Norway?

We don't (necessarily) need you to write the article. We would love to interview you or your friends about projects, ideas, theories and the like. The next issue of Playground is planned for September, and this time the theme is 'More!'



"How do we create more good role-playing?"

And we need you to give us tips as to where to look for interesting stories. Who should we interview? Are there some people in your community with projects and ideas that are interesting? Is there an interesting larp or convention planned for next summer that requires an in-depth look? Or do you have an opinion that should be heard?

Regards

Lars Nøhr Andresen

It's all been done before

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Change is a good thing, right? It has a delicious after-taste of evolution and visionary politics. But as any cyberpunk fan knows, we are quite capable of imagining futures that suck. In the larping community, it's long since become very popular to create these dystopian worlds.

It's funny how a lot of the fictions we create or recreate tap into this sense of a foreboding fall from grace, while we at the same time hail change and progress in our methods of designing and playing these games. Now, if this is true, we are steadily becoming better at portraying really horrible things.

This can serve different purposes and not all are benevolent. Some of them are. Some of the things we achieve with our games are very impressive and beautiful. One of the reasons why this magazine exists is because people have constantly been exploring, experimenting and pushing for change in the Nordic role-playing communities. But please do me a favor. Stop focusing so much on what is new. Hold on... let me put it differently. I don't give a shit about whether your meta-technique is new or not. I do give lots of shits about how and why you used it. Change is an empty word without the how and why, and all of you tend to forget that, just as I do.

In the artsy part of our great community, this rings especially true. In case you were wondering whether or not we are artists, stop wondering. We are. Artists are also the worst breed of people at talking trash about fantastic projects, just because they did not do anything completely new and spectacular. And don't pretend to be innocent. You are not. I heard you at Solmukohta. I know it does not have quite the same impact the second time you see a urinal in an art gallery. But let us give a bit of elbow room to those who have not seen the urinal there before.

Otherwise, the gates to the playground will stay closed. Get off and kill the high horse of "We've already seen it all done before." It's a bad habit, and you know it.

Enjoy!

Kasper Friis Hansen



■ *Kasper Friis Hansen*



■ *Claus Raasted*



■ *Lars Nøhr Andresen*

Content

- 08** News and stuff
What's going on in the world of role-playing?
- 14** Fastaval of Change
How does a convention ensure constant change?
- 20** We're laughing at YOU!
How role-playing is perceived in popular media
- 24** States of Stasis
Evan Torner reviews the Solmukohta 2012 book
- 28** Krigslive - a changing larp
They fight and fight, and fight, and fight, and fight
- 38** 24-hour larp design
Aaron Vanek on fast larp design
- 42** 5 things we lie about in larp
Bjarke Pedersen takes a critical look at larp dogma
- 44** The Nordic invasion
What can Nordic and American larpers learn from each other?
- 48** A strange journey into Solmukohta
Solmukohta. What is it? And what isn't it?
- 54** How bleed is ruining larp
A personal uproar from Rasmus Høgdall
-





Nordic larp gets its own Wiki

Every year after the annual Nordic Knudepunkt/Solmukohta event, people are inspired and things happen. One of the things that's happened this year is that Nordic larp (the phenomenon – not the book) has gotten its own Wiki. Johannes Axner, who is behind the initiative, explains why it's finally happened: "Spirits were high after Solmukohta and I have the know-how. It was simple setting up the wiki and I'm a big enough attention whore to get the word out fast. The Solmukohta withdrawal made other folks contribute and spread the word."

◀ Visit nordiclarpwiki.org and read about Knudepunkt/Solmukohta

Just a lot of lovin'

One of the more talked about games last year was the Norwegian 80's gay larp Just A Little Lovin', which dealt with the AIDS epidemic in New York in the 80s. Luckily for those who weren't there, JALL (as it's also called) is being set up again – this time by by the LajvVerkstaden association in Stockholm. In the words of the organizers, it's "...a larp about friendship, desire and the fear of death." And on the web page there's an info page labeled "How gay is this larp?". Gotta love it. A little, at least.



◀ It's probably not the last time Just a Little Lovin' is run. Pay attention to the website

just-a-little-lovin.blogspot.com

Brazilian RPG conference in the making

Eight years ago, some people in Brazil put together an academic RPG event. If this is new to you that's ok. It's new to us. But now some researchers are putting together a new event – with a focus on education and RPG, but also trying to gather a broader range of themes. At the moment all we know is that it's scheduled for early 2013 and will be held at Uberlândia Federal University, in Uberlândia city in Minas Gerais State. Rafael Rocha is the mastermind behind it, and one of our Brazilian larper spies – Wagner Luiz Schmit – has promised to help foreigners who are interested get in touch with the event. So if Brazil and role-playing sound like a cocktail you don't want to miss out on in 2013, throw Wagner Luiz a mail.



◀ If larping in Brazil sounds like something you might be into, contact Wagner Luiz Schmit to hear some more.

wagner.schmit@gmail.com

Swedish larper does PhD on gamers and gaming

"A new PhD dissertation at the University of Gothenburg by larp-enthusiast Karl Bergström combines six articles on games, gamers and gaming; exploring how games bring people together and how good games design can improve the facilitation of togetherness. While not aimed at larp-gaming per se, it nevertheless has a broad approach towards the phenomenon of games and especially two articles - on framing in storytelling games (such as larp) and on rules and their impact on creativity for role-playing - should be highly applicable for the larp scene."

Those are the words from the press release. We just think it's damned awesome that more is being written on games in general, especially by people like Karl who also have the larp perspective.

gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/29072

Knutpunkt 2014 already kicking off

Solmukohta 2012 is just over, and we don't have the dates for Knutpunkt 2013 yet, but the Swedes are already planning '14. The first kick-off meeting has just been held in Stockholm, and insiders (that's you guys – or some of you, at least!) tell us that Gustav Nilsson is the man with the plan. To this we have two things to say. First, a tip of the hat to the planners who think far ahead. Second. Gustav, Playground is watching you.



Celebrating New Year's Eve Larp Style

Party until it's 2013. Larp style. How about spending New Year's Eve at a larp/ARG called "KNB 109 M – the weirdos were right" which will be played in Germany at the end of this year? You're welcome too.

The basic premise has to do with Maya superstition (what hasn't, this year?) and inspiration comes from both X-Men, Shadowrun and other such cyberpunkish settings. Nordic veterans Martin Ryssel and Larson Kasper are behind the thing, and they promise that even though the web site is in German, being able to speak the language is in no way a must for those wanting to attend. So if you're planning your New Year's Eve and think a German larp is the place to spend it, take a look at

knb109m.chaosdimension.de

Barda Norway to be more Norwegian

Erlend Eidsem Hansen, who's one of the oldest hounds in the Nordic community, is doing something that most people wouldn't have thought possible some years ago. Because it wasn't! At the moment he's working as a script consultant for the Barda tv show in Norway, and making sure it's more "Norwegian". Does that make no sense to you at all? Well, then we should maybe add that Barda is a Danish children's tv show about larp that's been exported to Sweden and now Norway. And Erlend's job is to make sure that the Norwegian version incorporates a little Norwegian mythos without being too obvious about it. And that's damned cool.



So say we all!

Actually, nobody's really saying it yet. It's just being whispered in dark corners (and on facebook), but that's where we lurk. A group of old Nordic hands (Daniel Krauklis, Anna-Karin Linder, Henrik Summanen, Thomas Walch, Elin Gustafsson, Martin Ericsson and Anna Westerling) are putting together a Battlestar Galactica larp in March 2013. Right now information is sparse, but we expect it to be wild!



The Minister who won D&D

The Norwegians have a new Minister of Development, and his name is Heikki Holmås. Some might wonder why we think this is supremely awesome, but there's good reason for that. Holmås has a past in both tabletop RPG and larp and thinks role-playing games have political potential. The fanzine imagonem.org bagged an interview with Holmås in March, and amongst other interesting facts it's stated that he won the Norwegian National D&D Championship in 1989. Read the full length interview (it's in English) at the Imagonem site!

imagonem.org/2012/03/27/larps-can-change-the-world/ >



Finnish larp(?) calender

We all do fun stuff. That's what makes us part of this crowd. But some of us do funnier (or weirder!) stuff than others. In Finland, there's a group who makes the Heittämättömän Arwan Kilta (or HAK, which at least is pronounceable) calender. It's pictures of larpers in crazy outfits and it looks quite well done. So if you're the type who wants black & white Finns decorating your office wall, then this is the thing for you.



[Order your own calender at spike.kapsi.fi/calendar/](http://spike.kapsi.fi/calendar/)



If you're able to read Russian go visit chp2012.ru and learn more about the ambitious larp

Game of Thrones larp draws 1000+ in Russia

In the middle of July, George R.R. Martins "A Song of Ice and Fire" creates the backdrop for one of the biggest Russian larps of the summer. Spanning a mindblowing 115 years (if we've understood it correctly), the larp is a five-day event where legend comes alive. The only downside – for most of us at least – is that it's played in Russian.



Nordic Larp turns Bible

This isn't really a piece of news, just a random picture that we stumbled upon that's guaranteed to make you smile (or if you're Markus Montola or Jaakko Stenros, maybe touch yourself in inappropriate ways). The photo is from one of the Russian "A Song of Ice and Fire" games. We'll let it speak for itself.

Lizzie Stark is all over the place

If you're a Playground reader, you should know who Lizzie Stark is. And if you don't, shame on you. She's the author of the book "Leaving Mundania", which we reviewed in Playground #5 and if you take a look at the glorious internet, you'll find her name and the name of the book plastered all over the place. BBC even did a four-minute piece on her book, which you can find easily enough using your friend Google. And why do we care? We care because she's one of us and she's an evangelist for Nordic larp, wherever in the world it may be found. Which makes her one of our heroes. Go, Lizzie!

elizabethstark.com/ >



Iraq war revisited

Some people write articles when they want to comment on the world. Some set stuff on fire. Others do larp. Danish larp Den Hvide Krig (The White War) this August is a game based upon the occupation/liberation (depending on how you feel about it) of Iraq in the 00's. The idea is to give the players a sense of the feelings and frustrations on both sides and while the larp must be considered strongly political in its theme, according to organizer Søren Lyng Ebbenhøj (who served in Iraq) "...we don't have an opinion we want you to end up having. We disagree in the organizing group – a lot – and this means that we want the players to form their own impressions." The White War will be run mainly in Danish, but has been dubbed "International-friendly", and will be run in a fantasy setting even though the themes are borrowed from the Iraq War.

[Read more at denhvidekrig.dk](http://denhvidekrig.dk) ▼



Danish War Larp takes a swing for larp as culture

Krigslive (War Larp) is a popular Danish series of larps. Popular enough that we write about the latest one here in the magazine, anyway. But Krigslive is also relevant for another reason.

The last Krigslive got quite a bit of media coverage in Denmark, and managed to bag the entire front page of the culture section of one of Denmark's most respected newspapers, Politiken. The angle: "larp is serious culture on line with theater, music and literature. Most people just don't know this yet." So if somebody pokes fun at your hobby, poke them right back – because here we're not talking about high-art political games like System Danmarc or KAPO. No, this is fighting and fun – but it's still considered "cultural". We like that.

(It should be mentioned that Danish media has had a curious and positive view on any kind of role-playing since role-playing games appeared in the mid 1980s. The big satanist scare in the 1980s never really got any traction in Denmark and the kind of positive article like in Politiken is quite typical. But it's still cool. - ed.)

There's more on Krigslive in the magazine. Visit krigslive.dk



The new Czech book

Ok, ok, so it's a stupid word joke... but there actually is a new book out – this time published in conjunction with the Odráz larp conference. And though most of it is for Czech speakers (and readers) only, there are a few articles in the book that are in English. The name of the book? If our copy hadn't disappeared somewhere at the office, we'd be able to tell you. But that just makes it even more of a collector's item – not even the Playgrounders know the name.

Write to 2012@odraz.org to find out more.



