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„Live Action Role-play – A Narratological View“

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Elisabeth Schwaiger

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Abstract

Live action role-play (or LARP) is an improvised theatrical performance game with personality developing elements that is conventionally played over the course of a weekend. It is performed mostly for recreational reasons and therefore does not feature any audience. The goal of this thesis is to do fundamental research on live action role-play from a narratological point of view. The knowledge presented was gained through experience in the organisation of, and participation in, severalLARPs in Austria and Germany over the past twelve years.

The thesis will first explain what LARP is by defining its relevant elements, such as the different kinds of participants (*gamemasters*, *non-player characters* and *players*), the different states of the game (*in-time* and *out-time*) and the two main approaches to it (*storytelling* and *acting*). It will then move on to categorise live action role-play according to its literary, historical or purely fantastic roots, arriving at a list of LARP's overall conventions.

This thesis shows how LARP creates a variety of texts in preparation for a performance (plot, world backgrounds, character descriptions), through the performance itself (lyrics, poems...) and as a reflective exercise after the performance has concluded (down-time texts, reports, pictures...). LARP plots and their fluid narrative structure with various storylines are explained in detail. A short historical overview puts live action role-play into a real life context.

All of the above opens the way for an analysis which shows that LARP participants create multimedia *imaginary entertainment environments* (cf. Mackay 29), that *showing* and *telling* as well as real-life sensitivities permeate all of LARP's levels, that *real* and *implied author* as well as *narrator* seem to merge in the figure of the gamemaster, that LARP features most aspects of temporality offered by classical narrative genres. The analysis also shows how perception involves all the senses and is interwoven with creative appropriation of the environment and that LARP characterisation follows classical modes of speech, appearance etc. while also, uniquely, including 'mistakes' in the portrayal and a spontaneous development through interaction.

List of Abbreviations

LARP.....	Live Action Role-Play
GM.....	Gamemaster
IT.....	In-Time
NPC.....	Non-Player Character
OT.....	Out-Time

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1. Introduction

Live action role-play (or LARP) is an improvised theatrical performance game with personality developing elements that is conventionally played over the course of a weekend. It is performed mostly for recreational reasons and therefore does not feature any audience. One person or a group of people create a *frame story* setting the stage for role-play in an imaginary environment. They then invent characters to enliven it, cast people to play these characters and acquire all props needed to equip them. They then invite a group of *players* who are informed of the kind of setting to expect but remain unaware of the details of the intended plot. Following certain rules, the *players* create imaginary characters for themselves. They enter the frame story and shape its narrative by interacting with it, thus becoming the protagonists of the plot.

Live-action role-play emerged in various countries all over the world in the 1980s. What little has been described in connection with the LARP phenomenon deals mainly with game theory and the creation of fictional worlds and alter egos (in recent times especially in connection with computer role-playing games), or has a strong focus on psychological and sociological factors. The goal of this thesis, then, is to do fundamental research on live action role-play from a narratological point of view. Being an Anglicist and a LARPer helps me combine the background knowledge necessary to undertake this novel endeavour.

The first step will be to explain what LARP is by defining its relevant elements, such as the different kinds of participants and the different states of the game that can be experienced. There are also two main approaches to LARP, one with a focus on rules and the storytelling of events, the other with a focus on pure acting. I will then move on to categorise live action role-play in a manner which I consider relevant for the narratological approach of my thesis.

After having given a description of what constitutes live action role-play, I will try to summarise its conventions for a better understanding of LARP structures. The thesis will then exemplify what kind of texts LARP produces in preparation for the performance, as well as through the performance and as a reflective exercise after

the conclusion of the performance. A short historical overview will put live action role-play into a real life context.

All of the above is going to open the way for an analysis that aims at answering:

- questions about what realities are created within LARP and by whom
- what role *mimesis* and *diegesis* play in its realisation
- whether LARP features an author, a narrator and a narratee and if so, what kind
- how the mechanics of time (in the narratological sense of order, duration and frequency) are at work
- what can be said about space and place
- what kind of experience or perception is dealt with
- what plots or storylines are developed and if and how they can be characterised as well as realised, and
- what kind of fictional characters are created and how they relate to the ever-present real life personas of LARP participants.

Due to the fact that so little scientific research has been done on the narrative of live action role-play, this thesis is best understood as an attempt to provide grounds for further analysis and critical reception.

2. The Structure of LARP

LARPs vary greatly in setting and structure, depending on the mentality and culture of their organisers. This paper will be concerned with general aspects and narratological principles rather than a comparative study of peculiarities. Where practical examples are given, they are taken from experience gained LARPing in Austria and Germany. In both countries, the games held are fairly complex in nature.

Every LARP necessitates at least two kinds of participants: the organisers, called *gamemasters* (GMs) and the *players*. Most also include extras called *non-player characters* (NPCs) who are employed by the *gamemasters* to facilitate the enactment of a *plot*. These three participant functions will be explained in more detail below.

Coming from a sociological background, Gary Alan Fine worked with the terms *person* to identify the real-life social persona of a LARP participant, *player* to denote the person becoming involved in the LARP experience and *character* to mean the person's alter ego in the fictional world (cf. 39ff, 153ff). In this paper, what Fine calls "person" will be termed *participant*, as social aspects are of less relevance and person seems too general a term. *Player* will be further differentiated into the functions of *NPC*, *GM* and *player*. *Character*, however, will be used in the same fashion as described above.

2.1 The Gamemaster (GM)

The gamemaster is akin to a play's director, a novel's author, a film's editor, a legend's storyteller, a performance's actor, and a sporting event's referee. (Mackay 6)

LARPs are organised by one or several gamemasters. These are the people who decide:

- *how long the game will take* (usually one evening or one weekend, though LARPs lasting an entire week are also common if the LARP community is large)
- *where the game will take place* (most commonly castles or castle ruins, camping sites, youth hostels, woods or some private property)
- *how much it will cost* (depending on rents, victuals, props and non-player-character costume requirements)

- *how many participants they intend to cater for* (smaller and more personal LARPs range between 10 to 60 people, huge conventions can sport up to 7000 people and more)
- *who will be invited* (some games are 'open', allowing anyone who applies via the internet to join; some are 'closed', admitting only those with a personal invitation).

Apart from these organisational details, the gamemasters also decide whether there is going to be a storyline (*plot*) or whether players are simply invited to play their characters. If a plot is planned, the GMs decide on an outline. A simplified version of a plot outline could look like the following:

The Prince has been abducted by a dragon and his mother, the Queen, offers 1000 gold coins as a reward for the person or group of people who bring him back to her.

As can be seen, this outline is vague insofar as it does not specify whether or not a rescue will be either attempted or successful. This outcome will depend on the way the players interact with the plot.

The gamemasters then decide on what is required to provide the setting for their story. In the case of the above example, requirements would include someone playing the Prince, the Queen, possibly some courtiers and the dragon, each demanding a costume. There is also the need for a chest of gold and a building or room to function as a castle, and a place to serve as a dragon's lair.

The GMs then write roles for their characters. For example,

The Queen could be a greedy old crone, not intending to part with her gold but to kill all who witness her son's rescue. The Prince could get the instruction to be vain but gentle-hearted and to be very fond of one player of his choice, therefore wanting to save his rescuers from his mother's cruel plan.

Thus, the plot gains depth and complexity and more unanswered questions arise: How will the player react to the Prince's attentions? What will the players decide once they discover the Queen's treachery? Etc.

Lastly, the gamemasters inform their players, usually via homepage or email, of the cost, date, location and the kind of game they can expect, whether there will be a plot and what their characters' reasons for arriving at the location are. A possible reason,

again in this example, for arriving at the court could be a notice from the Queen, asking for help in the rescue of her son.

Once the game has commenced, GMs still function as supervisors. They make sure everyone is playing by the rules, they resolve controversies, brief NPCs, adapt the plot when necessary and act as contact points for any real life problems the participants may encounter (injuries, strangers entering the gaming location, etc...).

2.2 The Non-Player Characters (NPCs)

The term *non-player character* or *NPC* can be confusing when applied to LARP. In computer games, NPCs are the characters controlled by the computer, in contrast to the *player character* which is controlled by the player. In LARP, NPCs are those characters directed by the gamemasters, in other terms those that are offered a scripted role and possess knowledge of the storyline. Their roles can either be fixed, meaning they will be playing the same character throughout the game, or they can be asked to change roles as required by the plot. Returning again to the example from above,

as soon as the player characters leave on their quest to rescue the Prince, the Queen and her courtiers will no longer be needed as they remain in the castle. The NPCs playing them could then change into the roles of highwaymen, donning different costumes, intercepting the player's journey. Later on, some of them play the dragon then switch back to the characters from the castle, should the players prove able to return.

2.3 The Players

In contrast to the NPC characters which are created by the gamemasters, each player creates his or her own character. This always includes developing a background (name, talents, proficiencies, possessions etc...) which can either be very vague or highly elaborate, depending on the creativity and preferences of the player or the requirement of the game. There are different approaches to character generation, some with a focus on the character's history, others with a focus on the character's skills. Sometimes a new character is created for a game, at other times a player will reuse a character from a previous game.

Also in contrast to the NPCs, a player is only aware of the general gist of the storyline, helping him or her decide what type of character to create. To utilise the above example once more,

An overly rich and callous character that is afraid of dragons would not be an ideal choice for the hypothetical game. A noble paladin working for the greater good, on the other hand, would have a reason to come to the Prince's rescue, as would a very poor rogue – each shaping the plot with their different approach.

Since they are central to the action, many LARP participants consider the players to be the ones the game is made for.

2.4 Audience

One distinct feature of live action role-play is that it supports no kind of audience whatsoever. Whoever is at the location is part of the game, either in connection with the real world (people taking pictures, people cooking) or in connection with the fictional world (characters, gamemasters...). Witnesses, i.e. people who stumble into the setting or are unwittingly part of it, sometimes appear but their presence is avoided whenever possible. Examples of such witnesses are hikers visiting a castle at which a game is taking place, as some LARP locations are also popular hiking or tourist destinations.

Some games, if they are compatible with reality, are also integrated into and run in parallel with real life. An example for such a setting would be the *World of Darkness* that works with Earth's real history but integrates the existence of mythological creatures such as vampires, werewolves and fairies. These LAPRs may take place in the heart of a city, mostly in seclusion (the cellar of a bar, a private home...) but sometimes also in public places (e.g. on the underground trying to get from place A to place B). As the participants are usually of almost completely human appearance, only featuring small deviations such as pale make-up or pointed teeth, the attention raised among the general public is minimal.

In both cases, the tourists and the unwitting observer, there are people witnessing the event but they are not in the strictest sense an audience.

3. Approaches to LARP: Acting vs. Storytelling

In general, there are two very different approaches to live action role-play. The first focuses on role-playing abilities, demanding that players present everything they do in a recognisable fashion (e.g. if a player wants to throw a fireball, some sort of visualisation such as a red softball with fire-coloured ribbons attached to it is required). In German, this approach is called *Du Kannst, Was Du Darstellen Kannst* (translating to *you may do what you can play*). If taken to the extreme, almost everything is taken at face value which renders most supernatural effects impossible and requires players to operate solely within their (fitness, handcraft...) limits. This extreme view goes by the German name of *Du Kannst, Was Du Kannst*. It would roughly translate to *you can do what you are able to do* and basically corresponds to the English concept of 'what you see is what you get'. In this thesis, the approach described above, with its focus on representation, will hence be called the *acting approach*. Rules of conduct during such games are fairly simple as the action is mostly self-explanatory. Characters are created with a story background only and this background defines what they are able to do.



Fig. 1: Here is one example of how a dragon could be visualised. Many fantasy games work with the assumption that dragons can take on humanoid form.

All pictures in this thesis are private photographs of LARP participants. I have attained the right to publish them, but where not stated otherwise, the people depicted wish to remain anonymous.

The second approach adheres to a rule book governing the game. These rules define what is possible and what is not, giving a player points for character skill generation and listing possible abilities to choose from. The points assure a common starting ground while also offering opportunities to improve the character's skills, as every LARP the player visits with the character awards a number of points which can be spent. With this approach, storytelling is usually an integral part of the game, giving the players, NPCs and GMs the possibility of narrating effects that cannot be properly visualised. For example, in this setting magic usually works with spells ending in

commands (“By the powers that I possess: sleep”) so that whoever is affected by it can react accordingly (lie down and pretend to be sleeping). Ideally, the rules are never in the foreground but are merely supporting and facilitating performance (cf. Mackay 2). For reasons of simplification, this approach will be termed the *storytelling approach*.

The line between these two approaches is not clear-cut and overlaps are possible. However, a certain animosity can occasionally be observed with participants of the first persuasion complaining about the lack of effort put into props and costumes, while those of the latter tend to complain about the restrictiveness of the other gaming style.

In the acting approach, gamemaster supervision is usually less necessary and the GMs are always in costume, often taking part in the game by simultaneously playing a character and managing the game. In the storytelling approach, GMs are able to be in costume and part of the game as well, but they may likewise choose to remain separate from the action, in both attire and character.

4. In-Time and Out-Time – The Different Levels of the Game

There are more structures that need to be explained as they are crucial to the game and what has to be said about narrative in LARP cannot be properly explained without them.

First of all, it is important to keep in mind that live action role-play has two dimensions, namely the gaming reality and real life. Everything that pertains to the gaming reality, LARP participants call *in-time* (or IT); while everything that has a connection to real life is called *out-time* (or OT). A player deciding to talk to the Queen from the example above, saying: “I am always at your command, your Majesty!” is therefore making an in-time statement, while the player’s suitcase, hidden under the bed in the sleeping quarters, remains an out-time item. If, for any reason, a person needs to be taken out of the game (e.g. due to some real life discomfort such as a migraine or some in-game reason such as the need for GM information on a certain object), he or she changes from an *in-time* to an *out-time* state. To signify this to other participants, Germans and Austrians use a sign, namely

arms crossed in front of the chest. For further information on *in-time* and *out-time*, see chapter 12.1.

In Austria and Germany, there are two commands framed around the gaming experience. The first is *time-in*. It is given at the very beginning of the game by the gamemasters, after all briefings and last-minute explanations are over, to signal that the game will now commence. To signal the end of the game, it is possible for the GMs to call a *time-out* which indicates that the planned plot is finished and that they are resigning from their supervisor function. As many players want to continue playing after the main action is over until they go to bed, an official *time-out* statement is sometimes omitted. For more details on time see chapter 15.

There are three commands that appertain to the distinction between IT and OT. The command *time-freeze* is usually only issued by gamemasters and it arrests the in-time action. Players are required to close their eyes and disregard anything happening around them. This mode is used mostly when playing with rules and is avoided in the acting approach. It is enacted, for example, to allow some magical creature that can materialise, or a curious apparatus that was invisible until the player characters broke a certain seal, to appear in midst of the players without ruining their surprise.

Time-stop or *stop*, on the other hand, is a command that interrupts the game completely due to some out-time reason, and it can be issued by any participant. When, for example, a player falls and hurts his or her foot, someone close-by will call 'stop' and the game is arrested until the player has been aided. The command to then re-start the game is 'time-in'.

Slow-Motion or *slow-mo* is another gamemaster command that can be used for fights, when either the surroundings are not ideal for fighting (too narrow, too dark, costumes too fragile...) or the character being fought is very powerful.

5. Types of LARP

So far, this thesis has dealt with LARP participants and the two crucial levels of the game. Moving from general structures to the actual content, the first, general distinction that can be made is whether a LARP is an *ambience game* or a *plot game*. *Ambience games* have little to no plot as GMs only provide a setting (such as a tavern) for others to play their characters in. *Plot games*, on the other hand, are characterised by the fact that they offer a continuous storyline. In either case, there are several kinds of LARP to be characterised and in the case of a literary background, I drafted the following distinction.

5.1 Literary



Fig. 2: This is an example for a female participant embodying the character Professor Snape out of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series.

Some games are so closely linked to literature that calling them 'literary' seems appropriate. These settings choose a novel or a series of novels to form the background of their fictional world. Examples would be *Harry Potter* LARPs (following J.K. Rowling's series of novels) or *Lord of the Rings* LARPs (following Tolkien's writings). Such games sometimes also include one or more of the source books' fictional characters. Mostly, literary games are merely inspired by their literary source, but even in the rare cases of a closely related plot, the action usually deviates considerably from the original due to the poetic freedom of the genre.

5.2 Literary and Historical

It seems appropriate to draw a distinction between games as specified in the previous paragraph and games in which the literary source text also has a historical

dimension. These games share the greatest similarities with re-enactment¹, as people also try to emulate the historical setting. Yet, as authenticity is not the main goal, participants are freer in their choice of character and costume than they would be in a purely historical setting. An example of such a 'literary and historical' LARP would be the Musketeer setting as it is performed in Austria, based on the novel by Alexandre Dumas. Here players portray fictional characters such as d'Artagnan and Milady de Winter, or historical characters such as Cardinal Richelieu and Johannes Calvin, while others choose to develop their very own characters.



Figs. 3, 4: Here are two examples from a musketeer LARP. On the left are three nobles visiting a ball. (The man on the right is played by a woman.) On the right picture, I am playing a waiting maid who is praying. The costumes were mostly self-made

5.3 Historical Fantasy.

Leaving the literary realm, what I term 'historical fantasy' aims at taking a historical setting and embellishing it with supernatural elements, be they mythical, horror or otherwise. An example of such a setting would be the Austrian *Dalriada*, a background that incorporates a simplified version of Celtic society structures and

¹ Re-enactment tries to relive and re-enact history, emulating historical facts (clothing, food, costume, social roles, historic events ...) as closely as possible, allowing for no fantastic elements. It is therefore to be differentiated from LARP.



belief systems; or Victorian age LARPs which try to closely imitate the historical timeframe while often allowing for fantastical aspects such as ghosts or black magic to have real gaming effects.

Fig. 5: This is a picture from a Dalriada game. The player is wearing a kilt, drinking horn and sporran (fur pouch).

5.4 Pen & Paper Derivatives

Pen & Paper is a collective term for games played at a table following similar structures as live action role-play but remaining on a purely verbal level (no costumes, no physical enactment). They apply simple or complex sets of rules requiring probability checks made by dice for the success of character actions. One gamemaster tells a story, playing all characters that would be taken over by NPCs in a LARP. A small group of players, usually between two and eight, create characters, noting their attributes on a sheet of paper according to the rules, and acting and reacting within the story created by the gamemaster. (For further information on pen & paper see also chapter 8). LARPs based on pen & paper are worth mentioning insofar as pen & paper systems usually generate a huge amount of literature to go with the rules. Novels with their action taking place in the game world, or elaborate descriptions of whole worlds detailing their flora, fauna and sentient beings are common. Two examples of such English literature-spawning games are Catalyst's *Shadowrun*² and Wizards of the Coast's *Dungeons & Dragons*³.

² <http://www.shadowrun4.com/> 23/12/2012

³ <http://www.wizards.com/dnd/> 23/12/2012

Fantasy and science fiction, as genres with the books they produce, influence the pen & paper games while the pen & paper games and their appropriations of mythologies (a prominent example being fantasy races such as elves, dwarves and dragons) in turn influence fantasy and science fiction literature (cf. Mackay 18). To give two very different examples of pen & paper inspired novels:

1. *2XS* by Nigel D. Findley, released in 1992⁴, is a *Shadowrun* novel placed in a dystopian cyberpunk future where magic has returned to earth and some humans have begun to evolve into fantasy races such as trolls, orcs or elves. *Shadowrun* is a famous American cyberpunk role-playing system; the book itself is a detective novel set in the same fictional world.
2. *Canticle* by R. A. Salvatore, published in 1991⁵, is the first book in a series of five named *The Cleric Quintet*. It is a *D & D* adventure novel, following a young scholar priest and his allies battling a danger to a cloister. It is set in a fantasy world full of foreign gods and creatures, and is part of one of the oldest and largest role-playing systems in the English speaking world.

