

# PLAYGROUND

THE NEW WAVE IN ROLE-PLAYING • ISSUE #7 • 2012

**SIMULATED SEX - TESTED TO THE LIMIT**

**SNAPDRAGON - PLAYING WITH FIRE**

**CHARLIE TODD CLOSE UP**

SEE YOU IN THE SPOTLIGHT?



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COPENHAGEN. 5-7 OCTOBER. 2012  
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## Never tell me the odds!



k, so it's cheesy to open with a Han Solo quote, but still – you recognized it, right? And the reason you did (and if you didn't, you need to watch *The Empire Strikes Back* again), is because what started as a movie in 1977 has since spread to become a huge and crazy phenomenon that's more or less an industry of its own. No one knew that *Star Wars* would take off the way it did, just like Gary Gygax didn't have a clue in 1974 that when he passed away (which happened not too long ago, sniff) he'd be mourned by millions and millions across the globe. What were the odds of that happening?

And every time someone tells me "...don't take it seriously", "it's just a hobby", "larp will always be for weird nerds", I think of *Star Wars* and D&D. While this of course sometimes leads to surreal daydreams about Chewbecca rolling d20s with R2-D2 instead of playing something chess-like, it mostly leads to me smiling and telling them that I disagree.

Because I can remember when people thought we were satanists. I can remember when I had friends who lied to their parents about what they did with their weekends. And I can remember the social stigma it gave to say that I ran around with strange-looking round boffer weapons beating the crap out of my friends while pretending to be an alchemist.

That was in 1993. We're closing in on 2013 and things have changed more than I'd ever have thought possible. When things were booming the most in Denmark (around 2006-2007) you could buy larp weapons in supermarkets. Supermarkets! And not three weeks ago, there was an excellent (and very sober) piece on Danish primetime news about a larp inspired by the peacekeeping effort in Iraq.

Contrast that to last week where I played in an American larp and talked with some of the local larpers there. The difference in outlook was staggering. A guy told me about lying to his (now larping) fiancée about what he did at weekends. Another told a story about how his ex-girlfriend had broken up with him when she found out what he actually did when he went "camping".

I remember when we were there. But we're not anymore and in time, hopefully neither will they be. And whenever someone tells me that we can't progress further than where we are now, I smile at them. Because while where we are now is a much better place than where we were 20 years ago, there's still a long way to being considered the equals of theater, movies and other forms of culture. I'm convinced we'll get there. In time. And if you think I'm wrong, I have only one thing to say to you.

*Never tell me the odds.*

- Claus Raasted





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## Get to work!

**E**arlier this year I attended a panel debate. The tough task left to the panel was this: How to communicate about larp to a mainstream audience? As far as I remember, the only thing people could more or less agree on was this: Make more games!

Over the years, I've heard various versions of "just make more games" as the answer to a whole lot of different problems. How to get more players, how to get more funding from institutions, how to make better role-playing games and the list goes on. Create a flourishing scene – and milk, honey, government funding and gender equality will rain down from the skies.

That last part sounds a bit sarcastic. Well – maybe it is not. Maybe it really is that straight forward. But you'll need players. And you can't wear them out. Then what about all the other great games? So all we have to do is this: Make a lot of well promoted, high quality, easily accessible games. Great! Now get to work.

I'm not insinuating that you should reduce quality to increase quantity, so just relax. Even though that might be one way of doing it. Designing for work minimization (for both organizers and players) is not always a bad thing looking at the bigger picture. But who am I kidding. Your game has to live up to your expectations right? It has to be all that it can be.

It is probably not going to. Why? Because it is bloody hard to predict player behavior and design accordingly – but also because we all too often design a role-playing game, play it, and move on. Is playtesting even a part of your plan? How about a rerun or two? My impression is that most people in the Nordic neck of the woods suck doing this. The book *Nordic Larp* documents 30 larps (and congratulations on the Diana Jones Award to all its creators!). 23 of those have only been played once. Sure it is difficult given the nature of a lot of role-playing games. Especially the big larps. But it is also difficult to document them and we are getting pretty good at that. I think it's a shame that we suck at this. There are two redeeming factors though. One is that it looks like we are getting better at doing reruns. The other has been our saving grace so far. It is our will to document, discuss and share our experiences. And that is why the people crying out for more games are right. The more we try, the more we play, the more we share, the better we get. It really is that simple. So let's make more games happen.

*Kasper Friis Hansen*



■ *Kasper Friis Hansen*



■ *Claus Raasted*



■ *Lars Nøhr Andresen*



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## The Great Nordic War 300 years later

In 2015, it's going down. No, really, man... it's goin' DOWN! Because 2015 is the year when the grand Danish/Swedish larp Arvsvienden will be held, and that's going to be one spectacle you don't want to miss. Featuring a seven-digit budget number (but remember, it's Swedish money, so don't be that impressed), an organisation chart that would put most bureaucracies to shame and a shitload of ambition, we're quite sure that Arvsvienden is something we'll hear more about.

[granland.se/arvsvienden\\_upd.pdf](http://granland.se/arvsvienden_upd.pdf)

## Don't spiral out of control!

By the time you hold this magazine in your hands, the interactive Belgian/Swedish/Dutch/ even-more-than-that TV series "The Spiral" will have launched. But why is that good news for us? Well, for one thing, some of the people behind the series are Nordic larp veterans Martin Ericsson and Adriana Skarped, and that's freakin' awesome (it's totally transmedia, so we can use that kind of language). But that isn't all. Several other Nordic larpers not only help make the online interaction of The Spiral come alive, but some of them (us) are also on screen in the series. Kasper even has a line!

Last, but not least, producer Peter de Maegd was so happy with using larp as part of his production that he said he'd do a larp before all his next TV shows as a kind of "actors' bootcamp". Yeah, yeah, he was drunk and happy at the time, but who knows - maybe it'll happen. At any rate, we at Playground are really looking forward to seeing how The Spiral will turn out. Oh, and watch for Kasper, who might actually have lines in the final production.

[thespiral.eu](http://thespiral.eu)



## From Eastern Europe (or Denmark?) without love

*"Maybe one player must get up early, watch brave Croat footballers have glorious 2-0 victory with no precedent over treacherous Serbian ballmen".*

This is a line from the manual for 6 page manual, a re-runnable larp (more or less) that we want to share with you.

Ok, so we've gotten this tip about a French game that's a translation of a Danish game. Or wait a minute. It might actually be a (really bad) English version of a Danish game that was originated in Eastern Europe. Maybe Poland. Or maybe not. Maybe it's a Danish game all along. Or maybe it isn't. Nobody really knows what it is, and by skimming it one doesn't become any wiser. We didn't, that's for sure! But take a look.

[miserystourism.com/6pagemanual.pdf](http://miserystourism.com/6pagemanual.pdf)

# Bleed actually works

Of course we've known this for quite some time, but now via roundabout routes, people with academic credentials are getting there.

*Researchers at Ohio State University examined what happened to people who, while reading a fictional story, found themselves feeling the emotions, thoughts, beliefs and internal responses of one of the characters as if they were their own - a phenomenon the researchers call "experience-taking." They found that, in the right situations, experience-taking may lead to real changes, if only temporary, in the lives of readers.*

Such are the words of Jeff Grabmeier, who works with Lisa Libby, who's one of the people behind the study and also has the title of assistant professor of psychology at Ohio State University.

Sure, Libby and her colleagues are talking about written fiction, but if reading things can alter behaviour, then living them sure as hell can do it too. Yeah, yeah, we know, this is new to you, our readers, but it's still nice every time someone else stumbles upon one of our dogmas and finds it correct.

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[.osu.edu/archive/exptaking.htm](http://osu.edu/archive/exptaking.htm)

## Norwegian Girl-Only Convention coming up

"Are you the only girl in your role playing group? Always wondered how it would be to play role-playing games with only girls? Considered trying to be a game master, but not quite dared or gotten around to it? Then JenteCon 2012 is for you!"

That's how the organizers of the Norwegian JenteCon 2012 write on their web site and though none of us here at the Playground editorial staff can go (is it discrimination? nah, not really, but that's a whole 'nother discussion), we think it's awesome. And why isn't it as awesome to do a "GuyCon 2012"? It might be, except for the fact that we of the hanging items are still very much a majority in most larping circles. Except in Finland, but that's a weird country anyway. Long story short, we think it's cool that JenteCon 2012 is happening, even though we can't go.

[jentecon.wordpress.com/info-in-english/](http://jentecon.wordpress.com/info-in-english/)

## Mad about the boy crossed the Atlantic

"Mad About the Boy is a larp about survivors of a global disaster that killed more than half of humanity; an inexplicable disease killed everyone with a Y chromosome in mere minutes. The surviving women face not only the enormous task of rebuilding society, but also the possible extinction of humanity."

MAAtB (which no-one calls it and for good reason) is one of the more talked about Nordic larps of the last years and now it's coming to the U.S. of A, where Lizzie Stark (of "Leaving Mundania" fame) is organising it. And is there controversy about hosting an all-female (and one male, not to be forgotten) larp in the U.S? You bet.



[lizziestark.com/2012/07/26/mad-about-the-boy-sign-up/](http://lizziestark.com/2012/07/26/mad-about-the-boy-sign-up/)



# New larp reality show

“Realm of Larp” is the name of this American production and if you want an idea of how many American larps are, this is a must-see. Production value is so-so, and the weird factor is high, but the sheer level of immersion and spirit the cast of the show put into their larping is wonderful to behold. Beware, this is NOT 360 illusion territory, and

you’ll either love it or hate it. But don’t miss it. The format is 10-minute episodes and they’re available for free on the web site and also on youtube. Oh, and next issue of Playground we’ll have an in-depth interview with some of the people in and behind the show. Look forward to it!  
[worldoflarp.net](http://worldoflarp.net)



## Conquest of Mythodea to reset after next year

It’s easily the biggest larp in the world, with around 10.000 participants and has been called the Las Vegas of larp for good reason. We’re talking about the German mega-larp Conquest of Mythodea of course, and if you haven’t already been there, you should go next summer. Why, you ask? Well, if you’re thinking that the larp equivalent of Las Vegas isn’t wild enough, think how it’ll be when they round off an epic 7 (or is it 8?) year storyline with a huge bang and reset the campaign. As they say on the web site: “See you in Mythodea!”

[live-adventure.de](http://live-adventure.de)



## A New larp web comic

Where it's from is unclear, but this small, nifty piece of weirdly-drawn, only-for-the-initiated humor is about a form of larp that's quite different from Nordic larp. Which makes it both interesting and funny. Take a look.

[howtolarp.larping.org/size-matters/](http://howtolarp.larping.org/size-matters/)



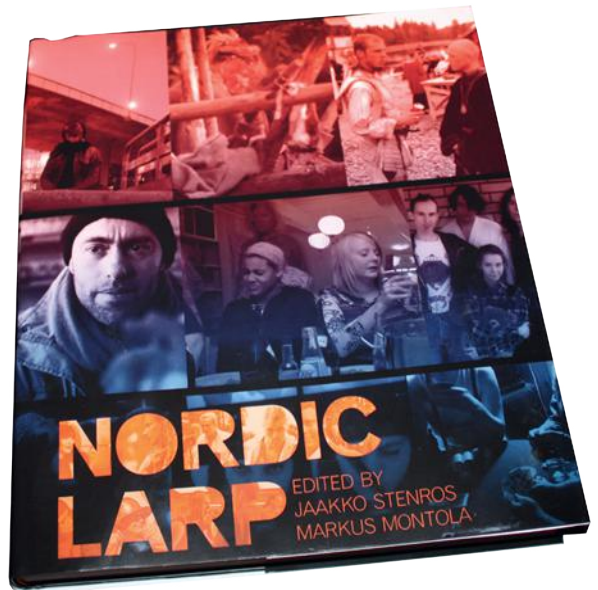
## American children larps exist!

They don't call it larp (of course not, in the U.S larp is frowned upon and these guys reek of success), but it most definitely is. Padded weapons, monsters and good vs evil fights where you learn something you can take back with you into your "real" life? Oh, yes, it's there and it's apparently quite popular. There are even some excellent - if not very pretty - videos on their web site. And is it larp under another name? You betcha. And it's amazing.

[guardup.com/](http://guardup.com/)



## Nordic Larp wins Diana Jones award!



Some of you are probably unaware what it is, but it so happens that one of the most prestigious awards in gaming today is called the Diana Jones award (named for Indy, not some unknown gamer chick). And this year, it was won by none other than the Nordic Larp team. Are we happy about that? Damn right, we are!

Markus Montola and Jaakko Stenros, who are the editors of the book, had the following to say about it:

"We were super-excited about being nominated, but did not at all expect to win; for a non-American thing just to get nominated is a big deal. We also did not have the funds to attend the award ceremony at Gen Con. We did, however, write an acceptance speech on the off chance that we'd win. Because how often do you have a chance to write an Oscar speech in your life?"

Congratulations, guys. And also congratulations to Tommi Kovala, Anders Hultman and Anna Westerling, who took care of the layout and production of Nordic Larp, and all the people who contributed to the book in smaller ways. This is indeed an epic win!

On a funny sidenote, it turned out that amongst the around forty thousand people at GenCon, there existed only ONE (1!) who had a Nordic Larp book. Who, you might ask? Lizzie Stark.

[dianajonesaward.org](http://dianajonesaward.org)



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**- Matilde, 9 years old  
latex warrior**

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## Improv Everywhere - BUST or BLAST at Roskilde 2012?

Playground had a talk with Charlie and Cody from Improv Everywhere about staging the extraordinary in an extraordinary space like the worlds largest temporary city, Roskilde Festival. We also went to their events and reviewed them



■ Charlie Todd at the Black Tie Swim event.

TEXT | KASPER FRIIS HANSEN

PHOTO | SØS ULDALL-EKMAN

*The photos are a courtesy of Streetheart. See more photos and a bit of video from the events at their website [www.streetheart.dk](http://www.streetheart.dk).*



She tells me that they're still very hungover after getting drunk during The Cure last night.