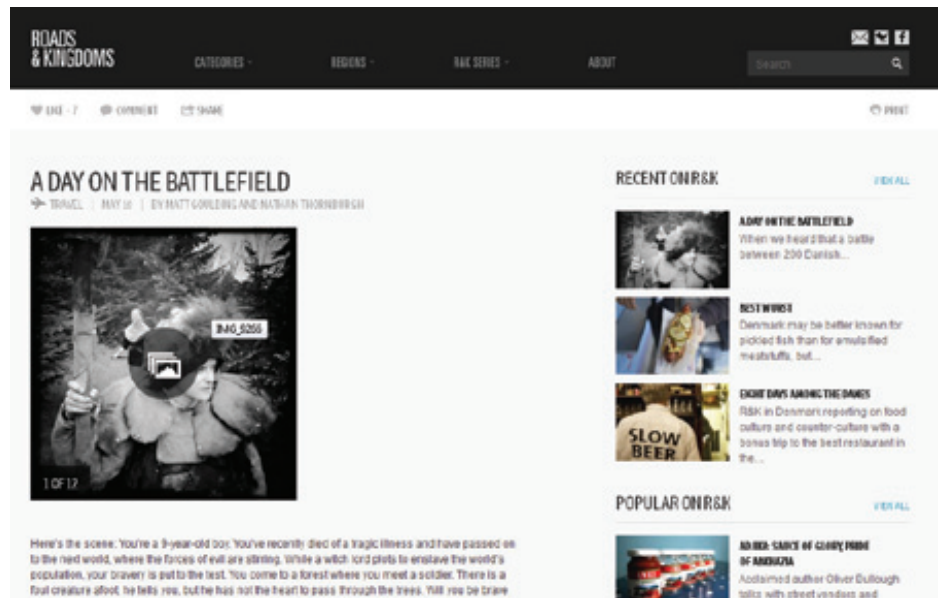
A [facebook.com \(search for "Larps looking for International Audience"\)](https://www.facebook.com/LarpsLookingForInternationalAudience/)

Internationals, we want YOU!

After Knudepunkt 2011, larp veteran and upcoming Solmukohta2012 main organizer Heidi Westerlund created a facebook group dedicated to larps looking for an international audience. The FB group was aptly named "Larps Looking for International Audience", and we bring you a few of the juicier tidbits from it. Oh, and we also want you to join the group, since it's a lot easier to get information there than here.

Christiania and Larp have got WHAT in common?

A few weeks ago, the kingdom of Hamlet had visitors from abroad. More specifically, two American journalists from the web site Roads & Kingdoms swung by. And why is that interesting to you (or us?). Well, first of all, the two guys (who amongst other things write for Time magazine) expressly wrote that they were coming to study two phenomena; Christiania and Danish larp. That in itself will put a smile on most people's faces, but it goes without mentioning that we managed to grab them before other people did and dragged them deep, deep into the Rabbit's Hole. Of course it may seem weird to write about the fact that others write about us, but when one of the descriptions used is "It's something like a combination of video games and acting and rural flashmobbing.", the mind is intrigued.



For an interesting outsiders perspective, go take a look at www.roadsandkingdoms.com

Upcoming scenarios

Dublin2 – Stockholm

- A larp about the asylum seeker's experience in the Nordic countries
- Autumn 2012
- <http://dublin2.fi> (Also FB community)
- Organised by: Johanna Raekallio, JP Kaljonen
- Sign ups open soon; mailing list at info@dublin2.fi

Between Steel and Glass

- A larp in two episodes, imagining two future scenarios dominated by one gender)
- From summer 2013
- facebook.com/pages/Between-steel-and-glass
- Organised by: Emma Wieslander, Johan Lundby, Bjarke Pedersen, Johanna MacDonald, Nynne Rasmussen
- Stick to the FB group for news. Site and mailing list up soon.

2027 – Life After Capitalism

- A game covering 15 years, imagining a new system of living)
- October 4-7, 2012
- <http://2027.se/>
- Organised by: Morgan Jarl, Annika Lykta, Anders Nilsson
- Sign-up open soon; register on the site for the mailing list

UnderStockholm: The Floating Market

- A larp inspired by Neil Gaiman's Neverwhere, set in Stockholm
- September 7-9, 2012 in Stockholm
- www.understockholm.se/
- Organised by: Sofia Stenler, Annica Strand, Annika Lykta

From Dungeons & Dragons to ...



■ A typical role-playing room at Fastaval in the late 1980's and 1990's. Dice, pens, character sheets, candy wrappers and Coca Cola.

Contrary to most other tabletop gaming conventions, the Danish convention Fastaval has fostered constant change in the games played there. But how did a rather traditional and conservative tabletop role-playing convention make that kind of evolution and change happen?

TEXT | LARS NØHR ANDRESEN PHOTO | PETER MUNTHE-KAAS

For many years, the annual Danish tabletop role-playing convention Fastaval was not conscious that it was any different from other conventions. It had its own isolated existence, with about 600 participants and 30 all-new scenarios that were run over a span of five days every Easter. But then in 2004, Fastaval was visited by a Swedish collective of writers (Vi Åker Jeep) and with that, its self-perception began to shift.

The Swedes were overwhelmed by what was going on at Fastaval and soon after came the Finns, Americans and other international guests who were surprised about what was going on there. Since then, the evolution at Fastaval has only accelerated.

Instead of being content with traditional tabletop role-playing games like Call of Cthulhu, Dungeons and Dragons, Rolemaster and the like, in the early 1990s Fastaval had already become a conven-

tion where role-playing was explored and pushed to new limits. Many of the games being played at Fastaval today have much more in common with larping than with classic tabletop games, but it is still its own unique form of larping.

Fastaval has been good at documenting the actual development of the games and scenarios at the convention over time. But how exactly did Fastaval become a centre for change in an otherwise conservative environment of tabletop gamers?

... Freeform Larps



■ A typical scene from a scenario at Fastaval today. The action takes place through larp or semi larp instead of players describing their actions

The written tradition

Kristoffer Apollo has been part of Fastaval since the very beginning. He wrote his first scenario for Fastaval in 1989, and his most recent scenario in 2012.

“There are, of course, many reasons why Fastaval became such a creative playground for developers of games, but I think one of the primary reasons is the written scenario. Since the beginning of Fastaval, it was established that every

scenario at Fastaval should be written down so that it could be played without any form of briefing (this is distinct from other Danish and international conventions, where tradition often dictates that only the writer runs the game or that part of the game is written down, but most of the game is conveyed to other game masters through a briefing.)

“This meant that it was possible for everyone to read the scenario and, perhaps most importantly, for us to have objective discussions about whether the scenario was good or bad, and why,” Kristoffer Apollo says.

Because of the established tradition of writing down the scenarios for other people to read, in 1992 it was possible for

Fastaval to introduce the Otto: an award given for the scenarios that excelled in different fields. Inspired by the Oscar, the Otto was awarded at a big feast at the end of the convention.

“The Otto was introduced with the clear goal of creating better scenarios. It was thought of as an incentive for the writers to do their best. There was controversy, of course. The Otto was perceived by quite a few as being elitist, and a few writers argued that an award would take the fun out of writing scenarios, and that role-playing games shouldn’t be taken that seriously. Luckily, the protests were drowned out by the applause from hundreds of role-players at the first award show,” Kristoffer says.



Most importantly it's as fun as it should be. There's a lot of work in writing a Fastaval scenario and there's no other payment than the fun of it.

Facts about Fastaval

- Has existed since 1986
- Takes place from wednesday to monday every easter
- Located at a school somewhere in Jutland, Denmark (2012: Hobro)
- About 600 participants
- Focus is on role-playing, larp, board-games and table top strategy games
- About 30 role-playing scenarios premiere here
- Ages 13 and up - average age about 24 years
- www.fastaval.dk

Judge not, lest ye be judged

The idea of having a panel of judges able to judge scenarios is possible thanks to the tradition of written scenarios. The judges do not judge the actual game play. They judge the written material. And they discuss the potential of interesting role-play in each scenario.

When the Otto came into being, there were five to six people reading all the scenarios at Fastaval. Judges came and went, but the core idea of having a panel that read every scenario at Fastaval and actually gave a verdict about which scenarios should be commended or not created a lot of discussion. These discussions were mostly uplifting, as they were concerned with what a good scenario was. How should it be presented? How could one write believable characters? The convention gave the writers some people to talk to about scenario creation, and it created an environment where it was natural to critique each other and to aspire to create something better, more interesting, provoking, and beautiful than last year's entry. And most of the players loved it.

"One other positive consequence of the Otto was that the scenarios had to be finished long before the convention for the

Otto judges to be able to read all the scenarios. Many writers are notoriously bad at keeping deadlines, but if you wanted to be part of the competition, you had to deliver before the convention. That meant a dramatic rise in quality," Kristoffer says.

A positive writing environment

In 1993-1994, some people involved in Fastaval created a weekend workshop for potential writers to further raise the quality of the scenarios. This first weekend for the writers would prove to be very important for the community of writers at Fastaval.

"Before the writers' workshop there existed a small community of writers based in Aarhus. They knew each other and talked about their ideas and scenarios. After the first writers' weekend, this community was greatly expanded. The weekend workshop was held with positive thinking in mind. No negative response was allowed during brainstorming. It was all about developing ideas and helping the individual writers to make better scenarios. All were treated as equals. Young and old. Newbie and veteran," Kristoffer says.

The Fastaval writers community has existed ever since. It's a bit like becoming

Larping at Fastaval

During the 1990s and early 2000s, there was a clear distinction between tabletop role-playing scenarios and larping at Fastaval. The people behind the larps were frustrated that larps did not get the same amount of attention as the other scenarios. For example, larps were not part of the Otto competition at that time. It led to many heated discussions and finally it was decided that if a larp was written down in the same way as the other scenarios, it would be judged on the same terms. Since then, the clear border between tabletop and larping has been blurred to a degree where it doesn't make much sense to make a distinction any more. Several larps have won Ottos in different categories since the inclusion.





Joust (Dyst)

The scenario *Joust* (Anders Frost Bertelsen, Kristofer Rudkjær, Morten Hougaard, 2009) is an example of drawing more firmly on the Fastaval tradition and merging it with new system mechanics.

Joust is also an example of another subgenre; the ensemble scenario, where each player controls several leading roles (typically three or four). The ensemble scenario can be said to be a mutation of extras role-playing, but on the other hand the idea of giving each player multiple roles had been around since at least the 90s.

a member of an exclusive club. You gain access to coaching and feedback from experienced writers. You are invited to social gatherings at bars in Copenhagen where ideas and scenarios are discussed over a pint of lager. You are invited to several workshops, and are offered the possibility of having an experienced writer as a coach.

“Most importantly, it’s as fun as it should be. There’s a lot of work in writing a Fastaval scenario and there’s no other payment other than the fun of it,” Kristofer says.

Banning D&D and Call of Cthulhu

The Otto was not the only controversial step Troels Chr. Jakobsen took to change the direction of Fastaval. In 1990, *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Call of Cthulhu* were banned from the convention.

“I actually don’t remember if we directly forbade *Dungeons & Dragons*, but we made it clear that we had no interest in scenarios based on prefabricated systems and worlds. The idea was to stop thinking about such systems and worlds and instead put the focus on creating something new and innovative,” says Troels

Chr. Jakobsen.

The banning of *Dungeons & Dragons* was also a great publicity stunt for Fastaval. The traditionalists at Fastaval protested, while the ‘avant garde’ role-players approved. Fastaval quickly established itself as an alternative convention with different scenarios and a very different approach to role-playing. Luckily for the development of Fastaval, there were a lot of creative people willing to participate in planning the convention, and thereby the new direction became a success. This early battle between ‘traditionalists’ and ‘reformists’ showed that Fastaval is open for change and development. It doesn’t have to be like last year. New ideas and initiatives are welcome and that is very important, even though there are a lot of people in the tabletop community who like the idea of everything being just like last year.

Troels admits that the banning of traditional scenarios went beyond just creating art and new scenarios.

“At that time, it was a bitch to get people to write scenarios for Fastaval. The people running the convention had to beg their friends and lure or threaten them into writing scenarios and the results were as

you would expect from somebody writing a scenario at gunpoint. We had to find a way for getting people to write scenarios voluntarily,” Troels tells and that is where the Otto came into play.

Troels Chr. Jakobsen took the initiative to introduce the Otto in 1992. From the very beginning, the award had a clear goal:

“In the early 1990s, the large Danish conventions such as Fastaval, Viking Con, TRoA-con and several others awarded the players, as Gen Con did. In that sense, role-playing was becoming a competitive sport. We at Fastaval wanted to go another direction. We wanted to see role-playing as an art form. Also, as I mentioned, we had a problem with motivating people to write scenarios,” he tells.

The Otto wasn’t meant for the players. The Otto was from the very beginning meant as an incentive for the writers that didn’t exist anywhere else before 1992. If Fastaval was to be an interesting place for developing role-playing scenarios, you had to motivate the writers and not the players. From the very first award show in 1992, it was an overwhelming success with all the good and bad things to come. >>

The idea of an award that was taken seriously in an environment of mostly nerds and misfits was back then extremely provocative and the Otto has been intensely discussed since its introduction.

Kristoffer Apollo has from the beginning been involved with the Otto:

“In the beginning, we had to guard the award. It was a fragile thing and a lot of people liked to ridicule the Otto or just sabotage the idea of an award at a role-playing show. Some people were just ‘against’ it, others were jealous that it wasn’t their own initiative, and still others were skeptical about the whole idea of certain writers being better than others. So from the very beginning, the five to six people sitting on the jury took their responsibility seriously and regarded the award with respect,” he says.

