BRANCHES OP DLAY

Edited by Amber Eagar

The 2011 Wyrd Con Academic Companion



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The 2011 Wyrd Con Academic Companion

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Preface

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Last year we started our journey to enrich our understanding of LARP and interactive theater as we took a critical, academic look at the hobby in *Journeys to another world*. This year, in conjunction with Wyrd Con's expanded vision, we continue that journey as we look at some "branches" of the hobby. The branches contained within this brief book are less on styles of LARP and interactive theater and more in the cultural spectrum.

Rob McDiarmid starts us out with providing us with a different way to look at LARP design through the lenses of various player motives and desires in his article entitled "Analyzing Player Motives to Inform LARP Design."

Following him we have Yaraslau Kot giving us a glimpse into Belarusian LARP culture in "LARPs in Belarus: A Glimpse into Their Culture," letting us see how we are similar, but also a bit different.

Lastly, Sarah Lynne Bowman shares with us a review of a book from our Nordic counterparts that should be of interest to LARP academicians in "A Review of *Nordic Larp*."

Though few in number, it is with these authors that we continue our journey as we take a look at some of these different branches of play.

- Amber Eagar, Editor

About the editor

Amber is a long time LARPer who has enjoyed participation as both a player or staff in several LARPs that run the gamut of styles and genres and is currently running a pervasive LARP titled *The Collective*. She edited last year's academic book titled *Journeys to another world*, is a former columnist on RPG.net and maintains a mailing list, called LARP Academia, for those in the USA who like to take a more academic look at LARPing. Amber calls the Emerald City, better known as Seattle, Washington, her home.



Analyzing Player Motives to Inform LARP Design

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By Rob McDiarmid

Arguably the most important thing a LARP designer can do to please her players is to give the players what they want. Accomplishing that goal, of course, is much more challenging. Part of that challenge lies in the fact that, like many people, LARP players are not particularly good at articulating their desires.

However, players tend to exhibit behaviors that give clues as to their desires. The focus of this article, then, is to identify many of those indicative behaviors, group them into common motives, and discuss affordances that can be used to cater to those motives.

My observations are based, more than anything, on my experiences in live combat games, primarily in fantasy settings, in the Los Angeles area. And my examples tend to fit within that context. But I attempt to draw from my broader experience with other styles of games that I've participated in or read about and present a framework for analysis that is wide enough to be useful outside of games about whacking orcs.

If successful, this article may accomplish some of the following:

- To give game organizers a tool for analyzing their own games and inspire ideas for how to satisfy motives that may not otherwise be at the top of their list to focus on. And to give organizer groups a lexicon to help them discuss event design effectively.
- To improve the dialog between game organizers and potential players. By identifying the motives that a given game focuses on, organizers can attract players that are the most likely to enjoy their game and players can find games that best suit their taste.
- To validate various players' motives. While some players value some of these motives more than others, all motives are intended to be presented as being valid. However, as already mentioned, certain games may be a better fit for some players than others.
- To identify additional elements that are possible in the physicality of LARP that may not be relevant in tabletop roleplaying and therefore not covered by some of the previous models, such as The Big Model (2005),

- The Three Way Model (2003), and The Threefold Model (1998). For example, the exercise motive is almost never present in tabletop, and others such as exhibition and crafting are rare. Also, these motives are intentionally more flat and granular than the hierarchies of creative agendas, play styles, stances and other components that make up previous models. I feel that the complicated hierarchies in those models obfuscate the basic goal of the interaction players want things and games either do or do not give the players what they want.
- To expand the scope of LARP discussion to include interactions that occur before and after the scheduled event time. Too often LARP theory (especially as it regards players) focuses only on what happens during game time and everything else is considered "just logistics." But players' interaction with a game involves everything they do about the game, from their first exposure to the time they spend reminiscing about it afterward. And player motives can potentially be satisfied or frustrated during any of those interactions.

What are Motives?

Motives are two different, complimentary things:

- The player desire that drives an individual decision regarding a LARP event the decision to talk to a certain PC or NPC at a given moment, the decision to sneak into an enemy encampment, the decision to trade wood commodities for silk, the decision to make an alliance, the decision to wear the plum colored shirt instead of the black one (and the decision to have more than one shirt to choose from), the decision of whether or not to attend the event in the first place. Multiple motives can come into play on a single decision humans are complex animals and I don't want to argue otherwise.
- An urge to have certain types of interactions. Players tend to have certain motives that they favor, though they may tune their expectations toward the motives they feel are likely to be satisfied by a given event, based on information they've received about the game. If the player feels that there are not enough opportunities to satisfy an urge, or if they feel that a specific opportunity doesn't turn out well, they may feel that their urge is frustrated.

A given player will tend to value some motives above others, though they may have at least a passing interest in many or all of the motives. An event will tend to encourage some motives above others, though affordances may be present that focus on different motives than the main ones that are typical in an ongoing game. **Behaviors** are the outward manifestations of a player decision. These include both in-character and out-of-character actions occurring before, during, and after the event. Basically everything the player does in regard to the event can be analyzed as a behavior driven by one or more motives. This is important because some motives can be satisfied outside the timeline of the event itself (crafting is an obvious example, but others, such as leadership, apply as well).

Affordances are the interaction points put in place by a game that can potentially satisfy or frustrate a motive. These include everything from advertisements, web pages, rules systems, props, NPCs, combat scenarios, game locations, catering, and any other way a player can potentially interact with the game. Even the lack of an interaction point is meaningful, though this is more likely to frustrate than satisfy. Adrian Long (2010) suggests that affordances, a term from user experience design, is a good term to use when discussing how a player interacts with a LARP.

Psychological Motives

I purposely don't look at the level of psychological motives. I don't want to theorize about why a catharsis-focused player wants to experiment with emotional play and what that may do to make them a better person. I don't want to look at how a fellowship-focused player finds a safe haven community in LARP that may allow them to develop better interpersonal relationships outside of a game context. Thomas Duus Henriksen (2005) analyzed these psychological motives with an emphasis on how those with mental disorders can use LARP as therapy. Sarah Bowman (2010) analyzes the psychological functions of roleplay in far more detail than I could hope to cover. Instead of focusing on the psychology of the player, I focus on how to identify what the player wants out of a game and what the designer can do to help them get it.

Dysfunctional Motives

Let's face it; players sometimes perform actions for bad reasons. Dysfunctional motives, such as cheating, being disruptive, or being abusive, are outside the realm of what I would consider valid motives. As such, they are outside the focus of this article and will not be addressed. All motives are presented in a neutral to positive light.