I am wearing my wellies. It's Roskilde Festival, and the Danish summer rain has showed up as always. I'm nervous since I'll be interviewing Charlie Todd from Improv Everywhere in a few minutes. I thought I had an hour more to prepare. However, TV2 News and DR 1 have cancelled so I'm up now.

The fact that Playground is on the same list as the two biggest networks in Denmark annoys me. We should be sitting at some dive bar dominated by brown colors and cheap beers in recycled bottles. It would go a lot better with my headache. Serves me right for drinking cheap box wine.

I ask Charlie's assistant if it would be cool to sit down and have a drink or a cup of coffee during the interview. She tells me that they're very hungover after getting drunk during The Cure last night. Also, I'm the last scheduled interview and

they said they'd leave early today. Great! Not only are they just as hungover as I am. They're also just waiting for the interview to end, so they can go home.

#### The Interview

Once the interview starts I find that Charlie and Cody are relaxed, friendly, smiling people. Perhaps not that surprising – these two people staged a prank at their wedding ceremony involving a professional wrestler taking on the groom and the groomsmen at the "speak now or forever hold your peace" mark.

We get started. My questions aren't exactly the pinnacle of investigative journalism and Charlie prefers answers that don't exceed a sentence. But the smile stays on. Charlie thinks that his trip to Roskilde has been a success. In the corner of my eye, I notice Cody yawning.

"We have been quite impressed with the participants. There has been a good amount of them too. We had around 500

#### IMPROV EVERYWHERE

In their own words: "Improv Everywhere is a New York City-based prank collective that causes scenes of chaos and joy in public places." The Founder, Charlie Todd, started in 2001, before people were even talking about flash mobs. By now, Improv Everywhere's videos have been viewed over 240 million times on Youtube – for a good reason. Their latest version of the No Pants Subway Ride had participants in 49 cities around the world. Charlie Todd has also given a quite entertaining TED-talk.







## ROSKILDE FESTIVAL GOES PARTICIPATORY

Roskilde Festival is a non-profit music festival, the biggest music and arts festival in Northern Europe, creating the world's largest temporary city (defined as such because of the infrastructure) with approximately 125,000 volunteers and guests. It takes place annually in Roskilde, Denmark and in 2012 it hosted over 200 bands, with artists from 36 different countries playing on eight stages.

Every year, Roskilde Festival offers an extensive selection of art installations, events, and entertainment under the headline More Than Music. This year, Roskilde Festival launched its biggest arts program yet. In the festival's own words, "this means international art that involves you and wants you to participate". Charlie Todd from Improv Everywhere was one of the headlining artists on the More Than Music program.

for the Mp3 Experiment, 200 for the Giant Freeze and about a hundred for the Black Tie Swim. We're pretty happy with that", Charlie says.

At this point, I'm getting a bit suspicious about the positive attitude. The giant freeze happened about 30 minutes ago and if it had 200 frozen-in-place participants, that definitely eluded me, unless we were talking Facebook participants.

Sure, there were far more than 200

people in the vicinity of the event site. But most of them were just sitting, chilling and complementing their afternoon buzz with some greasy take-away or discussing their festival schedule. Right after the giant freeze ended, the girl next to me called it the "biggest flop ever". A couple of dudes near me almost didn't notice the event before it ended.

## A rather thin smile

Back at the interview I suddenly lose my train of thought. I feel like someone pushed my reset button. Fuck! After several very long and silent seconds, I let them know what just happened. Charlie tries to smile, but doesn't really think it's funny. His smile looks like one of those thin smiles you would expect of a waiter in a fancy French restaurant who has just been asked to split the bill in five.

"We were talking about how we have experienced the audience", he says while crossing his arms. Cody breaks in: "We've seen a lot of enthusiastic participants. Everyone just seems happy to be here and eager to participate."

"Right", I reply. "That's nice". Then I realise that I might as well give up on the cosy chat. They won't ask me to join them for a beer anyway. Besides, the event I just participated in did suck. And so I ask: "The stuff you do is somewhat similar to the kind of things that happen at Roskilde Festival by itself. Has it been a problem



Right after the giant freeze ended, the girl next to me called it the biggest flop ever

to compete with the general vibe of the festival?"

Cody answers first: "It has been a challenge to stand out, with so much going on."

Then Charlie: "Sure, like Cody said, it has been a challenge but I think it worked well. We've had a good amount of participants, people have been eager to participate. My impression is that people have been happy with the experiences too."

I try from a different angle: "What you normally do, as far as I understand, is changing an ordinary everyday space into something extraordinary. How have you been dealing with the fact that this place is not ordinary in the first place. What have you been doing differently here?"

### Looking for a way out

Judging from Charlie's body language, he just wants to go home.

"We have focused on the active and participatory parts of what we do, and I think that part works just as well at the festival. We wanted to create an opportunity for people to participate and play together, so that's what we have been focussing on. No surprises this time. Everything has been available on the web so everyone could play along. Also, the things we ask of people are things pretty much everyone can do. Everyone can freeze in place – well, unless they have Parkinsons – and everyone can download an Mp3 and turn it on at a specific time. We have tried to focus on these small things that everyone can do together."

It sounds like a good decision. But it's not what happened at the giant freeze.

### At home or obsolete

I can't decide whether Improv Everywhere's public pranks are the perfect match for the anarchistic vibe of Roskilde, or whether the detournement-style



public space interventions are simply made obsolete at the festival. I'm leaning towards the first if (if) you do it right. The easiest way to explain this is to go through the three events staged at the festival.

### The Giant Freeze

At the Giant Freeze, I was puzzled by the low-interaction design. Why choose that particular prank if your focus is to have people play together? And of course, it doesn't help that the location was poorly chosen. I know the giant freeze is a classic of Improv Everywhere's repertoire. The Youtube video of the giant freeze at Grand Central Station in New York has been viewed almost 31 million times.

The surprised reactions of spectators to a complete and surreal change in their environment makes the prank – something that never happened at the festival. It's not particularly fun in itself to stand completely still for three minutes. It was an event where people showed up, stood still, and walked away – without ever interacting with anyone.

### The Black Tie Swim

The Black Tie Swim was better suited (no pun intended) to stand out a place like Roskilde Festival. This is a place that has about 100,000 promiscuous, drunk, messy and adolescent (or temporarily adolescent) Scandinavians living in tents with nowhere near sufficient access to hot >>



showers and rubbish bins. Tents, trash, booze, smelly teenagers, animal one-piece suits, puddles of mud caused by the release of urine in undesignated places, Converse sneakers and the occasional naked guy. It looks like a hipster refugee camp somewhere in the not too distant future.

So a person wearing a dress gown or a smoking is out of the ordinary. A whole crowd of them is pretty cool. And if you add champagne and an octet playing Mozart while the overdressed people go for a little swim – bingo! Something out of the ordinary.

However, it still did not make a lot of people play together, except for the band. It made people look at each other –except of course the people who already knew each other. They were chit-chatting and hanging out. Creating a beautiful spectacle together, of course, but still mainly just a spectacle.

## The Mp3 Experiment

The Mp3 Experiment was another story entirely. The concept is quite simple. You go to [improveverywhere.com](http://improveverywhere.com), download an mp3 made for the occasion, and synchronize your watch with one on that site. Then you meet everyone else at a designated location, and at exactly the same time, everyone presses play.

First, you are greeted with friendly electronic music that makes it sound like you are inside an old school arcade game. After that, Mark, the omnipotent voice and guide welcomes you. From here on, you just do what Mark tells you to do for the next 24 minutes. At the Roskilde event this included a mass thumb war, several 15 second power naps, waving to as many of the other participants as possible, square dancing and putting your hands in the air like you just didn't care. There was also hugging another participant, an inanimate object, and an animal







#### DETOURNEMENT AND THE PRANK THAT MATTERS

Apart from being fun and games, public pranks have a more serious side and are founded on a tradition of protest. They can be associated with the notion of “reclaiming the streets” that also flows through skateboarding, graffiti, and street parties. The point is to challenge what can be done in a public space.

One early example within arts is the French Situationist movement, and in particular their method of *détournement*, meaning diversion in English. In a *détournement*, the point is to make people think about themselves and their surroundings in new ways by disrupting the ordinary.

The Situationists used a distinction between spectacle and situation, the first being something artificial or mediated that could only be looked at and the second being something that could be engaged or interacted with.

Oh yeah... and they loved playful behavior: “Play, radically broken from a confined ludic time and space, must invade the whole of life.”  
- Guy Debord

if you could find one. If not, there were always people in animal costumes around.

In short, it escalated. It all ended with everyone running around, hugging, and high-fiving each other in slow motion to a remixed version of Vangelis’ *Chariot of Fire*, which is the ultimate piece of slow motion music out there, in case you were wondering. (You know it too. Just look it up.)

There were smiles, giggles and laughs everywhere, both from spectators and participants. The Mp3 Experiment showed Improv Everywhere putting their money where their mouths were during that hungover interview. It was equal parts play and performance, where the other two events were mainly there for the looks.

But maybe people who are used to roleplaying expect something different when told “let’s play together” or “this is participatory”?

In a way, I, the reviewer, am caught in my own preconceptions of what makes something playful or participatory. Being a larper, I am used to a lot of agency, and I expect the activity to be interesting in itself – not because some outsider is watching me. When someone invites me to play with my fellow festival guests I expect to play – not perform.

Maybe I judge Charlie on my terms and not his. But just because an event has participants does not make it participatory, and Improv Everywhere themselves proved just how important the difference can be. ■





# Just some

Just a little lovin' were set up first time in Norway summer 2011, and later in Sweden summer 2012. A third run is scheduled during the summer of 2013 in Denmark. What is the story behind this re-runnable success?

PHOTO | LAJVVERKSTADEN, KAREN RYDING

Just a little lovin' is set in the beginning of the eighties when AIDS came to New York. Your character is part of a gay community or a cancer survivor group. Both groups are out of town celebrating the 4th of July in two parties that have merged into one over the years. The larp plays out during three evenings, each evening being a new 4th of July party. During the first evening everyone is unaware of the disease. Paranoia spreads during the second evening as everyone knows that the disease exists and that it is deadly, but not how it spreads. During the third evening everyone knows how it spreads, and some have been tested.

The game is played in the night time with play-time beginning each evening and ending after breakfast each morning with death paying the players a visit. Depending on how much sex your character had you got to put 1-5 lottery tickets in a hat. It was a lottery of death, and those characters pulled from the hat died and the players got new characters. Daytime was spent discussing what had happened to the characters during the past year. Just a Little Lovin', or simply JaLL amongst the initiated was designed for about 70 players and included a workshop and an after party making the experience five evenings long in total.

How did it become a touring success being put up in three Nordic countries? And what type of work is it, both for the designer and the producer to do it again? To find it out I asked Tor-Kjetil Edland who designed it along with Hanne Grasmø. I also asked Miriam Lundqvist who produced it in Sweden 2012 with Petter Karlsson and Anna-Karin Linder. Finally I asked Flemming H Jacobsen who is producing it in Denmark next year with Bjarke Pedersen, Nynne Søs Rasmussen and Helene Willer.



# more Lovin'

## Just a little Lovin'

### Why did you want to design the game to start with?

**Tor-Kjetil:** I've had the idea for several years – doing a game about how the AIDS epidemic hit the gay community in the early eighties. When Hanne Grasmo signed on to create the larp with me it became reality. I wanted to do a larp about this period of time because it was such a unique and devastating event in the recent history of the Western world, but one that has already been to some extent forgotten outside the communities that experienced it first-hand. Also, I believed that this larp had the potential to create a meaningful story about desire, friendship and death in a more general sense as well, beyond the particular historical setting of the larp.

### How did you feel after doing the first run of the game?

**Tor-Kjetil:** I was amazed of the impact the larp seemed to have on most of the participants. We were very happy about how dedicated and daring the participants were in throwing themselves into a story that at times could be emotionally painful and scary to play out. When the larp was over I felt that I wasn't done with this larp yet. Hanne and I actually said that we would do it again if someone offered to do the practical production of a second run about a week after the larp. So when Miriam Lundqvist, Petter Karlsson and Anna-Karin Lindner offered to produce a second run soon after we immediately said yes.

### Why did you want to do a second run of the game?

**Miriam:** The idea came from Hanne and Tor-Kjetil. They put the word out on Facebook that they would do it again if anyone else did the production. Petter Karlsson and Anna-Karin Lindner were interested, and

together we became a great team that was fun to work with. For me personally, I had recently played the larp and loved it, and I felt it was important that others got a chance to play it too.

### How much work did you put into the second run? And what type of work?

**Tor-Kjetil:** We had two weekends with the Swedish organizers. Hanne and me did the casting of characters and editing of the written material (characters, information about the setting). I also had most of the communication with participants regarding character questions while the Swedish crew had full responsibility for the finances of the project, renting of the game venue and communication with the participants regarding participation fee and other practical matters.

### As a production team, was it a lot of work doing a second run?

**Miriam:** Yes, probably more than we thought from the beginning. We couldn't really help ourselves to get into discussions about the game and doing some tweaking. For example we worked a lot with structuring the off-game time and making workshops. Besides, it is a pretty big job to get to know a new workgroup and working with people from different countries.

### Did you change anything in the design the second time?

**Tor-Kjetil:** We changed a few things in a couple of the characters as well as reorganizing the web of social circles that the characters belonged to in order to make that part easier to workshop before the game. We also redesigned and lengthened the pre-game workshop and debrief after the game together with our three new co-organizers.





# Advantages and disadvantages of doing a game several times

**What were the advantages and the disadvantages of taking a game already played?**

**Miriam:** What was amazing was that we could improve the things that worked to become even better, and the things that didn't work so well we really had time to make them work. It is always easier a second time when you have seen the player's reactions.

We also didn't need to worry whether this was going to work – we knew it was a great game and weren't worried.

The only worry we had was that old players would create a kind of owning of the game, that this was their game, and that would affect the new players. It turned out to be no problem at all.