Scientists versus humanitarians

One of the things that has been celebrated about the role-playing environment is the diversity of people involved, but such diversity also creates tension, especially when nerdy groups of people from totally different milieus meet up and play together.



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Scientists like order and systems that can be used to measure the world. In the role-playing scene, there are a lot of scientists. Role-playing springs from strategy games and many role-playing games are more like advanced strategy games than social experiments. On the other hand, there are a lot of creative and artistic role-players and these two groups of people do not always get along. (This is very different from the traditional larping scene, which has never attracted as great a following of scientific-oriented gamers).

At Fastaval, it was the creative and artistic people that came to ‘rule’ the scenarios and the most important ‘battle’ took place in 1993.

With the creation of the Otto in 1992 came the first focus on the writers and, one weekend in 1993, Kristoffer Apollo, Troels Chr. Jakobsen and Mette Finderup founded the Fastaval Writers Workshop mentioned before. They each had their own field of expertise. Kristoffer studied journalism, Troels studied drama and Mette studied literature, which made them an excellent trio behind a creative workshop. And it should be noted that there were no engineers, mathematicians

or computer scientists involved with arranging the workshop. The workshop focused on the creative development of ideas into scenarios and the practical implications of writing a scenario. The “Fastawood” model was introduced, which was basically the Hollywood model made to fit a role-playing scenario. The idea of creating the

Scenarios at Fastaval

At Fastaval, you can find many different kinds of role-playing games. The one kind that is never present is the typical Dungeons & Dragons scenario where the players compete to get the most gold or as many experience points as possible. Almost every scenario at Fastaval is written for Fastaval and most premiere at Fastaval. Each game consists of four to six players and a game master, but there are games with more players.

Classic tabletop role-playing

There are quite a few classic tabletop role-playing games where you mostly sit around a table and interact with the others characters in vocal descriptions. In most of these games, you play a single character and have one role throughout the game.

Horde role-playing

In these types of games, you still mostly sit around a table but the roles are changing as the scenes are changing. The players takes on the roles of “extras” in the game and thereby it is possible to play a game where there’s only one lead character without the other players getting bored.

Semi-larp

In the semi-larp games, the table is mostly discarded and, instead of vocally describing your actions in the game, you just play it out to some extent. There is often a game master who sets the scenes and controls the game.

Structured freeform

This is the most larp-like kind of game at Fastaval. There is no table and there is no distinction between you and the character. You just act it out. These are basically simple black box mini-larps with a classroom being the black box.



The often chaotic and creative writers were helped to finish their scenarios instead of being punished if they fell behind.

characters before creating the story was presented. Much energy was put into creating interesting characters who, prior to 1992, were most often one or two lines or just a D&D character sheet.

At Fastaval and at the workshop, writers were met with a gentle, but firm hand that guided them into writing a good scenario and, most importantly, delivering the finished scenario before Fastaval. The, often chaotic and creative, writers were helped so they could finish their scenarios instead of being punished if they fell behind.

This attitude of helping creativity instead of punishing tardiness is still an important part of writing scenarios for Fastaval this day and has for the last three years been under the care of the Scenario Officials Klaus Meier Olsen and Kristoffer Rudkjær.

On the side of the writers

It was and is possible to see scenario-writing as a separate institution because Fastaval as an organization is a bit anarchistic in the most positive sense of the term. The writers community did not come from Fastaval, but from the writers

themselves. There is a person or group of officials responsible for the contact with the writers. These “Scenario Officials” have the responsibility of collecting synopses for scenarios and selecting which ideas are to be made into scenarios. Over the last couple of years, about 50-60 synopses have been submitted per year and 30 ideas are eventually chosen from them.

Up until recently, there were no guidelines for being a Scenario Official at Fastaval, but three years ago Klaus Meier Olsen and Kristoffer Rudkjær volunteered to take on the role for three years in a row in order to create a consistent line in the way the officials should see their role.

They both had extensive experience as scenario writers and had themselves what felt the difference between a dedicated Scenario Official and a not so very dedicated Scenario Official could be.

For Fastaval 2012 they took on two apprentices that now have taken over the responsibility as Scenario Officials and they are just now starting up the first workshops and meetings for Fastaval 2013. ■

What if I want to participate in or write for Fastaval?

Keep an eye out at fastaval.dk. The sign-up typically opens about two months prior to Fastaval, which always takes place during Easter. If you are interested in writing a scenario for Fastaval, also keep an eye out at fastaval.dk. Around October the scenario officials call for synopses, but you also could just write them today. The officials for Fastaval 2012 are Kristian Bach Petersen and Simon Steen Hansen. You can reach them at scenarier@fastaval.dk.

Dancing with the clans

At Fastaval there is a tradition for having a larp running throughout the entire convention. The idea is to be able to play something even when you're not participating in a scenario.

At Fastaval 2012 this larp was Vampire: The Masquerade - Dancing with the Clans. A larp with all the different clans battling it out ... on the dance floor! Every night the clans battled it out disco style in front of more or less astounded and riled up audiences.



We're laughing Not with you!

Laughing at the larpers or laughing with them? With some very few exceptions, the laughs are on the larpers – most recently shown in the Canadian movie *Lloyd the Conqueror* which revolves completely around larping.

TEXT | LARS NØHR ANDRESEN PHOTO | PRESS

After the April screening of *Lloyd the Conqueror* in Copenhagen, it was hard not to feel disappointed. The three hardcore larpers in the cinema had the biggest laughs. Whispers like “Oh my god, that guy is just like Claus!” were heard between giggles. But it was clear that the three larpers was laughing at parodies of themselves.

The disappointment was crystallized after the movie when director Michael Peterson took the stage and answered questions.

“Are you a larper yourself?”

“Ehhmm, well... I played a bit of *Dungeons & Dragons* when I was a kid.”

Lloyd the Conqueror is a low-budget Canadian comedy about three normal guys forced into participating in a fantasy larp to get a passing grade in a community college class. The comedy in the movie springs from their meeting the strange subculture of larping, which is portrayed throughout as a silly pas-

time. The basic attitude toward larping is mainly positive and although initially reluctant, the main characters end up enjoying the larp and taking the game seriously.

Talking to Michael Peterson (which we of course did), it became clear that he wanted to do a movie about the meeting between an offbeat subculture and apparent normality. Peterson represents normality in this regard. He was asked if he did research and larped himself before undertaking the project. He didn't actually play, but watched a larp in Canada and some documentaries.

In that light it's rather impressive that he succeeded in creating so many jokes that larpers themselves tend to laugh at. It seems that larping has become culturally known to the extent that an 'outsider' is able to create a parody that even larpers have to acknowledge. But Peterson takes nothing to heart when it comes to larping. For him, it's a funny subculture with recognizable clichés that we all can laugh at.

Larping is silly

Peterson was a bit nervous about the screening in Denmark. He had been warned that Danish larpers are extreme, and given the fact that three of the most outrageous larpers in his movie are Danes (speaking with German accents, though), he seemed anxious when confronted by a group of Danish larpers after the screening. He had nothing to worry about. He was invited for beers and pizza at the Danish Rollespilsfabrikken, where a lot of larpers were preparing their gear for a large upcoming fantasy larp.

Lloyd the Conqueror is cousin to *Role Models*, which was a big budget Hollywood movie where larping played a central role. The difference is that *Lloyd the Conqueror* is based totally on larping, where larping in *Role Models* is just an element of the movie. But the idea is the same: non-larpers are forced into larping, and while they start off perceiving it as silly and stupid, during their endeavours they realise that there is something beau-

at you

tiful to be found in it. In that way the message in both Role Models and Lloyd the Conqueror is positive towards larping—but at the same time, we are presented with the worst of clichés. The favorable portrayal of larping comes in spite of the laughable stereotypes.

Laughing AT the nerds

The laughability and silliness of larping and role-playing also appears in the hit TV-series *The Big Bang Theory*, which features four highly intelligent, yet highly dysfunctional nerds as the main characters. They enjoy *Dungeons & Dragons*, cosplay, card games like *Magic: The Gathering*, and role-playing on the computer. But these pursuits are only shown for laughs and ridicule. Only the most well-known and cliché-filled games are shown, and we are made to feel sorry for four grown-ups who are interested in things that clearly are meant for kids.

This theme is emphasized through the

non-nerd female character in the series, who never understands the four friends' fondness of gaming culture. When in one episode she gets hooked on a MMORPG, the negative consequences are clear: bad diet, bad personal hygiene, repeatedly missing work and losing good judgment. The message is obvious: nerd culture corrupts normal humans. In this show, the nerds are already lost.

Despite this negative portrayal of role-playing, gaming, cosplay and other nerd culture icons, the series is loved by both nerds and normals. The nerds love to see references to the things they love (whoaa... they're playing *Dungeons & Dragons* on prime time TV!) and easily forgive the negative portrayal of nerds, while the normals like to laugh at the loveable, but unlucky, nerds with all their fallacies.

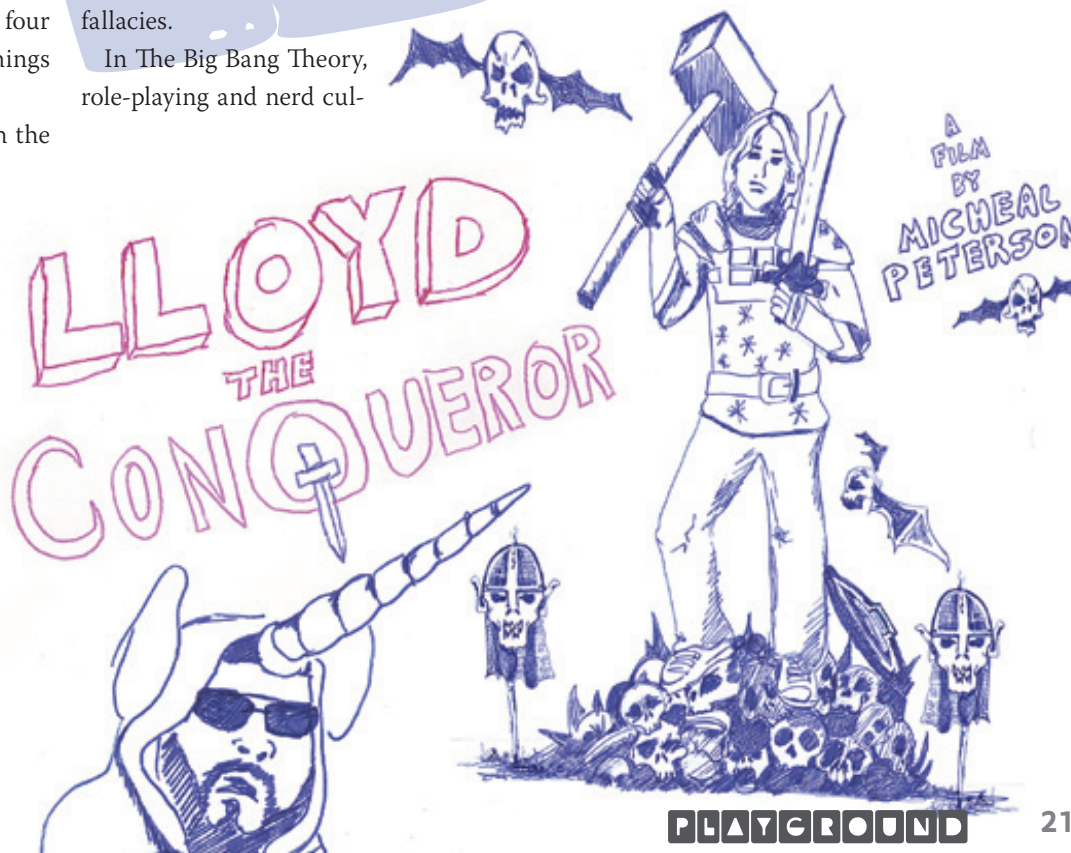
In *The Big Bang Theory*, role-playing and nerd cul-

ture are used exactly in the same way as in *Role Models* and *Lloyd the Conqueror*, although the portrayal is especially spiteful and malicious towards the nerds in *The Big Bang Theory*. It is very clear that the jokes about role-playing games, card games and computer games need to be obvious because the normal audience has to understand them. For example, the four nerds enjoy playing *Magic* (though it's called something else in the series), and the game is portrayed as being to no more difficult than the card game *Go Fish*. That's typically how non-nerds perceive 'silly' games like *Magic*.

Again, it has to be said that *The Big Bang Theory* is created by people who are very competent in creating a TV series, but with no knowledge of the nerd culture it portrays.