The Motives A Quick List

- 1. Audience Experience a satisfying narrative.
- 2. **Catharsis** Experience emotions through the character.
- 3. **Comprehension** Figure things out. Solve problems and puzzles.
- 4. **Competition** Win at something, or at least enjoy the act of competing.
- 5. **Crafting** Create non-ephemeral things (costumes, props, documents, etc.).
- 6. **Education** Take away new knowledge or understanding as a player.
- 7. **Embodiment** Make decisions based on character

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- background, knowledge, and motivation.
- 8. **Exercise** Enjoy physical activity and movement.
- 9. **Exploration** Experience the fictional setting.
- 10. **Exhibition** Show off (costumes, props, acting chops, mad skillz, etc.) and get kudos.
- 11. **Fellowship** Enjoy time with friends (also includes flirting and such).
- 12. **Flow** Enjoy losing oneself in the moment.
- 13. **Leadership** Be important to the player community.
- 14. **Protagonist** Be important to the story and impact the game world.
- 15. **Spectacle** Experience the awesome stuff (pretty costumes, elaborate sets, funny NPCs, etc.)
- 16. **Versatility** Collect important things (spells, lore, favors, etc.) and have the right thing at the right time.

Audience

The goal of the audience motive is to experience a pleasing narrative. An audience-focused player wants to leave the event feeling like they were part of a good story. Some audience-focused players are more active in making story happen, often combining with the protagonist motive. Others are more passive, which generally combines well with Spectacle.

Behaviors

- They seek out conflicts for their character not because they want to win those conflicts but because conflicts drive story.
- Occasionally, an audience-focused player will want to participate in plotlines presented by the staff regardless of whether they are appropriate for their character.
- Keeping an in-character journal of events (which often overlaps with the crafting and embodiment motives as well).
- Identifying or creating connections between setting elements that may not have originally been intended by the designer.
- Seeking resolution to forgotten elements from previous events in an ongoing campaign.

Affordances

- In medium to large ongoing LARPs (those with at least 20 players), satisfying the audience motive becomes increasingly challenging, as it becomes more difficult to follow story arc conventions without treating the entire player base like a small party in a tabletop RPG. Pursuing story arcs too strongly can sometimes fail to take advantage of the unique advantages of LARP, such as simultaneous action (McDiarmid 2010) and often frustrates other motives, such as protagonist. Instead of trying to follow complete story arcs, providing many points of potential conflict, thereby allowing players to instigate their own subplots, may be more fruitful.
- In "LARP of a Thousand Faces" (2010), Nathan Hook suggests incorporating monomyth elements, such as a

call to adventure, mentor and three thresholds into plot design to bring resonances of ritual storytelling into an event. This is easiest to do with adventure-oriented games, but he argues that it can be used in emotional, relationship-oriented games as well.

- Another technique I have seen used in an ongoing campaign is periodic character retirement built into the system. *Dying Kingdoms* forces characters to retire when they reach a certain point range, which takes about three years of consistent monthly play to reach. The players get two things in return.
 - First, when their character nears the end of their story, they get to be in the spotlight for a couple of games and are world-changingly important as they seek resolution of their goals. During their final games, a character may be capable of changes deep enough that they affect the rulebook itself for example, one character changed the nature of necromantic magic in the world.
 - And secondly, the player gains access to a special perk with their new character – something not available to normal starting characters such as an unusual race or magic school (possibly one created for them by the game designers).
 - According to some literary theory, stories are defined by their endings, so building endings into the system helps this game to maintain stronger narrative elements than many ongoing fantasy campaign games manage.
- Many campaign games with a combat focus plan for a big fight right before the end of each event, as an attempt to bring the event to a dramatic climax. Games with less combat focus may schedule an important deadline near the end of the event for the same purpose.

Catharsis

The goal of the catharsis motive is to experience rich emotions through the character. An embodiment purist may make decisions based on naturalistic character goals such as staying safe, while a catharsis-focused player will often gravitate toward conflict and areas with the potential for intense emotional exchanges. This can overlap with the audience and protagonist motives, because emotional conflicts help make great heroic narratives.

Behaviors

- A catharsis-focused player will often either raise their voice or cry in character at least once during a given event.
- A catharsis-focused player often seeks conflict less because conflict is good for story and more because conflict can result in an emotional argument.

 A catharsis-focused player may seek to push things along quickly from one emotionally engaging scene to the next, though some are content to experience quieter emotional times or even boredom though their characters.

Affordances

- Placing conflicts into the game that revolve around emotionally charged issues for example, betrayal is generally more emotionally engaging than simple greed.
- Catharsis-focused players may need ramp-up and cooldown time at the beginning and end of the event.
 Markus Montola (2010) mentions the importance of a debrief after emotionally charged games to allow the participants to sort through their thoughts and feelings before moving on.
- Involving the PCs and the characters in their background stories directly often helps as well for example, don't just have the bad guys kidnap a random princess, have them kidnap the sister of a catharsisfocused player, which will drive emotional connection to the plot.
- When catering to catharsis motives, it often helps to have a talk with the players about physical and emotional boundaries and safewords, so that the players can feel more comfortable with exploring potentially heavy emotional content. A specific trick I have used during my *ApocaLARP* events is the OK hand sign if a player thinks that other players may be concerned about their real-life physical or emotional state, they can make the OK sign with one hand (held over the heart, if they're not sure it will be seen otherwise) while continuing to scream and yell. That way, they don't have to break out of their highly charged moment just to reassure the other players. The OK hand sign also works particularly well with fake coughing/gagging, such as when a character has been poisoned.

Competition

The goal of the competition motive is to make strategic decisions and seek advantage. A competition-focused player wants to win at something, or at least feel that they competed well, even if it is against their own potential performance. "Seeking advantage" does not include cheating, which I do not consider a valid motive, and therefore it is outside the realm of this article.

Behaviors

 In a game with strong combat elements, they will often invest a lot of time figuring out maximal ability combinations to fight successfully. They may also spend time discussing multi-person tactics with other players.

- A competition-focused player may bring their own dice, card, lawn, or board games to play with other players during an event.
- In some settings, competition-focused players may engage in social politics to gain advantage over others.
- Competition-oriented players will also often latch onto puzzles that are given to the players, especially strategy-oriented puzzles. A focus on knowledge and understanding puzzles comes under the comprehension motive.