5.6 Generic

As should be clear from the examples above, live action role-play can take place in any genre and setting. Apart from fantasy and history, there are real life settings, steampunk or sci-fi settings, and so forth. *Generic LARPs*, then, are live action role-plays that do not draw from a body of literature or any specific time in history. Nevertheless, they produce literary text, both out-time (character and world backgrounds) and in-time (poems, lyrics⁶, reports etc. created during the game). Of course, not all texts produced are of literary value, yet some are worthy of interpreting. Less common are actual novels produced in connection with live action role-play, however there are examples of this as well⁷.

⁴ Findley, Nigel D.. *2XS*. NY: ROC, 1992.

⁵ Salvatore, R. A.. *Canticle*. Lake Geneva: TSR inc., 1991.

⁶ For an example of a poem of praise that I wrote for a LARP which was later turned into a song by my best friend, see appendix III.

⁷ For example. one Austrian LARPer wrote and published a book playing in one of Austrias game worlds. Grosinger, Jürgen. *Unter Linsars Banner*. Wien (Self-Publishing). 2010.



Fig. 6: Example of two player characters of a classical generic fantasy LARP. One is shaman-like, a child between a human and ‘the earth’, the other is pure magic, given a body and a conscience. The latter is holding her cape and a yellow sash which is put on when the character changes to the astral sphere and is no longer visible to the naked eye. Such ‘freak’ characters do not fit all settings and are often hard to portray in the acting approach.

5.7 Experiments.

Some LARPs break with classical gaming structures, introducing new and interesting notions. One example would be the *Save or Die* concept that works with a discontinuous timeline, whereby the group of players are able to ‘save’ their progress and return to these saving points, gaining further chances of resolving a scene very much like they would in computer games. However, as such experiments are mostly innovative and seldom repeated, they will be excluded from analysis in this paper.

6. LARP Conventions

What, then, do all of these different kinds of LARP have in common?

The literary theorist and comparatist Jonathan Culler called ‘genre’ an “institutionalized literary model” that shapes reader expectations insofar as it defines what is possible, probable and plausible: thus on the one hand setting limits to what can be done, and on the other, allowing for a number of peculiarities that would be considered odd in any other context (147). It would be possible to take LARP as a practice and try to explain it using comparison, by defining what differentiates it from prose, from theatre, from film, hyper fiction, improv theatre, flash mobs and the like. However, I chose a more direct approach and have attempted to summarise what

expectations are usually met, thereby arriving at the basic constituents of a LARP experience:

- the GMs set the stage for an improvised performance game and are going to adapt it according to game-developments, all the while functioning as advisors for all participants
- the game is taking place on a location that allows for the desired amount of immersion
 - the borders of the game location⁸ (where OT begins and IT ends) are made known to all participants
- there is a time-limit to the game; the approximate end and starting points are made clear beforehand
- the game evolves in a make-believe world that can be close to reality, historical or any kind of fantastic and has been defined before the start of the game or, in rare cases, will be defined through the development of the game
- the game follows certain rules which have been stated and made available to all participants before the start of the game
- there will be no audience of any kind which is uninvolved with the gaming processes and there will be no recordings made public without the consent of those recorded
- NPCs are under the guidance of the gamemasters and work towards the realisation of the gamemasters' plans
- players are the main protagonists of the narrative and are free to act as they wish within the confines of the game setting and rules
- all participants aim at performing and maintaining their (chosen or allocated) role to the best of their acting ability while allowing for interruption of the game whenever real life problems require it
- should participants desire a time-out (time away from the gaming reality), they will try to realise it without interfering with the gaming experience of the other participants (e.g. pass from visual and earshot range)
- if there is a plot, there is a resolution to the plot
 - the skills of players and NPCs combined suffice to solve the plot

⁸ The *location* is usually a secluded space, such as a castle or a youth hostel with its surrounding plains and woods. However, as mentioned before, some LARPS take a whole city or even the whole world as (theoretical) location, and try to integrate into real life situations.

- it will take only the time of the LARP to resolve the plot, and if not there will be a sequel or sequels to allow for resolution
- in case of disputes, the GMs' decisions are always final

Of course, just like most works are not pure examples of genre (cf. Chatman 18), LARP does not always meet this standard and for some games with special structures, other conventions have to be added. Yet, for the purpose of this paper, the above list should suffice to outline what LARP is and does.

7. LARP's Text

Having defined the mechanics of LARP, it seems best to now move on to the content. In 1978, the author and literary critic Saymore Chatman stated that literary critics are prone to considering only the purely verbal medium, despite the fact that stories are also communicated through “films, comic strips, paintings, sculptures, dance movements, and music” (9). More than three decades later, there is still some truth to his criticism. Live action role-play, I would argue, can be added to the above list of story-developing arts.

As Daniel Mackay puts it, what combines to create the artistry of role-playing in general is the immersion involved in performing a character and bonding with other participants, experiencing real emotions while, at the same time, being aware of the make-believe aspect of the game (80). The analysable text of a LARP or its “aesthetic object” as Mackay calls it, “is memorial rather than marmoreal. It is virtual rather than visitable” (122).

LARP is a fleeting genre characterised by its constant transformation. Recordings are usually limited to photographs and plot outlines, the latter hardly ever having been realised exactly as they were written. Any other kind of recording, be it audio, visual or a combination thereof, is problematic as the observation influences the game and can only focus on one scene among the multitude of parallel developments constituting a LARP. However, this does not mean that live action role-play cannot be analysed. The majority of insights, perceptions and hypotheses presented in this thesis can be validated – or refuted – with participation in one or two actual games. Only a few findings may need a more in-depth engagement.

What Mackay is referring to when he says that the text of live action role-play is “memorial and virtual” is not the written but the performed body. However, I would argue that the physically verifiable traces of LARP, namely anything that it produces in picture, film or writing, are also part of LARP’s text. Thus, LARP text can roughly be divided into four groups with very different functions. The first group is the actual performance which is fleeting and hard to capture or explain due to group dynamics and emotional responses that can only be fully comprehended through participation.

The second kind of text involves film or picture recordings which are made in an attempt to capture at least part of a game in order to facilitate memory or give an outside view of how a certain scene/costume etc. appeared. This is done because most participants immersed in the action do not want to focus on meta-reflection but might like to analyse or apprehend a scene, costume or construction or recreate a certain make-up later on.

The third category of text is the in-time texts, meaning they pertain to the fictional reality, and they can either be graphic (paintings, sketches, schematic drawings...), literary (poems, lyrics, essays, fictional history books...) or functional (guest lists, recipes, instructions for the use of a magical artefact...). There are also a few magazines or newspapers concerned with LARP, some of them in-time (e.g. *Stimme des Herolds*⁹), some of them out-time (e.g. the German *Larpzeit*¹⁰ or the Austrian *Ariochs Offenbarungen*¹¹).

The largest group of LARP texts, however, are first and foremost instruction manuals, teaching participants how to act in, react to and interact with the fictional world and what to expect of the partaking characters. These are the rule books, LARP plots, character descriptions, world backgrounds and so forth which are (and mostly remain) at the out-time level.

⁹ http://www.drachenfest.info/df/index.php?article_id=220&clang=0 23/12/2012

¹⁰ <http://www.larp-zeit.de/> 17/12/2012

¹¹ <http://www.larp.com/arioch/offenb2.shtml> 23/12/2012

8. A short history of Live Action Role-Play

It seems reasonable to suggest that the roots of live action role-play are to be found in the earliest stages of human society, in practices like children's role-play or the ritual enacting of mythological tales (cf. Tresca 181). There are, however, several historic developments that are less vague and better able to explain the complex construct that LARP actually is.

Michael Tresca points to the *Commedia dell'Arte* of the 16th century with its fixed archetypes but an improvisational nature as one of the first eminent examples of performances comparable to live action role-play (181). As far back as 1905, G.K. Chesterton describes structures similar to those of a modern LARP in his short-story collection *The Club of Queer Trades* (Tresca 182). There, the "Adventure and Romance Agency" stages "dazzling events" for its costumers to satisfy their "desire for a varied life"¹².

Another important influence came in the 1920s from the Austrian-American psychiatrist and sociologist Jacob Levy Moreno, the founder of psychodrama. Psychodrama is a kind of therapy that works with the enactment of different situations by a patient or patients, thereby making feasible a better understanding of coherences, relations and emotions involved as well as creative solutions to personal problems (cf. Stadler 14).

The genre most commonly used in Austria to explain LARP, however, is improvisational theatre as artists like Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone developed in the 1950s¹³. The reason for this is that improvisation in connection with the theatre seems comparatively well-known and acceptable as an artistic/recreational interest. In general, improvisational theatre works with certain gaming structures such as mood and setting, or general performance aspects such as status and focus, but lacks premeditated text, allowing for free acting on the part of all participants.

¹² Chesterton, G.K. *The Club of Queer Trades*. 1905. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1696/1696-h/1696-h.htm> 31/10/2012

¹³ For details on their work see, for example:

Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater: Drama and Performance Studies*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1999.

Johnston, Keith. *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*. New York: Routledge, 1987.

Live action role-play may incorporate historical elements but is, overall, concerned with fictional and often fantastic setups. Organisations like the *Society for Creative Anachronism* founded in 1966, or the *Markland Medieval Mercenary Militia* founded in 1969 (both still exist today¹⁴) are interested more in reliving historical times (their cultural, societal, and social structures) and historic events (Tresca 182), forming a subgroup called *re-enactment* which is different from live action role-play yet has strong ties with it through its character creation practices and improvisational performance nature.

In 1974 came the publication of *Dungeons & Dragons*¹⁵, a game designed to be played at the table with dice, pen and paper (hence the nickname *pen & paper* for this and similar games). It sported one narrator telling a story and a small number of players, embodying the heroes of the narration, whose abilities were noted on a character sheet. Checking for the success of any noteworthy action concocted by the players required the rolling of dice and comparing of the result to the appropriate corresponding ability on the character sheet. The characters usually went on quests to slay monsters, rescue damsels in distress and improve their abilities. Pen & paper's similarities with live action role-play are tremendous, as will become clear in the following chapter.

The structure of *Dungeons & Dragons* inspired various live battle games that were competitive sporting events in which the neutralisation of a rivalling team through staged combat-like fights was the main goal (Tresca 182). Aside from the realm of combat, the *Society for Interactive Literature* began organising more theatrical happenings in 1983 (Tresca 182). The term 'interactive literature' already hints at the rich backgrounds and intricate stories associated with (good) live action role-play nowadays.

Due to its complex and alien nature, role-playing games are surrounded by various rumours and misconceptions that have so far prevented LARP from gaining general acceptance as a mainstream practice. Nevertheless, LARP communities began to

¹⁴ Homepage of the Society for Creative Anachronism:
<http://www.sca.org/officers/chatelain/sca-intro.html> 17/12/2012

Homepage of the Markland Medieval Mercenary Militia: www.markland.org 17/12/2012

¹⁵ <http://www.wizards.com/DnD/> 23/12/2012

form and spread over the course of the 1980s and they are still growing today (cf. Mackay 16). Thus, live action role-play developed its own culturally different structures in various countries including England¹⁶, Sweden, Finland, Norway (Tresca 182), Germany and Austria.

Of course, mentioned above are only those facts and events that have been recorded, and as live action role-play is due to its spontaneous nature a highly transient genre and also, due to bad publicity, sometimes a secretive practice, we remain in the dark about much of its history.

9. Creating Realities for LARP

In order to explain temporal or spatial structures, it seems advisable to first explain what kind of reality is constructed in LARP. As regards fiction in general, Chatman states quite rightly that verisimilitude is connected mainly to motivation, meaning that unlikely events and actions are accepted by the audience as long as they are justifiable from within the inherent logic of the text (51). The same is true for settings in LARP. Any structure – be it magical, social or otherwise – needs to be consistent and have explanations that make it plausible, no matter how farfetched these explanations are. However, realism is often knowingly disregarded in favour of playability. For example, convalescence is preposterously reduced or pain tolerance increased, as no player wants to remain in bed for the rest of the game just because their character has been wounded. With fantasy in particular, the creators have various options for creating plausibility (by magic, divine intervention...) that real life does not offer.

Chatman also discusses reality and probability as cultural constructs that are not 'natural' but only naturalised by the author in his or her work of fiction (49). The same kind of naturalisation happens in LARP, only the 'reality' does not necessarily correspond truly to (a single) culture of the real-time world. Many backgrounds offer mergers or impose imitations from real cultures, such as the *Novadis* in *Das*

¹⁶

http://www.larpmag.com/Issue01_April_06/larp_magazine_newsletter_volume02.htm#Section%20IX.%20%20%20%20%20The%20History%20of%20UK%20LARP,%20Written%20By%20Nathan%20Hook,03/10/2012

*Schwarze Auge*¹⁷ who emulate Bedouin culture, or the country *Vodacce* in the *Seven Seas*¹⁸ setting which features strong similarities to Renaissance Italy. Others are so far removed from any model that they become a point of reference in their own right. Whatever the world background, it then commences to form its own reality regarding which probabilities of effects, events and such are defined.

However, live action role-play as a practice is not stable; it forms a discourse in the Foucaultian sense. What is known or what conventions are learned varies synchronically (from culture to culture) as well as diachronically (over time). For example, American LARPs usually lack the sophistication of European LARPs, featuring shallower plotlines and focusing on the element of competitive in-game fighting.¹⁹

What is 'doable' or 'preferred' now says little about what might be acceptable in the future. So far, the Austrian trend goes in two directions, one being an increasing sophistication and expansion of background detail (legends, geographical descriptions, social structures, maps,...) and the quest for new, experimental gaming structures. The other trend goes into commercialisation and thus simplification that allows for a broader range of participants.

Participants in LARP may make 'mistakes', for example by taking actions that are motivated not by their characters but by other influences such as their own emotions. Examples of such mistakes would be a mute character speaking or a character that is fond of spiders being scared of an exceptionally large and strange-looking spider encountered in a cellar. Of course, 'mistakes' can also be more subtle and hard to define and most players complain sometimes that they think they reacted in a way unbecoming their character, disregarding the fact that real people also makes unsound decisions or behave inexplicably sometimes. As long as these slips can be explained within the setting, they do not disrupt the flow of the game. Where they do, reactions on the meta-level (e.g. pretending the event never took place) usually resolve any

¹⁷ <http://www.ulisses-spiele.de/> 23/12/2012

¹⁸ <http://www.alderac.com/7thsea/> 23/12/2012

¹⁹ Fights in LARPS can take various forms. Most commonly, weapons made of latex-covered foam (using various core materials for stability) are used, following strict safety rules (such as: no stabbing, no hits to throat or head, moderation of strength in dealing blows, etc.). Seldom are 'in-fights' (bar brawls, fistfights...) which are weaponless staged combats. Some also use bows or crossbows (with a strict limit on draw strength and arrowheads made of foam) or throwing weapons of any shape which are invariably made out of soft material.

difficulties. What can be observed here, then, is a number of people trying to adhere to a gaming reality that, in turn, usually has been defined by a (sometimes larger, sometimes smaller) group of people. Often, one person stakes a copyright claim, but every participant shapes the world in his or her own way, by actively appropriating or even by participating fairly passively in it. What is thereby created is what Mackay would call a *shared world* or *imaginary entertainment-environment* (29).

9.1 *Imaginary entertainment-environment.*

The *imaginary entertainment-environment* is characterised by the fact that not one but a multitude of alternate authors develop it, often using different channels and media such as films, books, computer games, comics and the like (Makay 29). What is created is a world shared and shaped by different people and thus often more complex, adaptable and, on the down-side, sometimes also more contradictory than imaginary worlds which are the work of a single person. Of course, LARP is neither the only nor the first concept to make use of this kind of phenomenon. Yet, LARP's *imaginary entertainment-environments* are very complex, because they are shaped by each and every participant who interacts with the gaming world.

Most large and prominent role-playing systems have fostered various kinds of extra-material produced/written/created by an international company. Among these creations are novels (for examples see chapter 5.4), films (such as *Dungeons & Dragons*²⁰), computer games (such as *Neverwinter Nights*²¹) and comic books (such as the *Forgotten Realms* comics published by Devil's Due Publishing). SomeLARPs also utilise these settings (D&D, DSA...), giving them yet another interface.

However, as concerns LARP in Europe, there are numerous worlds that have been created solely for live action role-play. Usually, GMs define the game world they want to play in. A lot of work goes into world creation, and learning to play in a certain setting also takes effort (costumes need to be made, backgrounds learned). For that reason, these worlds have a tendency to be reused. Whichever world is favoured varies regionally. Some countries are interlinked with each other, forming a global

²⁰ *Dungeons & Dragons*. Screenplay by Topper Lilien and Carroll Cartwright. Dir. Courtney Solomon. DVD. New Line Cinema, 2004

²¹ *Neverwinter Nights*. BioWare. PC Game. Infogames/Atari, 2002.

map (e.g. Arioquia²² or Whenua²³); others are stand-alone concepts (e.g. Haourin²⁴) that often, but not always, allow for ‘world-hopping’ (characters from other settings entering the world via magical portals or by the will of a god in order to allow players to continue playing the character they invented elsewhere). The copyright of a country can lie with the GM (or GMs) who was (were) the driving force behind creating it. This entails whoever wants to use the setting having to discuss this with the inventor. Such claims, however, are usually not legally constituted. Other countries are open setting, meaning no-one has staked a legal claim so anyone can choose to use them.

Not only do LARPs feature so many authors interacting with the same structures that their worlds can be considered *shared*, these worlds also change and develop. The kind of development that makes invented places akin to real places and their changeability is another important factor in *imaginary-entertainment environments*. Both the real places and the imaginary ones used have a history, may feature geographical changes, natural catastrophes, social and political evolutions, wars and so forth. Every new work published or, in the case of LARP, game played (ideally) corresponds with the existing body of work, functioning as an update (Mackay 29).

All LARPs, even those with a historical background, play in such imaginary-entertainment environments. The environment evolves with every plot, every character decision, and every *down-time* gaming event. *Down-time* is the expression for the time between LARPs of the same setting. If, for example,

a campaign spans several LARPs with a common thread but different plots, it could be that in the first game a princess is saved and in the second LARP the same princess kills her parents and turns into the villain of the story.

The three intervening years would be called *down-time*. Sometimes participants need or want to resolve issues *down-time*, either because there was no room for enacting certain scenes in the LARP or because logical developments need to be defined to keep a character consistent. These events are then either discussed with all relevant people (some scenes might need GM affirmation), played out (via pen & paper) or, where they are relevant only to the character, merely noted in the background story.

²² <http://www.arioch.at/ariochia.shtml>, 01/11/2012

²³ <http://www.whenua.at/>, 01/11/2012

²⁴ <http://www.haourin.org/>, 01/11/2012

10. Space and Place in LARP

After having defined the kind of world created, this thesis will now move on to the question of how it is realised. In film, there is a differentiation between the events that are visible onscreen and can thus be perceived by the audience and those that are off-screen, only visible to the fictional characters or hinted at by the plot and by auditory cues. The first is *explicit story-space*, the second *implicit story-space* (Chatman 96).

LARP functions along similar parameters. The location as marked out by the gamemasters is the *explicit story-space*. It is three-dimensional and affects all the senses (for further information see chapter 16). Contrary to cinematic representations, the scale, positioning, focus etc. are not an issue in the *explicit story-space* of LARP as the objects are real and characters are able to interact with them (come closer, retreat, touch, use a candle to shed more light...). Sometimes, GMs illuminate scenes using floodlights, real or electric torches or other means of illumination to draw attention, symbolise magic or make the environment safer (e.g. stairs or a nocturnal battle-ground).

The *implicit story-space* is everything off the defined perimeter, such as the rest of the city, woods, world... that the plot alludes to. However, instead of being aurally supported (as is the case in film or theatre), the implied story-space is usually diluted by real-life happenings (lights and noises of cars, loud music, smells from a nearby kitchen, a nearby village...) that need to be ignored (for further information see chapter 17.1, *Inverted Gaps*).