Lloyd the Conqueror

Three students at a community college becomes engaged in a larp ruled by the ominous Derek the Unholy, who also happens to be the students' teacher. They reluctantly enter the world of larping, seeing it as being rather ridiculous, but with the aid of the seasoned larper Andy the White Wizard they ultimately overcome the evil Derek in an all out final battle.





■ The tv-series *The Big Bang Theory* portrays nerds, role-playing and larp as being a sad way of living that stands in the way of real life (and girls!).



■ In the Hollywood movie *Role Models* larping is introduced as something sad that only a nerdy and lonely person could be into but later we see that larping stands for fun and strong friendships (and girls!).



■ The comedy *Knights of Badassdom* portrays the larping community in the usual way with a cool outsider being forced into participating in the larp so the audience can see the world of larp through the eyes of a normal person (who gets girls!).

Laughing (larping) with the nerds

Another TV show (a direct competitor to *The Big Bang Theory*) has a completely different take on nerd culture. The TV series *Community* is created by Dan Harmon—a nerd himself. *Community* takes on much of the same nerd culture as *The Big Bang Theory* but uses it in different ways. *Dungeons & Dragons*, larping, and gaming culture are woven into the series, often without even mentioning the references. The series itself revolves around a very diverse study group in a community college, and where *The Big Bang Theory* follows the strict sitcom formula, *Community* is shot mostly on location, with a lot of extras, and follows no clear formula.

Larping is used often in *Community*, and with great affection. It is mixed with the cosplay culture, and it's much harder to pick up on than it is in *Role Models* because it doesn't portray fantasy larping. In one of the most referenced episodes ("Modern Warfare," Season 1) the whole college participates in a paintball-larping game. In the next season this is followed up with a two-episode, western-themed larping adventure also involving paintball guns. "Larping" is never mentioned. During the paintball game it's only natural that the characters take on different roles. In the adventure, the character Abed takes on a Han Solo-type of role and, totally out of his normal behavior, seduces one of the female students. However, the second the game is over, he snaps out of character and returns to his normal dysfunctional personality. Contrary to most other depictions of larping culture, this is done without ever mentioning role-playing, cosplay or larping. In a way that's very different from *Role Models* and *Big Bang Theory*, larping here is used as a way to tell a surprising story in a different way. It is not used as a joke, or something we should laugh at. Most non-larpers wouldn't even see the paintball episodes as "larping."



■ Community is the only mainstream tv-series to use role-playing games and larp in a serious fashion

This is a role-playing game. It takes place entirely in our collective imagination. I tell a story and you all make choices in the story. Let's begin!

The Dungeons & Dragons episode

Dan Harmon dedicated a whole episode of Community to Dungeons & Dragons, but he had to fight the producers to make this happen, and he had to fight hard—because, contrary to almost all portrayals of role-playing games in popular media up until then, he didn't mock or make fun of Dungeons & Dragons. There are no stupid clichés. There are no easy laughs. What there are, instead, are a lot of jokes that are especially funny if you've played Dungeons & Dragons or other tabletop RPGs yourself. In this episode role-playing games are described in a very concise and precise way:

"Shouldn't there be a board?"

"No, this is a role-playing game. It takes place entirely in our collective imagination. I tell a story, and you all make choices in the story. Let's begin!"

In an interview, Dan Harmon describes his feelings towards doing a Dungeons & Dragons episode:

"So I always wanted to do a Dungeons & Dragons episode. I knew that we had predecessors there. I knew that The IT Crowd did one. I knew that Freaks And Geeks did one. I saw that what all those had in common was, number one, they bounced back and forth from the actual game to other stories, and also that the joke, the conceit was that it's a nerdy game, and that's the

whole point. I wanted to just fade into the group playing the game, and how do you tell a story that way?"

In Community, role-playing games aren't described as something nerdy. In fact one of the characters (Pierce Hawthorne, played by Chevy Chase) is enraged when he discovers he's being kept out of the game. Still, the series uses some role-playing stereotypes. The character that introduces role-playing is called Fat Neil, who is the typical fat, lonely nerd—but here, the type is twisted and depicted with affection.

An ongoing theme

Larping is handled with even more grace than tabletop role-playing in Community. Two of the main characters (Abed and Troy) are constantly taking on the roles of the fictional character from another popular TV show—Doctor Who. The terms "larping" or "role-playing" are never used, even though both things permeate the series, especially in season three. We see a double episode dedicated to an all-out pillow fight that is a re-creation of a Civil War battle. In the episode "Virtual System Analysis," role-playing is taken to a new level with the "Dreamatorium," where the characters constantly take on different roles to explore themselves. Talk about bleed and alibi. ■

Serious vs. silly

For once larping isn't used for laughs. In *The Wild Hunt*, larping is used as the frame for a tragedy, and the larpers aren't portrayed as silly losers with nothing to do in their real lives. They are portrayed as extremists for whom larping is more important than real life.

Opposite of *The Wild Hunt* is the new high budget movie *Knights of Badassdom*, which takes the traditional comedic view of larping. The twist in this picture is that the larpers summon a real demon and have to use their abilities to fight it. The producers of *Knights of Badassdom* have to be commended for hiring actor Danny Pudi from *Community*. They know what their audience wants. Other than that it's clear that the movie is silliness upon silliness.

These two larping movies are totally opposite each other, and it's interesting to see larping treated so very differently.



States of Stasis

A Review of *States of Play*, edited by Juhana Pettersson.

TEXT | EVAN TORNER

Like it or not, Nordic art larp has gone viral. Through its events, designs, conventions and publications, a fairly small group of well-educated larpwrights and larp academics drawn mostly from Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland have had a disproportionately massive impact on role-playing game design communities around the globe. The ur-event behind all this buzz is, of course, the annual “Nodal Point” retreats held between the four countries mentioned above since 1997, pronounced “Knodepunkt,” “Knutpunkt,” “Knutepunkt,” or “Solmukohta” depending on if the retreat is in Denmark, Sweden, Norway or Finland respectively. And each year that this 350-person elite meet-up has taken place since 2003, the host country has published an accompanying edited volume of documentation, essays and manifestos. Their previous titles are themselves illustrative: *As Larp Grows Up* (2003), *Beyond Role & Play* (2004), *Dissecting Larp* (2005), *Role, Play, Art* (2006), *Lifelike* (2007), *Playground Worlds* (2008), *Larp, the Universe, and Everything* (2009), *Playing Reality* (2010) and *Do/Talk/Think Larp* (3 books, 2011). One might interpret this chain of titles as a provisional melting period during which larp as a medium “came of age,” then transformed into an art form, and then transcended the boundaries of our world

so that it could finally be reborn again as itself: mere larp, written in lower-case.

The latest book in the series – *States of Play: Nordic Larp Around the World* (2012), edited by Juhana Pettersson – has thankfully refrained from an abstract, faux universalist position found in previous books in favor of an embedded, transnational approach. “Nordic Larp,” writes Pettersson in the book’s introduction, “has become an idea that’s being exported to the rest of the world, an ideal of ambitious game design ready to change the world, for fun, for art, or more idealistic reasons” (p. 9). Pettersson is correct in that Nordic Larp has become an exported medium and design philosophy. Groups of role-players in Russia, Italy, Poland, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and even (as we discover in the volume) Palestine can be found running games and adopting techniques developed in the so-called “Nordic scene.” He stresses the specificity of larp’s global reach into individual nation-states, and many of the submissions of the volume reflect an expanded consciousness about the historical and national specificity of locales outside of the conventional zones of contact.

Influencing the world

But Pettersson may have overstated things a bit when he writes of “changing

the world,” and the creation of larps for “more idealistic reasons” than fun or art. Time and time again over the course of the 2012 Solmukohta weekend in Kiljara, Finland, designers and theorists grumbled about the political assumptions behind the “change the world” impulse and expressed a contrasting cynical worldview: larp has come into its own as a medium for the wealthy countries, but not in the poorer countries. As such, it is currently changing the world as much as any other medium, such as film, television, and theater, namely: not nearly enough at all to be significant. Trine Lise Lindahl’s otherwise well-written article “Weddings and Anti-Condom Activists” about teaching Palestinians to larp, for example, lends the art larp “mission” a missionary aura, while JP Kaljonen & Johanna Raekallio loftily describe their 12,000 euro Finnish refugee camp larp “Dublin2: The EU’s Asylum Policy in Miniature” as “designed both to criticize and provoke public debate on the faults of Dublin II” (p. 31). Don’t get me wrong – these are admittedly sticky subjects that, thanks to Nordic innovations, larp is now perfectly capable of tackling, but the self-congratulatory tone, like that of Jane McGonigal in her book *Reality Is Broken* (2010), seems more like the optimistic posturing of well-meaning artists than the humility one finds among people whose work actually makes an impact.





Mixed feelings

In any case, *States of Play* reflects all the prior Nodal Point books in that it is both a must-read and a bewildering stew in terms of its content. Eirik Fatland's quote from *Dissecting Larp* in 2005 still rings true: "If you feel confused, you can seek comfort in the knowledge that you are not alone." The length of the texts varies wildly, from half-a-page to 6-7 pages, and the content lunges between documentation of a French action larp ("Shadowrun" by Thomas B.), to a pervasive Italian larp from the 1990s ("Pathos: Dreams of a Future Past" by Lorenzo Trenti) to singing in Russian larps ("Songs and Larp: How Singing in Larp Can Uncover New Horizons" by Alexey Fedoseev & Daria Kurguzova) all within a few pages. In addition, although there are very few outright English mistakes in this edited volume, many of the texts read as if someone submitted them as e-mail or as a forum post. And just as larps engage the first-person audience, so too are these essays written mostly in the first-person, which corrodes their academic quality in one form or another.

Nevertheless, Pettersson valiantly reigns in the chaos using several clever tricks. First of all, he selects a clean, two-column layout with full-color images and an eminently readable font of the Constantia persuasion, giving the reader the impression of reading a copy of the *New Yorker*, except about larp. Second, he organizes the works into the subheadings "Documentation," "Good Game Bad Game," "Art and Design," and "New Frontiers," and mixes them up throughout in alignment with the above flaneur principle: as opposed to a rapid reference, this is a text through which one must stroll. Third, he follows the model of Jaakko Stenros and Markus Montola's *Nordic Larp* (2011) coffee table book and uses photos that seem unvarnished and au-

These articles are like reading the larp form of tabloids – juicy details that reveal the human failings cowering behind the otherwise bold-and-brash Nordic scene.

thentic: the "No Glamour Shots" principle. Last, but not least, he listens to Danish larp designer Rasmus Høgdall and has designers who are usually bragging about their latest meta-technique or hot new larp (I'm not naming names) talk about their failures, larps-that-never-were, and major disasters. These articles are like reading the larp form of tabloids – juicy details that reveal the human failings cowering behind the otherwise bold-and-brash Nordic scene.

Go for the must-reads

Since the book is freely available as a PDF at nordicprg.fi there is little reason to summarize or spoil the articles that you could otherwise easily read yourself on a rainy summer afternoon. What those individuals who do not own a copy of the physical book are missing is the DVD attached to the inside cover containing video artifacts and documentation of several Nordic art larps, many of which involve confinement situations – prisons, camps – of some kind. As a follower of larp video documentation, I must say that the quality has somewhat improved over the years. Otherwise, there are several must-read articles that stood out above all the rest. Emma Wieslander's "Letting the Stories Go" presents an elegant defense of her form of larp design that emphasizes the excitement of relationship building over simulations of violence. My national biases as an American are

evident when I tout "Beyond the Game Master" by Emily Care Boss, Ivan Vaghi & Jason Morningstar on the design principles underlying the GM-less tabletop game, or Lizzie Stark's "We Hold These Rules to Be Self-Evident" on the litigiousness and "fairness" of the American fantasy larp scene. Eleanor Saitta's piece "It's About Time" regards the larp *Just a Little Lovin'*, which is about the New York gay scene of the early 1980s, with a keen theoretical eye toward dynamics of temporality, while Andrea Castellani's "The Rogue Wave" reformulates the diffuse nature of larp as a strength leading toward a new kind of narrative.

Among "Nodal Point" books, *States of Play* is of a high quality and certainly captured my attention in the way that *Playground Worlds* did several years ago. It is a relatively short, engaging read that downplays the Nordic scene's penchant for academic pretentiousness and bombastic arty manifestos in exchange for a more journalistic view of various national larp cultures and events that stirred the affect of the community. At the same time, however, it has consciously discarded the recent efforts by the Danes in 2011 to separate the rants from the play reports from the academic theory. Instead, Pettersson has re-merged the content into a jumble that rewards the idly curious more than the information-seeking obsessive. Given the diffuse nature of larp, maybe that form is for the best. ■



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KRIGSLIVE

From Warhammer to medieval Iceland

Every year there is a Krigslive gathering about 400 larpers mainly from Denmark. But every year there's a new group behind Krigslive. This year the setting was changed from Warhammer to Iceland.