Affordances

- Strategic decisions can come in a variety of formats. Combat systems are an obvious one that is present in many games, but other systems will do.
- A well designed game economy will often please a competition-focused player. Just about any sort of resource management system will allow for strategic choices of some sort and will potentially satisfy a competition-focused player.
- Like fellowship, the competition motive often gets a bad name because it can, at its worst, interfere with other motives such as embodiment. Looking closely at the competition motive can be key to mitigating this problem. If the game designers consistently present challenges for players to face in a character-driven way, this can help reduce the dissonance and help everyone maintain their personas.
- It is often assumed that competition-focused players need a complicated ruleset to be happy, but this is not always the case. Often, they can be plenty satisfied with a streamlined ruleset and will focus their interests on other elements in play, such as live combat tactics or political maneuvering. A few, though, thrive on exceptionally long rulebooks.

Comprehension

The goal of the comprehension motive is to figure things out, to solve problems or puzzles. This can overlap with education when the player has opportunities to learn things that are applicable outside of the game. But the comprehension motive generally focuses on the game itself.

Behaviors

- Comprehension-focused players will gravitate toward obvious puzzles when they appear in a game. They may work on puzzles regardless of whether it is appropriate for their character to do so.
- They may gravitate toward physical traps if thieving is well represented in the game.
- In an argument between characters, these players will tend to propose reasonable compromises rather than engaging in the emotional conflict. This can be frustrating for catharsis-focused players, and it can be tricky to satisfy both, though an open talk outside of

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game about motives can help – encourage the comprehension-focused players to allow the conflict to play out for a while before they calm things and propose solutions.

Affordances

- The most obvious affordance for the comprehension motive is to provide puzzles and problems that need to be resolved that require methods other than "hit it more." However, repeatedly inserting abstract logic puzzles into the game in a way not connected to the story and setting will be seen as artificial and distracting to some players. Also, it should be noted that most logic or word problems can only effectively be worked on by only a few people at a time. It can be good to present such puzzles as options rather than blockages players who are interested in engaging with them can do so if they wish, but the game doesn't come to a screeching halt waiting for a few people to finish a word puzzle or logic puzzle.
- One type of comprehension affordance that game designers often use is the "puzzle monster," which is usually a monster that is immune to everything except the one proper solution. When doing this, it is important to use some sort of clear, consistent signaling for the players to cue off of. An effective example I have seen used at a Live Effects game involved a swarm of monsters each wearing different colored lightsticks around their necks. It is important with this sort of puzzle to make sure the player base has plenty of the right solution available, so that the puzzle monsters are not only able to be affected by the elite few, which can be very frustrating to the protagonist motives of the other players. It is also important to allow some thinking time – comprehension does not happen in the middle of a hectic live combat fight.
- It can helpful to signpost to the players where the puzzles and problems in an event are going to be, since they can appear in many places. If there are going to be social-political problems, comprehension-focused players may need to learn the cultural lore well in order to have an impact. If there are going to be puzzle monsters, the comprehension-focused players are going to need to learn the combat mechanics well. If the game is going to heavily support physical thieving skills and present puzzle traps, a comprehension-focused player may need to stat their character as a thief to be able to engage with those puzzles appropriately. These things generally need to be studied well before the event, so it is important to communicate these things clearly in order to satisfy comprehension-focused players.

Crafting

The goal of the crafting motive is to create non-ephemeral items for an event. This includes crafting done during event time as well as between events. This doesn't just include props and costumes – I was once in an event with a group of players who composed a song as they were roaming around, which was then written down and preserved.

Behaviors

- Though some players may focus on specific types of crafting, this can include a broad range of items, such as costumes, props, foam weapons, in-character fiction, or even things such as setting documents (in one of my local games, some of the players help write the documentation for some of the in-game cultures, though the GM has final approval).
- Sometimes crafting-focused players will create props or costumes that are inappropriately elaborate for their character, just because they can, which can create a dilemma for the game producers. But when they are encouraged and guided correctly, crafting-focused players can add a tremendous amount to the visual appeal and overall verisimilitude of a game, meaning that they can help satisfy the embodiment, spectacle, and Exploration motives of other players.

Affordances

The trick to creating affordances for the crafting motive lies in 2 areas – inspiring and delegating.

- Inspiring comes in the form of communicating an intriguing setting that encourages the craft-minded folks in the player base to make things for the game. This means that setting documents need to be evocative and published early while the potential players still have plenty of time to act on them and create the types of items that are generally done before game, such as costumes and major props.
- Delegating means taking advantage of the creative abilities of the player base by getting them to produce props and costumes (or set design or other crafts) for you. This can be done through open requests or private requests. Private requests are necessary when you want a product to be a surprise or a secret lore-related item. But when secrecy is not necessary, it is usually best to use public requests and a minor reward bounty that gives the player base an equal opportunity to participate, thus avoiding accusations of favoritism that can be harmful.

Education

The goal of education is to learn something so that the knowledge can be taken outside of the parameters of the event. This may be coupled with crafting, if the player wants to learn about making things. It can be combined with catharsis, if the player wants to learn about themselves or

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others on an emotional level. This motive is typically emphasized heavily when live roleplay is used for training or education purposes, such as a roleplay-based customer service training exercise or a school field trip to a Renaissance faire.

Behaviors

- Preparing for an event by reading appropriate materials, such as histories or training documents.
- Having conversations about the historical accuracy of props, costumes, accents, events, etc. during a historically-based event.
- Purposely playing out a worst case scenario during a training exercise in order to stress test the facility, procedures, participants, etc.
- Formally analyzing what was learned after the event, such as writing a paper or conducting a concluding discussion.
- Making suggestions or corrections during the event when discrepancies are noticed between the stated intent and the execution.
- Crafting an item (or making a meal or doing some other task) using historical techniques and tools, in order to learn what special challenges would be present that would no longer apply in modern times.

Affordances

- Being as accurate as reasonably possible during a historical event. Learning opportunities can be present in small details, and these will be noticed by those with more knowledge going in.
- Setting expectations for the participants, so they will know how to deal with anachronisms during a historical event. Calling excessive attention to anachronisms can ruin the educational potential of an experience.
- Encouraging participation. Education-focused events are often conducted with those unfamiliar with live roleplaying, who will need assistance in staying actively engaged. If possible, give the players active goals that will give them something to be doing during times that they are less directly involved, such as noticing details of other players' performances.
- When an event is purposely held for education purposes, holding a discussion right afterward can be key to ensuring that the desired learning has taken place. At the Osterskov Efterskole, an entire school in Denmark that uses live roleplay as a basis for delivering curriculum, Malik Hyltoft (2008) notes that "many learning goals can be achieved in the preparation of the LARP and the evaluation afterwards."