In verbal narratives, creating an action that takes place “nowhere in particular” is fairly easy, whereas film has a problem with exactly this kind of “non-place”, if it has no wish to leave the realm of classical story-telling in favour of modernistic experimenting (cf. Chatman 107). Even more than film, live action role-plays also need to define their place. While some years ago, people often worked with little to no explanation of *where* (in terms of country)LARPs take place, the German and Austrian trend nowadays goes in the direction of sophisticated gaming world backgrounds. Yet some LARPs (especially short ones spanning only an evening, taking place in a rented room in the middle of the city) do not clearly define *where* it is

they actually play, how it is that the characters came to be there and why it is that the participants cannot really exit the premises and still continue playing. So all in all, it could be argued that *nowhere in particular* might be an ideological construct applied for a game, yet scenes nevertheless take place *somewhere* and even if this somewhere is not defined, it is not a non-place in the same way as a novel can create.

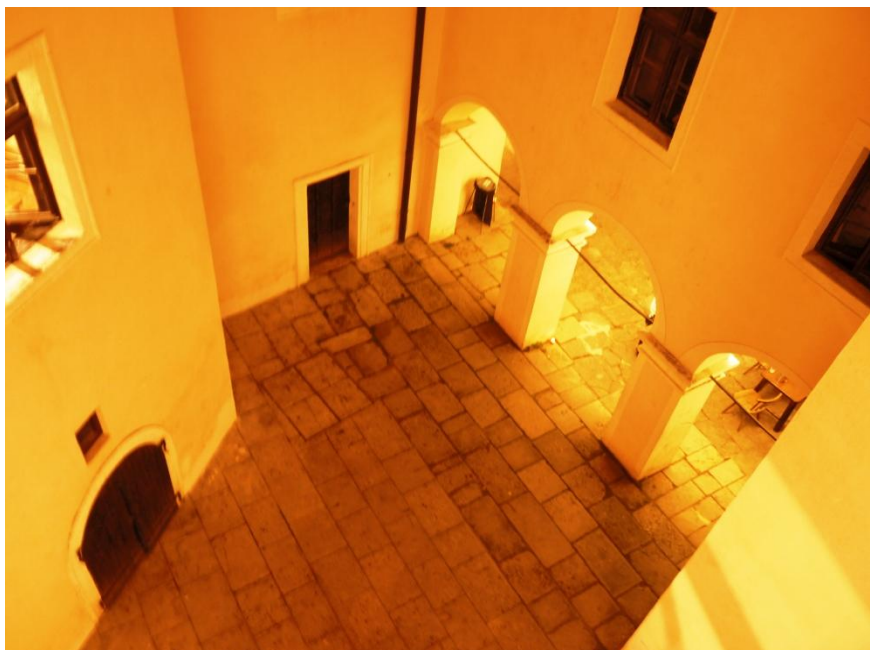


Fig. 7: This is the courtyard of castle Wildegg in Lower Austria which is a popular Austrian LARP location.

Unlike in film or theatre, the real life component of a LARP location can never be completely ignored. A movie can be set in Middle-earth and be filmed in New Zealand or be situated in Paris but filmed in Amsterdam. The same is true for LARPs.

Youth hostels, castles and

camping sites turn into boarding schools, dungeons and apocalyptic war sites. Nevertheless, while a movie is a completed work, LARP is always on the move and as people phase in and out of the gaming reality, a second space, one that I would call *discourse space* is created. *Discourse space* is the space that pertains to the OT, to the meta-level of LARP, just like *discourse time* does (see chapter 15, *Time*). It is to this space – not the fictional setting – that GMs direct participants if they phone because they lost their way driving to the location. It is this space that has a spatial relation to the nearest hospital, should a participant be injured. The LARP *discourse meta-level* and its implications will be further analysed in chapter 12.1, *Diegetic and Extra-Diegetic Elements in LARP*.

11. Story and Discourse

So far, this paper has put great emphasis on the fact that LARP can be analysed using narrative terms. Various literary critics from different countries, the best-known among them undoubtedly the French Gérard Genette, have concerned themselves with narration and narrative structures, forming a body of theory that is commonly referred to as *narratology*.²⁵ Each has developed their unique (sometimes ambiguous) terminology, often creating overlapping concepts. What will be extrapolated here is a synopsis of the concepts most relevant to the thesis.

In order to understand or create stories, certain presuppositions need to be developed and that is best achieved through reading or listening to stories and by practicing storytelling. Through this, an understanding of narrative structures as independent of the actual words or pictures used can be developed (Rimmon-Kenan²⁶ 8). Gérard Genette distinguished between '*histoire*', '*récit*' and '*narration*' (cf. 25-27). Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, an Israeli comparatist and professor of literature, called these functions *story*, *text* and *narration* respectively (3f).

The *story* or *story-paraphrase* is the content of a text abstracted and presented in a chronological fashion, so time becomes the ordering principle of narrative. While various non-story aspects may be present in a narrative text, and vice versa, the constitutive element is exactly this story, differentiating narrative from non-narrative (RK 15). *Text* means the actual discourse, be it written or spoken, that is used to transport the narrative, thus usually implying a writer or speaker (in other words, some kind of narrator). In light of this, *narration* as the process of creating the narrative becomes the third function (RK 4).

In analysing LARP, a differentiation between *text* and *narration* is useful, and this paper deals with both the question of what kind of *text* a LARP is and whether or how this text is narrated. Another useful definition is the distinction between *story* and *discourse*, where *story* equals the content of a narrative and *discourse* is concerned with the method of transmission (Chatman 9). This thesis will work with *story* as the

²⁵ The much older term, *poetics*, which goes back to Aristotle, is often used in a synonymic fashion. *Narratology*, with its more modern associations, brings to mind narration in all kinds of media and therefore seems to be the more appropriate term, considering the unusual body of texts that LARP represents.

²⁶ For reasons of simplicity, Rimmon-Kenan will from now on be abbreviated to 'RK' for the purpose of quoting from her work.

events/content/plot of the LARP, imposing chronological order (only) where it seems useful, and *text* as the actual physical traces. The term *discourse* will be used to denote the structure of the game as evidenced by narration, actions and player knowledge²⁷. Questions of *narration* and whether LARP features a narrator in the classical sense will also be answered.

As regards *story* and *discourse*, it can be said that LARP tells multifaceted *stories*, often transcending the possibilities of other texts such as films and books due to its adaptability, immediacy and parallelism. LARP's *discourse* is also highly complex as it incorporates a level of participant interaction with the text as well as a level of real life influence on gaming structures.

12. Mimesis and Diegesis in LARP

As far back as ancient Greece, writers and philosophers such as Aristotle in Plato's book *Politeia* (Republic) differentiated between *mimesis* as the showing of events, through dialogue or direct representation without the use of a narrator, and *diegesis* as a telling of events which is a mediated, often summarising practice (cf. RK 107, cf. also Küpper 33f²⁸). Genette, concerning narrative, explained *mimesis* as giving as much information as possible while keeping as silent as possible about the informer, and *diegesis* as having the reverse effect (166). Both Chatman and Rimmon-Kenan agree that narrative cannot be truly mimetic, that any written or performed work can only create the illusion of pure mimesis and that there is always an element of (story)telling involved (RK 108f; Chatman 147). I would argue that LARP is an exception to this rule. Precisely because real people create fully fledged characters to breathe life into within unknown circumstances, true *mimesis* becomes possible. I am not saying that everything in LARP is *mimetic* – on the contrary. Telling is, whether participants are aware of it or not, a crucial element of any LARP and it pervades the majority of actions to a greater or lesser degree. The NPC stealing the crown jewels does so because he was instructed to do it by the gamemasters, he does it in a way

²⁷ By *player knowledge* I mean everything a participant knows including meta-level/real life considerations (such as: higher mathematics, the fact that the game ends on Saturday night or that a friend always plays evil characters), as opposed to *character knowledge* which is limited by the invented character (for example a character could be alphabetic, more gullible or less patient than the participant etc.).

²⁸ Küpper describes how Plato differentiated between *mimêsis* as an imitating reproduction (33) and *dihêgêsis* as a summarising report (34).

that already reflects that he is aware of the possibility of being seen so that he may be caught and his movements and actions have an element of *telling* to them, of exaggeration for the benefit of the characters potentially watching.

In interaction between different characters, the *telling* element is often even more pronounced. The necessity of negotiating meaning can prompt any participant to enter the role of narrator, explaining and/or interpreting certain actions. For example,

A player could investigate an amulet an NPC is wearing and while she touches it, the NPC explains how the player (because she is magically active) feels the subtle stirrings of immense magical power, trapped within the artefact. The player decides she wants to have the artefact and tells the NPC that she will now tug quickly and violently on the chain around his neck, but will do so only in-time in order to prevent out-time injury to the NPC's neck. The NPC opens the necklace but lets it dangle over his shoulders, instructing the player to pull.

Thus the scene has been resolved through a series of action and narration that is far from being purely mimetic.

The gamemasters, unlike all other participants, are usually not part of the story-level and their actions are close to pure *telling*. Everything they say either concerns a meta-level (settling quarrels, halting game-time, explaining how much damage a character takes after touching water that represents an in-time acid...) or becomes a narration, as when the GM enters story-telling mode, narrating events that cannot be shown (see chapter 14, *The Gamemaster as Narrator*).

However, within the flow-experience (as explained in chapter 16.2) which is devoid of any (pre)mediation, actions can become an end in themselves, evolving for anyone to see but not so *that* anyone sees. The priestess chanting a prayer, whether she is an NPC or a player, might be completely oblivious of her surroundings or any audience. She is not *telling* the story of a priestess chanting, she is *showing* a woman doing a religious chant.

12.1 Diegetic and Extra-Diegetic Elements in LARP

In more modern times, the differentiation between *diegesis* and *mimesis* has evolved, with Gérard Genette as one of the leading figures into theories that name what is part of the narration *diegetic* and what pertains to the narration, and yet is not part of the narrated reality, existing outside of it or on a higher level (such as the narrator level)

as *extra-diegetic* (cf. 228). LARP utilises a similar distinction. The diegetic could be equated with *in-time* (IT) while the extra-diegetic is *out-time* (OT), a kind of personal meta-level. Accordingly, the OT produces the *real author* and the *real reader* (or in this case *player*), the IT develops an *implied player* and an *implied author* (for further information see the following chapter).

Usually, *in-time* and *out-time* are separate spheres that intermingle as little as possible, with out-time events (such as briefings or rule discussions) taking place apart from the in-time action, so that participants are not disturbed in their playing experience. When, however, the gaming reality is disturbed by out-time reality, for example if a group of players discusses the brilliant make-up of another player in the middle of the courtyard, LARPer speak of *out-time bubbles* (i.e. spaces that should be part of the IT but are not). These *bubbles* are usually burst by a GM, player or NPC either verbally (“Hey, come on, if you want to talk out-time, just withdraw to where we can’t hear you.”) or using a non-verbal sign (bursting an imaginary bubble by using a finger as a pin-prick and making a plopping sound).

An *out-time bubble* is not the same as a *stop* given purely for safety reasons. If a participant is hurt or in danger (of stumbling down a hill, falling over a prostrate person, stepping into the fire...) the action is arrested and resumed as soon as the danger is averted. The command for arresting the action is “stop”.

As Mackay rightly summarises, this duality entails that the identity of all participants is both diegetic (in the game) and nondiegetic (in the real world). It includes both the social identity of the player²⁹, which is created during and around the narrative’s performance, and the fictional identity of the player-character, which is created within the narrative’s performance. (Mackay 48)

13. Real Author and Implied Author in LARP

A narrative, when thought of as communication, requires both senders and receivers who exchange information. If there is a *narrator*, he or she together with the *real author* and the *implied author* are on the relaying end, while the *real audience*, *implied audience* and *narratee* are their receiving counterparts (Chatman 28).

²⁹ Mackay uses the term *player* to denote what I call *participant*. I chose the term *participant* to avoid confusion between the *player* (as actor in the game) and *player* as function (in contrast to NPCs or GMs).

Real author and *real audience* (in LARP *real participants*) are straightforward concepts – these are the actual people producing the narrative or consuming it. In the case of a LARP, the GMs function as *real authors* while the players function as *real participants*. NPCs are often in between these two, both shaping and experiencing the game.

An *implied audience*, on the other hand, is not ‘real’ but can be deduced from the text in instances such as a direct salutation or by the fact that the story is presented in a way that suggests a narratee, independent of the question of whether this narratee is actually present or not (cf. Chatman 150). Through the language and style used, any text suggests a *model reader*, often discouraging those who are unfamiliar with its technical expressions or do not enjoy the text’s literary quality (Eco 7). Live action role-play works more actively with its implied participants than many other texts do, as any LARP plot needs to account for a number of different (hypothetical) actions that might be taken by potential players, if it wishes to minimise the risk of its dramatic structure completely collapsing on player contact.

Keeping in mind that the lack of audience is one of LARP’s important characteristics, it would probably be more accurate to use the term *implied players*. The players are, after all, the ones for which the action unfolds without prior knowledge of the plot. Thus, they are the ones whose individual reactions need to be taken into account when creating a LARP. All other participants, even if they are for any reason outside of the action (e.g. because they are taking pictures or cooking) are, in a way, managed by the GMs. In other words, the players are the closest to an audience LARP has. The written background does address the players, be that in general (e.g. by creating a plot element that requires a strong character to solve or a shrine that needs to be consecrated by a priest) or in particular (e.g. involving an element of plot written for a certain character). Despite the fact that the players are addressed, most of them never read the plot, even after the game has concluded.

The *implied author* is the sum of the markings of a creator, evidenced in the style, plot choices made etc. that a reader discovers in a work and from which he or she reconstructs the personage of an author (cf. Chatman 148; cf. also RK 87f). Keeping in mind that participants of a LARP are always actively involved and that their real life

personalities can never be completely ignored, questions like “What did the GMs have in mind when they were planning this scene? What am I supposed to be doing?” tend to arise. They mark the quest for the *implied author* or, in this case, *implied gamemaster*.

Usually, the *implied author* needs to be clearly differentiated from the *real author*. The *implied author* “is conceived as a stable entity, ideally consistent with itself within the work” (RK 88) while the *real author* is a real person whose inner thoughts and intentions cannot be known and who has no need for a stable relationship with the text. In LARP, the GMs are personally known to the players and even if they are not, they are still present on set. Therefore, I would argue that the quest for the *implied author/GM* may lead to the *real author/GM* instead, obscuring the line between the two more than in many other texts. (“Ah, this is XY mastering the game. She is very fond of hidden treasure. There must be a trinket somewhere.”)

Chatman presents an interesting notion concerning the difference between the narrator and the *implied author*. The first, he writes, tries to establish the accuracy and authenticity of the narration. The other undertakes to make the work as a whole, including the levels of discourse, story and narration, “interesting, acceptable, self-consistent, and artful” (Chatman 227). In light of this notion, I would suggest that the boundaries between *implied author* and *narrator* also merge, at least partially, in LARP. In order to offer a satisfying gaming experience, the gamemaster must strive for consistency and suspense in his actions, stories and characters to keep all participants interested in playing. On the other hand, it is also within the gamemaster’s power and responsibility to make all decisions for the game absolute and thereby accurate and authentic. As the only participant whose move from IT to OT functions does not necessarily require a character, the gamemaster can sometimes remain ‘herself’ (or ‘himself’), even as a narrator. (For further information on the GM as narrator, see the next chapter.)

While audience and creator are mandatory to narration, a narrator telling the story is seemingly optional (cf. Chatman 151). LARP is very much concerned with mimesis, with ‘showing’ rather than ‘telling’; so if most things are enacted and there is no classical audience, is there any need for a narrator at all?

14. The Gamemaster as Narrator

The answer is: possibly but not necessarily. In LARP, players and NPCs are usually alone with their narrative, engrossed in a practice that is close to pure mimesis, even if this is sometimes interrupted by storytelling. Some participants follow the *acting approach* with its implicit request of ‘show, don’t tell’. In extreme cases, this means everything is just as real as you can make it, so if you want fire, you have to have real, burning fire. This, of course, makes most supernatural effects (magic, divine intervention...) impossible.

So some games do well without a narrator. Most games, however, make use of at least a minimal amount of narration. The LARP narrator is usually *extradiegetic* or, in other words, above the level of the action narrated in contrast to an *intradiegetic narrator* who would be part of the *first narrative*³⁰. He or she is also *heterodiegetic*, meaning not part of the story he or she tells (Genette 245). Yet, the gamemaster fulfils a real narrator function whenever he or she chooses to describe events rather than letting them be played out by NPCs and players. For example,



Fig. 8: This is an example of how a fantasy ritual could be realised. Glowing sticks make up the pentagram; the round shapes are battery-powered LEDs. The light in the background comes from a lantern. To stage a ritual, participants would likely chant, sing, light candles or incense or conduct similar ritualistic actions integrating this pentagram.

A mage might spontaneously want to perform a ritual to call an ancient dragon to her aid. Representing such a huge, alien creature is impossible without long preparation, thus the GM decides to merely storytell the dragon, meaning he whispers into the mage's ear, describing how she sees one single scale as big as a plate, then raises her head to gaze at a face the size of a house with ancient golden eyes speaking of an intelligence far beyond human grasp ...and so forth.

³⁰ *First narrative* is the defining temporal level of a narrative. Everything deviating from this is considered anachronistic (Genette 48).

In most cases, such instances are resolved in a way that prevents excessive storytelling to many people for extended periods of time. Yet gamemasters who are apt at storytelling have been known to captivate large numbers of participants in make-believe worlds without loss of credibility. One example of such extended storytelling was one gamemaster 'erecting' a city in the middle of a forest with nothing but his incredible narrating skill and the help of a few NPCs who were able to switch characters quickly by changing posture and accent, using various invisible requisites such as doors and baskets.

What kind of narrator, then, is the GM?

14.1 Focalisation/Narrative Situation in LARP

This thesis will follow Genette in using the term *focalisation* (189). *Focalisation* equals perspective, answering the question "who sees?". It can be *internal* (i.e. the narrator is a character in the story, Genette 189), *external* (the narrator knows less than the characters, the latter are seen from the outside, feelings and inner thoughts are mostly omitted, Genette 190) or *zero* (using an omniscient narrator, Genette 189). The Austrian critic, Franz Stanzl, prefers to call these instances *narrative situations* rather than focalisation, but the distinctions he makes are very similar. For him, three main narrative situations exist: *first person narration* (told from a highly subjective, first person perspective, with the narrator as protagonist or witness to the action), *figural narrative situation* (a character telling the story from a third perspective with a minimum of intrusion) and *authorial narration* (an omniscient, objective narrator who is not a character, telling the story from a third person perspective often using intrusive comments) (cf. Stanzl 16ff).

One sure sign that the GM is no *internal focaliser* or *first person narrator* is that he or she does not usually embody a character that is integrated into the plot. The GM as narrator remains a function of the *discourse*, someone with whom participants exchange knowledge on a meta-level. This knowledge can take various forms. A player might ask "What does my character know about the elves of this country?", because she is playing an elf herself and supposes that her character has some knowledge that the player did not think of clarifying before the start of the game. The GM's answer then remains on the discourse level because the player character, who

is part of the IT-reality, of course already knows what is being discussed. Participants may also ask for clarifications in connection with things their characters did not know already. For example, a player might begin to interact with a riddle erected in a dungeon and rely on the GM to explain what consequences his actions have. These explanations, however, are also part of the discourse level because in the IT-reality, the character perceives without question what the GM explains.

In rare cases, gamemasters may decide to partake as IT-GMs meaning they play a seemingly omniscient entity allowing for in-time interaction rather than purely out-time communication. In this case, what is integrated into the story is their homodiegetic³¹ character who may narrate in his or her own voice (angrily, in complex wording...). Yet, the truly narrative function (explaining effects or defining the outcomes of actions) remains firmly rooted in the discourse, so arguing for *zero focalisation* or an *authorial narrative situation* seems most adequate. If this is the case, but the GM is a real person, how can human limitations and fallibility be incorporated with the ideal of omniscience and objectiveness?