TEXT | LARS NØHR ANDRESEN PHOTO | PETER MUNTHE-KAAS, CHRISTINA MOLBECH

This year's Krigslive took place in Iceland in the end of the 12th century. The setting was the Danish museum "Lejre, Land of Legends" which is an open museum focusing mainly on the stone and iron ages.

The battle stood between the Christians and the Vikings. (And there are *battles* at Krigslive, which translates as "War Larp"). This was a big change of the setting which prior to 2012 always has been a Warhammer-setting but for General (and goddess Freya) Ann Kristine Eriksen, it was a welcome change.

"Personally I welcomed the change of setting and scenery. I prefer to make new equipment and gear for each year so the change from Warhammer to Icelandic Saga was fine. Overall there were some protests against the new setting

and the fact that Krigslive was moved from Jutland til Zealand, but no more than usual."

Claus Raasted interjects. He's one of the two organizers behind this year's Krigslive and he felt that there were quite a few protests.

"As an organizer I took contact to a lot of the disgruntled groups and heard their critique, but that's ok. There's always going to be objections and disappointment when you do an event where change is a part of the game. And that's just something you have to live with. If Krigslive was the very same from year to year, you would hear fewer objections, but the creative people and the creative energy would soon leave the larp. The objections and discussions are a good thing! We learn from the discussions. If everybody just shrugged



their shoulders and went 'Meh, its fine. Just like last year' the whole point of doing something creative would be gone," Claus says.

Well deserved critique

"One of the consequences of changing Krigslive from year to year is that there really needs to be a lot of focus on communication. Nobody can assume that it's 'just like last year'. That's something I've personally learned from being a general

this year. I didn't have enough focus on communicating before the game took place and I've gotten some well deserved criticism for that," Ann says.

Communication and press was something that was top-of-mind for Claus as an organizer. One of Claus' missions with this year's Krigslive was to get it out in the public. He doesn't try to hide his motives and says that for a man that makes his living doing it's pretty important to get attention and good press. This year it was possible for audience members to attend Krigslive. Since it took place at a museum it was a obvious choice to let in the public as audience.

And again this change was met with some criticism, as was Claus' focus on



getting reporters to cover the game. Quite simply some of the players felt that the public, the reporters, and the photographers were in the way.

Try something different

Claus and Ann agree that the change from Warhammer to Iceland was about getting the participants to try out new things. Personally Ann loves to create new gear for Krigslive.

“When playing in the Warhammer setting it’s almost always about the Empire. I agree that the Empire is fucking cool and there’s a good basis for creating really cool Empire gear. But then again... If we always play in the Warhammer setting and if the Empire always is a part of Krigslive then we could just as well be part of a campaign,” Ann says.

Claus smiles. “Yeah, and you just loves campaigns!”

Ann answers: “I think campaigns are boring and stagnating. One of the cool things about Krigslive is showing up and seeing what people have thought of this time. Being amazed at a group’s new armour. Or a whole new group in brilliant, new uniforms. A carnival would be pretty boring if people showed up in the same costumes year after year. At Krigslive there’s always something new. It’s about seeing and of course being seen. Showing off. The group that shows up in the same gear three years in a row doesn’t get the same attention the third year as they did the first,”

“In one way I missed the Warhammer setting though. The Icelandic setting was a bit lacking in colour. With the Empire there’s always a LOT of colour and I kind of missed that,” she says.

And the colours will be back for next years Krigslive. It’s back to good old Warhammer and once again the Empire will let all it’s colourful banners fly.















THE 24-HOUR LARP DESIGN

There are costuming, fighting, prop building and role-playing workshops to improve larp play, but few activities to improve design. Here's a contest to exercise larp design techniques. It's for both novices and veterans eager to play god.

TEXT | AARON VANEK

SETUP

This works best with at least one person handling administrative duties and management needs, but it's not required.

You'll need a room big enough for all your participants to move around in. Tables and chairs for all are nice, too. Everything happens in this location. Start with a workshop explaining what is going to happen at this event. If you want to have additional "what is larp?" material, or a talk focusing on an aspect of larp relevant to the challenge, feel free to do that as well.

TEAMS AND COACHES

Next, break up those willing to design into equal teams. You can do this randomly or

have them with friends, whatever works. Three is a good number of total teams, as each team will run a larp. And three to five per team is a fairly good amount.

Each team needs one coach, preferably a veteran larp designer. Coaches advise and encourage their respective team on their larp design. Coaches should do everything they can to ensure the larp is run, but it is critical that the coach allows the teams to exercise their own creativity. Coaches should bring the best out of their team, not use the team to insert their own design. If a team is headed into a larp minefield, warn them (repeatedly), but if they persist, let them go and be prepared to offer alternative suggestions later.

Teams should meet their members, discuss their experience in larping, and then choose which coach they want. In the event of a tie, the administrator should be the final arbiter. Or use boffer combat or rock paper scissors.

SECRET INGREDIENTS

Each team will have three elements they must include in their larp. These elements should be revealed after the teams and coaches have paired up. Possible selection options are to have a large list of ingredients and each team picks one (but all teams have to include all ingredients chosen). Or, they can be drawn from a hat. Or the administrator can simply assign



Live Game Labs (livegamelabs.com)

Live Game Labs is a consortium of some twenty-odd (yes, odd!) experienced LARP designers in the Greater Los Angeles area. Many of the members have strong historical associations with Enigma, the UCLA speculative fiction, fantasy, horror and gaming club, which independently ‘invented’ the idea of live role-playing games in the late 1980’s. Live Game Labs used to be “Enigma Live Game Labs”, but have forged ahead with their own identity. Live Game Labs says about themselves that they were by no means the first, but their live games (as they called our LARPs before the word LARP even existed) have evolved in their own way.

them. However, do not let the teams contribute any of the ingredients; let them deal with what is given to them, not what they can come up with for an ingredient.

DESIGN

Teams and coaches now have 24 hours to design a larp using all three of the ingredients. Teams can relocate to their homes, or a library, or stay in the main location, or wherever there is privacy and working materials such as a computer, printer, and Internet connection. Coaches and teams can work as closely or as distantly as they like. For the Live Game Labs production, coaches willingly left their teams alone after about ten hours of consultation.

THE LARPS

All teams need to have their larps completed 24 hours after the ingredients are revealed; though random lottery determines the order the larps are run.

The larps should be run in the same meeting space where they began. Teams need to set up the room and clean up for the following team. Setup and cleaning should not be part of the time limit. Each team and coach should participate in each other’s larp, but additional “judges”

are likely needed. Plan on recruiting other folks just to play. It would be nice for all teams to know how many players will be attending, but how often do we have an accurate prediction of player attendance?



Everyone should play all larps created, which can make for a long day. Two hours is the ideal time for these larps..

Everyone should play all larps created, which can make for a long day. Two hours is the ideal time for these larps, including team intro and explanations. With three teams, it’s six hours of larping. Adjust your team count and larp length to fit the schedule. Be sure to include breaks for meals, setup and cleaning. Try to run all larps consecutively. There is nothing wrong with having a larp end before two hours, but they should be stopped at two

Secret Element categories

- A certain character or character type, like the Trickster, Emperor Norton, or Tom Bombadil.
- A specific prop provided by the administrator, unless it’s a common item that can be easily obtained, like a glass of water, a train ticket, a blinking light.
- A theme or genre, e.g., comedy, drama, horror, political, etc.
- A particular setting, e.g., Renaissance Italy, the Fourth Circle of Hell, a Mars base, etc.
- For advanced challenges an ingredient could be a song—teams take inspiration from the lyrics, the artist, the structure, or the time period the song refers to. Think “Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds” by the Beatles, “Cross Road Blues” by Robert Johnson, or “Faai De Oaid” by Tool. What would happen if you asked a team to make a larp featuring a weather report for this day in your city twenty years ago, a Buddhist koan, and a position from the Kama Sutra? The purpose is to get designers to exercise their creative organs and realize that muses for live action role-playing frolic everywhere.
- The first Live Game Lab 24-hour larp design had the following three ingredients chosen by organizer Alejandro Komai: an engineer, a deck of cards, and zodiac. Some teams used a regular playing card deck, another used a Tarot deck. Two teams used the Babylonian zodiac, one used the Chinese zodiac. None featured the Zodiac Killer from the late 60’s, early 70’s in San Francisco, but they could have.

hours regardless of where they are in the narrative. If something is really good and should be longer, run it again, later.

Foam weapon combat is not recommended for this challenge, though if you have the equipment, location and people willing to participate, go for it.

Teams can bring in additional matériel to their larp such as costumes or props, but a cap on either the cost and/or time involved to make it should be imposed: let teams exercise their design skills, not their prop building ones. A good rule of thumb is the larp they create should be able to be run cheaply by another group in another country. That prevents unique, expensive items from being used unless a team is willing to ship that item freely to others.

JUDGING

If your participants are competitive, you should have extra players who are also impartial judges—not the teams or coaches—rank and comment on each team's larp. Suggested categories to rate are narrative, production, use of ingredients, mechanics, fun and originality. Feel free to have your own criteria. Judges should have time to write notes about

each game, but they shouldn't rank them or assign numbers until they have played all of them.

DEBRIEF AND WRAP

If there is time for comments after each larp, feel free to have some, but there might not be until the end, when all larps should be discussed, compared and contrasted. If you have judging, allow the numbers to be tallied and if you have prizes dish them out here.

Questions, comments, etc., should be handled during this time—meals and booze beneficial but not mandatory. Did the teams learn anything? What was the easiest part? The most difficult? The most surprising? The most confusing? How were the coaches? Why did the teams make the decisions they made? What would they do differently if they had to do it again? What did they notice about designing and running a larp? All these things and more should be verbalized. Written reports and recounts are helpful afterward.

Finally, teams willing to share their larps should have the opportunity to do so, whether at a convention or via a website. ■



Did the teams learn anything? What was the easiest part? The most difficult? The most surprising? The most confusing? How were the coaches? Why did the teams make the decisions they made? What would they do differently if they had to do it again? What did they notice about designing and running a larp?

**YOU THOUGHT IT
WAS JUST A
JOKE...**



YOU WERE WRONG...

5 THINGS WE LIE ABOUT IN LARP

Larp is for everybody, larp is safe, larp is awesome. These are all things we tell ourselves without critically examining them. But we are wrong. We lie to each other about the thing we love the most. We need to look at all aspects of larp again and again, so things do not get stuck in the rut of habit. Only by critically examining every aspect of larp, even the difficult or embarrassing stuff, will we move forward and gain knowledge about making better larps and get better at larping them.

TEXT | BJARKE PEDERSEN

#1: THE ROLE-PLAYING AGREEMENT

What happens at a larp, stays at a larp. This was one of the first things I was told when I started larping: You were not allowed to be angry at a player after a larp because of what that player's character had done in the larp. This is one of the ways we build alibi to larp together. By agreeing to this we can trust our fellow larps not to make us accountable for our character's actions. Makes sense, doesn't it?

But, unfortunately, it is not true. Profound experiences lead to profound relationships. We have all experienced the phenomenon of playing with a stranger who, because of the game experience, has become a new friend, lover, or business partner. Of course we are affected by the actions of the characters around us, as players and as human beings. We call this bleed. And with games designed specifically for bleed, we cannot continue to say it doesn't affect us.

But what should we do about this? I firmly believe we will be better off if we stopped telling this lie, and agreed that it

is perfectly OK to be affected by the characters and players around us. We should also agree that it is perfectly OK to talk about the time in the larp where we were happy, in love, hateful, scared, horny, hurt or angry. It takes guts, trust and cooperation to have a completely open dialogue about these things, but it is one of the things that will make larp move forward in the years to come.

#2: WE OWN IMMERSION

Immersion has been a goal for most larps for more than a decade. It is one of the things we as larps brag about the most: how we were so immersed in our characters. And time and time again I have heard about how larp is the best way to immerse ourselves. Nothing compares to the tangible immersion we can create from larping. Nothing does it like larp. We believe we have some kind of patent on the highest levels of immersion. Again, this is not true. Let me give an example:

I have a female friend who played *Dragon Age: Origins* intensely. At the end of the game she had courted Alistair, the bastard prince of Ferelden, and he had promised her they would get married and she would be queen. But at the last battle

he sacrificed himself so she could live. My friend cried for three days over the loss of her lover. She told me she cried more over the loss of the fictive boyfriend than she had over some real world ones.

We do not own immersion.