Embodiment

The goal of embodiment is to make decisions based on the priorities and desires of the character. The player is focused on correctly portraying their character. When combined with exhibition, the result is acting – the

portrayal of the character for the sake of the audience. When combined with motives such as catharsis, flow, and exploration, the result is immersion – experiencing a state as close as possible to truly being the character within the game world.

Behaviors

- Creating a character background with a strong focus on elements that drive character decisions, such as a knightly code or a dislike of a major setting element like magic.
- Dressing in character-appropriate costuming (prioritizing "correctness" above prettiness, comfort, practicality or other factors).
- Speaking in an appropriate accent and using a vocabulary appropriate to the character.
- Making choices that are strategically suboptimal because they are the most appropriate choices from the character's perspective.

Affordances

Embodiment-focused characters generally find it easier to portray their character when their fellow players are acting in character as well. The higher the fidelity of the environment, the easier portrayal generally becomes. Embodiment-focused players face a particular challenge in that they rely on others to participate in the fiction illusion along with them – other players with other motive focuses can create glitches in the illusion that are difficult to ignore.

- Costume requirements for the whole player base can help reduce exposure to anachronisms. Add cultural or faction costume groupings to satisfy explorationfocused players at the same time.
- Costuming for cast that is appropriate and unique. Different NPCs should look recognizably different, and should look appropriate for the setting. This satisfies exploration and spectacle as well.
- An active element that can be cultivated to help satisfy embodiment is simultaneous action, which I have discussed previously (McDiarmid 2010). Having multiple things going on at the same time enhances the sense of being physically present as the character in the game world and gives the player an ongoing choice to be made by the character of which elements to interact with
- Streamlined game mechanics with minimal calls are generally helpful, though more complicated systems often help satisfy versatility and competition motives. So either choose to emphasize one side or the other, or try to find a working balance.
- Reducing the consequences of failure (such as reducing the lethality of the combat system) can allow players to make character-driven choices rather than strategydriven choices with less fear. However, some players

find a world of low consequences to be unengaging and artificial, so this approach will not always work.

Exercise

The goal of the exercise motive is to enjoy physical activity. An exercise-focused player generally wants to break a sweat as part of the event. Sometimes this is combined with exhibition ("See how strong/fit I am.") and sometimes with competition ("I want to challenge myself physically in competition with others.") but this should not be always assumed, because some players care much more about the pleasure of movement than being seen or winning.

Behaviors

- Exercise-focused players generally embrace live combat or physical challenges when these are available.
- In a less physically-demanding game, an exercisefocused player might be the one who is quick to volunteer to run to the store to get something the staff forgot, or to help set up props in a room, because they crave the physical activity.
- Exercise-focused players may seek other outlets for physical activity, such as an in-character dance party.

Affordances

The exercise motive is almost exclusive to live combat games and the existence of the motive is one of the main reasons LARP in the United States is so often split into 2 base categories of live combat and theatre style.

- Providing affordances for the exercise motive is relatively straightforward on the surface – just include some fights and/or some physical challenges. A big part of the trick, though, is doing so without interfering with other motives.
- Break up an important discussion with a meaningless fight and you may frustrate those with audience motives who wanted to see how the discussion would turn out. In fact, fights that have little meaning may frustrate several other motives, so it is usually best to make sure that fight scenes flow naturally from the setting and story as much as possible.
- If you approach fights with the goal of satisfying exploration and occasionally spectacle motives in addition to the more obvious motives of exercise and competition, players are often more satisfied with the results.
- Physical challenges can also appear artificial unless
 they are designed with a goal of appealing to spectacle

 these elements usually call a lot of attention to
 themselves, so it is best if that attention is positive. If
 you build balance beams or jumping pads for players to
 interact with, take the extra time to add a couple coats
 of spray paint to them and suddenly they become a
 well-remembered highlight for some of the players.

• Dancing in character can be a great way to satisfy the exercise, fellowship, and exhibition motives.

Exhibition

The goal of the exhibition motive is to show off and be praised. This does not necessarily mean simple shallow vanity, but also includes a virtuous pride in a job well done. This can be coupled with the crafting motive, if the player is creating their own props or costumes or other items which they are then displaying and being praised for, though it can also include purchased items.

Behaviors

- Exhibition-focused players tend to show up in new costumes often.
- They often want to spend time NPCing so they have a reason to use a new costume piece that doesn't fit their character or use a new accent.
- During an event, an exhibition-focused player may take time to set dress a personal space with their own props and such.
- They may use a particularly strong accent that calls attention to their verbal performance.

Affordances

As with crafting, exhibition-focused players can help add to the visual appeal of a game and help satisfy embodiment and exploration motives. As with some of the other motives, exhibition can be tricky, because it can fall into a negative – players becoming selfish and distracting from the quality of the game. So the trick is in emphasizing the positives and guiding the players toward the shared vision of the game.

- Document the vision of the game in a way that encourages and inspires. Give the players a strong sense of what the various factions or cultures should look like. In *Dragonbane*, for example, Johanna Kolijonen (2008) notes that the character cultures were documented in extensive detail, from costuming to custom to architecture, so that the players would be able to construct their costuming to fit seamlessly into the shared vision of the game.
- Place photos of particularly outstanding costuming on the game web site. Make sure to only emphasize costumes that are appropriate to the setting and situation rather than those that are inappropriate but flashy.
- If a player creates a nicely designed space in the event site, send NPCs to interact with them there. Have the NPCs act extra favorably toward the character as a reward. Resist the urge to interact negatively with the space. Don't send thieves to steal their stuff just because they brought noticeably nice stuff that just discourages the practice. Unless the thieves purposely do a horrible job so they can get caught then you're gifting the player with plot.

Exploration

The goal of the exploration motive is to experience the fictional world set forth by the game producer. If the setting is a non-fictional historical reenactment or modern training exercise, this motive is generally replaced by education. This is similar to the spectacle motive, but is less focused on the "wow" factor and more focused on things like verisimilitude. Exploration motives are closely related to Embodiment, but the exploration-focused player is more focused on making sure that a fictional culture or religion is represented correctly, while the embodiment player is more focused on making sure that their individual character is represented correctly.