14.2 Narrator Authority and Presence

It seems self-explanatory that GMs are not omniscient as they, as real human beings, are not able to look into the future or read the feelings and thoughts of any participant. However, gamemasters have the authority to demand and be granted internal knowledge. Also, each GM holds concepts of possible solutions and outcomes to a plot, variable though they may be, and may choose to orchestrate an ending.

Gamemasters are not restricted to a certain time-frame. They know, or rather are allowed to know, each character's past and, as mentioned above, have ways of controlling the future by postulating a certain outcome or by directing NPCs to influence scenes in the desired direction. In this sense, GMs are close to being omniscient narrators. If their function is to direct NPCs and the outcome of a game, it could be argued that the GMs fulfill a directing rather than a narrating function. However, there are certain arguments against this proposition:

³¹ *Homodiegetic* means that the narrator is present as a character. (Genette 245)

1. GMs are not restricted to giving directives.
2. GMs (unlike directors) remain part of what LARP is, because the final artifact, in essence, equals the process of creation. LARP is the game as it took place, not any recordings or stories told afterwards.
3. Storytelling descriptions have the potential of being highly literary, eloquently expressed and imaginative.

Concerning omnipresence, again, the GMs are limited to their physical body and incapable of being in more than one place at a time. However, unlike all other participants, a gamemaster has access to all gaming areas without being affected by the gaming world (by traps, locked doors etc.). Also, when gamemasters are needed to complete a task, yet are absent, story-time is usually arrested (for further information see chapter 15, *Time*). Last but not least, many GMs use radio or mobile phones to keep in touch with each other. Thus, a certain degree of omnipresence can be claimed.

Having dealt with questions of presence and knowledge, this thesis will now move on to questions of GM-narrator reliability.

14.4 LARP Narrator Reliability

Chatman postulates that narrator reliability depends on how far the values of the narrator differ from the intentions of the implied author. The narration becomes more unreliable the further what the narrator wants to tell is removed from what the implied author envisioned (or, in other words, from the 'truth' of the story) (cf. Chatman 149). As has been argued before, implied author and narrator seem to merge in LARP. Even if gamemasters deviate from the path they have laid out, this change in plan becomes a constituent of the game. A divergence of viewpoints as described above is impossible. The closest a gamemaster can come to being unreliable is by letting a player believe something that is not true, for example:

If a player (in character) tells the GM "I am going to open that chest with my lock-picking tools" and the GM answers "Go ahead, do it.", this might imply it is possible to lock-pick the chest, even if it was magically sealed and therefore cannot be mechanically opened.

Gamemaster and player can also have exchanges “at the expense of a character” (Chatman 229) such as a player telling the GM

“I know it’s stupid and it won’t work, but my character is going to try to open that chest. I know it’s magically locked, but she doesn’t.”

Another divergence of viewpoint that is not only possible but also likely to occur is that which exists between the different gamemasters of a game. Often, one GM is viewed as being responsible, either for the game as a whole or for certain aspects (a certain part of the plot, the fights, organisational matters such as food and shelter...). The more participants the LARP has, the more important this task allocation becomes. Most gamemasters try to keep up inherent logic by always referencing participants to the gamemaster most likely to give the correct answer. Sometimes this is not possible or gamemasters do not realise they are of differing opinion and contradictions arise which could be interpreted as narrator unreliability. Where the divergence is unintentional, participants prefer to think of them as mistakes which are isolated instances, rather than as unreliability, which would affect the whole gamemaster-narrator identity and perceived authority. The mistakes are then ignored, integrated into the gaming world (explained away) or solved by withdrawing statements.

The decision about which gamemaster is contacted depends on the gamemaster’s jurisdiction (“If I need technical advice, I need to talk to gamemaster C who is in charge of lighting and sound.”), but also on participant preference (“Gamemaster A is always too strict with rituals, I am going to ask gamemaster B”), attitudes (“The main organiser of this game is gamemaster A, so if I get two different opinions from two different gamemasters, I am going to stick with A’s opinion.”) and experiences (“Gamemaster B always forgets the little details and mixes things up, so I am not going to ask B about the village’s name”).

Diverging opinions can, of course, pertain to different mind-sets rather than misunderstandings or miscommunication. Where they do, they relate to the *discourse level* of the game as they cannot be resolved within the *story level*.

The above examples make one thing abundantly clear: LARP always merges two viewpoints, namely that of the OT-person and that of the IT-character or IT-function.

The separation of these viewpoints, combined with the conscious disregarding of player knowledge in favour of character ignorance, is among the most difficult of things to achieve in LARP.

11.5 Overt vs. Covert Narration

So having identified that gamemasters are best described as *omniscient narrators* (or *zero focalisation*), does it follow that their narration is *covert*?

An *overt narrator* would be one whose opinions shape the narrative, while a *covert narrator* is seemingly objective and neutral and hardly noticeable at all. As has been pointed out more than once, gamemasters are real persons, not fictional characters. Neither are they narrators of a fixed work whose opinions cannot be changed once they have been defined. Thus, the gamemaster's personality necessarily influences any report. As mentioned before, GMs can make mistakes, and they often have an attitude towards possible plot-solutions and game-endings. Thus the narrator can seem to shift between being *covert* (merely describing effects) and being *overt* (adding interpretations, emotional colour). Sometimes overt narration is intended, for example if the GM wants to prevent a certain character action. Usually, however, the ideal of LARP storytelling is that of a covert narrator who merely describes facts.

11.6 A Story within the Story

In books, films or theatre, there is often a frame story with various possible subordinate narratives (cf. RK 92). In LARP, such stories within a story also exist. They can be put on stage (similar to *Pyramus and Thisbe* in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) or told by participants acting as storytellers or bards.

15. Time

Narration can be immediate or more or less from the narrated events. *Ulterior narration* follows the events while *predictive* or *prior narration* precedes them. *Simultaneous narration* takes place at the same time as the events, while *interpolated narration* alternates between action and narration (Genette 217; cf also RK 90f). If live action role-play is defined through its performance, does it follow that everything enacted is immediate and only pertains to the present?

LARP narration is usually *simultaneous* or *interpolated*. When it is simultaneous, the gamemaster describes effects while the characters act according to the narration. For example,

If the players are doing a magical ritual to summon a fire creature, lighting candles and singing a fire song, the GM might tell them that slowly, the temperature around them begins to rise, metal parts on their bodies begin to feel hot, they start sweating, begin to feel dizzy and so forth. While the gamemaster is narrating, some characters may choose to get rid of metal armour, or jewellery, or the outer layer of their clothing.

Although the events described and the actions taken are not the same thing, the actions can still be considered a silent commentary on the narration. A book narrator might have described the same scene by saying “The temperature was rising, metal began feeling terribly hot to the skin so the heroes began shedding their armour and jewellery...”). Therefore, in this case, I would argue for *simultaneous narration*.

LARP narration is also often *interpolated*. The gamemaster might narrate effects, either in private or for a larger group of people and the respective character might then act on the narration. For example,

In a dungeon with traps and riddles, one character finds a chandelier with three burning candles. The gamemaster stands hidden somewhere and cannot see what the players are doing. So a player blows out a candle and makes the statement, “I blew out a candle.” The GM affirms by narrating “The candle is out.” As nothing else happens, the character blows out all candles, stating “I blew out all candles.” The GM pronounces in turn that “All candles are out.” It goes on with the character lighting and blowing out candles until the GM says “What a nice light play”, his sarcasm elucidating that the lighting and blowing out of candles is of no importance for the game.

The example might seem needlessly humorous, but it is an authentic example from a LARP and should be sufficient to explain the point of *interpolated* narration.

The narrative distance of LARP narration is usually minimal as the gamemasters' narration takes immediate effect or describes current events and is therefore of immediate importance to the other participants. However, sometimes gamemasters choose to narrate future or past events, either at the beginning or towards the end of a game, or even in the middle of it. A GM mastering a LARP campaign might, for example, explain at the end of the game what will happen to a villain the players have chosen to spare, as the gamemaster is aware that one year will pass IT before the next game of the campaign is realised. The players, therefore, leave with mixed emotions (they might have defeated the villain but her promise to desist from further

evil has proven false) and have time to think about what they want to do downtime (in the IT year that will pass before the next game).

Concerning time, narratology not only deals with questions of distance of narration, it also habitually differentiates between *order*, *duration* and *frequency*, again following Genette³².

Order is concerned with 'what' happens 'when' (RK 46) or, in other words, the chronology of a text. The chronological order of events and the actual order in the narrative can differ, creating *anachronies*³³. The *first narrative* is the defining temporal level and what deviates from it is considered anachronistic (Genette 48; cf. also RK 47). Genette names events before the time of first narrative *analepsis* and those after the time of first narrative *prolepsis* (Genette 40; cf. also RK 46). An *analepsis* can be *homodiegetic*, meaning that the information given is concerned with the same story-line as the text at the time of the *analepsis* (Genette, 51); or *heterodiegetic*, meaning that the information given is concerned with a story-line other than the one the text detailed at that moment (Genette 50; cf. also RK 47). An *external analepsis* narrates events prior to the *first narrative*, an *internal analepsis* narrates events within the *first narrative* that have not yet been mentioned (Genette 49). A *mixed analepsis* traverses the border of the *first narrative*, beginning before its onset but entering the narration (Genette 49; cf. RK 48). A *prolepsis* can also be *homodiegetic* or *heterodiegetic* (Genette 69). Genette further differentiated between kinds of anachronies, but the above distinction will suffice for explaining anachronies in LARP.

Duration answers the question of how long something takes, in both regards, the actual duration of described events and the amount of words use to express it (RK 46). These two levels are sometimes named *story-time* (*erzählte Zeit*, the duration of described events) and *discourse-time* (*Erzählzeit*, the time it takes to read, watch, tell... the narrative) (cf. Müller 273; cf. also Genette 33). The expressions *narrative time* (*Erzählzeit*) and *narrated time* (*erzählte Zeit*) are also in use and seem more straightforward, especially when dealing with a fixed opus (such as in film or prose).

³² cf. Genette 33-161

³³ cf. Genette 35-85

Nevertheless, I chose to use *discourse-time*, because this concept better exemplifies that it is not solely concerned with the time of narration, but also with other time phenomena, unique to LARP. *Discourse-time* begins at the onset of the game and ends with all participants abandoning their character play. Due to the changeability of LARP as a text, discourse-time not only relates to narration and plot but is also interwoven with the real life dimension of *out-time*.

The most common pace is that which is constant and real-time, against which two kinds of adaptations can be measured; namely acceleration and deceleration. When an event is completely omitted, in other words if there is an *ellipsis* (Genette 51), there is no textual space at all but an unknown amount of story duration. This is the fastest kind of acceleration. The slowest kind of deceleration is a *descriptive pause* with some textual space but no story duration (e.g. the detailed description of an item). Between these extremes, there are a number of possible paces, of which the most commonly used, however, are *summary* (in which the *discourse-time* is greater than the *story-time*) and *scene* (in which story-time and discourse-time are equal) (cf. Genette 94; RK 53f).

Frequency, then, deals with how often something happens and exists within the tension of the number of times of occurrence and the number of times the event in question is narrated (Genette 113; cf. also RK 46). Frequency can be *singulative*, “[n]arrating *n* times what happened *n* times” (Genette 114). It can also be *repetitive* or *repeating*, “[n]arrating *n* times what happened once” (Genette 115), or “*narrating one time [...] what happened n times*”, which Genette calls *iterative* (116).

Classical film seldom allows for a pause in which the description of events takes precedence over the continuous showing of the action (Chatman 106) and verbal accounts can hardly evading temporal linearity in their descriptions (Chatman 107). As mentioned before, some LARP participants criticise the overuse of storytelling and cling to an ideal of ‘play, don’t tell’. Yet even if sometimes descriptions are omitted in favour of immersion in the experience, as the above examples show, the action can as easily be arrested for descriptive intervals. This way, LARP can do both, it can arrest time and it can cling to linearity in an interesting blend of film and prose narration techniques.

15.1 Order in LARP

Unlike written narrative, which is necessarily linear, LARP can let several scenes evolve simultaneously, even more so than film or drama can, precisely because it is not created for an audience that is meant to perceive all important events. As LARP plots are acted out, gaining their final shape only through their realisation, it seems feasible to assume they always occur in the present. In truth, however, there are also instances of anachronies. I would argue that *first narrative* in LARP begins when the GMs proclaim time-in and ends when the last participants return to their out-time state.

If *first narrative* does start with time-in, most *analepses* (or flashbacks) have to be *external* or *mixed*, as happenings cannot just be left out as they would in prose or on stage. However, as LARP participants sometimes miss important events due to their physical absence from a scene, flashbacks can also be *internal*, informing characters of what happened elsewhere in the game by magical or spiritual means (see second paragraph below). Flashbacks are mostly scenes interjected into the narrative, either publicly (e.g. in the middle of the castle courtyard) or privately (e.g. in a room behind closed doors). Most commonly, such scenes are staged in a *scene chamber* which is not a regular part of the gaming world (such as the dining room or the courtyard would be), but rather an undefined/in-between space (e.g. somewhere in dreams) or somewhere else entirely (e.g. some monarch's sleeping quarters further back in time and in a place miles away). It follows, then, that these scenes can be visions from the past, dreams, memories and suchlike of one or more player characters. Flashbacks can be realised with the help of NPCs or they can be pure storytelling events.

Apart from such scenic flashbacks, characters also report events from the past (what happened when the new king was born, who they saw running from the crime scene etc.). NPCs' motivations are usually interlinked with the propagation of the storyline, therefore their tales concern a past relevant to the plot. Players also often like to tell plot-unrelated details of their experiences (e.g. plots of otherLARPs they visited) or tales about their personal background.

Prolepses (or flashforwards), on the other hand, are mostly internal as it makes little sense to go beyond the *first narrative*, unless subsequent LARPs are already

planned or the prolepsis deals with the player characters' future rather than the plot. Just like flashbacks, flashforwards are narrated or interjected as scenes into the narrative. While flashbacks are usually planned in advance by the GM as a plot device, proleptic scenes or storytelling events are sometimes spontaneously requested by the players (e.g. from a deity, by magical means, using a prophetic skill such as pyromancy...). Such a request can, in truth, lead to either flashbacks or flashforwards. If a character asks a deity, "What are we supposed to be doing?" the answer will most likely be a flashforward. If the same character asks, "What happened here?" the answer will be a flashback. Again, these scenes can be enacted, involving NPCs and one or more player characters, or they may be narrated, such as the player hearing (in his mind), the gentle moon god he follows explain (in the voice of the gamemaster), how the villainous magician is planning to kill the king.

15.2 Duration in LARP

As has been mentioned before, commands like *time-in* or *time-out* usually put a frame around the action. However, there are concepts such as *flowing time-in* and *flowing time-out* that allow people to join or leave the game at different points in time. Overall duration, as argued for *first narration* in the last chapter, exists within the clearly marked points in time between the first person entering and the last person leaving the gaming reality.

Most of a LARP is experienced as a *scene*. Actions are actually performed, thus taking up time. Distances (e.g. from the castle to the forest) have to be crossed in real-time. Yet NPCs are also often outside the narrative, only witnessing certain scenes, waiting for their appearance. To facilitate the game-flow, the distance that is crossed in real-time by the players may be shortened for the NPCs through the use of a car, to assure their timely (and relaxed) arrival at the scene. Therefore, *story-time* and *discourse-time* can diverge. Some game mechanics also produce this kind of divergence. Among them are *time-stop* and *time-freeze*.

Time-stop is an out-time command (pertaining to real life) and immediately arrests the action due to some danger that has been identified. Thus, *story-time* is halted while *discourse-time* continues. All participants are encouraged to assist in resolving

the problem, if possible. After the problem is resolved, the command *time-in* resumes *story-time*.

Time-freeze is a command that also arrests story-time but for in-time reasons (such as surprising the players with the sudden appearance of a creature in their midst). While *time-stop* concerns all participants, *time-freeze* is relevant only to those who do not already know what is going to happen on the story-level (i.e. the players and maybe some NPCs). All other participants use the *discourse-time* to make preparations (e.g. leave line of sight, place a chest in the middle of the room etc.). *Story-time* is again resumed by the command 'time-in' and all participants then react to the changed circumstances as if they are surprised in the middle of the action they were taking before the *time-freeze* was declared.

There is also a vague state in-between playing and not-playing, when participants ask (or wait for) a GM for clarification. For the person(s) involved in the scene needing clarification, the personal story-time does not, in essence, continue even though the rest of the game may evolve around them. Anyone trying to interact with the 'absent' persons may be drawn into the *out-time bubble* with their story-time becoming arrested. As mentioned before, LARPers talk of an *out-time bubble* whenever there is a section within the game taken out of the gaming reality, usually by people talking off-topic or waiting for answers concerning game-mechanics. Sometimes, once the character returns to the game, *summary* is used to return to the normal *story-time* (e.g. a player saying: "My character has been standing here, looking thoughtful for the last five minutes and now snaps out of his reverie.").

There are other instances, where *story-time* and *discourse-time* diverge. Concerning GM explanations (of magical effects that cannot be seen, props etc.), the time needed to listen to/perceive/... this narration is considered zero in *story-time* (cf. RK 91). Actual *ellipsis* (leaps in time) are possible but seldom occur due to the IT-problems that usually arise (e.g. what have the characters been able to learn/talk about in between). However, this does not mean that *ellipsis* is never used. I have visited LARPs where comparatively short walks of one to two hours substituted a day-long (or even days long) travel. It is important for LARP ellipses that the gamemasters ensure that all participants are aware of what they should know. In a

book, an *ellipsis* might be useful to distract the reader or to create suspense, but in LARP, participants need to be informed of actions skipped that they would have witnessed or even taken themselves.

Examples of *deceleration* would be magic that can slow time (forcing everyone to move and talk in slow motion) or a gamemaster calling for slow-motion in a fight, usually because there are fragile constructions, bad lighting or other dangers involved. Slow-motion here is, of course, an abstraction and not everyone moves at the same speed, but it is a concept that everyone understands and if someone really disregards the order, the gamemasters usually intervene.

15.2.1 The End in LARP

Chatman claims that “No end, in reality, is ever final in the way “The End” of a novel or film is.” (47). I am not sure I agree with that notion. Yes, the story of a film or novel ends but so many things are left open, insinuated, sequels are written or filmed, characters reused or adopted... that the end of the narrative seems illusionary at best. Often, LARP is even more extreme in its open-endedness. As has been mentioned before, role-play has many possible gaming structures. Some work with one-time (or *one-shot*) characters that are only created and used for one LARP, but other gaming structures spawn characters that, if they survive the action, enter new narratives. These narratives can be within the same framework, meaning the same world background and the same set of rules, and maybe even be a true sequel to the story. They can also be in different settings or be played by different rules (there are more than six different sets of rules forLARPs around Vienna alone). So while a single LARP ends with the last person who quits character play, the characters and their stories continue.

15.3 Frequency in LARP

Live action role-play is usually *singulative*. As it is lived experience, repetitive actions like eating, sleeping, in-character praying... are seldom summarised but are mostly executed. What would seem uninteresting in any other artistic context either pertains to human needs and cannot be excluded from the game or is part of the temptation of playing. A player who chooses to play a fantasy priestess often does so precisely

because she wants to experience religious ritual. What is everyday experience for her character (praying, meditating, going to or holding mass,...) is new ground for the player or, even if not new, then certainly not part of her normal daily life. NPCs, on the other hand, who are mostly given a role they did not develop themselves, might get tired of certain repetitive actions and choose to retreat from the players' sight to the out-time, defining that their characters are engrossed in the action, returning to the game after an appropriate amount of time has passed. This, of course, only works if the action does not require player characters as witnesses. An NPC priest may choose to spend his time of silent meditation chatting with the kitchen crew, but he cannot pretend to be holding the evening mass for all participants and be absent at the same time.