But what does this mean? Plain and simple, we need to get off our high horse and look into other fields for knowledge and understanding of immersion. We should look to tabletop role-playing, performance art, religious ceremonies, interaction design, theatre, and beyond.

#3: WE CAN LARP ANYTHING

I have always been told that the larp community is open to everybody, and everybody can play any character—that personal restrictions do not apply to larp. This is of course not true. We all have limitations, limitations we cannot do anything about. It can be our intelligence, charisma, appearance, sex or physical fitness. But, most important of all, we need interpersonal attraction to be able to larp together. Interpersonal attraction is the attraction between people that leads to friendships and romantic relationships. Without elements like friendship, trust, mental intelligence, social intelligence and sexual attraction we would not be able to larp together. You probably know somebody who, if they sign up to a larp, will ensure that you don't go. Simply because that person is there, you will not larp well, or maybe not even be able to larp at all. I know I have experienced this.

This might be taboo to talk about, but we need to get past that and start discussing how we can design for this. How can we get around our own and others' limitations so that we can make better larps?

#4: WE KNOW SAFETY

The Kutt//Brems (Cut/Break) system has been the Nordic scene standard on safety for more than a decade (see the Nordic Larp Wiki for an in-depth description). The system works perfectly when it is activated, but it rarely is. We have grave problems using the safety words. There is a multitude of reasons for this. We are not trained enough, we forget to use them, or we have too much adrenaline in our system to act. But most importantly it is because of this: The first rule of larp is NEVER BREAK THE GAME! It is very difficult to break the game because we do not want to ruin other people's experiences, or our own.

There is a lot of prestige in being a "hardcore gamer" who can take anything. This leads to stupid choices where we go places we shouldn't have. We really need to train players in using the stop words before the system is completely broken. OR. We really need to train players in using the safety words because the system is not completely safe. We need to work on this.

#5: WE ARE PROGRESSIVE

We think we in the Nordic Larp Community™ are progressive. That we KNOW larp and we are at the forefront of what we can do with the medium. But this is a lie. We are at the forefront, but we could do so much more. The key to moving forward is iterations. The more we larp, talk, design and test aspects of larp, the more we move forward. If we do not look at the history of larp we will keep repeating mistakes designers made years ago. How many larps did you attend last year? How many larps have you designed and executed in the last three years? Not that many, right?

Only by continuously testing and sketching can we move forward and evolve. We need to make room for experimentation. Places such as Laivfabrikken understand this. By making smaller larps every month, they get a lot of iterations and this evolves our medium much faster than big larps that come along every other year.



I dare you to create more larps and play more larps. Try stuff you not normally would attend. Challenge yourself. Do not be afraid to fail. By failing comes insights and you will become better faster.

the nordic

What can American larpers learn from the Nordic tradition? Aaron Vanek has asked several prominent American larpers this question and explores the possibilities.

TEXT | AARON VANEK

The Grœnlendinga Saga and the Saga of Erik the Red suggest Nordic warriors landed in North America more than a thousand years ago. The Vikings didn't stay in Vinland for long. We have only an oral legacy, transcribed in the 13th century, to ruminate on their lasting effects.

The Nordic Invasion of America in the late 20th and early 21st century, however, is being recorded, and its impact will endure. The Nordic Larp invasion, that is. Though it's not really an invasion if there's an invitation—some American larpers want the Nordics, but all U.S. larpers need to be Nordic larp-raided at least once.

The difference between larps in America and Norway, Sweden, Finland or Denmark is really only apparent at the tip of the spear. Most of our larps are fantasy foam combat campaigns or World of Darkness. My unscientific ballpark figure of larps in America comes to 60% fantasy, 30% vampire, and 10% Other. The last category includes zombies, Cthulhu Mythos, apocalypses, westerns, science fiction, conventions, freeform, and even a few events that would not be out of place in Northern Europe. But Other is growing in the United States, and that's where we could use some Nordic Larp style pillaging.

What we are missing most in America, in my opinion, is the desire to take risks in our larps.

We speak no Americano

This retreat from novelty occurs both with players and designers/GMs. Players in the States rarely break out of their own larp style, whatever that may be. Few are willing to take a chance, especially if it costs money, on something that they aren't already familiar with. Ergo, because fantasy foam combat campaigns are so popular, they continue to be popular. That's what people know. As H.P. Lovecraft wrote, "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." If a U.S. larp isn't a Tolkien-barfed-up bofferer or the vestigial twin of an Anne Rice-Peter Murphy love child throwing rock-paper-scissors with its flipper claw, it's unknown, and therefore untrustworthy and unsupported. Even the larp conventions Intercon and Wyrd Con risk ridicule if they sail too far from proven shores. New routes are being mapped, however. Live Game Labs (www.livegamelabs.com) is constantly experimenting with things like "The Game of Sunken Places", a larp about larping, or the 24-Hour Larp Design Workshop.

And the aforementioned cons are taking chances, e.g., there is a heavy component of Transmedia in the 2012 TriWyrd convention.

What's worse about this fear of the unknown is that many of our larp designers are afraid to experiment. Few GMs participate in different, multiple larps. Once a campaign has started, radical structural changes are nearly impossible—that would freak out the player base, likely causing a rift where one group of players splits off and follows the "Old School" style and rules. The only direction to go for larp campaign designers in America is further down the rabbit hole, accreting more bricks in the wall and rules in the book until they're completely cut off from any other sources of inspiration or rejuvenation. Some larp campaigns claw at their barriers by bringing in new designers and retiring old ones. But these folks are often drawn from within the ranks—people who are chewed like gum by the campaign until they lose their personal flavor and unique creativity. "Meet the new boss / Same as the old boss."

The words of the wise are Nordic

The content of these campaign larps, however, is usually high and varied. Sure, patterns and formula arise, such as the

invasion

How can Nordic larps help?

We need to interbreed (ooh baby). We need hybrid vigor to introduce new concepts and ideas into the American larp bloodstream. To do that:

- Nordic larpers need to run larps in America. Brody Condon has established a beachhead with his events Level Five and On Stellar Rays, both of which occurred at museums. Nordics can pair up with American designers, too, so there will be a DNA exchange between us. Maybe even some of the Americans' ideas will express themselves back in Scandinavia.
- Come over here and play our larps. See how they are different. Bring your method of play, your intensity, your foreignness. 99% of our larps always want new players anyway.
- Translate your larps into English and make them available to us online. Most American larpers are monolingual. Until we get the Spanish-speaking population larping, you'll have to switch the language for us. Don't be intimidated, your English writing ability is likely better than ours.
- If you can't travel over the pond, consider helping as our NPCs: a foreign correspondent posting in character to a larp's IC forum, Skyping as an Earth Republic diplomat on another planet, or making a mysterious late night phone call as a secret agent in Copenhagen. We welcome postcards, letters, packages, wraps with international postmarks, too.
- Run American larps in your country. We have some for free. Check out Mike Young's www.interactivitiesink.com, Alleged Entertainment (www.aegames.org), or the brilliant J Li's Shifting Forest parlour larps (www.shiftingforest.com). If you run American larps or play them, the second request is to write about them. In your review, compare them to Nordic style larps or larps in Scandinavia. And send the review to the GMs. Most American GMs can't stand criticism (or maybe just can't stand criticism from me), but occasionally a well-phrased outsider perspective, like a random arrow shot into the sky, can fall into the king's eye and change everything.

The above is my opinion. I asked a bunch of Americans who are familiar with the Nordic larp genre to present their wish list for the re-conquest of Vinland. This is what Yankees, Rednecks, Hipsters and Gringos want the Vikings to do to us.

QuestBoard™, the Craigslist for boffer larpers (it's an in-game notice of modules, or mods, the players can undertake for experience points or treasure, occasionally for plot reasons). It's the structure that's immutable. Unexpected sudden PC death, PvP, or fateplay won't appear in an American larp campaign unless they were brought up at the beginning.

The best way to see structural innovation in American larps is to look at single shot events. Using evolution as a metaphor, single-shot larps have a short lifespan and quick generational changes—mutations and adaptations can appear in them much sooner than in the long-lived campaigns.

*I'm a big fan of the Vi åker jeep approach to live action—structured freeform with lots of transparency, minimal staging, and small groups addressing generally mature themes. Let's see more of that kind of high-speed, low-drag play. A lot of the most interesting Nordic larp is deeply political, let's see more of that! Let's unapologetically treat the live action medium as art *and* make it more accessible! Let's be dangerous and transgressive. At the same time let's be boring and fearlessly mundane. This stuff clearly works in the Nordic countries and it's time to bring it over here.*

—**Jason Morningstar**, one of the leading figures in the indie table top RPG scene (Fiasco, Grey Ranks). Check out Bully Pulpit Games: www.bullypulpitgames.com

I'd love to see more emotional intensity and bleed in American larps. In my opinion, both of those factors are immensely helpful for creating larps that tackle serious issues, and for having players walk away from them thinking. In a medium where sets, special effects, and elaborate costumes can be extremely costly and difficult to pull off, emotional intensity is a great way to give players a truly visceral larp experience.

—**Nat Budin** of Alleged Entertainment, whose credits include A Garden of Forking Paths, inspired by jeepform and Jorge Luis Borges as well as The Last Seder, combining Jewish tradition with science fiction tropes infected by present day issues.

Nordic larpers can learn from Americans how to successfully switch between meta-game mechanics and immersive character interaction, whereas American larpers need to "steal" the Nordic larpers' attitude. The Nordic folk can be given the barest bones of a scenario and turn it into

a full-blown emotional epic with no need for a combat system or a referee. They're not in it to win it, but to make a truly moving first-person narrative for themselves and everyone else. But Americans (as well as the jeepform community) can also interrupt their first-person narrative with mechanics to spice it up in ways their role-playing cannot. What we need is a happy medium.

—**Evan Torner**, whose larp *Metropolis*, inspired by the Fritz Lang movie of the same name, was nominated for a Technical Achievement Award at Fastaval 2012.

Out of the many aspects of Nordic larp that I admire, I can identify a couple of practices that I think would directly improve the experiences of American larppers. Nordic larps often require extensive workshopping and debriefing. Role-playing games are rituals, requiring preparation in order to thoroughly enter the liminal game world and to properly transition back into our lives. Without establishing a comfort level amongst participants through lengthy, structured interaction before and after game, we miss out on opportunities to build community and reinforce the safety of the role-playing experience. While some American gaming groups hold informal pre- and post-game activities, organizers should institute formalized, mandatory workshops and debriefs and consider these activities an important part of the game itself.

—**Sarah Lynne Bowman**, author of *The Functions of Role-Playing Games: How Participants Create Community, Solve Problems and Explore Identity* and one of the leading American larp academics.

I think that focusing on ordinary, everyday characters rather than extraordinary heroes would drive innovation on the U.S. larp scene by shifting the focus away from

epic story lines and onto more realistic, emotionally-potent drama. By the same token, I'd love to see organizers facilitate more co-creation in their games by adopting pre-game workshops. To me, co-creation could transform the scene by moving it away from the more traditional producer/client business model. Co-creation represents an emotional (as opposed to a fiscal) investment, and I think that could prompt a sea-change in the themes the community deems playable.

—**Lizzie Stark**, author of *Leaving Mundania*, a Gonzo journalism look at larping. She also has a Nordic friendly larp blog: elizabethstark.com.

Finally, there are three concrete (or virtual concrete) things I have determined we need for Live Action Role-playing in America. If you Nordics can help us with this—Hell, even do one for yourselves that includes us—that would be, like, totally awesome.

- We need an international larp calendar, so we know what's going on when and where. Be aware that I am working on this.
- We need a larp census. How many of us are there on the planet, really?
- We need a free, easily searchable larp archive: what game was run where, who was the GM, what was the general plot, etc. We don't need a complete recap, an abstract is fine. I am more interested in knowing, for example, which larps use "hand on head" to represent Out of Game and which use "forearms crossed"? Who started that, when, where, etc.? A historical museum of larps could yield a wealth of information for the art form.

Whoops, I labeled larp an art form. I expect American larppers are dousing and lighting torches and grabbing their pitchforks. I see a few Nordics in the mob, too. I better open the gates to the Viking horde before it's too late. U-S-A! U-S-A! U-S-A! ■





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PLAYING WITH PLAGUE or Solmukohta 2012

TEXT | EVAN TORNER



“So why are you going to Finland?”

Such an obvious fucking question. Why wasn't I prepared for it? I had to answer it again and again for about a month among my fellow Americans. The real question was: “Why hadn't I chosen an effective response yet?”

“So why are you going to Finland?”

Well, I had to answer it somehow. Here are a few ways I took on the formidable challenge of summarizing Solmukohta to the lay observer, especially when I'd never attended one before.

1. “I’m going to a game studies conference.”