Behaviors

- The exploration-focused player spends time between events rereading setting documents (or related history/anthropology/etc. documents).
- Making suggestions to the GM about things to add to the setting.
- During the event, they focus on things like talking to a representative of a culture that was mentioned in the setting documents but has previously not been represented by a character in play yet.
- If there are well-developed in-game religions, exploration-focused players tend to take a keen interest in them, and often play a priest of one. Exploration-focused players may also focus on things like in-game fictions or elements that involve deeply experiencing the event location.
- Discovering a new element of the game world during play is a great thrill to an exploration-focused player, and they will usually gravitate toward such things when they appear.
- They may play characters who are explorers or linguists or historians or rare monster hunters or others that are designed to give the player a reason to explore the setting during play. They may also choose to play a character from an unusual culture or faction that is underrepresented by the player base.

Affordances

- Creating a believable and consistent game world with a set of interesting cultures or factions. As with embodiment, the exploration-focused player relies on the performances of the other participants to satisfy this motive. Therefore it may be useful to use cultures with historical analogues to help players fill in some of the details (for example, if you use a culture strongly based on kilt-wearing Scotsman, players can assume things like bagpipes and haggis unless you tell them otherwise).
- Encouraging the use of appropriate accents often helps satisfy the exploration motive, as well as Embodiment.
- · Some games may have a more focused scale, where

multiple cultures and accents may not be appropriate. Well developed group factions may serve the same purpose, in this case.

Fellowship

The goal of the Fellowship motive is to enjoy spending time with friends. A fellowship-focused player wants to hang out with their friends and maybe make new ones. The fellowship motive often gets a bad name, especially among those heavily focused on embodiment, because those seeking fellowship are often less concerned about maintaining the fictional illusion of the game world. But it should be noted that fellowship is one of the strongest motives among players, and attempting to completely subsume it may produce considerable frustration, especially in an ongoing campaign of long events.

Behaviors

- Ignoring a conflict with a character because it might impede your ability to hang out with them.
- Taking interest in an NPC primarily because of the player portraying it.
- Choosing to attend an event primarily because of the friends who are also attending it, rather than because of the content.
- The fellowship motive also encompasses sex/romance drives, but I'm labeling it with the fellowship name because those sub-aspects of it have received negative connotations historically.

Affordances

Generally speaking, it's pretty easy to satisfy the fellowship motive – once you've put an event together, you usually have plenty of people around for hanging around with. Usually the difficulty is in satisfying fellowship without harming other motives, such as embodiment, exploration and catharsis.

- Allowing for areas of the event site that are expected to be either completely out of character or just less roleplay-heavy can help.
- Having scheduled, designated downtimes during a long event can help as well – mealtimes and sleep times can be designated as out of character, so that players can relax and chat for a while.

Flow

The goal of the flow motive is to lose oneself in the moment. Wikipedia (2011) defines flow as "a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity." When combined with other motives such as embodiment, catharsis, and exploration, this state is often called immersion. However, flow can also be experienced in conjunction with exercise, competition, or even comprehension, and because of this I am identifying it as a separate motive.

Behaviors

• A distorted sense of time is often connected with the experience of flow. When combined with the fact that many players do not wear timepieces while in

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- costumes, a flow-focused player may completely lose track of time during an event.
- Flow-focused players may perform hobbies that encourage a flow state, such as juggling or musicianship or knitting, during an event.
- The sense of simultaneous action runs counter to the state of flow. When a player is experiencing flow, their awareness of events outside their current focus of concentration is greatly reduced only upon coming out of the flow state does one recognize that other things were going on. So don't be surprised if a flow-focused player expresses ignorance of events occurring outside of their focused attention.

Affordances

- Because tracking time can be difficult for players
 experiencing flow, they sometimes fail to take care of
 basic needs during extended events. It can be helpful
 for staff to set regular mealtimes to make sure players
 take a break and eat. On a hot day, reminding players to
 stop and drink water every hour or so is important.
- Prohibitions against out-of-character discussions taking place in in-character locations can help those who are experiencing flow to stay in the moment – especially for those combining flow with embodiment or catharsis.
- Streamlined and intuitive rules can help players achieve rules mastery more easily, which encourages flow.

Leadership

The goal of the leadership motive is to be recognized as an important/influential person by the other players (as opposed to protagonist, which focuses more on influence among the characters.)

Behaviors

- They tend to take leadership positions in both in-game and out-of-game factions/cliques, though they may act as though they are a leader regardless of the actual status of their character.
- They may position themselves as a primary point of contact outside of game for a group of other players who are less communicative with the staff. They will often be willing to call the other members of their clique to tell them about a scheduling change or to push someone to submit a character writeup.
- In a game where there is not an absolute distinction between staff and player, they are often the players who take on staff-like roles.
- When not interacting with a specific game, they may spend their time writing LARP theory articles in order to have an influence on the larger LARP community.

Affordances

- Leadership-focused players can be key to building and maintaining a large player base, if that is one of the goals of the staff.
- Building player factions into the game can help satisfy this motive. If you are building the factions before you have Leadership-focused players to lead them, you can design them with NPC leaders who can step aside once a player leader emerges.
- Some games include modular chunks of systems or content. Leadership-focused players can be placed in charge of these. New player rules introductions, itemcrafting systems, and other modular areas of the game can be managed by trusted players with nominal staff oversight.
- In "Culture and Social Status in LARPing" (2010) John Kim notes that perceived social mobility is important to LARP groups. Repeatedly focusing time, attention, and power on a select few creates a culture of cliquishness and disparity. Even though some players may be wonderfully reliable and communicative and easy to work with, it is important for the designer to avoid showing undue favoritism to their closest friends.

Protagonist

The goal of the protagonist motive is to be important to the incharacter action at the event. A protagonist-focused player wants to be a part of in-character decisions that are made. They want to feel as though the presence of their character had an impact on the plot and the game world.

Behaviors

- They tend to position themselves as the primary point of contact for a significant NPC so that decisions go through them.
- They may take positions of leadership among the characters, but they are just as likely to be a "power behind the throne" character, as long as it is well known that they are the one you go to when you really need to things done.
- A protagonist-focused player may make decisions on behalf of others without consulting them first.
- They will also tend to drive conflict, especially if the player also has a strong catharsis motive.