**What do you think is the pros and cons of doing a game several times?**

**Tor-Kjetil:** The main advantage is to make larps more like theatre plays in the sense that other people can make new versions of a game and that more

people get the chance to experience them. If we make larps rerunnable, then a great larp doesn't have to be this "mythical" event in the sense that if you lost that one opportunity to play it you never will. Also by running a larp several times you get the chance to analyze the design better as well. If something works or doesn't work the first time you do a game it could be because of particular dynamics between players in that run. If the same thing happens in later runs than you can say with greater certainty that it is the design that leads to this in the game. I don't really think there are any disadvantages as long as we still are continuing to make new games as well and not just rerunning old ones.

**What do you think makes playing a game several times interesting?**

**Miriam:** The first reason is of course that more people get a chance to play it. If it is a good game, it's such a pity if it is just made once. Then it is an exciting process to do a game several times because you get to see how your choice of design works, regardless of who is playing the character.



I don't really think there are any disadvantages as long as we still are continuing to make new games as well and not just rerunning old ones.



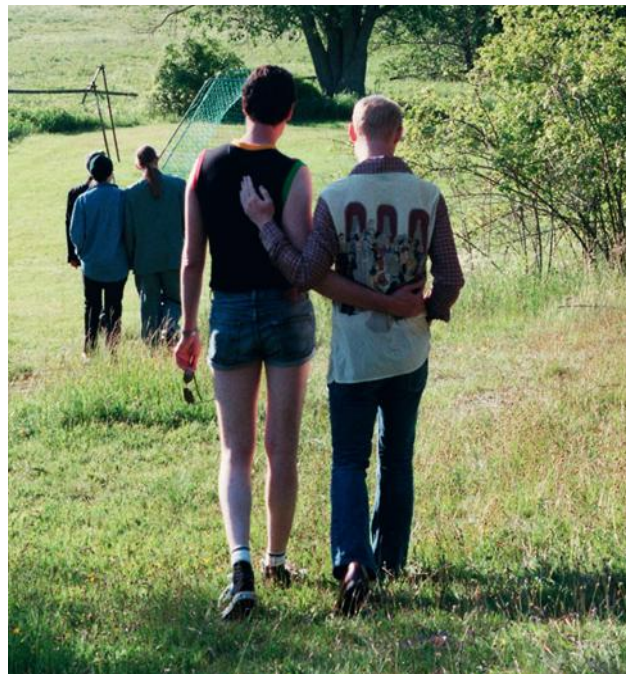
# Write Re- runable larps

**Do you think about making your games accessible for re-runs when you write them?**

**Tor-Kjetil:** Yes. A couple of years ago I started doing that with short black box larps and two years ago I did it with the first longer larp, Mad about the Boy, together with Trine Lise Lindahl and Margrete Raaum. We wrote a manuscript for the larp shortly after organizing it and last year someone picked up the manuscript and did a run of it in the Netherlands without our knowledge.

**What is important to think about if you want to write a re-runable larp?**

**Tor-Kjetil:** It's important to be able to write in detail about things like workshops, timeline and design instructions for new organizers. It's important to write out some things that the organizers usually only have in their heads, for instance, "how does the larp begin and end? Are there any particular instructions that aren't written in the background material that needs to be communicated to some or all of the players?" Most larps would be rerunnable if the written material was collected after the game and a short text about the design added as an introduction.



## Denmark 2013

**If anybody would like to take Just a Little Lovin and do a third run of it, what is your best advice?**

**Miriam:** Have a really good plan for the off-game time. The game is incredibly strong, but needs good process management during the off-game time; before, after and in-between. Also, make sure that you have someone who can solve practical problems and isn't too involved in the game.

**Why do you want to make a third run?**

**Flemming:** I want to make a third run for several reasons. It is great larp, and the more people who get a chance to be part of it the better. It is also already made, so all that is really needed is making practical arrangements and getting participants. On a more personal note, I had a great experience. I have no doubt that if I didn't first hear about the game at Solmukhota and cried my eyes out, and later had one of the best larping experiences, I wouldn't be setting a third run up for others to have the same experience.

**Will you and Hanne be involved in the run in Denmark?**

**Tor-Kjetil:** Yes, we will still work with the design. But this time we have more parts of the game that we are completely happy with, as for example the workshops. It will be a lot less work going over the design, even though we will improve a little yet again of course.

**So the larp is not a manuscript online yet?**

**Tor-Kjetil:** No. We still want to be involved in all the runs of it, and are improving the design every time. There have been talk about doing it in Germany and others countries, and even then we want to be involved. But when we feel like we are done, we will make a manuscript available online.

**So these runs are really game-tests for the manuscript?**

**Tor-Kjetil:** In a way, yes.



# IMAGINATION KNOWS

Larp can change the world. That is why a group of Norwegian and Belarusian organizers held a summer school regarding larp as a method for education about human rights and democracy. 40 participants from 11 countries went to Lithuania to participate in five days of Larpwriter Summer School. Kristoffer Thurøe went as an ignorant teacher and came home as a true believer

TEXT | KRISTOFFER THURØE



I am sitting in a car on the way from the airport in Vilnius to the old Soviet workers' summer camp Ruta by the Lakes of Molėtai. I'm driving with two of the organizers, asking questions and trying to understand what I'm about to participate in. The organizer from Belarus explains that the summer school is in Lithuania and not Belarus, partly because it's cheaper in Lithuania, but mostly because it is difficult to organize cultural seminars in Belarus without attracting attention from the state. That is when I really began to listen. And that is exactly what Norwegian organizer Martin Nielsen wants us to do.

"We wanted to teach and structure what we've learned after years of working with educational larps to raise awareness and provoke reflection. Our hope was that both Nordic and Belarusian larpers and soon-to-be larp organizers could benefit from such an approach. We also felt that the Nordic scene was lacking an arena like the summer school - Knutepunkt has moved in different directions in recent years. It was also our goal to grow networks between Nordic and Belarusian larpers" Martin Nielsen explains.

## Different realities

One of the ways to do this was to present and play as many Nordic larps as possible in the five days the school lasted. When the participants from Belarus were shown the documentaries on the dystopian Nordic larps Kapo, a game about the loss of humanity in a prison camp in Copenhagen, and Delirium, a surrealistic game about love in a

mental institution, they asked the obvious question "Why would anyone participate in that?"

My answer is that a big part of the Nordic larp tradition was created to develop people in democratic societies, where we have to create dystopian realities without human rights and the safety net of the welfare state to experience how we would act without them. It is a design tradition that we can now share with organizers from countries such as Belarus and Palestine, where



We think that larp can contribute to strengthening civil societies, especially in countries where it's needed the most.

# NO BORDERS



our imagined scenarios are their reality. “We think that larp can contribute to strengthening civil societies, especially in countries where it’s needed the most.” Martin Nielsen says. “Larp is a good method to provoke reflection and putting yourself in someone else’s shoes, which is important. The projects in Palestine and Belarus are inspired a lot by each other, and draw on the same experiences. We also have a project starting in Lebanon, and are hoping other larpers will start similar projects in other places around the world.”

This is not the first collaboration between Fantasiforbundet from Norway and POST from Belarus, who started creating projects together back in 2007 at Knudepunkt in Denmark. The conference focused on how larp could be a tool for changing the world. After a weekend of talk, they decided to make it a reality, focusing on larp as a method for education on human rights and democracy building. Since then, they have created two games and a Larpprimer Challenge together. The Larpprimer Summer School was the natural continuation of this collaboration - an arena where they could gather, structure and teach what they’d

learned so far, learning even more in the process. And not only teach it to the participants. I came home after five days of learning, playing, discussing larp theory and drinking beer in the lake with the feeling of having been a part of something special that transformed me. As any good conference or larp experience gives you. But this time I was thinking about changing the world with a newly found network of larp organizers all over Europe, Belarus and all the way to Palestine. That was the intended result, Martin Nielsen explains. “The participation of the experts was key to the Summer School. Not only did they contribute with their experience, many of them also took part in the actual creation of the program. We invited them to be experts only, but they ended up taking responsibility for the program as a whole, which was important for the success of the summer school. If you talk to the experts, i think they’ll confirm that they also learned a lot by being there.”

## Learning how to develop people

Martin Nielsen has been a part of the project since Knudepunkt in 2007. He and the two other Norwegian organizers, Erlend Bruer and Martin Eckhoff Andresen,



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represent the organization Fantasiforbundet, an organization started to support larp projects in Norway. But at the annual meeting in 2011, they rewrote their mission statement to include the whole world. Because, as they say, “imagination knows no borders” and some of their biggest projects were now collaborations in Belarus, Palestine and soon Lebanon. All of them aimed at using larp as a tool for building democracy and to educate about human rights.

It is a noble goal that has gained support since the beginning. Especially back home in Norway where the Minister for International Development, Heikki Holmås, is an old larper and talks about using larp as a tool to change the world. It is also a view shared by Kjetil Aasland, Charge d’Affaires at the Norwegian Embassy in Vilnius when he in his opening speech described our hobby with words that should make the toughest campaign warlords proud and feeling warm hearted: “For the next week, you will be learning how to develop larps. In many ways, I think what this really is about is developing people.”

His message was given to the 40 participants from 11 countries. A third of them were from Belarus and a third from the Nordic Countries; the rest were from all over Europe, except the two from Palestine. The majority had very little experience with larping before the summer school, while a few had organized fantasy games since the 90s. This weird bunch was put through a structured program with ten hours of talks, games, debates and workshops for five straight days. More than 15 experts from the Nordic countries and the Czech Republic led the way through the many choices you have to make as a game designer and handed out dos and don’ts on everything from characters and scenography to safety and briefings.

## The Mixing Desk of Larp

The program was structured around the idea that a larp design process is a chain of choices the organizers have to make. Choices about playing style, scenography, openness, character creation responsibility and so on. To explain this, they created the Mixing Desk of Larp, with 11 faders reflecting central decisions that a designer has to make.

A good visualization, also emphasizing that there are default positions that will be chosen for you if you’re not conscious of your choices as a designer. The faders were presented by the Nordic experts through talks, games and workshops. The experts were chosen both because they were experts in their field but also because they had very different views on how to create larps. “We think it’s important to have lot of different experts there to draw on their different experiences and opinions, to show alternative ways of thinking about larp design. We didn’t want to have the organizers preaching.” Nielsen explains.

Every day, there was room to debate the talks and extract the most important knowledge to use in your own ideas, to support the participants in their own projects. This was underlined on the last day by the Swedish experts facilitating the Jam Session of Larp. This was an enormous, structured brainstorm that was intended to let the participants use all the knowledge they had attained to work on their own ideas, supported by the Nordic experts.

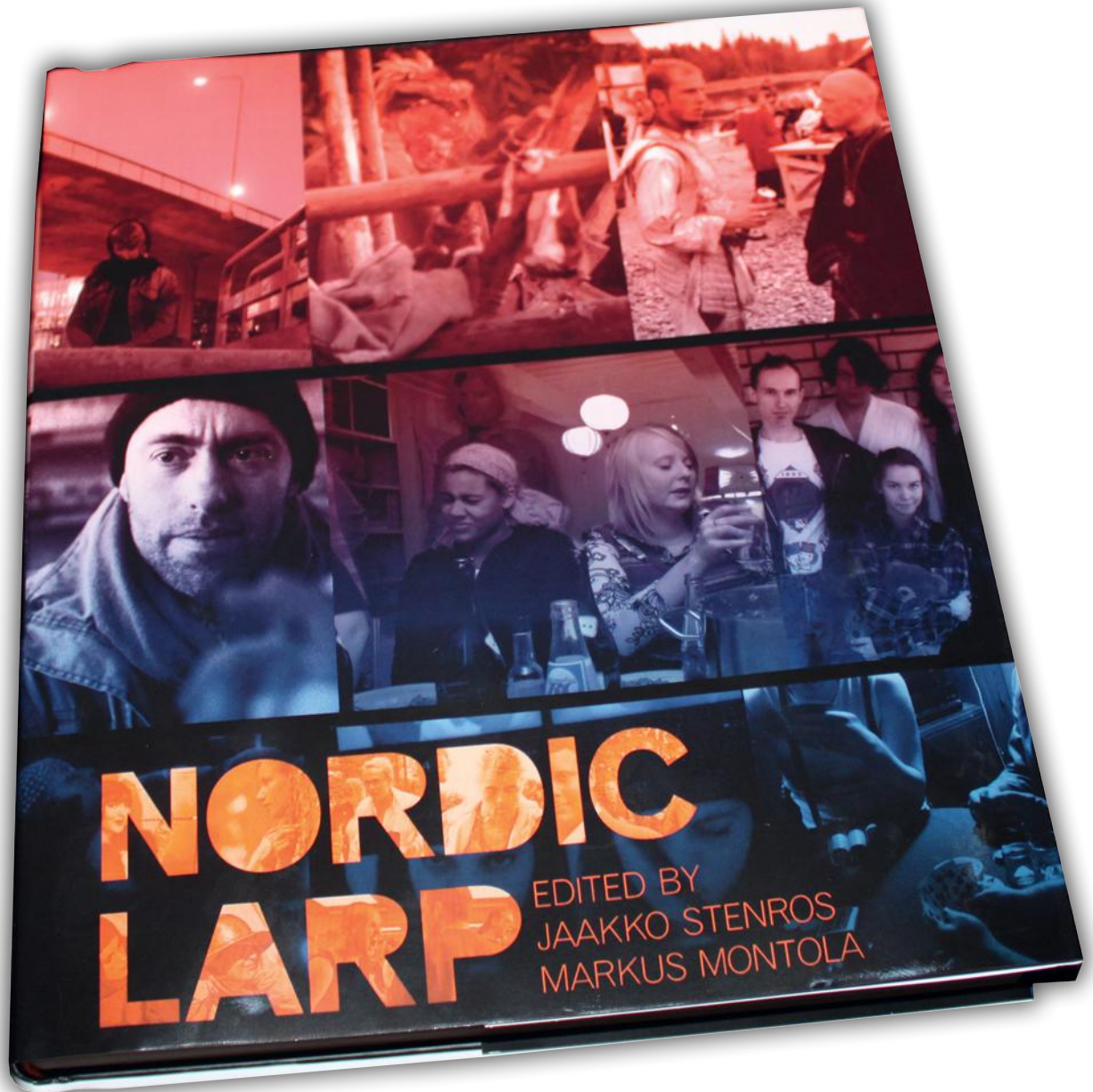
“It ended up in a lot of larp ideas that I’d love to play, and this was also the point where I realized that yes, this actually works. Our participants have learned something, they’re motivated and they want to make larps. That feeling is the best you can have as an organizer” Nielsen concludes. ■

## Kristoffer Thurøe

Kristoffer Thurøe is a Danish journalist and one of the creators of the larps System Danmarc (2005), Totem (2007) and Delirium (2010). He was invited to Lithuania to run a workshop on how to use pre-game workshops to create characters along with your participants. He is now a true believer.