Within (gamemaster) storytelling, *repetitive* narration becomes possible. Rarely enacted and hardly feasible are repetitions of scenes as in plots that involve time-phenomena. For example,

One game featured a sect with the ability to jump back in time. Whenever an NPC activated an artifact, story-time was reset to a certain point. Few characters were able to perceive this and they were the ones who had to discover what caused it in order to stop the sect from reusing the artifact until they fabricated the perfect outcome for their endeavour.

Due to the improvised character of the game, replaying scenes exactly would require eidetic memory. However, as with the ignoring of disruptive elements mentioned in chapter 17.1, *Inverted Gaps*, make-believe takes over the function of factuality and approximations of repeated scenes – often involving irony and meta-jokes – are accepted.

An instance of *iterative* narration is hard to find, as enacted scenes that are not narrated are more frequent than narration of scenes that are not enacted. It might be possible, however, to summarise several actions under one narration, because the gamemaster is needed elsewhere. Such storytelling might suggest “Whenever you do A, B happens.”, resuming the game after only one try at A, but defining that the player characters tried A several times to confirm their suspicion that B always follows.

Another LARP phenomenon that has to do with frequency is the alternation of telling and acting in connection with a single event. Some LARP participants think this

practice tiresome and obsolete, voting instead for circumstances that are self-explanatory and do not require GM supervision. Where storytelling is an integral part of the game, however, players sometimes first explain (to a GM or to an NPC or other player) what they are about to do in order to give the others the time to prepare a reaction or intervene, if what the player suggested seemed possible but is in fact not possible in the game reality (e.g. lifting a Styrofoam tile that is meant to symbolise an immovable stone tablet), and then act in the manner described before.

16. Perception in LARP

Having explained gaming realities, it also seems useful to outline what kinds of perceptions are possible within these realities as this will lead to a better understanding of the unique phenomenon of *inverted gaps*, described in the next chapter. We, as humans, are always trying to interpret, meaningfully, what we perceive with our senses and it is this interpretation that marks the difference between sensation (mere sensory input) and perception (Chatman 46). Chatman writes about film's "cotemporal information channels, visual and auditory" (158). LARP does more than merely evoke a world, it allows the player to *live* in this world. It thereby features cotemporal information channels concerning all the senses, even if visual and auditory are dominant here as well.

16.1 Physical Perception

In LARP, like in film, visualisation seems straightforward. Lacking screen or stage boundaries, the LARP world invites even less speculation about what lies hidden/beyond. The participants can look in every direction or even walk in most directions, expanding their field of vision, as they move. Examples of visual stimuli are obvious; these are the masks, make-ups, costumes, props etc... of the game. Whenever a gaming location features a building, participants also have the chance of surveying the action from various angles and vantage points, such as from above (a balcony, a tower...) or below (a cellar window...). Objects can be picked up and examined or questions about them put to a gamemaster.

Auditory input is realised by (character) speech and background sounds or music. Depending on the participant's skill, speech can be in different languages (be they

living, outdated, or fictional), dialects and accents (for further information on character speech, see chapter 19.1). As regards music, there are also various possibilities. Where feasible, participants like to have live music. There are several LARP participants who sing or play instruments, some even at a professional level. They are either asked to perform or choose to play bards who perform for in-time money. There are also some (mostly medieval lay) bands that frequentLARPs and they are either paid or are happy with attending the LARP for free. Where live music is not feasible, gamemasters fall back on sound systems of varying quality, ranging from simple ghetto blasters or an iPod with speakers to professional mixers, depending on their budget and technical skills.

Everyday smells that are not intended to be part of the game world but are generated nearby and thus reach the location are, of course, part of every LARP. Examples of this may be strong-smelling flowers (that might not exist where the LARP is supposed to take place) or food being prepared in a nearby restaurant (even though the LARP plays in the middle of nowhere). Apart from ambience smells, scents can also be intentionally used. For example, aromas (such as mint oil or other, easily discernible substances) can be added to food or drinks to symbolise poisoning. Perfumes can be utilised to signal the arrival of someone or something and either be sprayed on costumes (e.g. a king smelling of lavender) or in the air by GMs (e.g. spraying room scent every time the undead are about to attack).

Taste is probably the sense that is least involved. Of course, any food or drink consumed during the game could be defined as a taste-experience. Yet the taste of food and drink are usually not of plot-relevance but rather pertain to the participant's out-time need for nourishment. If, however, food or drink is 'poisoned' in the manner described above, taste does become relevant. One actual example of an occasion where taste was appropriated for an IT-effect was a Dalriada game. As explained in the chapter on *historical fantasy* LARP, Dalriada is a setting with ancient Celtic roots.

The game in question dealt with a display of Samhain rites, the festival marking the beginning of winter, where according to ancient beliefs, the boundary between the real world and the otherworld is exceptionally thin. One superstition goes that it is very bad luck to leave empty vessels standing in a room during this particular festival period, because ghosts or fairies may tamper with them. So the NPCs fill every unattended empty drinking horn or other drinking vessel with a small amount of strong vinegar and salt. The unsuspecting players did not notice this fact and poured on the bitter broth,

creating a number of spoiled drinks. Of course, people then became very careful about leaving empty vessels standing around.

Tactile perception is part of every action, but it becomes important whenever characters have to act in complete darkness, for example solving puzzles or games of skill. Some people choose to play blind characters, in which case they also rely heavily on their tactile sense. Many physical actions, especially violent ones such as shoving or hitting someone, are impulse-based or symbolised.

One player might shove another, exerting little power, but the one shoved realises from the context of the action that the push was actually meant to be violent and reacts accordingly, by stumbling a few feet away, looking scared.

In LARP combat, safety regulations are meant to help prevent real injury. Nevertheless, a character hit by a foam sword or a nerf³⁴ gun projectile is expected to take this as a prompt to enact injury.

16.2 Emotional Responses

Apart from physical perceptions, there are also emotional responses to perceptions. As all participants are social subjects and not merely stage characters, friendly touches such as hugs or hostile touches such as trying to grab someone also carry emotional meaning.

Chatman points out that characters can only become aware of what exists within the world of the narrative and that they do so through a “perceptual narrative predicate” (102). A similar phenomenon can be observed for LARP characters, though the explication of it goes far into the fields of psychology. Suffice to say that live action role-play can create a flow experience³⁵ which is an expression of an immersion deep enough to seemingly alter the perception of the participants. There are numerous instances where participants report that they overlooked, misinterpreted or disregarded circumstances not because *they* were unable to grasp them but because *their characters* lacked the skill to do so. Also, the emotions experienced in-character

³⁴ http://www.hasbro.com/nerf/en_GB/12/01/2013

³⁵ „Artists, athletes, composers, dancers, scientists, all people from all walks of life, when they describe how it feels when they are doing something that is worth doing for its own sake, use terms that are interchangeable in their minutest details. This unanimity suggests that order in consciousness produces a very specific experiential state, so desirable that one wishes to replicate it as often as possible. To this state we have given the name of “flow,” using a term that many respondents used in their interviews to explain what the optimal experience felt like” (Csikszentmihalyi 29).

can be defined as *real* in the sense that research into suspense³⁶ has described them as such. Some might suggest both to be evidence of a loss of reality, but participants are well aware of the phenomena and have no difficulty differentiating between gaming reality and real life. Of course, small instances of confusion are normal. I, for example, do not cope well with people screaming at me, no matter what character I play and I tend to experience stress if it happens. Such instances, however, are no more pathological than the anger experienced by a losing team in a sports event. Where participants do have real difficulties in differentiation, it is due to a psychological disorder connected with their personality rather than any effect of LARP itself.

16.3 Imagination and Perception

In the case of verbal narration, any potential reader uses his or her creativity to supplement and refine the given information, thereby creating a very rich personal and subjective experience. Film, on the other hand, may still allow for the interpretation of instances not shown or explained, yet drastically limits and narrows imagination through actual visualisation. In the case of literary film adaptations, the perceptual input can be so overwhelming that any formerly held notion of how a character dresses, her voice sounds etc. is thereafter mostly suppressed (cf. Iser, *Reading Process* 301). LARP combines and requires both the participant's physical perceptions and his or her imagination. Physical perception relates to the enactment of the game, to the input of the five senses as they have been described above. Imagination is required in order to partake in and thereby influence the game. If participants do not guess at other characters' motivations, decide to open a locked chest of drawers, forge a letter or begin to manipulate their surroundings in similar ways, the LARP would stagnate. It is also necessary to fill storytelling with gaming reality and understand the props as they are meant to be. For example,

Black tarpaulin dividing a room is not merely plastic but may function as the wall of a dungeon or the wall of a room and small vials filled with blue liquid should not be recognised as water with food colouring but as magical potions.

Apart from signs that are easy to recognise (one does not need experience with LARP in order to guess that blue liquid in a vial probably has a function), there are

³⁶ „Suspense is a quality of the stimulus; it is a narrative procedure, the result of which is an increase in interest in the viewer” (Tan 101).

also those that need to be learned in order to be understood. One such sign would be a closed fist, held on the head by a LARP participant which is the Austrian/German sign for invisibility. LARP often also works with the idea of an astral space, a plane of energy and magic, mirroring everything in the physical world that has an energy signature (i.e. everything living or magical). Beings, such as ghosts, may be present in this astral space but not visible to the naked eye. To symbolise this, the characters wear yellow sashes.LARPs following the *acting approach* usually forbid states such as invisibility or concepts such as astral presence that can easily create confusion in-game and need to be explained beforehand.

Notions of input that needs to be (re)interpreted or ignored lead to another important narrative concept, namely that of the hermeneutic gap.

17. Gaps in LARP

Wolfgang Iser, a German reader-response theorist, defined that within each text, *Leerstellen*³⁷ (hermeneutic gaps) exist which need to be filled with meaning by the reader. Thereby, the imagination of the reader gains providence over stated facts, necessitating an interpretation of connections and causalities and making the reading process a subjective and private act (Iser, *Appellstruktur* 33f). A narrative cannot and should not take into account all minute details or else it would be cumbersome and tedious. Usually, it suffices to explore just the main points. Readers, or an audience, then fill in any gaps through presuppositions which are formed by experience in the relevant fields (with regards to novels or the theatre, most daily life and art) (cf. Chatman 30). These experiences vary, of course, therefore gaps may be filled differently, yet usually problems with interpretation do not arise. If a book, for example, begins with “Carla drove to the airport in her new Mercedes,” several things are assumed. Some seem so self-evident that they are not perceived as a gap (e.g. it is clear without mentioning that Carla was born and it is also probable that Carla is a human woman, not an alien, a dog or a transvestite). Others are less self-evident but still probable, for example it can be assumed that this woman used her key to get into the car, that she stopped at red lights and that the drive, in general, revealed nothing

³⁷ He was following Roman Ingarden’s concept of *Unbestimmtheiten*. Ingarden postulated that any real object is determined (Ingarden 261) and individual (Ingarden 262), while (literary) representations of objects can never be comprehensive in their description, thus creating indetermination or, in German, *Unbestimmtheit* (Ingarden 264).

noteworthy. Similarly, if in a film an actor is shown getting out of bed and then, in the next shot, walking out of a house, it can be rightly assumed that he did several mundane tasks (such as showering, brushing his teeth, getting a coffee, getting dressed) in between. Some texts, of course, play exactly with these kinds of gaps, leading readers astray, yet in a majority of cases interpretation is straightforward, allowing gaps to be either trivial or important for the narrative. They can also be *temporary*, meaning they are resolved within the work (such as a murder in a crime story), or *permanent*, meaning they are not resolved within the narrative (RK 129).

As LARPs are played in real-time, trivial gaps are rare. Uninteresting details such as getting dressed in the morning, going to the toilet, changing footwear etc. cannot be skipped; they need to be enacted. However, strictly speaking, some of these mundane tasks are *story gaps* (gaps that exist in the *story* but not on the *discourse* level). For example,

A character playing a baroness needs to get dressed in the morning but she cannot possibly put on the dress by herself. The NPC playing her servant is occupied helping the GM but would actually be available in-time. Therefore, the player asks another player for help. This player is an in-game baron who, as an aristocrat and a man, would of course not be an appropriate helpmate. The pretence then is that in-time it was actually the maid that helped while on the discourse level, one player helped another player to put on a costume. Story-wise, the baroness just appears and no-one saw her get dressed.

This counts as a gap.

The absence of the maid herself is also a gap. As explained above, her absence pertains to discourse structures rather than story reasons. If an explanation is needed, the gap is filled with what seems most appropriate under the circumstances (e.g. it is agreed on the story-level that the maid helped her mistress get dressed and was then sent on an errand which is considered completed when the NPC is free again to return to the role of servant). Where no explanation is needed, these gaps remain permanent.

More important gaps are those that are plot-related, such as questions like “who is the murderer of the woman discovered in the courtyard at the beginning of the game?” Those gaps are meant to be filled on the story-level and are therefore important and tend to be temporary, unless the players fail to solve the plot, in which

case certain circumstances may remain unresolved. Unresolved important gaps may, or may not, give rise to LARP sequels, allowing for a delayed resolution.

Another kind of gap, perhaps unique to LARP, is concerned with personal boundaries. If a participant ever experiences emotional problems in going through with a certain scene, for no matter what reason, he or she is urged to communicate this and the action is arrested. Usually, what follows is a short out-time discussion of what should be done now. The most common solution is to clarify what the problem is and then to switch to storytelling mode (i.e. the participants agree to what their characters are doing without enacting it). Personal breaks away from the game following such occurrences are, of course, also possible and sometimes utilised.

Apart from personal boundaries, there are certain gaming contents that are omitted for reasons of decorum. These include such themes as incest, rape or torture. Participants of a regular LARP can expect to be spared from any such enactments, as well as less delicate but equally disturbing topics. If the gamemasters intend to create emotionally intense experiences that might be offensive, such as staging games with strong horror elements or a high chance of character death, the participants are warned beforehand. Most games also feature an age limit and do not allow minors as participants. Where minors are welcome, the plot is geared not to be disturbing and the children are required to have a supervisor.

17.1 Inverted Gaps

Apart from these regular kinds of gaps, LARP also features what I have termed *inverted gaps*. While gaps are instances of omissions in text-reality or content that can be filled in if needed, *inverted gaps* are examples of existents that are present but need to be ignored. Subsumed under this expression are all the sensory inputs that do not pertain to the gaming reality but to the real world, and thus need to be ignored. Obvious examples would be sirens, loud music from the next village, hikers crossing the location, an airplane flying overhead etc.

Less obvious but still recognisable are *inverted gaps* that are details of the gaming location such as adverts that cannot be taken down or concealed and areas that are closed off by barrier tape due to safety reasons. LARP also uses recurring symbols

that are often only recognisable through experience in a LARP-context, such as a sheet of paper with bricks drawn on it stuck to a door. This sign symbolises that the door is a wall in gaming terms which allows for the room beyond to be used in a special way (such as rooms to store props and costumes that are not in use at that moment or rooms to be used for enacting dreams and visions). Another common sign is black tarpaulin which is often used to divide rooms, create crawling spaces or hide windows, representing solid walls in all of these cases.

One sign used in Austrian and GermanLARPs deserves special attention, as it does not manipulate inanimate objects but turns people into *inverted gaps*. Participants cross their arms in front of their chests, creating an X shape. It means that they are not merely invisible (which would mean they could still interact with the gaming reality and may be seen by use of magic etc.) but actually non-existent in gaming terms. People use this sign when they are not prepared to enter their character yet (e.g. in the morning on the way from taking a shower to putting their make-up on). NPCs can also use it if they want to witness a scene their characters are not part of (e.g. the final show-down between the players and a plot villain). Players can use it if their character is unconscious or dead but they do not want to lie on the ground because it is wet or because a fight is still commencing and it would be dangerous to be in the way. Participants also cross their arms when they are teleporting (i.e. moving by magical means from location A to location B) or are led to experience a dream/vision etc. while their characters actually remain in bed or sitting at the tavern table. As further possibilities follow the same principles, an exhaustive enumeration does not seem practical.

One differing use of the above sign in connection with fights deserves special notice. Usually, if there is a threat to the characters of the players (e.g. a peasant rebellion, a horde of undead, a bunch of ghosts, orcs, robbers etc.), the attackers ought to be more numerous than the players or otherwise an attack would seem illogical and could be easily repelled. Since a game hardly ever has a sufficiently huge number of NPCs and a small enough number of players to adequately portray this, NPC attacks tend to come in waves, meaning the NPCs attack, are defeated (i.e. killed), retreat with their arms crossed and re-enter gaming reality a few moments later.

Other *inverted gaps* are not obvious at all and this can create certain problems within the game. For example, there are various in-between items where it is not clear if they are in-time or out-time. For example there can be furniture already at the location that is too heavy to move or that fits the gaming reality. Players will not always know whether they are filled with gaming items such as hidden documents or with non-gaming items belonging to the location such as table clothes, books, dishes, board games etc. There might also be pictures where players cannot tell if they belong to the location or were put there by the GMs. Usually, players tend to assume these things are not part of the gaming reality in the direct sense, meaning they might put their cups down on the sideboard but they will not search it unless something suggests to them that they should. Only in this context does the expression “you see what you see” begin make sense. It is the code for instructing players “rethink what you consider to be out-time”. To give an example,

I once went on a LARP where in the wee hours of morning we players were still trying to solve a riddle, but we were already tired and had run out of ideas. Three of us were sitting on a large chest that belonged to the castle and that we thus considered irrelevant for the solution of the riddle. The GM, wanting to help said: “By the way guys and gals, you see what you see” and, in unison, the three of us rose, opened the chest, looked inside and discovered that it was empty save for an item we needed to solve the riddle.

Moving from gap importance to temporality, *inverted gaps* like a huge beer advert in five metres height are of a permanent nature. No matter what direction the game takes, this sign will never be part of the gaming world. Others are temporary, yet they need to undergo a transformation before they can be integrated. Examples of this would be NPCs with their arms crossed (as soon as they uncross their arms, they enter the game) or a door that is marked as a wall (as soon as the sign is removed, the door becomes a door).

18. LARP Plots

Having explained and defined several concepts that pertain to the enactment of a LARP, this thesis will now offer a closer scrutiny of the written traces of actual live action role-play content. LARP plots in general, just like any other narrative, can be extraordinary or mundane, highly complex or unimaginatively simple. They can be part of any genre (mystery, gothic, science-fiction, steampunk, mafia....) or time period (real-time, fantasy, medieval, Victorian age...). Nowadays, hardly any

European LARP plot is so straightforward that it only features one storyline. Nevertheless, a LARP usually offers a main storyline (or *main plot*), around which the whole LARP is structured. Such *main plots* often include some wrong that must be righted (e.g. a murder solved, a person freed, a monster killed) or some rites or festivities to be honoured (e.g. Samhain, a wedding, a coronation...). They give characters a reason to arrive at or be in the location (e.g. because they got an invitation or an assignment or the location is their home, workplace etc.).

LARPs usually also feature several *subplots* that are characterised by the fact that they are optional, and whether they are resolved or completely ignored only has an impact on a personal character level rather than on a grand scale (i.e. influencing the whole game or game world). For example, if in a war zone, a traumatised victim sits whimpering in a corner and is not comforted, he might eventually commit suicide but this has no effect on the outcome of the war. Of course, subplots can complicate and delay the main action and sometimes, depending on the commitment of the NPCs, rise to unintentional significance. If, for example,

An NPC playing a Lord of War in the aforementioned scenario is shocked (as a participant, not as a character) by the callousness of the players, who were always boasting about being heroes; she might choose to embellish the plot. She decides that her character recognises the whimpering victim (who was defined as unimportant in the plot outline, not even having a name) as a serving boy she once fancied and is now angered to the point where signing a peace treaty becomes highly unlikely. Then the story takes a dramatic turn and the subplot suddenly becomes part of the main plot.

Good GMs allow precisely for this kind of fluidity, as will be explained later on.