Affordances

- The biggest way to satisfy the protagonist motive is to react to player actions. But due to the physicality of LARP, it can be difficult to respond to everything a player might want to do. So it is important to give them options up front, any of which the game is prepared to respond to.
- Approach reactions to player actions from the perspective encouraged by improvisational acting –

- whenever possible, respond with "yes, and" or "yes, but" rather than "no" (saying no at the right time may be important for consistency reasons, but always consider whether a "yes, but" might be possible instead.)
- Don't let high-level story override individual agency.
 More often than not, an individual player's choices are more important than the game designer's plans.
- In "6 Common Mistakes in Live Role-playing Design" (2010) Gabriel Widing notes that expecting some players to play "extras" who are unimportant to the main action of the event is deprotagonizing. Not everybody needs to play characters of equal status, but they need equal opportunity to interact with the themes of the game. *The Jeep Truths* (2011), however, say "There is no rule that says everyone should have equal direct impact on the story of equal screen-time." So there is room for debate on that front.

Spectacle

The goal of the spectacle motive is to make sure you participate in the "good parts" of a given event. Of course, nearly everybody has a bit of this motive in them – most players don't gravitate toward boredom and tedium. But the motives are a matter of priorities, so when a player chooses to pursue the wow content of a game for its own sake, regardless of other priorities, then they are exhibiting the Spectacle motive.

Behaviors

- A spectacle-focused player wants to see the best costumes, talk to the most interesting NPCs, handle the prettiest props, visit the coolest locations, see all the set-pieces, and experience the best plotlines.
- A spectacle-focused player may create a character that is specifically designed not to restrict them from getting involved in as much good stuff as possible. For example, their character may be involved in a faction, but choose not to have problems with a rival faction, so that they have a better chance to see content intended for both.
- Making decisions because they allow the player to experience the good stuff, rather than because they are strategically or thematically appropriate for the character. A spectacle-focused player may get their character arrested primarily because they haven't seen the prison yet and they heard the jailor NPC is funny.
- In a campaign game, spectacle-focused players tend to gravitate toward whatever is new to them at a given event.

Affordances

 It can be particularly tricky to satisfy the spectacle motive while making heavy use of simultaneous action.
 A spectacle-focused character may feel frustrated if they feel they missed out on some of the "good parts"

- while they were caught up in other elements that occurred simultaneously.
- One of the keys to avoiding this frustration is to signpost the good parts give the players clues about when the big stuff is coming and where it will be.
- And another is to stagger the different kinds of good stuff that appeal to different players. If you created 3 new sets of NPC costuming for an event, don't have all three come out at the same time and then leave again pair those arrivals with different scenes. Stagger different types of wow content throughout the timeline of the event, so that players interested in different parts can catch it all.

Versatility

The goal of the versatility motive is to have the right thing at the right time. The right spell, the right lore, the right item, the right favor, the right skill (or, perhaps, knowledge of who has the right skill and what it will take to convince them to use it). It is similar to the competition motive, but it results in a different set of behaviors. The competition-focused player tends towards a more focused, optimized approach, while the versatility-focused player tends toward a broad, comprehensive approach that involves collecting a range of things (skills, items, lores, favors, etc.).

Behaviors

- Versatility-focused players tend to focus on whatever sort of collecting is possible within the game.
- In some games, this may mean choosing to play a mage because there are times when they may have the key spell that lets them deal with a certain creature.
- In a social intrigue game, this may mean collecting favors from all the different factions so that they can call on the key one when necessary.
- In lore-heavy games, a versatility-focused player collects and studies as much lore as possible, so that they have an answer ready when it comes up.

Affordances

- In order to satisfy the versatility motive, there needs to be some sort of variety of useful things to collect.

 Because this usually happens over time, the versatility motive is often not satisfied during a one-shot game, though it's certainly not impossible to do so. In fact, stretching the time between the collecting and the use can make it too hard for the player to remember what they have and make the connection.
- The need for a certain amount of variety can run counter to the desire for streamlined simplicity, so a delicate balance must be struck if satisfying the versatility motive is not the main focus of the whole game. And even if it is a heavy focus, having way too much stuff to collect can make it more generic than special.

- When using lore as a versatility affordance, it is key to make sure that all the NPCs who are interacting with the lore knowledge are doing so in a consistent, well-informed manner, which can be tricky. Consistency is central to other forms of versatility as well, and any decisions made by whim and fiat that run counter to the consistency of the game risk frustrating this motive. This same consistency is important to the exploration motive, as well, so at least two motives can be satisfied with the same efforts at consistency.
- In many games, an alchemy system (or it's thematically appropriate equivalent) can help satisfy versatility-focused characters, as these systems often involve collecting a variety of components and often also collecting recipes for how they combine together.

Using the Motives

Once the motives of the player base are identified, they can be used to make games better and make players happy.

Design with the motives

The motives can be used in the initial stages of planning a game. Decide which motives you are going to focus on satisfying. Create a game economy designed to satisfy your competition-focused players. Create rich culture documents designed to satisfy the exploration motive.

Alternately, you can use the motives to help you create content for a specific event in an ongoing campaign. If you haven't been emphasizing leadership elements as much as you had intended, plan part of an event that will feature the leaders. Offer interested players an opportunity to learn period-appropriate dances during an event to satisfy their education motive. Plan an emotionally rich conflict for the catharsis-focused players who haven't had enough content thrown their way lately.

Analyze compliments and complaints through the motives

When players give feedback, use the motives to help you decide how to respond. They may guide you toward follow-up questions and help you get better responses. For example, when a player says they want to see more fights at a live combat game, it could be that they like the exercise. But careful followup questions could reveal that what they really want is more opportunities for exploration between fights and they're bored when all the NPCs are backstage changing costumes for half an hour after a fight. Keeping one or two in reserve to come out immediately after the fight might resolve the complaint. Or, maybe they want both. Whatever the result, you have more actionable information to work with.

Staff to compliment motives

If you want your game to cater to a broader player set than it currently does, look closely at the current staff from a motives perspective. Chances are there will be some gaps. In one of the games I participate in, the main staff was excellent at creating dramatic interactions with a subset of the players at a time. They hit strongly on audience, catharsis, and protagonist motives. But they needed to have extra stuff going on for the rest of the

players to interact with. So I came on staff to provide exercise, exploration, and competition elements to round out the game. The collaboration has worked well.

Cast to match motives

When you cast a character, make sure that the character is a good match for the motives of the player. When you want someone to play a feisty instigator, choose someone who enjoys the catharsis motive. When you want someone to play a big tough bad guy, choose someone with an interest in competition and versatility. When you want to cast a faction head, choose someone to whom leadership comes easily.

Advertise with the motives

Using the terminology of the motives can help a designer communicate to their players about what a game intends to try to do well. Such communication will help players find games that fit their interests and provide a better experience for all involved.