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# FUCKING AROUND

**TEST  
SCORES**  
1 = bad  
10 = goood

A variety of techniques have been developed to simulate sex at larps, but which ones should you choose for your game? Playground convinced a panel of brave Nordic larpers to test some of these techniques themselves. Here are their honest opinions about them, complete with test scores

TEXT | NYNNE SØS RASMUSSEN

**S**ex is an important part of life, so of course we want to have (simulated) sex at games too. Having the possibility to play out sex, love, and intimacy at larps enable us to tell different and complex stories and portray character developments in important ways.

But just as we don't want to beat each other to a pulp using real swords at larps, we do not always want to have real up-the-ass-feel-the-penetration sex at larps. Where your average fantasy larp will use boffer weapons to simulate violence and war, a lot of different techniques have

been developed to simulate sex. These techniques work basically in the same way as boffers: by enabling players to play out sex and intimacy in a safe (almost safe) way. The different techniques enable players to play out different kinds of sex: group sex, blow jobs, domination or sweet innocent love. There are mechanics for playing a sexual assault. The techniques can be diegetic, as in a fictional world where people's erogenous zones are located on their arms, so touching each other's arms is a sexual act. They can also be non-diegetic, where sex still involves the genitals, but players use a back rub

to represent genital contact. Choosing the right technique for your game can be challenging. Maybe you want your players to experience sex in a completely safe manner, or maybe you want them to get as close as possible to the real deal. That's why Playground decided to help you out! We assembled a panel of experienced Nordic larpers to try different larp sex-techniques and give you their honest opinions about them. But please, DO try this at home! Don't just trust us. Invite some friends over and have a fun (and slightly awkward) time testing the different methods and form your own opinion.



# THE BACK RUB

This is a good ol' classic! It has been used at fantasy games in most of the Nordic countries for centuries and is perhaps the most common solution to simulating sex at larps. Don't ask us why though. There exist several variations of the back rub technique. We choose to test it with both performers keeping all of their clothes on, and Charles giving Elin a back rub, which in the fiction equals sex. This can be done with or without the players making sounds, like moaning or crying out in pleasure. If the players want to play out sexual assault, the back rub could be rough and maybe even hurt a bit. We chose to do it without sound effects or rough behavior.

**Test persons:** Elin and Charles

**Hornyness:** 4

**Immersion:** 3

**Awkwardness:** 2

**Voyeur:** 3

**Use it at:** Larps without focus on sexual relations, where the option for ingame sex is still desired.

Charles explained how his biggest problem with the technique is the lack of eye contact between the performers, which makes it difficult to play on the interaction, especially if you don't make any noise. Another problem with this technique, according to the panel, is that it is a "one way" technique. It's not designed for mutual pleasure and has a clear division between "giver" and "taker". On the plus side, it's very easy to apply to games, since players don't need any props to perform it.

The panel agreed that the technique feels pretty safe and is not awkward—it's just a back rub after all. When the technique is safe it is sometimes easier to act out the sex. If it's a good back rub, sounds and mimicry might come easier for the players. As for the voyeur factor—it doesn't really look like sex, despite Charles and Elin's best efforts to make "O-faces" or as Ann put it: "It's really not that exciting to watch." Another funny side effect to using this technique at larps could be that a normally innocent back rub is impossible without making participants confused as to whether the characters are having sex or just rubbing, a problem strangely mirrored in most signs advertising Thai Massage.



## The Big Fat Disclaimer

This method of testing is flawed. We ripped the techniques out of the context they were designed for. We tried them out with no characters and no stories, apart from what we made up on the fly. Every technique feels and looks better when you are in the zone, in-game and in character. The panel compensated for this by rating the different techniques based on the potential for giving players a good sexual experience at larps, and not just how they felt and looked during the test.

## About the panel

**Name:** Elin Nilsen

**Age:** 32

**Country:** Norway

**Best ingame sex experience:** Desperate lesbian Ars Amandi ++

**Name:** Charles Bo Nielsen

**Age:** 23

**Country:** Denmark

**Best ingame sex experience:** Off-screen sex in a medieval tent

**Name:** Ann Kristine Eriksen

**Age:** 24 år

**Country:** Denmark

**Best ingame sex experience:** Telling the story of how her partner fell asleep during sex in a freeform game.

**Name:** Claus Raasted

**Age:** 33

**Country:** Denmark

**Best ingame sex experience:** Sex with a vampire prostitute in a toilet.  
**Clan:** Unknown

**Name:** Nynne Søs Rasmussen

**Age:** 25

**Country:** Denmark

**Best ingame sex experience:** Lesbian group sex in the pillow room

## The Scoring System

The panel conducted the test with two or more people trying out one of the sex techniques while those who weren't involved would observe. Afterwards the panel discussed the pros and cons and rated the technique on a 1-10 scale in four different categories.

**The Horniness Factor:** Does the technique have the potential for the performers to be turned on during use? How sensual or intense can simulating sex feel using this method? Could the testers imagine themselves being actually turned on using the technique given the right circumstances?

**The Immersion Factor:** How easy was it to immerse into the act? Did the technique provide the opportunity to express the performer's personality, feelings, and moods? Where they able to tell a story using the technique and/or play out different kinds of sexual relations?

**The Awkwardness Factor:** How uncomfortable did the performers feel using the technique? Would they feel comfortable performing it with everybody during a game or only people they trust? Awkwardness is not necessarily a bad thing; it is an ambiguous score. Our rule of thumb is that awkwardness and intimacy are often closely linked, so if a technique feels a bit weird, it's probably because it has the possibility to create an intense experience (given the players' comfort and safety). As a larpwright you might want to design for awkwardness or try to avoid it.

**The Voyeur Factor:** How good did the technique appear to spectators? Did it actually look like the performers were having an intimate moment? Where they able to communicate a believable story using the technique? Could the spectators understand what was going on? Maybe the technique looked dirty enough to turn the spectators on.



TEST  
WINNER



## DILDO VARIATION

The larp *Just A Little Lovin'* (Grasmo and Edland 2011) was centered on the AIDS epidemic in the early 80s in the New York gay community. The major themes were friendship, desire and fear of death, which made it important to apply techniques for simulating different kinds of sexual relationships. Characters would agree to have sex by offering and accepting pink feathers from each other and then go off-game and agree on how to play it out, discussing personal boundaries and so on. Then they would go somewhere and act out the sex scene in the designated Blackbox or Dark Room (both set aside for sex-scenes) using one or more phallic props. The props could be a strap-on dildo placed on a thigh or the crotch, a handheld dildo, or whatever phallic props were available. The phallus was supposed to be gender-neutral and used in different ways to play out guy-on-guy, girl-on-girl, "vanilla sex" as well as more ambiguous gender constellations. The players would keep their clothes on during the sex scenes and afterward deliver a short monologue about their character's feelings.

We chose to simulate a blowjob scene with a strap on dildo. After an awkward silence Nynne and Elin volunteered to do the scene.

**Test persons:** Nynne and Elin

**Horniness:** 9

**Immersion:** 9

**Awkwardness:** 9

**Voyeur:** 9

**Use it at:** Larps that focus on sex, lust and relationships and want sex to be visual

This was the panel's favorite technique for simulating sex at games. It's very visual; "There is absolutely no doubt about what's going on!" Ann said after watching the show. In settings where sex is a semi-public and important part of the theme, this technique would work exceptionally well. It also scores high on both the horniness and immersion scale. Nynne explains laughing, "The familiarity of the position and situation triggers your previous sexual experiences, which makes it very easy to immerse and potentially be turned on." It's perhaps as close as you get to the real deal, in a fairly safe way. Claus, on the other hand, argues that it must take some training to play out a believable blowjob. Not everyone has that training.

After laughing quite a bit the panel is back on track. Both Ann and Claus point out that they find the technique a bit too centered on the phallus, or, as Claus put it, "Everybody becomes men." Another point about this method is that it can feel pretty awkward, and hence it's a very good idea to introduce it at a pre-game workshop and make it possible to perform it in different ways and at different levels so everybody will be comfortable (as was done at *Just A Little Lovin'*).

## ARS AMANDI

If the back rub is a classic larp technique, *Ars Amandi* is today's Nordic larp mainstay. It was first used and developed during *Mellam himmel och hav* in 2003 (Wieslander and Björk) and has since been used at several Nordic Larps. It's a highly praised method to play out sex and intimacy in larps. The players touch one another on the arms and shoulders, lightly and firmly, playfully and forcefully, while keeping eye contact. Ann and Elin volunteered to try it out, as both were familiar with the technique.

**Test persons:** Elin and Ann

**Horniness:** 9

**Immersion:** 9

**Awkwardness:** 8

**Voyeur:** 6

**Use it at:** Larps where intimacy, love and relationships are important themes

"I once said that I would rather have my boyfriend having really bad sex with someone else than having really hot *Ars Amandi* at a game," Nynne states. Both the horniness factor and the immersion factor are really high here, and the panel knows several players who have fallen in love after using *Ars Amandi*, effectively extending the meaning of safe sex. Elin also commented that the potential for group sex is there and can be very hot! This technique gives the players almost unlimited options for playing out different kinds of sex and relations- not just for raw fucking, but *Ars Amandi* is also well suited for playing out love and intimacy. Another big pro is that players are able to keep eye contact and give and take pleasure simultaneously.

It's fairly easy to apply this method to a game, but will probably require some pre-game workshopping since the awkwardness factor is pretty high and it can end up feeling really intimate. *Ars Amandi* is a well-defined technique that makes players more comfortable after they have been properly introduced to it. As for the visual side, the panel agrees that it can be a bit difficult for spectators to see what's really going on. Is it sex or just friendly petting?





## THE PENCIL AND THE SHARPENER

This is a sex technique from Russia, which featured in Playground #2. The women at the larp will carry pencil-sharpeners and the men pencils, when they want to have in-game sex they will go somewhere private and the man will simply put his pencil into the woman's pencil sharpener. It's used at fantasy games running for years, where the organizers want to keep track of bloodlines or sex have another game-mechanic function.

This technique seems a bit alien to the panel, but Ann and Nynne agrees to give it a shot.

Test persons: Ann and Nynne  
Hornyness: 3  
Immersion: 2  
Awkwardness: 3  
Voyeur: 1

Use it at: Larps without focus on sexual relations, where the option for in-game sex is still desired.

"It's not awkward, in a manner that makes me uncomfortable - it's just really weird" Ann starts. Both she and Nynne couldn't help breaking down laughing while performing the test. The panel agrees that the weirdness might have something to do with the sexualization of the everyday objects. It does however actually provide the possibility of putting a little bit of character into the act, in the way you choose to stick or push the pencil into the sharpener. There is something in the symbolism that works well. Another plus is that it's so safe to use, that most players would be able to perform the technique.

The panel would prefer if all players carried both a pencil and a sharper, to break the "active man" / "passive female" stereotype. It might be a little weird to carry the items in a setting that strives to be historically authentic before the invention of the pencil. There is not much eroticism in the technique and it doesn't offer much to look at for spectators either.

## OFF SCREEN SEX

Another classic! The players go somewhere where they can be heard but not seen. The usual move is to take the action into a medieval tent, but around a corner, into the next room or the outskirts of the forest work as well. The players go off-game and talk about what kind of sex they want to play out and how to do it. They act out the scene making loud noises: moaning, screaming, clapping their hands, or whatever they feel represents their copulation. They will not actually touch each other and keep their clothes on the entire time. This technique differs from the others, in that it does not focus on the characters having sex but instead informs the spectators listening to the act.

Claus and Elin went into another room, with only a curtain separating them from the rest of the panel, listening intently.

Test persons: Claus and Elin  
Hornyness: 8  
Immersion: Spectators: 9 / performers: 3  
Awkwardness: 7  
Voyeur: 10

Use it at: Larps that wants to focus upon storytelling and dramatic, and less on immersion.

To the panel's surprise this one worked out rather well. Charles commented, "When you can't actually see them, it really gets your imagination going." "It's pretty much equal to watching porn without pictures," Nynne adds. Ann, Nynne and Charles agree that they found themselves on the fine line between horny and uncomfortable listening to Claus and Elin making quite believable fucking sounds. The panel was excited about the possibilities for playing out things like dirty talk, foreplay and the after match. The potential for agreeing upon things off-game is also a plus.

The downside is that it can end up being more performance than larp for those making the sounds. It's basically a division between playing for the immersion or playing to give the other players a great show, and it's very specific to what players would prefer. It can be quite awkward to make fucking sounds with someone you don't know, and it might be difficult not to mimic the way you actually sound in bed (that could be either a good or bad thing). Elin concludes that the range of possible awkwardness is wide and depends on the situation; it can feel very safe or really uncomfortable.

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## BODY PAINT

This one is another technique from Russia with love. The Russians invented body paint to make it possible to act out group sex. The one who is going to be fucked provides a part of his or her body to be painted. The shy ones will give you their arm; the hardcore ones show breast or belly.

We decided to do an exact copy of the picture from the feature about Russian sex-techniques in Playground #2. It involved Ann baring her neck, shoulders and arms, Elin and Charles painting her arms while Nynne puts a boffer weapon on her throat from behind.