A third type of plot is the *character plot* which is usually not central to the game as such. The main difference between a mere *subplot* and a *character plot* is that *character plots* are tailored for one specific character (or a group of characters). They are meant to be solved with or without the help of other participants, and whether and how they are resolved might have crucial effects on the targeted characters. *Personal plots* can also be *main plots* with LARPs structured around them, but if this is the case, participants (and especially the players concerned) know about it. *Character plots* can be either or all of the following: requested by the player, requested by another participant, announced beforehand, a surprise for the player or developed spontaneously during the game.

As has already been explained, some games are announced as *ambience games* and that means they feature no *main plot*. Minor *subplots* are sometimes integrated and the GMs need to offer at least some reason for characters to arrive at the location. These reasons can be as mundane as ‘there is a tavern here’ or as sophisticated as the existence of a tournament, complete with various competitions and prizes. Such *ambience games* place a great focus on character play and are usually not action-based, meaning there are usually no imminent threats or actions of great magnitude planned.

Less classical games might be action-based enough to forfeit the term *ambience game* yet feature a *main plot* so minimal that the term *setting* seems to fit better. An example would be a Last Days setting in which a fight for resources amongst a handful of survivors is initiated merely via defining different (rivalling) characters.

Similar to the distinction between *main plot* and *subplot*, Rimmon-Kenan advances the notion of *main storyline* and *subsidiary storyline*. A *storyline*, for her, is “structured like the complete story but following one set of individuals” (RK 16). It could be argued that any player character follows his or her individual storyline. However, one could also argue that the players, as a whole, form only one storyline, namely the one involving the protagonists of the plot. This, then, leads to calling LARP story-lines *plot-lines* instead, focusing on the different plots (rather than the characters). *Personal plots* and *subplots* are subsidiary, while the main plot, as the name already suggests, forms the *main plotline*.

18.1 Plot Structure

Just like games can be organised years in advance or within the short notice of just a few days, plots can be transported in various ways from being merely orally narrated to forming a text comparable to an academic paper in its complexity. The most common and useful format, however, features the following:

1. A short summary of what the game will be about or what is to be achieved (e.g. a new king should be crowned at any cost) or why it is being staged (e.g. as a birthday present to a person).

2. A background to the story/plot, explaining enough of what constitutes or preludes the game so that NPCs will be able to understand the action and the character they have to play within it.
3. A rough temporary outline, explaining what is supposed to happen and when. Some events have a time-limit (e.g. the evil magician has three hours to gather victims for his grand ritual) or need to take place at a specific time (e.g. when it is dark) or on a certain day (e.g. early after the start of the game, or the players will not have enough time to solve the plot). This time-table is often, but not always, combined with
4. The whole main storyline fleshed out in detail.
5. All *subplots*, *character plots* and optional pieces of plot and how they relate to the *main plot* (if they do).
6. A list of character descriptions and, if it has already been decided, who will play what.

Often, different versions of a plot exist. The GM version (like a 'director's cut') includes all information that has been put into writing. NPCs often get shortened versions, either to maximise their gaming fun (ignorance of a few plot elements gives NPCs something to explore or there might be character plots for them that they know nothing about), help them create authenticity (it is hard to pretend not to know who the murderer is) or to protect them from being forced to remain NPCs throughout a series of strongly plot-connected games³⁸.

The plot is distributed to all NPCs, usually via two channels: e-mail and one or more NPC meetings which take place before the game. All NPCs and GMs are asked to attend these meetings as questions, characters, plot ambiguities, costume problems etc. are discussed and clarification attempted. Whoever cannot attend often has a *personal briefing* in person or via the internet with one of the GMs. At the game itself, at least in Austria, there are usually two big speeches at the very beginning, one for all participants (welcoming the participants, introducing the GMs, mentioning again all safety precautions, special rules, answering last questions etc.) and one for the NPCs (giving a short overview of what is planned, who is there, who begins by

³⁸ It is among the most important functions of players that they are truly free to act as they deem appropriate for their character, without having to consider the mechanics of the plot. So a participant who already knows the plot for a subsequent game will have a hard time acting as a player.

playing what and organising the immediate requirements regarding set-up, character, make-up, costumes...).

It has been discussed that the GMs have the option of the final say in everything concerning their own game. Whether and how players will carry gaming consequences over into their next LARP experience remains at their own discretion, though completely ignoring what happened is usually considered poor form. Instead of controlling the action, GMs might also opt for distancing themselves as far as possible from the game once it commences, being content with watching what they have set in motion, interfering as little as possible. No matter where between these two extremes GMs situate themselves, Mackay is right in postulating that

[t]he role-playing game script is not solely in the gamemaster's hands. The gamemaster does not determine what the characters will do and where the characters will go in the fictional world. (52)

They *might* make such a determination, but if they always did this, sooner or later they would not find enough participants to continue playing. What, then, is fixed within a plot? How can LARP be planned at all?

18.2 Fluidity of (Plot) Structure

Barthes and Chatman differentiated between story elements that are crucial to the narrative and which promote the storyline by introducing a choice, and those that merely enrich, maintain or restrain it (RK 16). The first type Barthes named *nuclei* or *cardinal functions*, the second *catalysts* (248). Chatman, on the other hand, worked with the terms *kernel* and *satellite* (54f). This thesis will follow Chatman, as *satellite* is a clearer definition of omissible appendages than *catalyst*.

In LARP, a kernel is everything that advances the outcome of the *main plot*. Such decisions would include, for example, killing or saving an NPC character, ignoring or responding to a plea for help, following an invitation etc. As LARP is interactive, the differentiation between a satellite and a kernel is sometimes hard to make. After all, a conversation with a character might tip the scales in the players' favour and change the outcome of the whole game – something that can only be clearly defined in retrospect.

Some GMs define the *kernels* of a story, giving players and NPCs little opportunity to influence the main action but letting them merely tinker with the *satellites* (the story elements that add flavour and atmosphere, such as unimportant side quests or personal plots). Such plots are nicknamed *railroad plots* as they let no-one deviate from the path GMs have laid out. When live action role-play emerged, participants were challenged with the new experience of writing plots, inventing and playing fictional characters and creating costumes. Therefore, *railroad plots* which are easier to grasp and stage were the norm. Nowadays, with many LARP participants having already experienced various storylines and characters, playing a *railroad plot* is almost unanimously considered an unpleasant experience, unless the fact of the story being completely pre-structured is very well-hidden, in which case enough sophistication presumably went into creating it that an open-ended plot would not have been that much harder to master. Of course, various options for keeping the game tied to the gamemasters like a puppet to its strings are conceivable, such as ignoring scenes once they have been played or forcing characters to act in a certain way. However, all of them are now considered unsportsmanlike and are, ideally, avoided.

Most GMs opt instead for more flexible structures. They might script certain scenes that offer no possibility of interaction (e.g. the characters will witness a murder and no matter what they do will not be able to prevent it) and otherwise define *kernels* but leave various options (e.g. after the characters witness the murder, they can either catch the murderer, kill her or let her get away), thus allowing for very different plot realisations. GMs can add even more complexity by not defining the outcome of *kernels* at all. They merely stage core elements of a story and observe how participants react, or they define characters and their motivations and see how they interact.

Some scenes and characters are described in detail, while others are very vague. An example for a vague character description would be an NPC who is merely defined by the plot function (warn the players of an imminent threat) and has little or no preconceived background. Whatever is needed is defined 'on the spot', either by GMs briefing the NPC shortly before the action or by the NPCs themselves, who are usually told what ought to happen (e.g. give the message to at least three different

players) and what should not happen (e.g. the messenger must not stay on the premises, once the message is delivered) but are otherwise given free reign as to how they want to play the scene.

As hinted at before, since so much is undefined in the LARP-setting, contradictory statements (either from the different gamemasters or from the different characters) occur in almost every game. Some discrepancies are more fatal than others. If:

Character A says the princess is nine years old and character B says the princess is seven years old, and the two differently informed players do not compare their information but only agree on the fact that the princess is still a child, the discrepancy is all but irrelevant.

However, if a player character's survival depended on a little fact that one of the NPCs related wrongly (e.g. "No, you cannot use your magical item that protects you from fire here."), complications arise. Sometimes, the game-line needs to be backtracked up to a certain point (a procedure that most LARPers try to avoid) to disentangle such discrepancies. Those participants who prefer interaction (role-play) to rule dominance try to backtrack as little as possible but want to find solutions that explain mishaps without involving too many others in a confusing dissolution of events that have already been played.

LARP plots do not create hyperlinks in the physical sense, they are of a more traditional print medium character. However they do try to anticipate, predict and enlist various possibilities of interaction and thus any directions a plot can take by being enacted, often even hinting at some which are not expounded. Usually, a plot takes not of the most likely choices the characters can make. If:

The Queen asks for help, a likely choice A is that the characters will help. If the request for aid was the reason given by the gamemasters for player characters to arrive at the location, then choice B, to refuse help, is equally possible (if, for example the characters do not like the Queen's terms). However it is less likely (as this could possibly mean that the character refusing to help has to depart, and the player will lose the opportunity to enact the rescue). Far more unlikely choices would be that the player characters want to C, kill the Queen, or D, try to convince her that she does not want her son to be saved.

Naturally, no matter how complex the scripts are, it is not possible to cover all potential outcomes, otherwise the ensuing text would be impossibly long, confusing and impractical. Good gamemasters always keep in mind that the players, as a group but also as individuals lacking knowledge of the intended plot, often develop ideas

that the gamemasters (who cannot truly imagine what it would be like to engage the narrative without background knowledge) did not consider. As the saying goes; no plot survives first contact with the players. Thus, ideally, all participants are aware that the true story only evolves by being lived and that each of them has an active part in its evolution.

These kinds of open-ended stories can create complex scripts that, in essence, result in hypertext fiction (namely a non-linear, interactive narrative). Interaction, with regard to hypertext, means that creator and consumer take equal responsibility in shaping the work, with the latter choosing the path taken out of various interlinked possibilities that the former provided through different means, such as hyperlinks on an internet page, for example (cf. Douglas 31). Reading, formerly thought of as a passive practice (cf. Douglas 42), is transformed into a creative act.

However alien this concept may seem at first glance, when compared to Rimmon-Kenan's commentary on the classical reading process as such, striking similarities can be discovered. She sees reading as a process of constant speculation, of verifying and falsifying conjectures, creating new ones, discarding old ones until arriving at the essence of the story, at the final interpretation that creates a coherent whole, giving meaning without contradiction to all that has been written (RK 122). Or, as Paul Goodman put it so beautifully,

[I]n the beginning anything is possible; in the middle things become probable; in the end everything is necessary. (14)

So it is with live action role-play. As participants make choices, the number of possibilities is narrowed down, until finally, there is a more or less consistent string of events necessitating each other, forming the actual, played story of a LARP.

For a better illustration, a plot script that was actually distributed and subsequently realised in Austria in 2008 has been added to the appendix (see Appendix I). The transcript is a translation from the German original. I have drafted both, the original and its translation. Comments on the text will be in cursive script.

19. Characterisation

So far, the differences between NPC and player characters have been explained and also the fact that the real life personalities of the participants necessarily influence both. However, there is more to say about LARP characterisation.

In his article from 1971, Joseph Ewen summarised part of the Hebrew work of a scholar who has not been translated into English, stating that essentially two kinds of textual characterisation exist, namely *direct definition* and *indirect presentation* (qtd. in RK 59).

In LARP, a distinction needs to be made between character backgrounds or NPC role-descriptions and the actual playing of the characters. LARP participants are of various authorial qualities. Therefore, the write-ups they produce are diverse in nature. Some character backgrounds read like brilliant short stories while others are, at best, a grammatically inaccurate jumble of sentences³⁹. Nevertheless, if *direct definition* is to be found, it is usually in those backgrounds. Other *direct descriptions* sometimes occur during the game, when one character talks about another. Such instances of characterisation are highly subjective and often used to fulfil a certain function, e.g. discredit a rival, and are thus not necessarily reliable. Occasionally, *direct definitions* are also given by the gamemasters in answer to, for example, magical spells or special abilities that let game participants draw conclusions about a person's character (e.g. "You see a dark aura, betraying sadistic tendencies and a deep hatred of the human race."). This information is constitutive and is necessarily therefore to be considered reliable, even if mistakes on the part of the GM cannot be precluded. (See also chapter 14.4).

The remaining LARP characterisations, I would argue, are *indirect presentations* of a dramatic nature, meaning the traits of a character are experienced and interpretable by observing this character in live interaction with other characters or the plot.

19.1 Character Speech

Like all characters, LARP characters can be characterised through the subjects and mode of their speech (RK 63f). Participants may choose to speak in a vulgar and

³⁹ For an example of a player character sheet and player character background, see APPENDIX II.

impolite way, about topics that are not socially acceptable, in high speech or a dialect, with a heavy or slight accent, fast or slow, high-pitched or low-pitched and so forth. Most commonly, LARP uses 'real' accents and languages. For example, in Austrian and German fantasy LARPs, the elvish tongue, which is the foreign fantasy language most commonly needed, is represented by English while German functions as the human Common Tongue. As most people do not speak more than English and German fluently, several tricks are used to symbolise a language barrier or at least a different character origin. One of these tricks is the use of a salutation in a foreign language (e.g. Italian or Spanish), followed by German with the appropriate accent. Another possibility is using various forms of (regional) dialect, such as Northern German or Tyrolean. For example, various forms of Austrian dialect are often used to represent simple townsfolk. Others adopt simplified or spoofed versions of Low German to symbolise any kind of northern folk with similarities to Viking cultures. Some magicians use (often incorrect) Latin or Greek to cast spells or, if they speak a living language not commonly understood (such as Rumanian, Russian, Croatian etc.), recite nonsense texts, poems, recipes or such for magical rituals. Some LARP countries define their fantasy background as having French, Spanish, Arabic etc. roots, playing characters with appropriate names and accents.

Rarer than the use of actual languages are fantasy languages, ranging from those invented by people outside the community (e.g. Tolkien's *Quenya* or *Sindarin* or the Star Trek Klingon language) or the role-players themselves. I, as a LARP participant with a strong interest in languages, invented several rudimentary languages to accommodate characters. One of them even sprouted a fictional dialect used by a participant playing an elf.

Speech is a rather straightforward phenomenon. The representation of inner thoughts and properties are, due to the medium, not as easily accessible. LARP cannot resort to asides or inner monologues like the theatre does, to verbal descriptions of thoughts found in novels or to an overlay of a narrator's voice as is sometimes used in film. If thoughts, hidden emotions etc. are accessible, it is usually through certain spells or abilities that can render them available through storytelling. Yet many games preclude supernatural elements of this kind, only allowing for an outside view.

19.2 Character Appearance

Many authors and hence most readers are accustomed to drawing at least rudimentary conclusions following an allegorical connection between characters'



Fig 9: To illustrate what is within the reach of costume and make-up, consider this picture which shows me playing a man. I used a fake beard applied with spirit gum, laced my chest and chose loose clothing to hide my feminine figure.

appearances and their inner qualities (RK 65f). This relation is even more powerful when applied to a visual medium. LARP does like to work with both stereotypes (the old witch with the crooked nose and warts) and counter-clichés (the beautiful, blond, charming nobleman who is a witch). As with theatre, there are limits to what can be done. Make-up, masks or constructions blurring physical boundaries are possible, but the human behind the costume cannot be completely obliterated.

What cannot easily be adapted or changed, such as height, corpulence, a participant's actual stutter or limp is, of course, not considered as constitutive to the fictional character as those features that can be altered, such as clothing, hair-style, make-up etc. (cf. RK 65f). This means participants will often accept a dwarf, even if he is fairly big for a dwarf, as long as he fulfils those qualifications within his reach (long beard, long haired wig, large (pillow) belly, big axe, armour,...), just like they will accept an overweight elf with a calm and wise demeanour and a brilliant costume. So some unalterable facts are overlooked or outright ignored. However, there are limits to what is tolerated, depending on the kind of game and personal preference. Some LARP participants insist that elves have to be tall and lean, dwarves short, orcs muscular etc.



Fig. 9: Not everything in fantasy LARP is unusual or fancy. This picture shows my best friend playing a normal human woman. However, hiding her unusually dyed hair in a nice-looking and comfortable way would have been too much effort for this LARP which lasted only for one day. Unusual features like this are either ignored or explained in-time (e.g. a magical ritual gone wrong).

In film or theatre, it is possible to cast a person according to their physical traits, quality of voice etc. The same is true for LARP, at least in the NPC department. Players can be refused on grounds of personal preference ('I do not want this person in my game.') as can their characters ('Sorry, no evil-minded characters on my game.'), yet this is not the norm. Hence, the gamemasters usually exert little power over how well cast a player is for his or her chosen character. NPCs can be cast, but there are usually a limited number of available persons and not all of them are good actors, willing to wear a wig, able to tolerate masks etc. Therefore, most gamemasters will make their choices by a mixture of searching for people to play the characters they have in mind, adapting the character if they cannot find a suitable candidate, or create tailor-made parts for the participants available.

Money is a constituent factor in equipment and therefore in the physical appearance of the characters, as LARPs are recreational and, as practiced in Austria, usually not of a commercial nature. If there are to be unusual costumes for NPCs, they need to be founded by the money collected by the participants. Thus, GMs either adapt the costumes they or others already possess or they try to create new ones with as little cost as possible. Players also do not always have the money to acquire, or the time to create, all the accessories they would like for a character, often ending up with a costume compromise.

Furthermore, unlike in theatre or film, characters are often played for two days straight, not only a few hours, and are confronted with outdoor activities that can

render clothing wet, torn or dirty. Therefore, a balance needs to be found between authenticity (my character is now wet and cold and his robe has been destroyed) and comfort (rain ponchos, a borrowed cape that has a foreign coat of arms, gumboots etc.).

Since many NPCs switch roles, playing first one character then the other, there is a great focus on important differences (a new accent, a new costume,...) rather than similarities (the same face, the same shoes...). There are adults playing teenagers and young playing old. There are NPCs wearing costumes that have been used in other LARPs in completely different contexts. Sometimes, it is hard to differentiate what is a distinguishing feature and what is merely a slip or a necessary evil, creating difficulties that are, I would argue, alien to most other genres in their unintentional nature. For example,

A participant may be forced to change clothes because she got soaked and is then taken for another character by those who do not know her reasons for costume change.

To minimise these difficulties where they are foreseeable, OT information is sometimes given prior to the beginning of the game or in the middle of a scene. An NPC forced to play many similar roles might inform the players beforehand, “Whenever I’m wearing the blue dress I’m the princess, when I’m wearing the white dress I’m the fairy and when I’m wearing the black wig, I’m the beautiful witch”. Likewise, an NPC donning a symbolically laden garment might say “I’m wearing the tabard with my player character’s coat of arms, but I’m not playing Sir Geoffrey, just one of his knights”.

All these factors combine to create a certain leniency when it comes to evaluating characters. Of course, this tolerance is necessarily limited to what is known out-time. If people do not know a certain man talks with a lisp or a certain woman walks with a limp, they might criticise that the elven prince is lisping and the great warrior queen limping. Conversely, character performances are sometimes considered brilliant up to the point where it becomes clear that the participant is not truly acting but only behaving like he or she would in real life.

19.3 Character Surroundings

Apart from appearance, characters can also be defined by their environment, be it material (the belongings, home country, room...) or social (the class, relatives, relationships...) (RK 66f). While a written text can evoke any imaginable environment and film relies heavily on the creation of make-believe, LARP can only appropriate what is there and affordable. At best, imagination takes over the structuring eye of the camera which turns models into reality, preventing participants from opening the door camouflaged as a cupboard or trying to take books out of a picture that is merely a two-dimensional symbol for a well-sorted library. While it is possible to create dungeons in cellars using tarpaulins and poles, or in living-rooms using tarpaulins and furniture, there is a natural limit to what can be done and the result often necessitates ignoring many of the details, such as modern appliances (sinks, toilets, window panes, asphalt...). For details see also chapter 17.1, *Inverted Gaps*.