Appendix: Motives and Play Styles

The motives are not play styles (or creative agendas). They are more granular than that. It may be helpful to describe how the motives interact with the commonly defined play styles. It should be noted, however, that the motives are purposely designed as smaller pieces that can be valued in different amounts by players who identify with the same play style. It should not be assumed, for example, that a player that identifies as a gamist strongly values both competition and versatility, though both are connected with the way the play style is described.

Dramatist

Dramatism emphasizes the creation of a satisfying story. The audience motive is strongly tied to the dramatist play style. Protagonist is also important, and is central to the challenge of agency in a story-focused multiplayer game. Some dramatist players have strong exhibition and catharsis motives as well, as they often push for big emotional conflict.

Gamist

Gamism generally focuses on resolving challenges. Competition is central to gamism and is generally the strongest defining motive of the play style. Comprehension and versatility commonly back it up. The exercise motive is often associated with this play style more than others, especially in live combat games.

Simulationist

Simulationism generally focuses on the realistic presentation of the setting. Exploration is the mainstay of the simulationist. Spectacle is a common interest – a field full of period-appropriate tents or a battlefield littered with fallen victims make the setting come alive. Individuals in a simulationist game are generally expected to value embodiment and make their decisions in character. Crafting and the exhibition of said crafts is often valued in the simulationist play style.

Immersionist

Immersionism focuses on deeply experiencing the character, to the point of minimizing the sense of self. This usually comes through a combination of the embodiment, flow, and catharsis motives, often within the context of a strong exploration interest. The focus on being the character often includes the protagonist motive as well – it's nice if your character has a visible impact on the world. Some immersionists value crafting either before or during the event as part of the overall experience, though exhibition is often viewed as a purely player motive and discouraged. Other player-focused motives, such as fellowship, are often discouraged as well.

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About the author

Rob started out boffer LARPing with the International Fantasy Gaming Society in the early 90's. He quickly developed a passion for analyzing and experimenting with rules and event design. He helped build bridges across the various boffer LARP groups in the LA area, resulting in the current semi-cohesive LARP community. He is the LA LARP Examiner for Examiner.com, where he reports on local events and posts suggestions for designers and players. He occasionally runs a game called ApocaLARP, a near-future barely-post-apocalyptic game with Nerf guns and zombies.

BRANCHES PIRY



LARPs in Belarus: A Climpse into Their Culture

Branches of Play

By Yaraslau Kot

LARP, a wonderful hobby that has always been with us in some shape or form, yet only within last 30 years has it moved from the classrooms, psychology books and playgrounds into adult society as a form of art.

Gradually the subculture has developed and the number of ways to look at LARP game creation has grown. Each country, town or village which has at least a small LARP community has its own genesis and history; it's own path of development, forms and terminology. This lack of centralization indeed in some way a hinderance, yet growth and cross-sharing of information is inevitable and has its advantages. One of these positive moments is the appearance of academic LARPers who research the different styles and share their learnings. There always will be something new for such an academic to share, as there is no final list of all differences and similarities of LARP societies even in the same country, some times even in the same city, or moreover of different parts of the world.

So I wish to share with you some of the terminology Belarusian LARPers have generated.

Talking of the "ways of my Land" I should start with the GMs. We call them " " (translation: Masters) and due to the small size of our LARPs (the luckiest GM might get little over 300 players) many of them are organized by one or two such people. When the group of Masters is bigger than three there could be a " " (translation: Chief Master) who coordinates the work of the whole group. The further qualification and classification of GMs is dependent on the particular LARP event and this could be the subject of another article.

Now about LARPs, we simply call them " " (translation: Games). And the main classifications, which are shared when the dates of a Game announced are as follows:

By the size: This is dependant on the number of people participating in larp game. If the game is big we call it " " (translation: brig) which is short for "() () " (translation: Big Role-playing Game). If the game considered small we call it " " (translation: instant) or "() () " (translation: Small Game). The number of players required for game to be considered big is widely disputed, yet 50 is the common consensus.

By the place: There are three main categories that should be specially mentioned:

- 1. " " (translation: pavilion game): A larp game which takes place within the boundaries of one building or structure.
- 2. " "(translation: city game): A larp game which is limited by the territory of particular settlement or, in rare occasions, a few. Often include some number of interactive pavilion games.
- 3. " "or " "(translation: range game or field game): The larp game located within limits of specific territory. Often out of town in the wild, yet in certain occasions settlements could be located within the boundaries of the larp game territory.

All these definitions are in common use, and there are only few exceptions. For example in the year 2010 a LARP game had taken place within catacombs (not sewers) under the city and even though it had features of city game, the activities of players were limited by the boundaries of these catacombs, which, technically could be considered as single structure. So the underground game had features of both types. This makes it its own category, which has been in common use by the LARPers of Moscow since the beginning of the 2000s: underground games.

There are many more classifications by genre, by the time, by the style, by the methodology, by the structure, by the percentage of NPCs, by the source, by the aim, by the setting used, by the freedom of player, etc., which while important, require much more time to provide the details and intricacies of, thus it would be the topic of another article.

Another difference that might be of interest is the approach to the definition of NPCs. In the LARP culture in Belarus a NPC is called " " (translation: game technician). The essence of his functions similar to those of NPCs through out the world: to do what they are told by the GMs, although sometimes it is not so. Within Belarusian LARP exists an alternate approach that some of the characters, which are vital to the project could be called a NPC to impose additional responsibility for the quality of the performance and compliance to the character sheet and information.

Indeed the conversation on LARPs can be long, especially for those who share common passion. I am sorry for the shortness of this article and promise that future articles will be longer and specific. On this note I hope that the tiny glimpse into LARP in the Republic of Belarus is only first out of many in the exchanges of information for our mutal enrichment.

About the author

Yaraslau Kot has been a LARPer since 1996 and has studied in USA (Dramaturgy), UK (MBA), Russia (Finance and management) and Belarus (Law, psychology, educational science). Since 2004 Kot has been a lecturer of Constitutional Law, Legal Ethics and Criminalictics at Belarusian State University.



A Review of Nordic Larp

Branches of Play

Review by: Sarah Lynne Bowman

Book by: by Stenros, Jaakko, and Montola, Markus, ed. Nordic Larp. Stockholm, Sweden: Fëa Livia, 2010.