Test persons: Ann, Nynne, Elin and Charles

Horniness: 5

Immersion: 4

Awkwardness: 2

Voyeur: 5

Use it at: Larps that focus on group dynamics or want to portray different ways of having sex

Elin and Ann agreed that it was a bit weird, but could work quite well. Charles commented with a sly smile that group sex always tend to be a bit awkward at first. The panel agreed that the technique has a horniness potential; it could be quite hot and sensual to paint and be painted. They remained more skeptical about the group sex potential. Maybe it would work better one on one with both players painting each other at the same time. There was also doubt whether it was designed for group sex or sexual assault. However, you can leave the person holding the sword out of the picture. Elin summed it up: "At best it looks like Ars Armandi, at worst it's just plain weird." The panel couldn't seem to agree if it would be more or less sensual to finger-paint or if the brush adds sensuality.

They agreed that it has potential, and Ann suggested using it in a post-apocalyptic setting where you could integrate the painting as part of culture and each player could have her own color so you could trace previous sexual partners. The downside could be that it would require paint and brushes to be available to players at any time, and it can end up messy if you are playing indoors.



## SAFETY PIN

This technique is also from Russia. One player hides a safety pin somewhere on his or her clothing. If another player wants to have sex, they do a body search to find the pin. When found, the characters have had sex. The safety-pin can be located anywhere on the players clothing, from underwear to sleeve. It's up to player hiding the pin. If a player is a real Don Juan, she can display her many conquests by showing a row of different safety-pins.

We decided to let Charles hide the safety-pin. Ann was the one frisking him.

Test persons: Ann and Charles

Horniness: 5

Immersion: 4

Awkwardness: 2

Voyeur: 5

Use it at: Larps that focus on sexual conquest, for instance ballroom larps

It turned out that Ann had trouble finding the pin, and Charles couldn't see if she found it or not. "You can end up being really grabby in a bad kind of way," Ann commented, and in general the panel agreed. The problem is that the passive one can't control just how grabby the active one ends up being. The panel wasn't fond of the technique having a clear division between the active and passive player either. It's especially problematic if you also apply gender stereotypes: male players searching and female players hiding the pins.

It ended up feeling more like a treasure hunt than sex, which is a clear turnoff for the panel. Who would have thought? More than one member of the panel used words as unsafe and confusing to describe the technique. It might fix some of the problems if moaning louder indicated if the player searching you is getting close to finding the pin. It has some storytelling potential because it's pretty visual. As Claus concluded: "It looks like a dirty body search."

# FREEFORM STYLE

A freeform game is a term used to describe a number of unrelated role-playing traditions that have originated by rejecting some of the main components of traditional tabletop role-playing - usually game mechanics in the traditional sense of points and dice. Some freeform games are larp-like in that players may move and gesticulate in character, but are played with only 3-8 players who remain in the same room. (And you don't even have to take our word for it. We used the fantastic Nordic Larp Wiki. Check it out at [nordiclarpwiki.org](http://nordiclarpwiki.org). It's wonderful!)

There are several different techniques to play out sex scenes at freeform games, usually centered around the players narrating the action in some way, for instance while holding hands and looking each other in the eyes. We choose to test a technique from this year's Fastaval, a Danish convention, from the game Summer Lovin' (Lindahl, Nilsen, Westerling 2012). The scenario revolves around pseudo-awkward one-night stands at a music festival, and how a group of guys and girls tell their war-stories to their respective friends.

The sex-scenes are played out verbally, with the couple sitting opposite each other, holding hands and knees touching. No other parts of the body are in contact. One player will narrate an action (For instance, "I touch your boob.") and the other player will then narrate a reaction and a new action ("I like this. I move slightly so you can reach better, and kiss you gently/"). The players continue to play the sex scene out, always action-reaction-action. Charles and Claus tried it out.

Test persons: Claus and Charles

Hornyness: 8

Immersion: 8

Awkwardness: 10

Voyeur: 9

Use it at: Freeform games, but you could try applying it to larps

Claus' first comment was that the technique is like advanced chat or phone sex, and that obviously works for a lot of people. The immersion and horniness factors are therefore pretty high, but so is the awkwardness. It put our players out of their comfort zones, especially before the test-scene began with sweaty palms, racing hearts and shaking hands. When the scene started, it wasn't quite as bad.

You can end up drawing upon your own sexuality and previous experiences while narrating the scenes, because that's probably the first stuff that pops into your mind. It's also very easy to express a character's emotions and reactions. It was very interesting for the rest of the panel to watch and listen to. Maybe this had something to do with the whole thing being a bit dirty - in a good way.



## ARS SAVIOR

This technique isn't actually a sex technique, but a mechanic developed for kissing. As the name suggests it is inspired by Ars Amandi, but instead of players touching each other's arms, they stand close and touch each other's faces. This represents them kissing or making out like teenagers on the dance floor or in a dark corner. It was developed for the Norwegian larp Klassefesten (Larsdatter Grasmø, Jansen and Lindahl 2012), a larp about being in your teens. The technique was also used at the second run of Just A Little Lovin' this summer.

Charles and Nynne gave it a go.

Test persons: Nynne and Charles

Hornyness: 8

Immersion: 9

Awkwardness: 8

Voyeur: 9

Use it at: Larps where making out - and who is doing the making out - is important for the game.

It's a very intimate technique, the closeness and fingers softly caressing the faces makes it hard not to respond. Ars Savior enables you to play clumsy teenagers making out for the first time; either too much tongue and fumbling around, genuine soft kisses, or "I want to eat you up!" passion - it's all in the hands and eyes. Charles stated that he prefers this technique to its big sister, Ars Amandi.

The panel agreed that it's also nice to watch, and there is no doubt about what is going on. Another plus is that it's so simple and well-defined, making it easy to apply to different games, and it feels safe to use even though still a bit awkward and very intimate--in a good way. ■



# THE BOOK OF THE WHITE WAR

DOCUMENTING A LARP PROJECT ABOUT CULTURE CLASH IN AN OCCUPIED LAND



EDITED BY CASPER GRONEMANN AND CLÅS RAASTED



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## The complete guide to

# AMERICAN CONVENTIONS

The United States has a numerous, proud, and bewilderingly diverse set of gaming conventions that run each year. So if you want a taste of Americana gamer-tude, which one should you attend? Jason Morningstar, Evan Torner, and Lizzie Stark present a selection of the most intriguing conventions, organized chronologically for gamers planning a pilgrimage

TEXT | JASON MORNINGSTAR, LIZZIE STARK & EVAN TORNER

## Dragon Con

(Atlanta, Georgia, 46,000, late August/early September)



One of the largest gatherings of general fandom in North America, the monstrous Dragon Con completely overtakes downtown Atlanta for a week in August each year - a genuinely awe-inspiring collision of cosplay, media fandom in all its flavors, and every possible niche of general nerdery. Strangely enough, Dragon Con's larp and tabletop gaming offerings are somewhat weak for such a big event, but efforts are underway to correct this deficit. This is a place to see and be seen (you don't dare show up without a costume), to take in panel after panel related to your particular interests, and to meet your film and TV idols. But if you come to play, you may be disappointed.



## Gen Con

(Indianapolis, Indiana, 36,000, mid-August)

It is de rigueur for North American gamer nerds to make a pilgrimage to Gen Con at least once to play their favorite games and take in the spectacle. For many, it is a yearly tradition. A huge, intense, and occasionally amazing convention, Gen Con caters to every flavor of gamer, offering plenty of larps (including some interesting events that utilize nearby historic buildings and incorporate Indianapolis' history), and tabletop roleplaying galore. On the upside, there's a lot going on and everybody who is anybody attends. Of course, that's also the downside, as hordes descend upon the not-particularly-appealing downtown core of Indianapolis for five days. It can be oppressive, frustrating, and confusing, and the weather is invariably sweltering. It is also absurdly expensive. Unless you need to check the pilgrimage off on your nerd card, we would skip Gen Con.



# DREAMATION

(Morristown, New Jersey, 1,000 attendees, early February)

DREAMATION, and its summer sibling DEXCON, both run by Double Exposure, Inc., have a homey, inclusive feel, with legions of gamers of every conceivable variety gathering to play the ever-living-dickens out of some board, war and role-playing games. Forget panels – here, it's all about playing, people-watching, and the palpable excitement of the crowd jostling in the hallways. If you want great conversation, head to the hotel bar with game mates, or make new friends with the friendly, if grizzled, band of designers who mingle and talk shop. The non-gamers are part of this convention's charm. While DREAMATION and July's DEXCON aren't huge, they occupy an entire hotel, inviting inquiring looks and queries from the consultants who regularly patronize the bar. Inevitably, the venue is also hosting a wedding party – watching bridesmaids and grooms men mingle with dudes in armor is a unique pleasure. Although there are indie tabletop tracks and plenty of larps at both conventions, February's DREAMATION draws a large number of indie gamers and designers, since it's known as a wonderful place to play-test games before the busy summer convention schedule hits.



RECOMMENDED

# Camp Nerdy

(Triangle, Virginia, 75, mid-May)

Camp Nerdy is a residential gaming convention, something vanishingly rare in North America. Situated in a former CIA training camp nestled in a national forest, the atmosphere is serene and the food - and sleeping arrangements - are communal. Equal parts intense gaming and nostalgic summer camp, the gathering's peaceful isolation attracts both families and the hardcore alike, resulting in gaming of a very high standard. The location - just south of Washington, DC - makes it nicely accessible to European visitors. Highly recommended!

# Origins

(Columbus, OH, 11,500, mid-June)

A venerable, mellow gaming convention, Origins takes place in the pleasant mid-western university city of Columbus, Ohio. The Greater Ohio Convention Center and attached hotels afford lots of space, with delicious meals available during the day at the incomparable North Market. In fact, takeaway containers filled with its spicy Indian food, sushi, or falafel sandwiches make appearances on almost every self-respecting gaming table. At night, gamers relax at the Big Bar on 2, or stroll up High Street for a beer with old friends. The event leans toward board gaming - the true roots of Origins - but also offers a diverse variety of other games, from its well-established "Games on Demand" track, which continuously offers tabletop indie games, to its several fee-based, structured live-action events. If you are interested in attending a large American convention and sampling a little of everything, Origins is a good, friendly bet.

# Fabricated Realities

(Olympia, Washington, 50, early-June)

A small group of players gather to enjoy experimental roleplaying games inside breathtaking installations housed in an art studio. The surroundings inform the games, leading players to consider how context and scenery can affect tabletop gaming. To read more about this tiny but awesome roleplaying experience, check out issue #3 of Playground.

# Big Bad Con

(Oakland, California, 300, early October)

Big Bad Con epitomizes the new spirit in small- and mid-sized American conventions. The event is intensely user-focused, and the Big Bad organizers use social media and Web tools to promote, coordinate, and assess their show in a cycle of constant innovation and improvement. Primarily a tabletop show with a strong indie bent, larp is creeping in along the edges at Big Bad Con. Its location provides a nice jumping off point for further West Coast exploration.





## Intercon

(Chelmsford, Massachusetts, 200, early March)

Held in a friendly suburb of Boston and a destination for graduates of MIT, Harvard, and Brandeis, Intercon is one of the country's few larp-only conventions. It boasts a 16-year record of conviviality and nerdery. New England Interactive Literature (NEIL) organizes this intense weekend-long romp through the faerie forests, starships, desolate gardens and post-apocalyptic parties of the imagination. Game organizers receive participants' e-mail addresses months in advance, and build intricate and intertwined character configurations for the usual 4-6 hour parlor lap. During the convention itself, players rapidly change costumes as they attend up to 5 different event slots, grabbing free food at the convention suite whenever they are hungry. Each larp usually uses its own simple stat-comparison or card resolution mechanic to resolve conflict, though experimental jeepform, freeform and tabletop derivatives are slowly gaining ground there as well.

While its players, organization, and hospitality are of very high quality, Intercon's theoretical and (game) mechanical dimensions could use improvement. NEIL recognizes this and holds a separate, day-long pre-convention panel series discussing larp theory and method, as well as the separate New England Larp Conference (NELCO) in July aimed at developing new larps. It's unclear whether these efforts will match the fever pitch of larp theory and play attained in the Nordic countries. Nevertheless, the Intercon model has caught on and is beginning to spread to other regions, with an Intercon Mid-Atlantic in the Baltimore-Washington D.C. area. It remains above all a wonderful place to run live-action games and network.



## Wyrd Con

(Costa Mesa, California, 350, late June)

The slick new kid on the block, Wyrd Con offers a potent cocktail of theory and practicum, transmedia and roleplaying. Though it's young, it's poised to grow into an influential meeting place for serious gamers. Oozing Hollywood glitz and glam, from the high level of costuming to convention badges nice enough to double as jewelry afterward, Wyrd Con strives for media visibility, reaching out to reporters and documenting itself with high-quality photography. In addition to panels on theory given by academics and transmedia luminaries, the convention offers alternate reality games and numerous larps, from boffer dungeon crawls to artier one-shots. Perhaps the convention's youth means that straitjacketed ideas about larp haven't had time to settle, or perhaps it's the laid-back California attitude, but convention-goers are unusually open to new games and high-concept offerings, although the transmedia and larp crowds don't seem to mingle with one another. Come with lots of business cards, as people - particularly on the transmedia side - network aggressively.



## Go Play Northwest

(Seattle, Washington, 150, late June)

A bunch of scrappy indie game enthusiasts put together their own convention a few years ago, and it is still going strong today. GPNW is small, intense, collegial and focused on fun above all. The Pacific Northwest is a hotbed of game designers and dreamers, and every last one of them will be at Go Play Northwest. This event is strictly tabletop and strictly awesome.

## DEXCON

(Morristown, New Jersey, 1,500, early July)

Offering the same friendly milieu as DREAMATION, Double Exposure's flagship convention DEXCON presents a more diverse milieu of gamers, along with pageantry -- in the form of the opening ceremonies with a giveaway raffle, as well as tournaments with cash prizes.