Since I'm an academic, this was my most handy escape route. Among those who take me seriously as a scholar (or pretend to, anyway, and God bless those people especially!) I wanted to make the dual impression of serious beard-stroking inquiries around obscure and ephemeral cultural artifacts (“How would Nietzsche have interpreted Pong?”) and a connection to the multi-billion dollar video games industry that has symbiotically blossomed into a titanic growth now colonizing the minds of our children and grandparents alike. I don't know if you've been paying attention, but the academic humanities are flat broke all across the globe, and we've now got to prostitute ourselves a little to the digital games industry so that we can continue to read Kleist in small, snobby seminars and judiciously contemplate that delicious moment when Penthesilea tears Achilles apart limb from limb in terms of the unbridled power seemingly exhibited by Napoleon's revolutionary armies in the early 19th Century. If we waddle in the World of

Warcraft a little, then we get to continue to explore esoteric questions about our past. Yay. “Game studies,” my advisor once told me, “appears to be the future of all our disciplines.” With this response, I wanted to wag my scholarly tail, perfumed with the gravitas and money of serious game research. But this answer didn't convey the real spirit of the thing, so I told my closer acquaintances...

2. “Oh, there's a kind of live-action role-playing retreat thing there called Solmukohta.”

I really called it a “retreat thing,” by the way. If they were insiders of the gaming hobby, I even uttered the guttural noise “larp” and then scanned their faces for a reaction. Would they cut all ties once they discovered I was one of those larppers, those freaks who run around in furry costumes with foam swords in the woods or wear goth make-up and pretend to be angst-y vampires? Would they understand? Well, whatever – I gradually have stopped giving a shit about what people think about me. This answer usually involved a brief



Yes, they knew it was a crazy (-awesome) Nordic larp convention. Yes, they knew it was where high-quality discussions of the hobby were happening.

Solmukohta

The annual Knutepunkt conference, first held in 1997, has been a vital institution in establishing a Nordic role-playing identity, and in establishing the concept of “Nordic larp” as a unique approach. Though the conference started out strictly as a Live action role-playing (larp for short) event, it has since embraced role-playing games in a more general fashion. Today the conference still has an emphasis on larp, but programs devoted to traditional tabletop role-playing as well as newer arrivals such as freeform are common.

A live action role-playing avant-garde movement, which pursues radical experimentation and the recognition of role-playing as a form of art, has been connected to the Knutepunkt conferences. The scope of the Knutepunkt conference has expanded rather rapidly over the last few years with participants showing up from numerous non-Scandinavian countries. Since about 2003 Knutepunkt has seen participants from USA, Germany, France, Italy, Russia, Estonia, Belarus, Belgium, the Netherlands, Israel, Czech Republic, United Kingdom and Austria, among others.

The next Knutepunkt - Knutepunkt 2013 - will be held in Norway.

description of the event based on hearsay and Internet surfing: Solmukohta was an annual 300-person role-playing study retreat that rotated through Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland and supposedly functioned

as a combination of global larp convention, drinking party, pop academic convocation, alumni reunion and adult sleepover. Having told the questioner all this, I let it sink in like a corpse into the bathtub gin of our ancestors. They would ask follow-up questions like “Are they covering your travel?” (No.) “Is there a lot going on in Nordic larp these days?” (Yes.) And “Okay, but why Finland?” (*sigh*) For these Americans, going abroad to role-play and talk about role-playing seemed a bit quixotic and strange. I mean, in this Internet age, why would one’s physical presence matter? (Umm... it’s larp?) Wasn’t the United States good enough for me? (No comment.) Of course, I also hang out with people who are in the know about the whole affair, hence the third response:

3. “To go to Solmukohta!”

... at which point beams of white-hot jealousy were emitted in my general direction. Yes, they knew it was a crazy(-awesome) Nordic larp convention. Yes, they knew it was where high-quality discussions of

the hobby were happening. Yes, they had an unavoidable lack of time, energy and/or money that prevented them from attending. But lo! I had street cred with at least a few folks, and I rolled around in it like a pig in...

Okay, the story behind the trip was pretty banal: I’d had friends who’d attended the Nodal Point events in the past, I had been to Fastaval and Mittelpunkt in 2010, had written an article for the 2011 Knutepunkt academic book on what larp documentaries could do to make me actually watch them in a serious way, and was strongly encouraged by larp research veteran Markus Montola (who’d I’d invited to the States earlier that year) to attend his RPIG seminar at Tampere and then Solmukohta afterward. To boot, my Metropolis scenario had been accepted to Fastaval 2012 and, what the hell, I could at least debrief with the gamemasters afterward. So there were lots of auxilliary reasons for me to attend, but maybe no good ones. Fuck it - I went anyway.

Cut to the curbside outside KIASMA in Helsinki, where all us hapless world travelers waited for buses to whisk us off to the Kiljavanranta school/lodge for four days of relentless sleep deprivation and manic socializing about larp: Solmukohta! I had



properly prepared for the event by staying up really late several nights with some folks who were downright ill after having stayed up late for too many nights at Fastaval over Easter weekend in Hobro, Denmark. Fastaval is a convention where some of the best role-playing scenarios are pitted against gamers who have been sleeping on a gym floor and eating dubious food prepared by their peers for several days.

Their sniffles, hacking coughs and near-lack of voice were drowned out, however, by the countless boastful tales about my trip I was already inventing in my head to tell all the folks back home (“And then I made out with a wombat dressed as a Nordic larper. He pulled out one of my fillings with his snout piercing!”) No way was illness going to become any kind of factor on my epic voyage into... okay, where the fuck is Kiljara, Finland really? Google Maps indicated it was some kind of spot out in the Finnish woods near a big frozen lake. It occurred to me, as my soles lifted from the Helsinki pavement onto the rented bus, that we were all departing from civilization straight to some upper circle of Hell, which Jean-Paul Sartre once described as “other people.”

Hell, as it turns out, is actually more like a lobby with an overloaded Internet connection. See, all the gamers were geeks, and had dozens of Android smartphones, tablet computers, laptops and one-click pornography devices to suck down WiFi signal like cheap cigarettes. The minute we all stepped into the lobby of this un-

suspecting lodge with its kindly old Finnish ladies and its meager digital pipeline to the outside world, all the Tweets, Check-Ins and Facebook Updates subjected it to our insurmountable online footprint. We all had to report to the rest of the world about this! As a result, nobody could really tell anybody on the Internet about much, and we suddenly were in an isolated retreat thing. How was I supposed to upload photos of my every waking moment, check to see if my students had uploaded their assignment on German subordinating conjunctions or, better still, get really angry that somebody was WRONG on the Story Games forum? This was not happening. My only consolation lay in a notebook that I had accidentally brought with me, which I now relied as my new external memory. I opened it up to a blank page and began to write:

“Solmukohta

2012

As an anagram: SMUTHO KAL

Observation: These larpers are pretty well-dressed for gamers.

Addendum: Maybe not THAT guy in the track suit.

(Fuck, I just ate dinner with him!)

((... and it was informative and quite pleasurable, actually!))”

Soon I found myself taking notes not only in my notebook, but also in my program and random handouts. And I found myself drinking while I took notes. But more about that later. For now, a description of the Kiljavanranta set-up to make all the kids at home jealous.

Accommodations: Dorm-style boarding school rooms, 3 souls a piece. I got the floor.

Food: 3 square meals a day at far-too-early times consisting of assortments of cab-

Evan Torner

Evan Torner is a Ph.D. candidate in German and Film Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst chronicling his dissertation research and other assorted projects.

Over the past years Evan has visited several Nordic conventions such as Knudepunkt and Fastaval.

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bage, rice casseroles, sauces to dump on them, and cider. This was about the only thing that kept me going through the retreat, besides...

Liquor: A bar served beer and hard drinks until about 1 a.m., when we had to switch to the alcohol that nobody was supposed to bring but everyone brought anyway just in case. So we had rum and coke on Thursday night, Russian vodka on Friday night, and fine port on Saturday night, all there to fuel our debauchery and impending public health disaster.

Entertainment: Sauna and pool with requisite nudity, clawing and biting. Also the panels and such, which were mostly in boring lecture halls and classrooms. Natch.

Held in a brightly lit gymnasium, the short opening ceremony informed us all that there would be condoms and painkillers available at the info desk, meaning of course that we were to intended to use these facilities to have headaches and sex. Then we were given characters for the J. Tuomas Harviainen's zombie larp, the "Solmukohta Flu." Basically, the objective was for us to kind of see what it was like to first be a human running away from zombies, then being a zombie, and finally being a dead zombie shot by the authorities. What it turned out to be was one big meta-level commentary on the disease that would tear through our ranks: healthy humans would become infected by the sick humans, and all the sick humans would then engage in behaviors (staying up late, drinking, naked wrestling) contrary to everyone getting better. The best

moment of the larp, it turned out, was that moment of recognition that our group had barricaded itself in, and would have to die and become zombies as a result.

Oh, but you probably wanted to know about the rest of the convention, don't you? Let me open up those notes, specifically for Thursday...

Ah! "Personalities on auto-pilot." You had Erik Winther Paisley whipping his already efficiently-run and on-topic panel "Nordic Larp 101" (Elin Nilsen, Emi Maeda, Marie Holm-Andersen, and Gustav Nilsson talking about larp in their home countries) to be even more efficient and on-topic. Eirik Fatland came up with one fucking PowerPoint slide that explained everything you'll ever need to know about larp design. Claus Raasted put on his flame-decorated macho shirt and then proceeded to sap the microphones of their energy for the weekend during the rants, which Osher El-Netanyahu had claimed anyway for the nation of Israel (I will immortalize his words here: "Grow the fucking up, Knudepunkt!"). Then a couple of Danish dudes pitched me some magazine called Playground and foisted champagne on me. Bottoms up! In effect, Solmukohta is filled with people who offer their controversial and/or charismatic presence alongside their ideas about larp, and you have to see them in action to believe it.

I woke up tangled in my sheets on Friday to find my

roommate Jason Morningstar in what you might call a "fiasco." He was sicker than a dog, and there wasn't a drop of liquor in him. Somehow, the Solmukohta Flu larp that he had excoriated at the previous night's rants had taken its revenge on him, so now he had to be a bed zombie. In the afternoon, I played this tragic organ transplant larp run in a version of *Playing with Intent* by Emily Care Boss and Matthijs Holter, and all I could think of was the running noses of half the people in the room as we watched the hospital patient commit suicide in the old family pond. When I played Mr. Groundhog in Martina Ryssel's 90 minute (or 90 hour) time-traveler gathering *A Matter of Time*, I felt old, weary and sick as a character. But then I cast nervous glances at my fellow larpers - were they actually old, weary and sick? Was I coming to Finland to catch a plague and, like Gustav von Aschenbach in *Mann's Death in Venice*, slowly die on vacation in a lawn chair?

The evening saw the "Don't Mention Ze War" party in the Design Lounge, where we all got fake German names and began to larp our false German identities. My suspicions of all the others were justified: they were sick, and they had secret Germans living inside of them just like I did. I promptly vacated the party, only to find myself in the middle of another one. It turned out that after 1 a.m., the Solmukohta parties became pervasive larps in which anyone's room and any random hallway were game.





Someone remarked how they'd like to write a larp or do a panel, but they were still working on their dissertation. Academics, it turns out, inhabit Solmukohta like fleas.

Not only was I seized at several different points to join these private parties, but some of them were going to what we Americans call "third base" right there in the hallway...

On Saturday morning, or 4 hours after I went to bed at 4 a.m., I saw the results of this pervasive "party" larp. Stolid Finnish cleaning ladies sweeping up vast piles of shattered glasses, spilled liquor, obscure party favors, and broken dreams. For any of you who wanted to gaze into the heart and soul of this convention, it could be found in the number of kindly middle-aged Finnish women who cleaned up after us, fed us, and made our lives comfortable. Hopefully we didn't get them all sick.

All the panels seemed to be leading somewhere, like a conspiracy that's gone to ground and is now laying bombs. Nobody wanted to hear about abstract theories anymore, everyone was looking for the sweet spot of edginess and marketability to expand their stagnant player bases and reach out to the mainstream. How could larps that already used innovative techniques be improved for foolproof deployment? How could we all become one expanding viral phenomenon beyond our pervasive plague? I helped Emily and Jason spread a little bit indie GM-less tabletop game love at a

morning session "Beyond the GM," which was designed to interest more Europeans in our product. Then Alex Fradera slapped a group of us into trance masks that tore away our souls

for several seconds as we became slobbering infants. Then Anders Karls had a group of us pretend we were trash, and my character – the piece of pocket fuzz – found contentment in a dark room filled with garbage bags attached to a lonely glove. The party that capped off the whole evening saw me wend my way through the corridors of Kiljavanranta, taking a swig of chili vodka over here, having a Bjarke Pedersen-style hug over there. And then insanity hit the Bleed Lounge at about 2 a.m., when the lights went down, the Daft Punk music came up, and the Solmukohtans collectively coughed, drank, laughed, danced, and staggered until the break of dawn. One only vaguely recalls the details that produced the five garbage bags full of sketchy trash that the kindly old ladies were sweeping up Sunday morning...