The Nordic Larp (2010) book, edited by Jaakko Stenros and Markus Montola, features 317 pages of full-color documentation of Scandinavian live-action role-playing games from the last sixteen years. Though Nordic Larp technically refers to games produced in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark, participants from other areas of the world also attend these games. Nordic Larp refers to games developed within the Knutepunktbased tradition – a cutting-edge style of role-playing similar to theatre, avant-garde art, and games, but equivalent to none; Larp has evolved into an artistic manifestation of its own, as Stenros argues in the closing chapter. Since 1997, participants interested in the design, production, play, and academic critique of these games have congregated in one of the four pillar Nordic countries for a conference, which changes names depending on the host country that year: Knutepunkt in Norway, Knudepunkt in Denmark, Knutpunkt in Sweden, and Solmukohta in Finland – all words meaning "Nodal Point" in these respective languages. The host country also publishes a book of essays each year, thought-provoking pieces including heady academic discourses, rants, manifestos, techniques for play, documentation of past Larps, and ideas for future game design. The Nordic Larp book represents a consolidation and streamlined presentation of these many artistic and intellectual efforts, offering historical context, documentation, and academic discussion.

The editors have selected thirty games to feature in this massive, coffee-table sized tome, chosen based upon their production value and the variety of styles (Stenros and Montola 11). The book features a several page description for each game written by a member of the Nordic Larp scene who participated in the event. These contributors share first-hand accounts of some of their experiences within play, accompanied by a few stunning images per Larp. The descriptions also provide production details, sketching out basic documentation for academics, historians, Larp enthusiasts, and future Larpmakers who might wish to learn from the examples of the past. For many of these games, more extensive documentation is available in other locations for interested parties, but the book successfully conveys the important aspects of each Larp while maintaining brevity in description.

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The diversity of games explored in *Nordic Larp* is staggering indeed, particularly from an American perspective. Many Nordic Larps attempt a full "360 degree illusion" effect. Hundreds of participants create and inhabit entire villages set in a different time and space, immersing themselves in-character for several days at a time. Games such as Trenne byar (1994) and Dragonbane (2006) offered transport to newly envisioned fantasy-style worlds, the latter featuring a sixty-six foot long animatronic dragon that was designed to breathe gouts of fire and speak (Stenros and Montola 232). Other "360 degree" games immersed players in extreme living conditions, such as a dystopian shantytown in System Danmarc (2005), a post-apocalyptic scenario focusing upon human de-evolution in Totem (2007), or a refugee camp in Europa (2001). The common genres of boffer, White Wolf, and Cthulhu Larps are also represented by Krigslive (2009), Helsingin Camarilla (1995-2004), and Det Sista Kapitlet (1998) respectively. Children's Larps such as Rollespil i Rude Skov (2004), pervasive games like *Prosopopeia Bardo 2: Momentum* (2006), and historical reenactments like *Antikristuksen yö* (2009) are detailed as well. In addition, the book details highly experimental games exploring controversial content, including: nuclear war in Ground Zero (1998, 1999, 2001); mental illness in *Knappnålshuvudet* (1999) and *Delirium* (2010); physical illness in Luminescence (2004), alternative relationships and gender performance in the Ursula Le Guin-inspired Mellan himmel och hav (2003); and prison dynamics in inside: outside (2001-2002). The above-mentioned list offers a glimpse into the wide scope contained within the *Nordic Larp* book. The games described in the book are not meant to represent European Larp as a whole or to canonize these particular games as the "best." Rather, these games serve as key examples to represent the Knutepunkt tradition, which emphasizes the movement toward international Larps with high production values and, at times, highly political and experimental content.

The book is framed by two scholarly articles. *Nordic Larp* opens with "The Paradox of Nordic Larp Culture" by Stenros and Montola explaining the Nordic Larp tradition in terms of its historical trajectory and the main reasons why people play these games: to escape, to explore, to expose, and to impose (25-28). The final article by Stenros, "Nordic Larp: Theatre, Art and Game," details the similarities Larp shares with all three listed forms, but explains how Larp is identical to none of them due to its co-created, improvisational nature, its lack of a passive audience, and its emphasis on first-person perspective in experience. Thus, the *Nordic Larp* book provides not only colorful, eye-catching documentation of a series of fascinating games produced over the past sixteen years, but also compelling arguments as to the importance of these activities and their artistic merit.

In a few spots, the text would have benefitted from another pair of eyes, specifically a native English-speaking proofreader, though these typos are hardly distracting. Overall, the text is clean, the English is clear, and the graphic design professional and balanced. In addition, at times the reader may feel unclear as to whether events described in the first-hand accounts "happened" in-game or out-of-game and which elements were actually performed or merely simulated. However, the majority of the accounts are clear and well-formulated, providing a stimulating and

accessible read. In my estimation, anyone interested in the Nordic Larp scene or the artistic potential of live action role-playing games in general should read this book.

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Editors note

For more information on the *Nordic Larp* book please visit http://nordiclarp.wordpress.com/.

About the author

Sarah Lynne Bowman, Ph.D. is the author of *The Functions of Roleplaying Games: How Participants Create Community, Solve Problems, and Explore Identity*. She currently works as Adjunct Faculty for the University of Texas at Dallas, Richland College, Ashford University, and Brookhaven College. Her recent research emphasizes character development and social dynamics, with a focus on applying analytical psychology to the study of role-playing games.



Afterword

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"Docendo discimus" (Latin: "By teaching, we learn")

This phrase is very familiar to me as it is my alma mater's motto. It is also a nugget of wisdom I strongly believe to be true. As we share our knowledge with others, debate theories and examine new methods we pick up new insights and are inspired to try new things.

Part of teaching is also recording our knowledge for future academicians to read over, ponder, debate and to learn from. That is a large goal of the "books" that are put out in conjunction with Wyrd Con: to provide a platform to record learnings, thoughts, theories and other information to help create a collective academic history. Not only does this help us record our journey as we learn and thus expand our horizons, it also provides a record of our past learnings, successes and failures that others can learn from and allow us to look back on to see how we've progressed.

I'd like to encourage those who read and enjoy these works to consider participating as an article author in the future to help us create a collective bank of knowledge for those in the North American region of the world. Those who are not from that part of the world, your submissions are welcomed as we seek to broaden our horizons, connect with those from other LARP cultures and learn about the hobby beyond our borders.

- Amber Eagar, Editor

Branches of Play is a collection of articles that takes an academic look at live-action role-playing and
interactive theater with a focus on a North American audience. It has been put out in conjunction with
Wyrd Con Two held in Costa Mesa, California, from June 10-12, 2011.