Knutepunkt

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Haradvangen, Norway

See you in the land of  
black metal and oil



# ALIBI FOR DRUNKEN CRAZYNNESS?

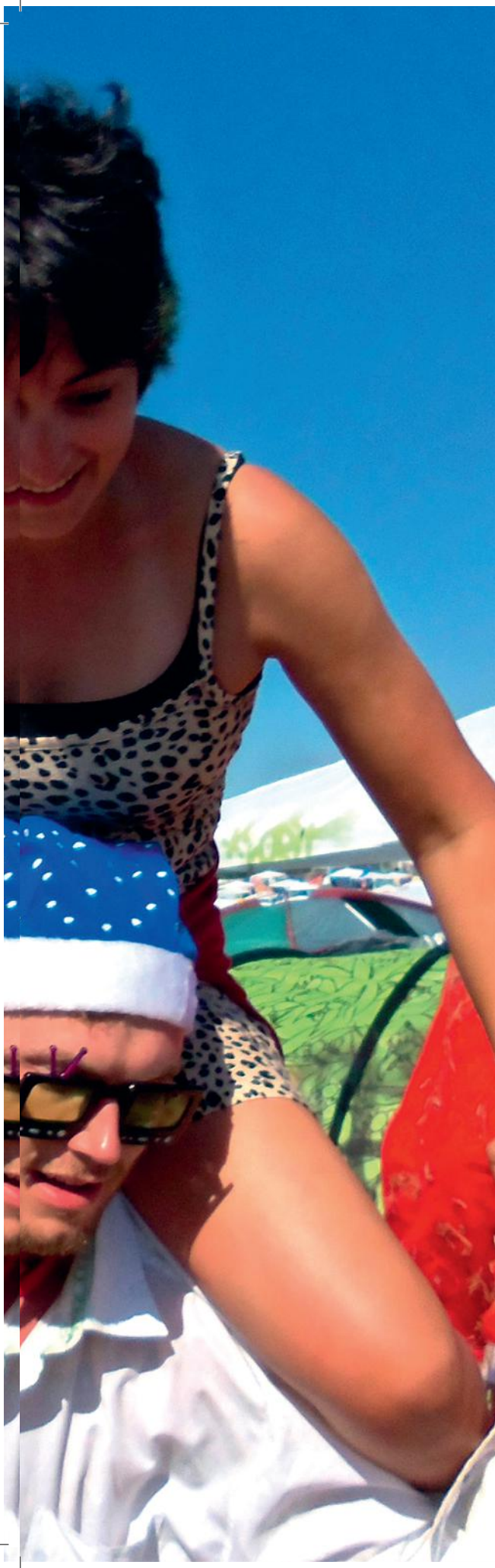
What does a festival full of drunken people doing crazy things have to do with larp?

Alibi, people. Alibi!

TEXT | CLAUD RAASTED







he midday sun is blasting down from above. Legions of stereos are blasting out different sorts of music in cacophonous chaos. Some people are sitting at tables playing board games, while others are lying in the sun and relaxing. A long-haired young man is using a beer can to direct his troupe, which consists of a tiger, a cow, an elephant and a monkey, who are all prancing and showing off.

We're at Roskilde Festival 2012 and the young man in question is one of the players in The Big Game (no tm).

### **A social game**

"The Big Game is a social game. It's not a larp, but it uses certain larplike game mechanics – and most importantly, it's all about alibi" says Bjarke Pedersen, one of the creators of The Big Game and a long-time veteran of the Nordic larp scene. "The game consists of two parts. One of these is a set of karma cards which we have a crew of helpers spreading throughout the festival. These cards have simple instructions like 'Give a random person a beer and pass along the card' or 'Help someone you don't know with getting an air mattress inflated and pass along the card'. The other part is the mission cards, which you can get here at our Big Game stand."

Bjarke points to the wooden structure behind him, which is overflowing with happy people, weird items for the game and cold beer, of which we both avail ourselves. He continues talking a bit about the mission cards, of which there are quite a few. "Basically, the missions are all fun activities that get you into contact with other people at the festival. In one of the missions you have to gather a private zoo of 'animals' and show it off here at our booth, while another has participants doing 'La bomba' naked at the lake and filming it."

### **Alibi for fun**

When it comes down to it, it's all about alibi. But what is alibi in this context? In popular culture, an alibi is the explanation you give the cops for why they can't charge you with the murder of dear old Uncle Steve. In a roleplaying context, alibi (see Playground #5) is about giving yourself an excuse that lets you take the leap of faith and pretend to be someone else.

It's one of the buzzwords in the Nordic community at >>



# social game

THE BIG GAME



the moment, and for good reason – we’ve been playing around with characters and stories for a long time now, but for many years, little was said about our explanations (alibis) for why it was ok to do so. After all, we’re a community where people have beaten each other up, tortured each other and fallen in love – and then afterwards pretended that it didn’t really count. Of course we need alibis.

The Big Game, however, is not about giving people an alibi for pretending to be someone else, but rather for having fun. Kasper Feld is one of the people who’s playing the game here at Roskilde Festival. “You can do these things yourself if you want to. I’ve organised Lanciers dancing sessions by putting up a ghetto blaster and finding people to dance with me, and that’s worked out great, but very few people do this sort of thing without some kind of prodding.” For participants here, it’s both the lure of prizes and the promise of being able to excuse yourself to others which tempts them.

I’ve organised lancier dancing sessions by putting up a ghetto blaster and finding people to dance with me, and that’s worked out great, but very few people do this sort of thing without some kind of prodding.





## Sex because of cards

"We had a guy who came over to us and thanked us profusely. And for good reason." Bjarke grins. Apparently, the guy had used one of his karma cards as an excuse to get to help a random girl inflate her air mattress. The girl had apparently thought the karma card quite funny, and had gladly accepted the guy's help, and after the ice had been broken, the two had ended up talking for quite a bit and eventually ended up testing out the newly-inflated air mattress festival-style.

"Of course, these things happen all over Roskilde Festival anyway, but this guy really felt that the card had given him the alibi he needed to talk to this girl. After having heard the story, we gave him some more cards – also some mission cards – because that's what it's all about. Giving people an alibi for doing stuff they want to do anyway, whether it's talking to attractive strangers in need of help or dressing up as Romans and throwing a toga party."

## But is it larp?

On this question, Bjarke is very clear. "It isn't larp. The participants are definitely not playing other characters, so calling it a larp would be wrong. But on the other hand, if a mission card tells them that they should gather a posse and create a flash mob, they'll be doing stuff that they wouldn't necessarily do as themselves. So even though it's not a larp, The Big Game definite has pretend-play moments."

One of these moments is just about to come to an end. The young man and his animal foursome have finished their act, and he lets out a loud whoop when one of the staffers behind the counter awards him a pool of points for the performance. And the animals? They get a big thank-you-hug from the sprechstallmeister and wander off to find new entertainment, their costume alibis just as effective as before. ■





# The 41 Year-Old Virgin

After 25 years as a dedicated role-playing enthusiast, Lars Andresen recently participated in a real larp - for the very first time. Some things were totally familiar and some things were very different

TEXT | LARS ANDRESEN PHOTO | NIELS JENSEN & LARS ANDRESEN

**T**he big tent almost shimmered in the hot summer air as I walked towards it through the barren quarry somewhere deep south in Zealand. It was surrounded by a lot of happy roleplayers. Then it really came to me. 54 hours! This game is going to last bloody 54 hours. Sitting around the table, a long game lasts about six hours. I thought of a means of escape.

The larp in question was the Danish 'Den Hvide Krig' - The White War - a game about the occupation of Iraq. I was one of the about 40 natives being occupied by a 'friendly' and technologically superior force. And at 41 years of age and with 25 years of role-playing behind me, this was my first larp ever.

## THE DIFFERENCES

### The players created the game

At my first workshop for Den Hvide Krig, I suddenly understood why Kristoffer Thurøe some time ago told me that it was difficult writing a scenario for Danish convention Black Box CPH because there was no time for extensive workshops. I didn't really know what to expect at the workshop. I've heard a lot of people talking about workshops in regards to larping, and it turned out that the workshop was much more story-oriented than I had anticipated. It was up to every player to create the basis for his or hers own story that was to unfold during the game.



■ *Sitting in the background enjoying my pipe. Den Hvide Krig was a very social larp*



I must admit that I sat for some time and waited for the organisers to tell us more about what was going to take place during the game, but they didn't. It was up to us as players.

That was very interesting to experience. I've written a lot of scenarios for pen-and-paper and at Fastaval and similar conventions you don't really get that much commitment from the players - or to say it more fairly: there's a very large difference in the commitment from the players. At a pen-and-paper role-playing convention, some players turn up with a surly disposition and just awaits being entertained. Some don't even turn up to the game because they're hung over or just not in the mood. And some turn up ready to give everybody a great experience. But at this workshop, each and every player was dedicated to the game. There wasn't any dead weight.

During the game itself, it was fascinating to experience stories created by the players unfold. As a first timer, I didn't start that many plot threads myself, but I did get involved in many, and it just seemed that the stories came naturally. The organizers had planned a few events that created basis for further story development, of course, but even without those events, many stories just appeared out of - from my perspective as a writer - nowhere. It was like 70 people juggling a lot of balls and I didn't see that many get dropped.

### Everybody wants the same thing

At pen-and-paper conventions, players usually doesn't agree on what they want out of the game. Heck, they don't even agree about what role-playing games are. It was much easier (and a lot more boring) when we all played Call of Cthulhu or D&D. Nowadays you risk turning up to a 'close-to-home semi-larp' at Fastaval and



get to play it with some 20 year-old dude who normally plays Rolemaster in his friends parents basement. That can create an amazing gaming experience - or an extremely frustrating one. At Den Hvide Krig, it was very clear that everybody basically agreed to what we were about to play and how to play it. It was just so fascinating to be with about 70 people and being in agreement to what we were about to do. I'm used to being ecstatic when I find 5 people that want the same thing out of a game at a convention.

### No meta or out of character time

I decided to play a nice person - not too far away from my own personality - so it would be easy for me just to fall into the role. But of course during the game I said some nasty shit to other players, manipulated them and so on, and I realised that I was really used to going off-game after an intense scene.

In pen-and-paper role-playing, you go off-game all the time. Even while semi-larping. In pen-and-paper, you get the "Was it good for you too" moment after a scene, just to be sure that the other player is okay. Not in this larp.

That really took some time for me to get used to. I scolded - like, really scolded - a member of my family and she just looked so hurt and so sad, that I felt really bad for her. And it wasn't really anything in

>>





## It was a lot less complicated than I had anticipated.

regards to what I saw other players do. But the fact that you don't go off-game all the time was extremely different from the RPGs that I'm used to.

### An expensive way of gaming

Larping - or Den Hvide Krig in this case - is expensive. The game itself was 115 euro and then I spent about 300 euro on equipment and my costume. I know that 400 euro for four days entertainment isn't expensive, but set against tabletop it is. Tabletop doesn't cost much.

## The Similarities

### All in a day's work

Basically it was role-playing and as a role-player I felt right at home from the very first scene. I could draw on my experience as a role-player, and that was a big relief. The really physical stuff - fighting and physical arguments and screaming - didn't come natural to me, and when I was involved in those scenes I became very aware of what I was doing and how

I was doing it. But otherwise, it was just like playing a scene in a

semi-larp at Fastaval. The scene just lasts 8 hours instead of 8 minutes.

### Another world

Being at Den Hvide Krig for four days felt so much like being at Fastaval, Knudepunkt or the like for four days. I had the same precise feeling of being pleasantly transported to Never Never Land. I liked that. I relaxed much more than I had anticipated. Several players told me afterwards that larps, of course, are extremely different, and at Den Hvide Krig there was a lot focus on having a good time because that underlined the sense of us natives having to lose something to the invading force.

### A conclusion

Larping was a lot more fun than I had anticipated. A lot of my friends had warned me that larping also can get pretty boring, with a lot of sitting around and waiting. But this game wasn't anything like that. I'm pretty sure that the organizers are to thank for that. They created a fam-

ily structure where you were supposed to approach anybody sitting alone and start a conversation, tell them a story or stuff like that.

It was a lot less complicated than I had anticipated. There were a lot of balls to keep track of but, whereas in pen-and-paper you have perhaps four hours to start and conclude the whole condensed story, we had several days. So even the more complex stuff never felt convoluted, and I never felt the pressure I normally feel in complex pen-and-paper games.

It lasted just the right amount of time. I hadn't lasted a day more - not because I was exhausted, but we had played out the conflicts that were in this game. At the very end, I felt that we began to repeat ourselves, and I was very glad that the game ended Saturday at six o'clock and not at midnight.

It was easy for my to become an integrated part of this larp. I have a lot of friends that are larpers, and people generally welcomed me and helped me to have a good experience. And it was just like we say at Fastaval: If you want to be a part of it and be accepted, you just have to put in a good effort. You cannot turn up to a larp and expect to be entertained. You have to provide the entertainment yourself.







# ake your own medieval clothing

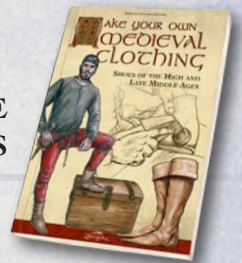
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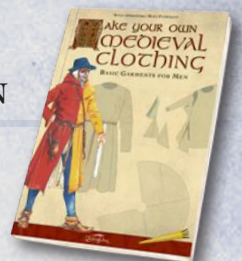
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# Old School and DANGEROUS

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## Chapter One: Snap-Dragon

by Aaron Vanek

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In the gas-lit nights before television, humans devised surprising pastimes. If you desire an old-fashioned and slightly dangerous yet playful experience, then read on. None of these parlor games are new; most are old enough to be in the public domain. Some will be familiar, but you might not know their history.

These games can be played as single party activity or stitched together for an enigmatic evening. They can be used as a part of larps or maybe in pre-game workshops.

All games in this ongoing series have been tested and found reasonably safe. Some pursuits in this series will hurt players, perhaps physically, maybe emotionally. They will be rated on a danger scale of one (you could play with grandma) to five (have players sign a liability waiver before participating). Be smart and make allowances for safety and wound salving with your group.

The first two in the dirty dozen involve fire.

### History

Snap-dragon, also called Flap-dragon, was played in parlors in the United States and England from the 16th to 19th centuries, often during winter, especially on Christmas Eve, Halloween, or Twelfth Night.