The human environment, on the other hand, is limited by the number and type of people available as characters. A mighty queen might be in need of a guard of forty people and at least half as many servants, but has to make do with one manservant and two personal guards. Likewise, a player may have invented a sister twenty years his senior, a brother of brilliant beauty and a father who is over two metres tall, but there are no participants fitting the character descriptions to portray them.

19.4 Flat vs. Round Characters

Leaving aside the physical realm of characterisation, what can be said about the actual character traits? Chatman explains that by formalist and structuralist standards, plot is central while characters are merely a vehicle for transporting it (111). Regarding modern, psychological characters he says that they are multidimensional, breaching or transcending the reduction to a single function or a small number of traits (112). Where one trait is so noticeable or dominant as to be considered the sole, identifying characteristic, characters are termed *flat*. *Flat* characters are fairly stable, their behaviour is easy to foresee and seldom mysterious or ambiguous. *Round* characters, on the other hand, exhibit a variety of different, sometimes competing or conflicting attributes and attitudes, making them capable of development and of creating unexpected turns in the narrative (Chatman 132).

It has been argued that a distinction between *round* and *flat* is too rudimentary and confusing, as flat suggests a two-dimensionality that characters of a narrative usually do not exhibit (cf. RK 41). Nevertheless, a binary distinction between *flat* meaning characters of little complexity and hardly any development and *round* meaning characters of greater complexity and development seems practicable in its simplicity as a starting point for further analysis. Naturally, LARP characters, like all characters of a narrative, are found on a continuum in between these two extremes of near realism and single-trait function.

In LARP, both round and flat characters are common. *Flat* characters, however, are only accepted without criticism in the NPC department. Even there, this acceptance mostly encompasses characters that are present for very short periods of time and are mere vehicles of the action. They may have descriptions as vague as “Your name is Crim, your village Perce is two kilometres in this direction. Come here, crying, and tell the players about the cruelty of the king and his taxes.” An example for characters that are there throughout the game but could still be considered *flat* are those that have one specific function and are only invented because of this trait (e.g. the healer who will help the characters should there not be enough healers among them, the oracle who can steer them in the right direction if they get completely lost solving the plot). However, NPCs playing such characters tend to embellish and enliven them, either before the game or as the game progresses. Therefore, it could be argued that these characters are *flat* in the plot outline itself while they become *round* in the course of the game. An example of such a *flat* character from the model plot (appendix I) turning *round* would be the victim of the “Cutszene”. The woman playing her chose to use a background from a pen & paper game she had played with me for three years, so she knew a lot about the world and its background and fabricated a round character out of it.

One distinction in NPCs that gives a hint about the complexity of the character is the distinction between *player-NPCs* and *jumbers*. *Player-NPCs* play a character created by the GMs, but they play it throughout the game, often with little or no knowledge of the plot and a freedom of interaction comparable to that of the players. The reason why they are NPCs is so that the gamemasters can control what kind of character is being played and, if necessary, restrict or direct the character in a way that player

characters should not be controlled. In the plot exemplified in this paper, the Calia congregation was made up completely of player-NPCs.

Jumpers, on the other hand, are NPCs who never play a character for a prolonged period of time but always ‘jump’ from one role to the next. Pure *jumpers* are rare as few people like the constant switching of characters that usually does not allow for a deep immersion in the game.

Those in between these two extremes are just called NPCs. *Jumpers* and ‘normal’ NPCs know the plot. NPCs themselves also sometimes ‘jump’, i.e. have a short appearance, for example in a dream sequence or as *cannon fodder* (for the sole purpose of staging a fight), but they usually play characters for longer periods of time, i.e. several hours. In the example plot, the warden who took care of the bad book committed suicide because Astris’ avatar was doing such a great job of causing despair. He then took up another character to play for the rest of the game. In between, he attacked a few times as a villager, thus alternating (or ‘jumping’) between *cannon fodder* and two more prominent roles.

What has just been termed *cannon fodder* (or *Schnitzel NSC* in Germany and Austria), is another interesting NPC part. As has been explained earlier, LARP fights usually necessitate that non-player characters attack in waves, meaning they attack, are defeated (i.e. killed), retreat with their arms crossed to symbolise that they are ‘gone’ and re-enter gaming reality as a new wave. In this function, they do not really have an identity, they are just ‘the threat’. Of course it can happen that even the *cannon fodder* NPC is captured and interrogated or naturalised, in which case the NPC has to be quick to invent



Fig. 10: An example of an NPC with plate and mail armour and undead make-up. While he would fall into the category of *cannon fodder*, the sophisticated make-up suggests he is some kind of special monster – either hard to kill, important part of the plot or especially dangerous etc. Make-up for *cannon fodder* is often much simpler. Undead may, for example, just have black shadows beneath their eyes and a face hurriedly painted white with water paint.

a background, but such instances are rare. In the example plot, the attacking villagers in all their different stages (as human, undead and spirit) are clear instances of *cannon fodder*.

So while a character cannot get any *flatter* than the *cannon fodder* NPC, any role that has a longer gaming time tends to be *round*. Player characters are motivated by the player's personality, expectations and preferences which usually, but not necessarily, result in a fair amount of sophistication. Even where player characters are *flat* with just a concept or general idea as background, the act of being played and thus gaining experience, generally transforms them into *round(er)* characters. Therefore, no matter how shallow the characterisations, characters can be and necessarily are enriched. The only restraint in development is the inherent logic of the gaming world. (If no magic exists, the character cannot turn into a magician.)

In some cases, NPC characters are appropriated as player characters. If this happens in a game following rules with character points, they must then be created with the appropriate amount of points for a new player character, thereby sometimes losing abilities they originally possessed (ideally those that were not used during the game). A loss or temporary suspension of abilities can also become necessary when transferring a player character from one set of rules to another. (If, for example, a magician was hitherto able to make herself invisible but the other rule book forbids invisibility.) The illogical consequences of this practice are another reason why some people prefer to play either without rules or to keep a character within one set of rules only, desisting from visiting LARPs that require a conversion.

The ideal of a LARP character as consistent is, of course, not always possible to realise. Some participants are bad actors, unable to emphasise with situations, be consistent in their actions, or remain in-time without constant out-time commentary etc. Consequently, some participants are said not to 'play' (characters) but just to 'be' (themselves). Even if they are not this bad, not everyone is as creative or entirely comfortable with acting, therefore the story-time may be interrupted as the participant playing a character is fumbling for answers to simple questions such as "Do you have siblings?" or "Why did you come here alone?". As regards NPCs, just like plot structure discrepancies, contradictory character statements cannot be avoided

altogether. Logical contradictions are, where they are relevant to the game, brought to the attention of a gamemaster who then apologises for the inconvenience and decides on the most plausible information, sometimes even finding an explanation for the discrepancy (e.g. NPC character 1 was right and NPC character 2 had no idea but did not want to admit it). Ideally, the gamemaster then informs the rest of the crew (gamesmasters and NPCs) to prevent the misunderstanding from reoccurring.

Another possibility that does not exist in narratives with a strict differentiation between the text and reader or audience, is to ask plot- or character-related questions and receive an answer. A fictitious queen in all the traditional media cannot be asked what pets she had as a child and whether she likes apples better than pears. If the text does not exemplify, we are left in the dark. In LARP, such questions can be asked and answered, thus creating new possibilities of interaction and, in most cases, consequences. Said queen with a fondness for apples could, for example, be flattered by an offering of her favourite fruit or she could be enraged by the attempt to manipulate her.

To summarise, there are characters which gain depth and pages and pages of background, and there are supporting characters who are created (sometimes even on the spur of the moment during the game) to fulfil a clearly defined function and this function only. Usually, the longer characters are played, the more *rounded* they become. However, personal problems or bad acting can inhibit all kinds of logical character development and compliant behaviour that other media minimise through the fixedness of their text and action, or their method of recording.

19.5 Characters as Real People

In contrast to the *purist* idea of characters as mere vehicles of plot, the *realistic* argument tends to compare characters to real people, seeing them as complex figures that can be abstracted and analysed independently from the work that created them (Murdock 87). In LARP, the characters are played within a vaguely defined story-line that requires reactions and decisions to be made. Therefore, the real personalities behind the fictional characters can hardly be ignored. As mentioned before, like an actor being cast for a role, NPC characters are often developed especially for a certain person. NPCs always have a choice in accepting or declining

a role, but they seldom develop their character themselves. The player characters, on the other hand, are created by the players, along the lines of what they find enjoyable and playable or what they wish to experiment with.

In any case, LARP characters are closer to real people than characters out of a book or play can ever be. Many characteristics are subconsciously chosen and/or added who nobody would think of describing in any background. Small subconscious details (such as how the character eats, walks, reacts to loud noises/dogs/children/magicians/priests/arrogant people etc.) arise as a result of other characteristics that have been consciously defined and vice versa. For example,

a player might have decided to create a very egotistic character because he feels he, himself, is a very compassionate person and he wants to find out if he can act ruthlessly and if yes, what that feels like. He decides that his character will move very decisively, in big strides, with a straight back. He also decides that his character talks with a stern undertone. Trying out this behaviour, he moves too fast around a corner and crushes into a young woman playing a housemaid. The player did not decide how his character thinks of servants and, being caught unawares, apologises hastily and moves away. Having time now to reflect, the player decides his arrogant character would probably be mean to the lower classes and begins being unfriendly to the servants. During the first evening of play, the player realises he does not feel comfortable with being mean to the servants and changes his behaviour, opting for ignoring their presence instead.

In other words, game events and personal sensitivities force all participants to shape and re-shape, develop and rethink their characters. As one cannot *not* act or react to the surroundings, there is a constant mediation of what is plausible and doable, both regarding the in-game reality and out-game feelings.

By regarding characters as persons rather than text vehicles, action and character can be thought of as interconnected rather than subordinated to each other (RK 35). In LARP, the plot and the actions it entails are often pre-constructed without a very clear idea of which characters are going to appear in the game. After the plot is outlined, the bare necessities of character participation are obvious and these are fulfilled by the NPCs. For example,

if the plot involves the marriage of a commoner to the princess of Barathia and the heinous murder of the bride shortly before the ceremony, it is clear that at least the princess, her groom, a priest and the murderer need to be enacted. Yet, who else will appear at the scene and how they will react to it is not clear.

Personal plots (such as the example plot) are constructed around a player character which, of course, makes it necessary for this character to participate. Player characters in general, however, also exist independently of any plot. They have a background and a 'life' of their own. Some NPCs are, after their first time in action, taken over as player characters gaining a similar status, or they are reused for plots taking place in similar surroundings. This phenomenon grants action and characters a certain independence from each other, even if one cannot function effectively without the other.

Whether action or characters are in focus depends on the kind of LARP. Ambience games usually involve a minimal plot and are therefore interaction-heavy, putting emphasis on characters. Plot games, on the other hand, can be very prescriptive, wanting to 'tell a story' in which case the actual characters participating become a vehicle for the action rather than vice versa. In other cases, LARPS are experimental in nature, investigating a new strategy or gaming structure with a focus on outcome rather than on story- or character-development.

19.6 Character Development

It has already been mentioned that characters can be embellished or reinterpreted before a game, in between games or through games. To what extent, then, are they stable, to what degree are they subject to change and what changes would qualify as development? Usually, when a character repeatedly exhibits consistent behaviour, voices the same opinions or takes similar actions, the audience or readership tends to derive a character trait. Contrast, within a character's behaviour but more so in comparison to other characters, is also a strong factor in character trait identification (RK 40). Keeping this in mind, it could be postulated that LARP characters are both very stable and constantly changing.

As regards change, the classic game offers merely a three day window and some developments need to be condensed and dramatised for effect. A character who is an addict might deteriorate or get clean rapidly; other characters might fall in love and commit to a marriage in a matter of hours. Also, plots often feature events that are highly unusual or traumatising which necessarily influences the characters. So, rapid changes in personality are possible and, for NPC characters, seldom problematic. If

the character has turned into a traumatised, manic-depressive murderer, then an NPC can discard this character after the game. A player, however, who intends to keep the character, often has to be careful not to become entangled in an unpleasant emotional state.

Player characters, even if they are played for years⁴⁰, are never played all the time, meaning there is at least a week and more likely months, or an even longer period of time, in between the games. For this reason, it is sometimes hard for the players to enter their role and they might play it a little differently each time, because they do not remember precisely how they portrayed the character or because their own life situation has changed and they now feel differently towards the character. Also, if a long period of time has passed, not only in real life but also in gaming terms, they might consider what kind of development the character went through in between and adapt their portrayal accordingly. If, however, in gaming terms a short period of time passed while in real life a long period did, players tend to forget details that were extremely important for their character or they cannot recover the feeling (towards another character, a plot element etc.) that they used to be able to feel, and thus behave differently. In this regard, player characters are always in flux.

As regards stability, players usually construct their character around a concept that they enjoy and this is connected to certain traits (e.g. the honest, gullible servant or the lying, thieving hobgoblin). They then adhere to these traits, trying to disregard interference as much as possible. Players might often enjoy the possible (logical) development their characters go through as they mature, fall in love, kill dragons, hold balls, pass exams, witness the death of dear friends or whatever else it is they do. Then again, they just might not want to act traumatised/start hating nobles/... just because it would be a logical conclusion of the character's experience. Consequently, in connection with traits beloved by the participants, characters can be fairly consistent, yet the disregarding of circumstances only works up to a certain point beyond which the character is no longer coherent. Reaching this point, most 'good' role-players half-heartedly complain that their characters have become *unplayable*, meaning there is no way to maintain character logic or they no longer

⁴⁰ In Germany in particular, old characters with hundreds of days spent on LARPs over the course of years are not uncommon.

wish to play the character as it was forced into a direction they do not enjoy. They then either kill it premeditatedly (e.g. by exposing it to mortal danger or by asking the GM of a LARP to stage an epic death) or just stop playing it, keeping it for the odd game when it seems appropriate to unearth it again.

NPC characters, unless they are transformed into player characters after a game, are usually played only once or at least for a very limited number of times. Therefore, these characters have the potential to be the most stable. However, especially NPCs who are key figures of a plot, and even more so those that are part of a campaign and are used time and again (as a villain opposing the players, as leadership figures etc.) tend to have a clear function defined by the GMs and thus they might make rapid or (depending on the gamemasters) illogical developments. A shining knight might fall prey to a dark cult because the plot demands it, even though his mental and spiritual strength are among his most valued qualities. Or a villain might turn megalomaniac, making extremely foolish mistakes that allow the players to eliminate her, even though she was feared precisely because of her intelligence.

20. Goals in LARP

After having explained various literary tendencies and narratological concepts, a short excursion to the goals live action role-play presents will bring this thesis to an appropriate close. The reasons for participating in a LARP are manifold and often very personal. They include the desire for a 'holiday from oneself', an interest in social structures and group dynamics, artistic considerations, an outlet for creativity, a wish to experience different ways of dealing with mundane as well as unusual circumstances and tasks. No matter what an individual's reason for playing is, while sharing the experience with all other participants, he or she can choose to either follow his or her own goals or to support the whole.

Where participants have the game as a whole in mind, their considerations often go in the direction of telling an epic story, of being heroic (or villainous), of creating an atmosphere and arcs of suspense. Their characters are sometimes impeded or made to comply with actions or circumstances that they would, in the eye of the participant playing it, not normally tolerate in order to avoid ruining the experience for others or thwarting the gamemasters' intentions.

Where participants are more interested in their characters than in any main plot or game mechanics, they often focus on character depiction, on personal (character) development, being involved in intense scenes or following their aesthetic and artistic impulses. This is the newer trend into which I see LARP moving, especially with those who have been active participants for some years, who have seen many experiments and are growing tired of stock storylines and clichéd characters.

Ideally, both tendencies unite to create an experience that is oriented towards personal gratification as well as a successful outcome of the game as a whole.

21. Conclusion

In the course of my analysis, I discovered that live action role-play is more complex in its inner mechanisms and thus harder to define than originally anticipated. Nevertheless, a focus on salient features of how participants create a fictional setting and fictional characters, interacting in a guided yet mostly improvised performance for reasons of both recreation and personality development, proved sufficient grounds for the examination of several narratological concepts. Interpreting LARP's history as an emulation of sportive, theatrical and therapeutic elements helped to put the practice into perspective as well as countering potential misconceptions originating from the presence of negative media.

After originally thinking of LARP text mainly as the actual performance, extending this definition to encompass written traces and the meta-level has furthered analysis.

A closer inspection of questions of *mimesis* and *diegesis* showed how much firmer LARP is rooted in diegetic practices than the spontaneity of the genre suggests. The thesis proved how, despite the lack of an audience, LARP features a narrator function, mainly in the person of the gamemaster but also in any other participant, should a scene require it. *Narratees* or *implied players* are addressed mainly on the meta-level of the written plot of a game, not on the story-level of actual performance. Due to the personal presence of a gamemaster, *real* and *implied author* seem to merge in the GM figure.

Contrary to my earliest intuition, and despite its immediacy and firm rootedness in the present, live action role-play exhibits most aspects of temporality that classical narrative genres offer, regarding questions of *acceleration*, *deceleration*, *repetition* or *anachronism*. The division of the in-time (part of the game) and the out-time (part of the meta-level of the game) proved to pervade all elements of LARP, so also did the concept of time and place.

More fruitful than spatial analysis were questions of the perceptions live action role-play offers which involve all five senses and an intricate interconnectedness of make-believe and reality.

Analysis of perception led to the formulation of the intriguing concept of *inverted gaps*, a kind of ‘negative’ gap that consists of elements that invite disregard, unlike the classical gap that requires complementation through reasonable presuppositions.

As regards the write-up of LARP plots, the fluidity of the genre was evident here as well, by creating a kind of *hypertext* that takes various possible solutions or turns in the narrative into consideration.

The fictional characters LARP produces proved to be of a broad range, reaching from very *flat*, vague and poorly defined to highly sophisticated, *round* and realistic character descriptions and performances.

As a fairly modern practice on the verge of gaining more public recognition, live action role-play seems to offer insights into developments of a culture’s society, art, recreational trends and self-perception. Social structures and group dynamics as they are shaped and influenced by everyday reality are an integral part of the gaming experience. Role-play, both in a professional context such as team-forming practices for companies, or in a recreational context as a ‘holiday from oneself’, is steadily gaining popularity. It also seems like fantasy, which is so integral to manyLARPs, is on the way of moving from single works of worldwide recognition (such as C.S. Lewis’ *Alice in Wonderland* or Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*) to being accepted into the academic body of literature as a genre, just like science fiction was not too long ago. The popularity of fantasy literature, on the other hand, has waxed and waned over the centuries, with certain works of fiction, such as Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, receiving worldwide recognition.

It is hard to say whether live action role-play will ever experience the academic attention that other practices have attained and how far its charm can survive this kind of scrutiny. However, what this thesis has hopefully shown is that live action role-play creates unusual narratives that deserve consideration.

The one sentence that all those who are interested in LARP should never forget is

It is just a game.

This does not mean that LARP is not to be taken seriously. The emotions experienced are real and the behaviours tested are of personal relevance. The body of texts created can be of literary and artistic interest and is worth further analysis. Yet precisely because LARP fosters strong emotions, because its unorthodox character sometimes promotes misconceptions and misunderstanding, one should never forget that LARP is, first and foremost, a recreational activity meant to be 'fun'. What LARP should not be is a reason for discord and apprehension. May texts like this thesis, just like those that have preceded it and those that will follow, lay the foundation for a greater understanding.