On the bus ride back to Helsinki, we debriefed about our favorite seminars and awkward groping experiences in the wan Finnish afternoon light. Claus recalled an epic Facebook debate about the sexism of the Dirtbusters at Fastaval, while Johanna MacDonald told us about Johan Lundby and Emma Wieslander's "Ars Martius" combat seminar that blew her mind, as well as the Just a Little Lovin' party that was so large it briefly ventured out onto the roof of the lodge. Parroting the kindly hotel

staff, I said: "I guess you'll have to pretend to die of AIDS indoors," which warranted a punch to my shoulder. (Thanks, Johanna!) We had all become siblings somehow, our comfort level among each other swelled to proportions not known to most people outside of high school. We knew we were headed back to our banalities and trivialities, and would soon have to be clinically sick alone, rather than as a large group.

Someone remarked how they'd like to write a larp or do a panel, but they were still working on their dissertation. Academics, it turns out, inhabit Solmukohta like fleas. When we're not larping concentration camp prisoners or incestuous war elves, many of us can be found bent over our publications, brow furrowed over the formatting of footnotes or over the next class' lecture. The idea then emerged that a larp series could be written by all the Ph.D. candidates attending next year's Knutepunkt in Norway about their dissertations. Strange proposals involving the enactment of subatomic proposals or homeless people abounded. I submitted my own: the larp has you play East Germans who then have to act in socialist science-fiction, musical and western films.

"But who would want to play in a larp like that next year?" I asked incredulously.

Arthur Swindells' hand shot up in the back of the bus.

And that's how I knew at that moment, despite pestilence and plague, sitting among these people was still the healthiest place in the world to be.

"So why did you go to Finland?"

That's why, bitches. ■



f o r u m

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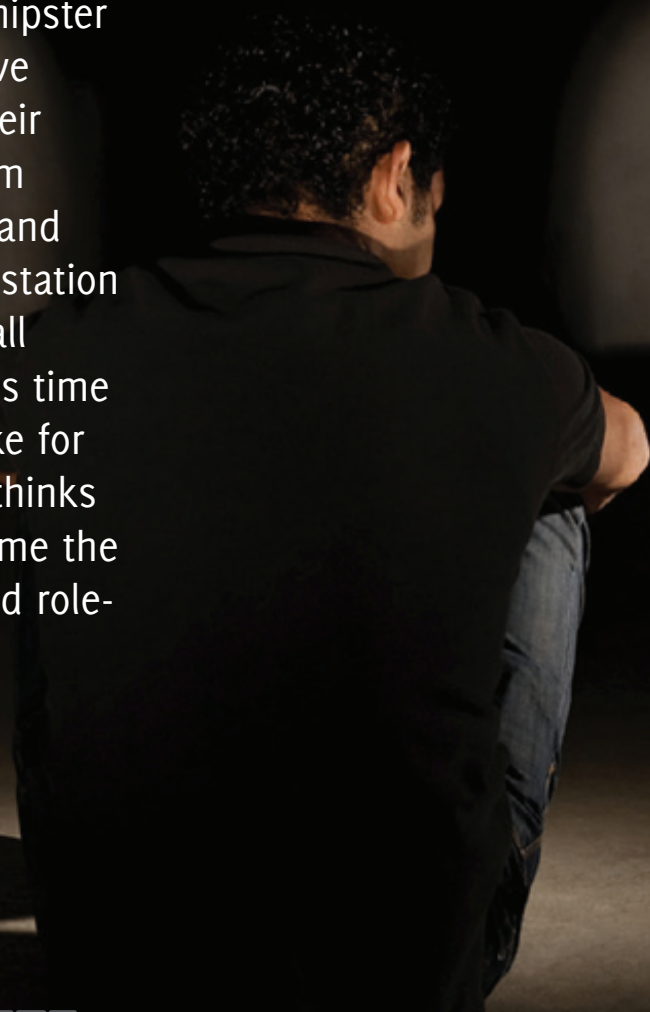
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How Bleed is Ruining Larp

TEXT | RASMUS HØGDALL

Bleed is killing larp. Why? Because hipster role-players have decided that their screwed up form of self-therapy and emotional molestation is the way we all should play. It is time somebody spoke for everyone who thinks bleed has become the downfall of good role-playing.



I wanted to join the Hardcore Players' Club: that group of people who have all experienced the heavy bleeding of the hip games. I, too, wanted to see the Nirvana of emotional rape, the Promised Land which edges itself into every conversation between the cool kids. But I seemed incapable of bleeding, either because I did not have the skill, or because a kind of psychological self-preservation held me back from immersing too deeply. And it did not disappear. Bleed continued to be the talk of the town. I needed to find the perfect game: the one game that could send me onto the path of becoming a Hardcore Player. One of US.

So I talked to people about Just a Little Loving, a larp that produced powerful bleed for many people I know. In one of those talks I was told that I am "a pussy" for not bulldozing my own limits and playing all-out flaming gay. I was told this by one of the most outspoken supporters of player safety, who just moments before had told a roomful of people to be extra careful and remember not to push their own limits. Even if it was a joke, it held a nugget of truth.

Right now the Hardcore Players are the hipsters of the larping community. And if there is one thing I cannot stand, it is being kept out of the cool kids club. However, I did not realize that what I chased so desperately was what I hated most. An idea spreading through our community had mutated bleed into some horrible disease,

slowly killing everything I found wonderful about larp.

But before I continue to explain why some of my fellow larpers are ruining larps, let me try to explain why bleedhunting is turning into a problem.

Bleed—a term that once explained emotional echoes between life and larp—has become perverted by emotional flagellants into a *Nouvelle Vogue* in our community. I do not mind that a player's life and emotions can be influenced by a larp: I am myself guilty of creating games like *Totem* and *Delirium* that have been central in fuelling the Bleedmobile. The main problem is not with the designers making emotionally dense larps, but with the new type of player who is heavily on the rise: The Bleedhunter.

Bleedhunters are players participating in larps so they can go through intense emotions. They often participate for this reason alone. However, like all other addicts, I am sure they will try to explain that there are tons of reasons for them to be playing a particular game besides the Bleed experience. Bleedhunters chase bleed because they think it is the essence of larp; they want games to be about their own private feelings and experiences; and they sometimes hunt bleed as a weird form of self-therapy. If you are running with the wild bunch in this day and age, you participate in games that will let you bleed—and then

you bleed as heavily as you can. In some cases, you even force it into games not suited for it, thereby bleed-bashing other players while chasing a self-absorbed dream of an orgasmic emotional epiphany.

Jeepform states: *Bleed is experienced by a player when her thoughts and feelings are influenced by those of her character, or vice versa. With increasing bleed, the border between player and character becomes more and more transparent. It makes sense to think of the degree of bleed as a measure of how separated different levels of play (actual/inner/meta) are.*

On top of this, the Bleed movement has gotten its own word; *Alibi*. *Alibi* is used to describe the players' ability to play together and being emotionally affected by it afterwards. *Alibi* is about being able to do horrid stuff "because it's just a game." It is not about the character's reason for interaction, but about the player's ability to find suitable partners for a Bleed relationship.

In my mind *Alibi* is a nasty way to dress up Bleedhunting into an accepted and reasonable way to play. As I see it, that is not what larping is about.

Participating in a larp is the same as be-

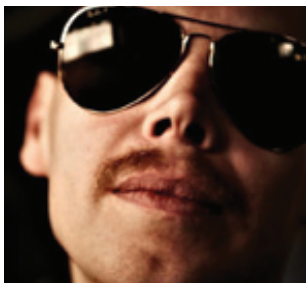


Bleeders do not play to win the game, but they are playing for a strictly private emotional experience

ing part of a short-lived community. While preparing, going to workshops, playing, and debriefing/defucking, you are part of a community consisting of your fellow participants. As in any community you want everybody to have a grand time. That is why the gamists are frowned upon: their playing style is about winning the game, not playing the game. Bleeders do not play to win the game, but they are playing for a strictly private emotional experience, making them just as unproductive for the collaborative experience as the gamists.

And playing the game is what larpers should be doing. We play the game for the magical experiences we can create between each other. We play for that moment nobody saw coming or thought possible. We reach these heights of gaming by collaborating on the fiction together and showing a lot of attention to each other's characters and playing style. The great larper is a person who has the skill to both embrace and build upon the fictional world, playing his role inside the thematic boundaries while giving and creating room for the other participants.

This takes a lot of preparation and effort, not unlike the way some actors prepare for their roles. You work hard to find the truth about your character, find his physical language and finally connect the character



Rasmus Høgdall

Been larping since 1993. Rasmus had his first experience as an organizer in 1996 with a larp about underwater vampires. It was a fiasco. He's been a part of larps like *Delirium* and *Totem* and has himself been promoting bleed, and now he would like to tell why bleed has become an unnecessary evil.



with yourself. The bleed an actor feels is during the preparation for the part, leaving him able to utilize his skill while performing and not breaking down while on stage. If an actor on stage still feels that the part is too close to home, he cannot perform because his mind is elsewhere. The same is true for larpers.

So let us get back to my nemesis—the Bleedhunter. He wants to play close to home. He attends these games with the best of intentions. I would not claim otherwise. He wants a great and magical experience. His only flaw is that he is an egotistical douche, because he wants a great and fun experience only for himself. The only time a Bleedhunter is actively giving something back is when he is playing with other Bleedhunters, creating the premise for a shared needle experience, giving each other a fix.

Bleedhunters typically attend games with one of two character types: he plays with a character based on his own personality instead of taking the time to prepare one. Or he prepares a character for bleed

by connecting it to his own personal issues, making the character with more holes than Swiss cheese. The Bleedhunter imagines that playing close to home makes everything OK. But in both cases the personal stuff will demand so much of his attention that he will not play with others except when he needs a new emotional fix shot straight into his heart and mind.

Bleed is hailed as the big thing by the Hardcore Players. They have created this hype that demands these types of malfunctioning characters, and gives players a freebie to play for their own private agenda instead of the collective experience. On top of that, when the game is done, I have to devote some of my time to talk things through, understand, and listen to the Bleedhunters' profound experiences and look as if I give a fuck. And since the hype has not lessened since last year, it is only fair to assume that Bleedhunting will keep gaining momentum and more and more players are going to become Bleedhunters.

We have to change this. We really have to do something about the hype and get

back to talking about Bleed as a by-product and not the reason for playing. Because the more Bleedhunters we have participating in a game, the more unprepared or self-absorbed the community will be. And if this is not enough, all the rest of us—those that prepare and never bleed more than could be expected—have to carry the game on our shoulders. And not just carry the game: we also have to feed the Bleedhunters' addiction for Bleed, while they give little or nothing back.

So just think about it. Are you a Bleedhunter, or one of the good guys? I don't think that our community will suffer in any way if these leeches get burned off and thrown away. I am quite sure that I and most other larpers will get better experiences while playing if this happens. We as a community have to look at the way we play and what kind of playing style we choose to praise. Right now we have chosen a playing style that offers less play and more self-therapy. Is this really what we want?

I don't. ■



JUST A LITTLE LOVIN'

"1982: It was the summer AIDS came to New York City"




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just-a-little-lovin.blogspot.com

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A photograph of a dilapidated building with a view of the sea and mountains. The building's structure is partially destroyed, with exposed concrete and metal beams. A red tarp is draped over a pile of debris on the right. A clothesline with laundry hangs across the middle ground. The background shows a body of water and distant mountains under a cloudy sky.

We hid on the mountains until the next day
and then returned to the village because we were too hungry.
My mother went from shop to shop telling our story and asking if she
could ring to one of the people she knew in Bagdad. After a number of calls
and hours of waiting we found out that my brothers had friends who had connections
in the village. We meat an old shop keeper who helped us back to Bagdad.
Later we heard that the ones that had stayed in the trucks had been killed.

Qachakhchi picked us up in the night. Fresh air caressed my lungs.
Again we were seated in the back of the truck and the journey continued.
For four days I cried silently and tried to get myself to fall asleep. Gasoline smelled
and it was possible to separate nights from days by the changeing temperature. We were let out
of the truck somewhere at the harbour area. It was the fist time that I had ever seen the sea.

A cartoon illustration of a man with spiky orange hair and glasses, looking to the right. He is wearing a red shirt. The background is a dark blue wall with some lines.

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