### Ingredients

- Either a handful of raisins, some dried plums, cherries, or prunes
- Large glass punch bowl or equivalent
- One bottle of high-proof liquor (brandy is traditional). If the bottle has a cork, keep it for the next game.
- A popcorn kernel or other small, solid object that can be eaten
- A lighter

### Rules

- Hide the popcorn kernel or other object inside one of the fruits. Slowly and carefully heat the liquor either on a stove or in a microwave so it is warm but not hot. This vaporizes the alcohol, which is flammable. Let's repeat that: alcohol vapor catches fire easily.
- Pour the alcohol into a large non-metal bowl or use the same one it was heated in. Gently add the fruit, including the one with the object in it. The more you plopp into the booze bowl, the more difficult the game.
- Turn out the lights.
- Ignite the alcohol in the bowl by holding a lighter just above the surface. If it doesn't catch, warm the liquid up a little more. The higher the proof, the lower the temperature needed to alight. At 90 proof, heating may not be required.
- Oooh and aaah as you watch the blue flames dance across the bowl.
- Players should recite the poem on the next page in unison before the game begins:

## The Poem

*Here he comes with flaming bowl,  
Don't he mean to take his toll,  
Snip! Snap! Dragon!  
Take care you don't take too much,  
Be not greedy in your clutch,  
Snip! Snap! Dragon!  
With his blue and lapping tongue  
Many of you will be stung,  
Snip! Snap! Dragon!  
For he snaps at all that comes  
Snatching at his feast of plums,  
Snip! Snap! Dragon!  
But Old Christmas makes him come,  
Though he looks so fee! fa! fum!  
Snip! Snap! Dragon!  
Don't ee fear him but be bold  
Out he goes his flames are cold,  
Snip! Snap! Dragon!*

From Robert Chambers  
Book of Days 1879

## Objective

Players reach their bare hands into the liquid—yes, the stuff on fire—to grab a fruit and put it in their mouths. The one who finds the solid thing wins.

According to Samuel Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language (1755), Snap-Dragon is "a play in which they catch raisins out of burning brandy and, extinguishing them by closing the mouth, eat them." In an 18th century Tatler article by Richard Steele, "the wantonness of the thing was to see each other look like a demon, as we burnt ourselves, and snatched out the fruit."

## Winning

Supposedly the person who grabs the most raisins will meet their true love within a year. Another tradition has a gold button hidden in the fruit. The one who gets it can claim a reward of their choosing—I recommend an ice pack.

## Play Tips

It hurts, but shouldn't burn or blister. Expect to lose any hair on your hand or wrist. One trick is to reach in, grab a raisin, and then blow out your flaming fingers before throwing the fruit into your mouth. Avoid scorching the hair on your head. Put the bowl on a surface that will not catch; the liquid splashes out while still afire.





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## Chapter Two: La Vache qui Tache

by Aaron Vanek

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### History

La vache qui tache means "The Cow Who Stains" in French, the country of origin. The game's development vanished over time, though Wikipedia claims it began as a drinking game before children appropriated it. It can be played with anywhere from four to 24 players, though it will take too long and become unwieldy if there are too many participants.

### Ingredients

- Burn a cork at one end so it will leave ash when rubbed on skin.

### Play Tips

Other than the possibility of making a mess that may not come out of your blouse, this is a fun, flirty game. Be sure to share the cork so the last person to get a correct phrase is the one spotting the one who made the mistake. This game is best played with alcohol—perhaps a nice glass of Seared Knuckle-hair Brandy?

### Variant

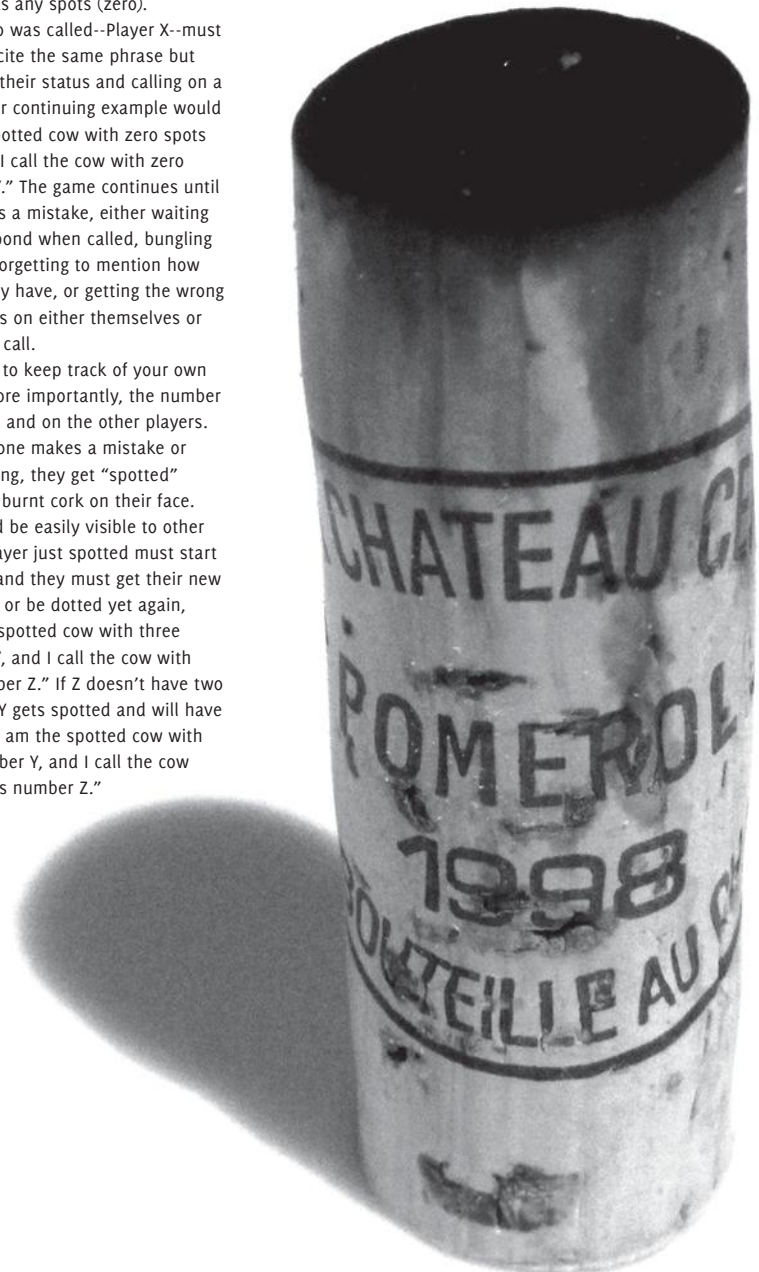
The English-American variant of the game, common to fraternities, is called "Ibble-Dibble", and the name of the person is used instead of a number. So the phrase is "I am Ibble-Dibble Claus with no Ibble-Dibbles calling Ibble-Dibble Lars with one Ibble-Dibble." This version also swaps the cork for Nutella or peanut butter, and probably devolves quickly into snogging.

### Rules

- Each player gets a number, from one to however many players there are. Player one says "Je suis la vache qui tache sans taches numéro 1 et j'appelle la vache sans taches numéro X", or, in your native language, "I am the spotted cow with zero spots number 1, and I call the cow with zero spots number X". X is the number of any other player, and since this is the first turn, no one has any spots (zero).
- That player who was called--Player X--must immediately recite the same phrase but change it to fit their status and calling on a new cow. So our continuing example would be "I am the spotted cow with zero spots number X, and I call the cow with zero spots number Y." The game continues until someone makes a mistake, either waiting too long to respond when called, bungling the phrase by forgetting to mention how many spots they have, or getting the wrong number of spots on either themselves or the player they call.
- Thus, you have to keep track of your own number, but more importantly, the number of spots on you and on the other players.
- Any time someone makes a mistake or hesitates too long, they get "spotted" by dabbing the burnt cork on their face. The spot should be easily visible to other players. The player just spotted must start the call again, and they must get their new number correct or be dotted yet again, e.g., "I am the spotted cow with three spots number Y, and I call the cow with two spots number Z." If Z doesn't have two spots, number Y gets spotted and will have to start over: "I am the spotted cow with four spots number Y, and I call the cow with three spots number Z."

### Winning

Whoever has the FEWEST spots when one person has five spots wins. You can alter this winning condition to receiving more or less than five spots (shorter or longer game), or when someone runs out of the room giggling to avoid being smeared again.





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# O Safety, Where Art Thou?

Rasmus Høgdall thinks we should stop thinking about psychological safety like creationists think of science and explains why, thus roasting everyone including himself

TEXT | RASMUS HØGDALL

**P** psychological safety is the Elephant Man of the larp scene – a freak in our side-show hobby that stands out as a prominent circus attraction. We don't mind showcasing it - pushing it out on the stage for squandering eyes to examine, but never have we really taken it seriously.

The larp community as a whole has more or less ignored the safety issue. Accepting whatever hocus-pocus some larpwrights deemed the cure for players' ailments was good enough for everybody. We hags and shamans have swayed all with our words of wisdom and made up palliatives. In fact, the foundation of debate and theory on safety is mainly a fantasy of rainbow vomit and sparkling bullshit. I

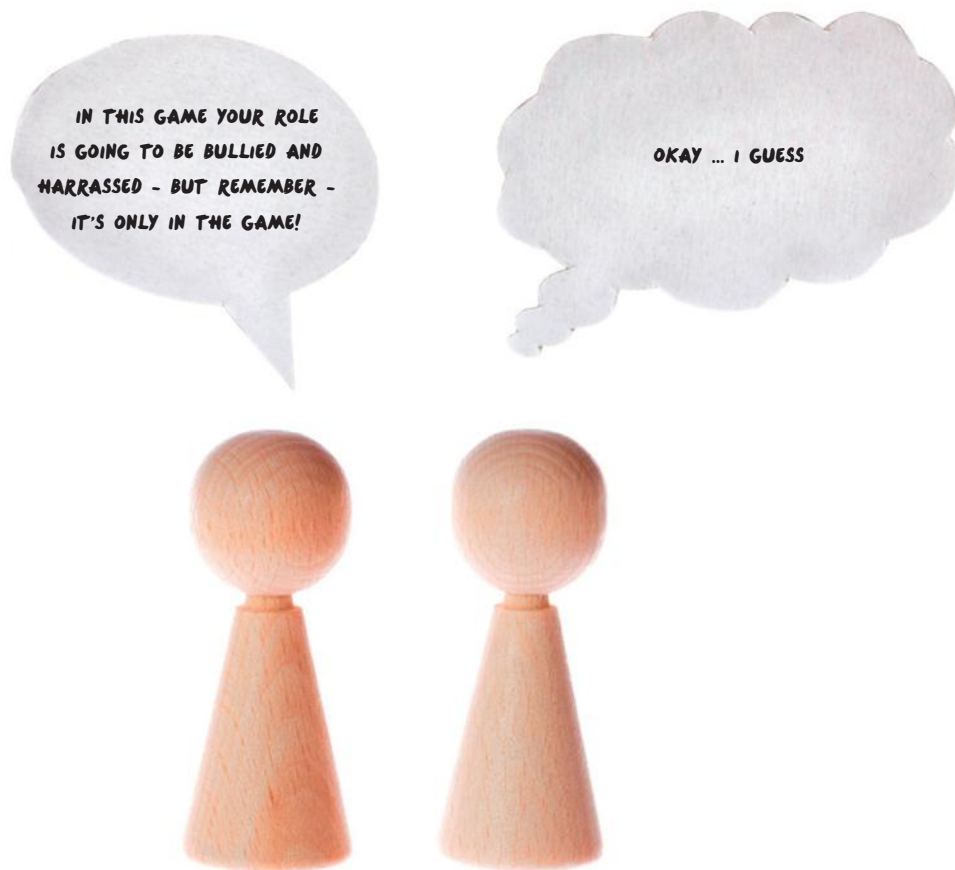
I FEEL TERRIBLE. I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY I DID THOSE THINGS YESTERDAY. WAS IT ME OR WAS IT MY ROLE IN THE GAME??

YOU'LL BE FINE



would go so far to say that we have handled the safety issue like Creationists tackle science. We see something that we believe works, we do not figure out why, and we preach about the unexplainable wonders of it afterwards. Safety is the larp-scene's necessary evil--a circus freak we have accepted but never truly take seriously. Here is why...

We began quite early in the larp community designing games that would affect players – not just their fictional characters. Some might say it is an unavoidable part of what we do. Vi Åker Jeep coined the term “bleed” as an expression for what happens when the emotions of a character affect the player and vice versa. But we bled and designed for bleed long before the term was coined. The word simply became a lighthouse whose beacon could guide us when navigating the hardcore and intense waters we wanted to sail. We have known for quite a while that larps can affect players in both good and bad ways. We know that if we do not take care of our players, we might leave them with small scars on their souls, make them do things they will regret or change their views on important topics. Granted, I have never heard about a player that was utterly and completely broken beyond repair by a larp – or of a larp that was designed for the sole purpose of mind-raping its participants. But I know people who needed professional help afterwards and friends waking up in the middle of the night suffering from panic attacks because of what we do.



Larps have changed how people see the world and their own life. Do not kid yourself. We are in the business of changing people. We do it in many subtle ways and not so subtle ways. By playing with gender, politics and intimacy we can and have created larps that altered people's perception of the world. I will not make the bold statement and proclaim that change is good or bad. Change is simply change. My problem is this: Who are we to actually decide what constitutes good or bad change in people's lives? And if we choose to change people's lives, we better be there for them when they step into our light. Even when we larpwrights do not fuck up the mental health of our players, we still have a responsibility for the consequences of our designs.

In my mind, larpwrights are artists. They have every right to create life-changing

games as long as they do not goad people to participate on false premises. The artist is in his good right to change the world and the people in it. But when we ask people to participate in what is going to be a lived experience that might well change their lives, we damn well need to give them a chance to come out the other side unharmed, unbroken and un-brainwashed. We need to know exactly what we are doing. And in this we fail.

I often hear the phrase: As long as we inform the players of everything that might happen in the game, we are safe from any form of prosecution afterwards. I have two minor problems with this: first and foremost, who are we to believe that we have the same limits and language as the potential players? Yes I can describe violence, hunger, or nudity because these are physical things that could be part of

any larp. But how do I describe the potential for hate, anger, love, and lust that are solely inside the mind of the player? What words do I use to convey other people's emotions without knowing how they tick? The other problem is that we try to solve half of the safety issues by describing and even rehearsing every single thing that might harm someone. By doing this we hope to overcome the emotional language barrier. This, on the other hand, leaves precious little room for a natural progression of the story. By explaining everything larpwrights lose power over the story and leave the bulk of the game on the players' shoulders. Unfortunately we have not explored different solutions to this problem, so right now that is our best option.

As a larpwright, I have been part of the safety discussion for a while. One thing >>





I have heard more often than anything else is that the larpwright should never be blamed for creating a life-changing larp. If the players are of legal age, they bear the sole responsibility for how the larp affects them. If they did not want to be utterly fucked up, they could simply have said no, gone off-game or flipped off the larpwright and left the building. This stands in stark contrast to the Nordic culture of immersion and hardcore play styles, which continuously pushes the players to give more and more of themselves in the larps they participate in.

I am sure that if you as a reader just apply “the perpetrator cannot be blamed”

to other fields of human interaction it might seem quite wrong. But since it is primarily larpwrights as myself that are having this discussion, I might have an inkling of an idea how this notion came to be.

Most of the people working with safety are the same people who are making intense larps. Most of them are good designers creating good games. But they are creating larps because they want intense emotional experiences for the players, not because they are interested in safety. Why, then, are they spending time on it? Because the larpwright does not want to scare away potential players by saying it

is an unsafe game. In the end he needs to covers his ass in case any player actually breaks by pointing out that he had taken all precautions known to man. But the precautions are designed by like-minded folks and not by people concerned with safety as a primary design. Larpwrights are better at designing for an emotional blow to the face than making sure that when you get knocked out there is something soft to collapse on. The real reason we have a safety discussion is not to help players, but to further the art we are creating. That is why we do not look for actual solutions but continue to rehash the same patches over and over. We even use the safety talk to design games that



## Rasmus Høgdall

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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.

will push people to go for an even more hardcore larp experience. As long as we give them hugs and cookies afterwards nobody is going to blame us for it.

Like priests healing the sick in shanty tents, we perform rituals before and after the game to ease the players' transition from one reality to another. The best sermon I know of is the role-play agreement. It states that you should not blame the player for the character's actions – something any post-larp love affair has proven void. Using safewords to signal another player to stop intensifying a scene or to completely stop it is another example. We believe that it actually works and not just makes you feel safer, which embodies the whole problem of safety rules and the false sense of security they give us. That said, there is no reason to believe we can't make some of these tools work. The tools have never been the whole problem. What about the people using the tools?

We learn that workshops are great because people have a chance to meet each other and become familiar enough that whatever feelings they might experience in the game is derived from recognized faces. This familiarity also helps people afterwards to hash out whatever problems they might have had. So what we have been taught is: It is better that the character your character falls in love with during a larp is played by a person

you know outside the game so it is easier to talk about afterwards. That makes sense. Even better is derolling after the game, where we ask players to retell or relive hard experiences from the game. This is basically pushing the player into a bleed experience, where he suddenly, as himself, relives fictional feelings and memories, blurring the lines between character and self. We implement safety mechanisms because we have been told they work and we have been telling our players they work. But just how much of it is actually to make the players feel safe, compared to actually being safe?

The worst part is that some of the designs causing bleed are supported by the safety mechanics. Workshops enable players to play harder with each other, safewords make people think they have an easy way out if things become too intense, which gives them momentum to go even further. If players – because of a workshop – have come to like and trust each other, then most players will do what they can to avoid disappointing the group. Derolling has design flaws that might actually make players relive harsh experiences without the alibi of the character – as themselves. So why are we not changing it, redoing the mechanics? Because we can see the larps work. They affect people to such a degree that some people change for life. And we as creators have a hand in that, and we love it. This is what art is supposed to do, right?

If we look at the mechanics for psychological safety that have been used so far, how many do we know work? Is the larpwright's reason for designing safety mechanics actually fuelled by interest? Do we in the end care more for the art than the people participating in it?

We should go back and look at it all; we should focus the best and brightest minds in the larp community to find proper solutions, so players and larpwrights alike can enjoy and create games without the fear of breaking anyone. But first and foremost, we have to acknowledge that we have a serious problem on our hands when we do not take proper care of players. We are doing the mental equivalent of extreme sports with a safety harness we borrowed from some guy we met at a party. We have people's mental health by the balls once in a while, and right now we do not know if we are softly stroking them or trying to yank them off.

It is not just the tools we have to redo and repair. The truth of the matter is that we the toolmakers and users are to blame. By now we should know enough about safety to understand that we need a change in culture inside our community if we ever are going to solve these problems. We have lived so long in the ugly shadow of what proper play is that we have deemed the player's experience of more value than the player's safety. We need to learn that breaking character is not bad, that saying cut or stop is not destroying immersion. I have seen inklings of change on the horizon, but neither the Solmukohta safety debate nor articles have given me peace of mind. But if you listen closely to the community, there are voices speaking out loud for safety. Still, we have a long road ahead of us. ■



# structured FREEFORM



If the word "freeform" was a mythical beast, it would surely be a hydra. Cousin to that many-formed chimera, immersion (in diversity of use if not in meaning), freeform is one of the most confusing terms in role playing. A latest application, used to describe games as structured freeform, brings new face to the briny beast

TEXT | EMILY CARE BOSS

**L**et's start with the old. In the UK it is applied to live action play deriving from the influential UK game *Treasure Trap*. Here freeform distinguishes the play from traditional (card and board) games that happen on a table top. It describes the movement of the players and the freeform flow of the narrative and actions of participants. Hitting each other with dye-laden boffer weapons is a darn sight more spontaneous than making yet another turn round the boardwalk in *Monopoly*. Live play spawned another branch of freeform. In Sweden and Denmark, reaction set in to the orthodoxies of larp: the rambling story-ish experiences of the players, the dependence on costume and props. In *Jeepform*, an offspring of Swedish freeform play, the use of the term meant that the designers were free of the standard forms of play. Instead rules are inspired by the stories the game revolves around. Writing a story about a family torn apart by a Drunk? Use a bottle with water (or rum) in it, that you swig from in turns. And where the line of the liquid lands determines when pre-scripted events (written on the bottle) occur in the game. Here, free means free of preconceived notions. Free to go where inspiration strikes.

“Freeform play” is the most basic use, consisting of pretty much anything happening in role playing games that didn't involve dice and crunchy mechanics. Walking across the village square to haggle for a magic sword? You may have to pick up the dice or consult rules for the bargaining, but before that: arriving there, talking with the merchant, examining their wares (perhaps) could just be trusted to have happened based on the acceptance by all involved. It has been described, it has been established. It has happened. Now cut to the contested parts of the story so we can roll dice over what really matters!

This leads us to a recent incarnation of freeform. A new guise with a paired term: “structured freeform”. This phrase, coined by Jonathan Walton (designer of *Geiger Counter Beta* and *Metrofinál* in 2006, is used to describe (originally tabletop) role

Looking across the Atlantic to the US, yet another set of "freeforms" exists.

### Further Proliferations

Looking across the Atlantic to the US, yet another set of "freeforms" exists.





# Knowing the full arc of the story ahead of time allows players to relax and play out what occurs.

playing games that leave mechanical procedures behind, especially omitting that most critical piece: the contested outcome, be it by roll or comparison of value.

Marrying the term "structured" to freeform, seems to make it an oxymoron. What on earth does this mean? Let's use an example game to discern some key differences.

### Everyway Slices and Dices

Long ago, in the dark ages of the 1990s, a game was published called Everway. An innovative game, it eschewed dice to resolve conflicts about which way the fictional events would go, and grouped its avenues for resolving these story bifurcations into three camps: Fortune, Karma and Drama.

**Fortune** mechanics called upon fate and chance (putting them under the guidance of Mother Fortuna?). In standard games this role was held by dice, but in this game a deck of cards was used to influence outcomes in a less quantified though still random manner.

**Karma** (sacred, of course, to the Hindu laws of Karma that determine the course of one's next incarnation) relies on relative or quantified descriptors. I am "strong" and you are "weak"? Then I beat you arm-wrestling. You have "cunning 10" and I am "simple" and have "cunning 2"? You, unfortunately, trick me out of the magic sword I paid waaaay too much for at the bazaar.

**Drama** (no, not Dharma, then we might bring in Buddha's words as well, instead we'll leave this one to the Muses of Comedy and Drama, Thalia and Melpomene, closest to theater as we know it) involved invoking "what is best for the story". Pure fiat it was.

In Everway, all of these techniques lead back to the GM. The GM interpreted the random cards. The GM called for

the comparison of value. The game introduced non-normative ways of moving through the creative impasse (i.e. "I hit you" "No you didn't!"), that was assumed always to occur, but each reduced down to GM authority. Structured freeform uses some of these techniques, and makes a similar break from the norm, but comes from a different direction all together. It is under the aegis of Æquitas, the Roman goddess of equality, that structured freeform would stand.

### Breaking Egalitarian Ground

Rather than waiting for the divergence to occur in the fiction, the structures of freeform create a path to consensus from the get-go. There are many ways this occurs:

- **Fate play** - knowing the full arc of the story ahead of time allows players to relax and play out what occurs.

Rather than fighting for their character to live, instead they may attempt to bring the most pathos or awe to their death. Jeepform embraces this concept (Happy Ends, Doubt, Growing Up).

• **Tonal play** - use of resonant concepts are used to invoke agreement among the players. In the Sea of Doubt (an improvised board/rp game), players created a board full of emotions and experiences ("anger", "betrayal", "elation", "the sea of doubt") that were represented and connected. Counters representing the characters were moved at the start of each turn, framing the tone for each ensuing scene. Swords without Master also uses tone as a unifying principle, with two dice, one for Glum, one for Jovial, rolled before decisive actions. The whole gamut of outcomes whether epic slaughter, devastating defeat, or seductive interplay are all possible, so long as what comes out feels informed by the tone of the dice roll.

• **Egalitarian creative procedures** - turn taking, pure and simple, can let you accept what others create without needing the mediation of weighted procedures (ie rolling against your stats). It's my turn to talk now, it will be yours later. Many fiction-oriented party games do it this way, such as Consequences and Exquisite Corpse games. Once Upon a Time and Microscope, as well. In Playing with Intent, basic principles of improvisation, such as listening to one another, and riffing off what has been created, are building blocks of







the game. Some games give you a back up procedure to use if agreement breaks down, in the game Microscope you can "push" to add something another disagrees with, then the group votes by pointing at the person whose idea they back. In practice it's infrequently used. Polaris is another game that primarily uses freeform structures negotiated in specific ways through ritual phrase. But it includes a fall-back dice mechanic to mediate agreement when the ritual phrases don't get you there.

• **Play it again, Sam** - Some games allow for a freedom or flexibility in what gets played out. A scene can be played twice or more in order to bring out different nuances and possibly different outcomes. Particularly in games where you are playing out live what occurs, the improvisation that happens with different approaches can change the fiction dramatically, and bring everyone to a new state of consensus without bickering over details. This is a standard technique in the Jeepform tool kit, and shows up in *Playing with Intent* as one of many ways to craft and create a narrative collaboratively. In the Shakespeare inspired *My Daughter the Queen of France*, scenes are intentionally played over and over many times, each time adding a new level of information and interest. First you only can describe what occurs in the third person, next you can speak from your character's perspective, then you add in emotional expression, and eventually can use monologues. When you are not limited to a "one and done" commitment to determining what happens in the fic-

In structured freeform, the Heraclian task of creating consensus is accomplished by creating a joint story line, tempered by strong play, and clear guiding structures that create a form out of the free.

tional events, you can use the fluidity of role play to enrich the field of narrative created, and bring everyone on board in ways that step aside from dual branching pathways.

An overriding principle that threads through all of these games is that we are all co-authors of the fiction we share. We can bring our imaginations on board the same craft of inventiveness through mechanisms that guide us, with heads ups about the fictional landscape we'll chart our way through, rather than enforcing a staccato tempo of conflicted decisions.

### Conflict vs Empowerment

In games that use contested resolution, that conflict is essential. The tension, the suspense, the hope of success creates a taut feeling of action in the players when they are put at odds with the GM or one another. It creates a sense of investment and keeps you moving forward. Or, that is the intent. In structured freeform, different principles are at work.

Structured freeform is additive. Players are empowered—and required—to continually build upon one another's play. Sometimes this is done by pushing and testing each other to keep the creative engines firing within a taut and connected

fictional tissue. Other times, the game opens participants up to working with whatever their fellows bring to the experience. The rules function to skillfully prime and orchestrate your consent to accept their fictional offerings.

Strong attractors and guidelines keep everyone within a shared circle of ideas. The oxen of our imagination are yoked together to pull together, not apart. Instead of drawing and quartering the narrative,

and allowing the strongest to survive. In structured freeform, the Heraclian task of creating consensus is accomplished by creating a joint story line, tempered by strong play, and clear guiding structures that create a form out of the free. ■

### Links

[jeepen.org/games/drunk](http://jeepen.org/games/drunk)  
[bleedingplay.wordpress.com/geiger](http://bleedingplay.wordpress.com/geiger)  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everway](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Everway)



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



**We are thrilled to announce that a third run of Just a Little Lovin' will be held in Denmark in the summer of 2013. The initiative to bring this larp to Denmark has been made by Flemming H. Jacobsen. He has recruited a splendid and experienced team consisting of Nynne Søs Rasmussen, Helene Willer and Bjarke Pedersen to produce the game in Denmark. The game will be hosted at Klinteborg, a great summer camp right next to the sea. It is an hour's drive from Copenhagen. The dates for the game will be 29th of July - 3rd of August 2013.**

[just-a-little-lovin.blogspot.com](http://just-a-little-lovin.blogspot.com)



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