*Fig. 11: Live action role-play is played by people of all ages, professions and persuasions. This picture shows my mother and me, posing for the camera. I was playing Makena, my fighter player character, she was made up for being a *cannon fodder* goblin.*

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX Ia – Plot Outline

ca. 21:00-22:00 Time-In

Friday evening – Plot hooks:

- cry for help in the woods (assaulted, blind Calia priestess, maybe in combination with raid)
- arriving at the temple
 - dead High Priestess in the altar room
 - her locked room (traps etc.)
 - corruption ritual list
 - the Astris shrine
 - demigod already there
 - explanation of the function of the temple by the believers
 - the bad, bad book and its desperate warden
 - the demons who want to free their master from the book
 - Aron's headaches – and his healer = merchant
 - the pitcher with water from the corrupted river stands innocently around
- cry for help from the vampire
 - the huntsmen, who want to kill the vampire
- parasite for Va'rakh
- first attacks from the villagers
- werebeasts attacking an innocent victim – Cutscene
- x Ruri
 - the monster escaped
 - oh, see, we have a weapon...

Saturday after getting up – around 11 (if need be – wake them up)

- trial of the werewolf
 - Corris' Dark Side is created
- further attacks from the villagers (= alive/undead/spirits)
- continuation/beginning of plots
 - bad book
 - Va'rakh wants to get rid of his parasite
 - Demigod
 - Monster
 - Aron and the healer – the play continues
- escorting Aseris (the collector's novice) (by NSCs or players)

Saturday Evening:

- Showdown with Corris' Dark Side
- Ritual for the cleansing of the river
 - end fight

Possible pursuits for NPCs who are bored:

Play Ruri – we did say a bus full of them, right?

Get lost in a portal

Come out of a portal and be confused

An addition to a plot that we have not thought of before (e.g. victim of the monster, magician who wants to learn about the book, medic who wants to help get rid of the parasite...)

APPENDIX Ib – GM Plot

The following plot is the translation of an original manuscript distributed and realised in Austria from September 5-7, 2008 at the “Zinnermühle”, an old abandoned mill near Altenburg and Roseburg in Lower Austria.

I have drafted both the original and its translation. Comments on the text will be in cursive.

The plot was very eclectic, drawing from different role-playing game sources. To avoid copyright infringement and to protect the identity of participants, a few names have been altered or abbreviated. Apart from that, the following is an unabridged GM-version of an authentic plot. Included are also some other, separate documents that comprised GM information.

Corris' Grandmaster Trial

The title was a working title and remained in use for the GM-version of the plot only. Following a certain set of Austrian rules that are now almost obsolete, a grandmaster trial was undertaken for a character that had been played for around a hundred days or more (one LARP equalling two to three days). The trial was supposed to test the character's skills and personality, resulting in him or her being allowed to carry the title “Grandmaster” or “Grandmistress”. Apart from the fun of having friends do a LARP centred on your character, a trial was required in order to gain access to skills, so in order to develop a character beyond a certain level, it was necessary to have a trial. A grandmaster trial was supposed to be very difficult with a high chance of failure, so the following game was very special in the sense that it featured few players (only four) and the main plot (saving a temple and its surroundings from corruption) was, in essence, the character plot of one priest.

Players: T. (Corris), W. (Va'Rakh), D. (Marius Stern), A. (Aron)

GMs: M.P., Elisabeth *some information never reaches the written state but is merely transported orally to the people who are concerned; for example, this game featured a third gamemaster who was never mentioned in the document*

KITCHEN: G. H., E. S.

SL-SPEECH:

Song: Wacht auf! (Sailormoon) *We wanted to play the song as an insider. Since Corris is a moon priest, he sometimes incorporated well-known Sailormoon slogans to make people laugh. However, this idea was never realised.*

Calia guides him into complete darkness.

Corris, is your heart still with me?

I do not ask, because I do not know.

I ask, because you do not.

Now you need to decide: Will you fight for me or die for yourself?

Corris, the moon priest, had almost despaired and committed suicide on a different LARP. Despair, however, is the aspect of his deity's nemesis, the dark sister Astris. Therefore, the quintessential question for solving this plot was: has Corris overcome his despair and is he fully prepared to follow his goddess in all respects? Instead of guiding Corris into a darkened room to ask him these questions at the beginning of the game, I read the following dream to him. This story, which was originally in a different document and not part of the GM plot, is a rare instance of recorded storytelling. Usually, storytelling is spontaneous and therefore a fleeting, oral text.

Plunged into nothingness, into dreamless sleep, you will not be able to describe later what happens to you, when your conscience lets go. But from the nothingness, a gleam of silver arises, forming a picture. The awareness that you are a human being, a body asleep, dissipates completely. You turn into the silent observer of a dream or rather you are the dream, its room, its vessel.

Two dissimilar women sit at a table, one pale like death yet vibrant, her black hair merging into the darkness surrounding her. Her eyes break your heart with their sadness. The woman opposite of her is glowing. It is her radiance that lets you see at all, since without her presence there would only be darkness. Her gracious beauty moves you to tears. Her white hair draws complicated edges into the nothingness.

Suddenly, the dark-haired one speaks, her voice a whisper only but with the elemental force of rolling thunder,

"So, sister...how does it feel to lose?"

The smile on the luminous figure's lips wavers, but then, with a consolatory gesture, she brushes the question aside. The dark-haired one does not relent, her allusions condensing into an accusation,

"How does it feel when one so smitten with you, seeks me out?"

Sadness spreads, reaching for the light – the shimmer opposes it.

"He is not seeking you, he is fighting you." There is no defiance, only the idea of a personal truth.

"Yes, when he is faced with me, then he is preaching. Then he is ready to fight for what you force upon him. But if you did not hold on so desperately...what do you think would happen? He is already chasing me. All I have to do is wait and receive him with open arms."

"Serving me is not forced upon him, sister. He follows love."

"Love..." Darkness rises. "Love is an illness of the soul, nurtured by pity."

Sparks penetrate the darkness. Seven stars twinkle.

"Silence, sister. I do trust; but it is as alien to you as love. We shall see what the future holds."

The scene loses colour, loses substance. You feel that your mind cannot hold on to it. You are not certain if there is more being said, you slip back into nothingness, into dreamless sleep, that you will not be able to describe later...

The following two short lists were lists of props that the plot needed. They were later copied into a different document and extended. However, their first draft was never deleted and remained in the final GM plot-version.

Already there – take along:

- Claw demon (a furry, feathery puppet produced for another game)
- theatrical blood
- priestess costumes
- noble savage torso (W.P.; demigod costume) *(the costume of a player character of the third, unmentioned gamemaster)*
- pulsing orbs (for the pupal stage of the parasite)
- foil or the like (for the moonlight portal)
- curtains (for the room of the High Priestess)
- Schmendrik's chest (M.P.) *(a chest of another gamemaster's player character)*
- small, lockable chest (Elisabeth)

To craft/buy:

- air-drying modelling clay
- „altar“
- rope for tug of war
 - scrolls for tug of war
- “Holy Portal Shrine”
- oracle well (from S. S.?) *(a role-player not invited to the game)*
- milky white bowl (mum?; for purifying the river)
- parasite (W.P.)
- lists for NPCs (body count, lost souls)
- riddles (for demigod plot)
- The Bad Book (W.P. will craft it)
 - for the Book: air-drying modelling clay, chains, lock
- undead masks (W.P.) *(the masks were not used, instead the NPCs wore make-up)*
- grey warden symbol (G.M.) *(someone who was invited to the game but did not attend)*
- sashes! (Corris' dark side, astral/SL/invisible...)
- oval handheld mirror (as big as a face, for confrontation with dark side)
- book of the chronicler
- rubber rat (for vampire-scene – L.A.) *(an NPC who, in the end, did not attend)*

Plot – Synopsis:

Corris travels (alone or with the players) and his goddess gives him a sign to walk in a certain direction. There he finds a Calia temple which has been raided by werebeasts less than an hour ago.

The High Priestess is dead (her body still lies in the altar room). One of the surviving priestesses is wounded, another is now senior and has a crisis of faith (“The goddess has abandoned us.” *I often use quotes as flavour texts to illustrate a point.*) She plans to commit suicide as soon as she has arranged a few things. Apart from that, there are an undefined number of novices. Calia has withdrawn her power from all of these women, because her High Priestess has been corrupted by Astris. *(Calia is the name of the “good” goddess whom Corris follows; Astris is the name of her “evil”*

sister. The goddesses were not invented for this game but taken from a very famous role-playing system, so their nature was known to all SLs. Therefore, an explanation of Calia's aspects and dogmas was reserved for the NPC version of the plot. Concerning Calia's power that was withdrawn, following this set of rules, priests have clerical power just like magicians have magical might. With it, they can pray for miracles which work just like spells.) Calia attempted several times to send her worshippers omens (see "Dreams") or to talk to them, but the High Priestess was so firmly in control, none of the women listened to the goddess. When Calia realised it was Astris's doing, she sent werebeasts to kill the fallen High Priestess. Now Corris and his companions need to restore order to the temple.

The History of the Temple

The building itself was used as a mill a few hundred years ago. When the crevices disrupted the Southern Region, the area becoming less and less stable, the populace migrated and the mill was abandoned. *(This background was orally explained to the other GMs. As with the background to Calia, a written version exists in the NPC-plot.)* Around a hundred years ago, a group of Calia pilgrims came through a portal *(A portal is a well-established fantasy term for a magical door that connects two otherwise unrelated places.)* and to this place. They recognised the precarious instability of the land and decided to rebuild the mill as a temple to give comfort and shelter to the countless stranded travellers.

Calia's Portal and the Oracle Well

Calia supported them with a grand miracle: she blessed a place that would, from now on, function as a portal, connected to all the time and space disruptions in the vicinity. With an oracle well, each priestesses of Calia could now predict where the next anomaly would lead and use the blessed portal to send beings and things back home. This power still works, even now that the temple has been desecrated! However none of the priestesses can still operate the holy artefact. (Corris can!).

The Congregation

2 (+) Priestesses (Lisa, M.K.?...) *(The initials in brackets stand for NPCs suggested for the roles)*

3 (+) Novices (A.G....)

x Stranded (Demigod, Vampire...)

The Fall of the High Priestess

Latira was High Priestess of Calia. She, as the only moon elf, was among the founders of the temple. *(Elves live longer than humans.)* After many lonely years, an elf came through one of the space anomalies. They fell in love. One night, her lover was stabbed by a shadowy figure. Latira took immediate, bloody revenge by killing the assassin with her own ritual dagger. From that day on, sadness and guilt plagued her. Calia tried to lead her out of her despair. When the priestess, due to her downtrodden state, lost the elf's child that had been growing within her, she turned to blind fury believing – misdirected by Astris – that Calia punished her with the loss of her child because she had dared to love someone other than her goddess. This happened one and a half years ago. Latira now no longer followed Calia's path, but it was not immediately noticeable. By taking possession of a small amount of her fellow priestesses' blood, but also through subtle manipulation, she managed to keep control over them. If Calia had not interfered, she would have led them all into the path of the dark goddess.

The Room of the High Priestess

...is locked. Strange mechanisms (traps) protect it. All the windows are covered so the room is completely dark. Candles or such are nowhere to be found.

Traps:

- Shadow Monster

Things to discover in this room:

easily found:

- Astris' unholy water
- notes about the priesthood
- memoirs of a trauma (lover died?)

hard to find:

- hidden shrine of Astris
- vials with blood
- list of ingredients (for the corruption ritual – see below)

The Dreams of the fallen Priestesses and how the High Priestess interpreted them *

* could be given to the novices or the priestesses to tell during the game

1. I dreamed the full moon was swallowed by darkness. A female voice told me: see what happens before your own eyes. Saraferi (*Saraferi was the character name of the senior priestess*)
 - a. Calia sees your doubts and that your faith is not strong enough. Look into the mirror, there you see what "happens before your eyes". You need to spend more time with me, praying.
2. A white wolf crossed my path. I followed her to her den. There she transformed into an incredibly beautiful woman with long, white hair. She pointed at the cave where I could see her black whelps. She said: My children are corrupted by darkness.
 - a. Meditate, you have sinned. I will help you pray.
3. I bathed at the spring near the temple, but the water was bitter and the plants along the riverside had died.
 - a. You are afraid your own impurity could bring corruption. I will perform the rites of cleansing with you.
4. I looked up to the sky, following the stars. But then I looked away and I could not find my way any longer.
 - a. You are afraid Calia could leave you, but her love is endless. Stay with me, I will pray with you for the salvation of your soul.

The Polluted River

There is another problem. Before she was destroyed by Calia, the Astris priestess used her dark goddess' power to pollute the nearby river so that anyone who drinks from it plunges into sadness and despair. Those who are exposed to its evil power become unreasonably aggressive and destructive. Good and neutral werebeasts *These are game term expressions defining the nature of character behaviour; neutral means "neither good nor evil"* fall into frenzy. This also happened to the troop (3-4) who raided the temple. Only their leader realised in time that something is amiss with the water. He now tries to contact Corris, to tell him about what happened at the

temple and also to ask him to help purify his companions. Before he does that, however, he needs to be certain Corris is still truly following Calia.

Nearby, there is a village situated on a catchment lake. The village wells are fed from the river, so the villagers regularly drink the polluted water. Many are already highly aggressive and attack the players. Others are in despair, begging for help. No living being who dies near the river may find peace – they all return as undead. If these undead are destroyed, their souls flee immediately, to return as restless spirits. *(Usually, following the rules, if a priest consecrates a dead body, the soul finds peace and the body can neither be reanimated as ‘undead’ nor can the soul turn into a wandering spirit.)* If the spirits are destroyed, the soul is destroyed (and that should not happen!). They can be banned (just hit them). Then they need some time to reassemble. The souls will only find peace, if their curse is lifted (the river cleansed). In the temple, there is a pitcher filled with water from the river. If a player drinks from it, he or she will feel the despairing effects...

The Werewolf’s Trial – (SATURDAY MORNING)

The werewolf confronts Corris in his wolf form. If the wolf is attacked, he flees. Corris cannot attack the wolf using his goddess’ power! If he works a miracle that allows him to talk to the wolf, the wolf assures him that he means no harm and asks Corris to follow him into the woods. There they go on a spirit walk with many strange noises and events (storytelling, NSCs?) *(Here is another example of a vagueness not yet resolved – the scenes could either be merely told or enacted by NPCs.)* “Here is poison, drink it. If you really are a priest of Calia, she will save you.” Corris will think that he is dying. His sight blurs, he feels dizzy etc. Then he vaguely sees a shape taking off (Corris’ “evil side” (the impatient, intolerant, bad tempered/volatile one) which has separated from him and disappears into the distance (NSC!)).

Since Corris does not die, the werewolf tells him that he and his pack killed the High Priestess under the orders of Calia – he does not know why (he would never question the goddess’ wishes). Now that his friends have drank from the nearby river and frenzied... Oh Corris, help them shake off the corruption! (The werewolves will return to normal once the river is purified and they come into contact with the clear water).

Purifying the River

To purify the river that has been polluted, the Astris priestess’ ritual must be nullified. Each of the ingredients (see list) should have its counterpart to break the curse.

List of Ingredients (Astris-Corruption-Ritual)

Corruption-Ritual	Purifying-Ritual (Suggestions)
Obsidian-bowl	Milky white bowl (in the temple!)
Unholy water	Holy water
Juice from 3 belladonna	Sunflower oil
Decoction of fly amantia	Healing potion
Feather of a nightingale	Feather of a white dove
Eye of an undead creature	Tear of Calia <i>(this is a holy substance the player of Corris used to possess; I did not know he no longer had it; instead he sacrificed his holy symbol – the insignia of</i>

	<i>his priest – which, in game terms, was a far more prized possession)</i>
Onyx dust	Moon stone dust
Tears of a child	Tears of joy
Blood, spilled in hatred	Blood, freely given
Scroll of Darkness	Light
Prayer of Darkness	Prayer of Moonlight

The suggestions were possible solutions given by the GMs to show what kind of substances might qualify. For most ingredients, the players came up with their own ideas.

The Magical Parasite – the “Turtle”

This was a personal plot intended for W., the player of Va'Rakh. Va'Rakh was the only magician present at the game.

A magical parasite, similar to a tick, came through the anomalies. It feigns, for the willing magician (Va'Rakh), to be an incredibly mighty power stone (a device which is very much in demand as it can store magical power, letting a mage cast more spells). If the magician touches the parasite, it stings him, wandering to the back of his hand. From now on, every spell the magician casts flows through the parasite feeding it and making it happy. The parasite amplifies the effect of the spell to entice the magician to do more magic. With every spell cast, the parasite gains power – slowly but surely one can see how tentacles build which will take over the host, sooner or later.



The parasite cannot be cut off, otherwise there would be a magical wound, similar to the wound you get for casting blood magic, which bleeds continuously and cannot be bandaged normally. Each spell cast on the creature is absorbed and makes it stronger. To get the thing off, the following trick needs to be employed (it is the same one that the creature itself used): make the thing think there is an incredibly powerful source of magic somewhere. It will then detach to move there. Once on the ground, it can be killed using profane means.

Fig. 12: One of the GMs, who is a very apt craftsman, created this parasite as a latex application that can be attached to the skin using spirit gum.

What the parasite can do:

- magicians meditate as if they have meditation lvl. 4 (*meaning the player will regenerate his magic fast and can use more spells*)
- the parasite has a certain level of arcane might that can be used, like a power stone, once

- each spell the host casts is stronger (Healing 1 heals 2 wounds instead of one, Magical Armour protects from one hit more than usual, magical analysis brings more information etc.)
- magic sense is enhanced (*magic sense does what the word says: the character can sense magic, the same way that other people can sense temperature or hear noises*)

How Va'rakh gets rid of it:

- Anti-magical herb (an alchemist can make it into a component which makes a ritual possible – the merchant has some... – *this merchant is, in truth, an NPC that plays a minion of Astris and any help the players get from him will hinder them in the end* – otherwise the players will have to merrily search through the anomalies)
- very complex operation
- cut off the arm – drink a potion to regenerate it

Here is an example of a 'mistake' in the plot itself. The continuous text above offers a solution that is disregarded in this list. The option that was actually realised was the last one. However, writing the plot I did not yet know whether such a potion would be available at the game or not. Other ideas would also have worked.

Corris' Dark Side

It is the manifestation of all he could be but does not want to be, sent by Astris (it splits off when he wanders through the moonlight portal – see Trial of the Werewolf) *Here is another 'mistake'. Originally, Corris was meant to walk through a magical door, symbolised by foil, to prove to the werewolf that he was 'good'; this was then substituted by drinking poison so there never was a moonlight portal.* The Dark Side is only visible to those it wishes to show itself to, which means mainly Corris. Dressed in black, masked and with a grey warden symbol (*a rare symbol Corris wears, so the manifestation would be easy to recognise as being part of Corris*). (Sash + glow stick) (*sashes and glow sticks are often used to mark something as special, magical, not visible for everyone etc.*) It appeals to Corris' conscience, sets the others against him, tries to thwart his efforts.

Examples of sequences:

- While a player lies on the ground and all efforts to help him seem to fail. "I can save him. Do you want me to? You just need to say it. You need to ask me. Say it, Corris. Please... Say 'Please help me!'"
- You are too weak, you already failed to defeat the False Blood (*the false blood is an evil from another game world, the one that relates to the grey warden symbol and Corris' despair.*)
- You are indecisive; you follow one lord (the grey wardens) and two ladies (Astris + Calia).
- These are your friends? Them...? Do you really trust them?
 - This Marius, who just throws away your holy symbol? (*in another game, Marius Stern, a friend of Corris, was given Corris' holy symbol to look after and he lost but later recovered it*)
 - (if he says "Yes") Then you have already lost. In this fight, you cannot afford friends.
- It is time for you...to go and serve...me...I have a hell to rule.

Showdown with the Dark Side

The Dark Side tries to sabotage the ritual by taking Corris away (to the astral sphere = a magical “mirror world”; *everything that has energy, i.e. is alive or magical etc., has a signature here*). At this moment, the mask falls – oh, see, it is Corris’ himself (handheld mirror). Calia intervenes – the scene takes place at the holy portal. There two identically clad NPCs quarrel, only differentiable by differently coloured sashes or something like that. Both quarrel in slow-motion in an utter dome (*an invisible sphere that no physical, magical or clerical thing can penetrate, meaning the others cannot interfere*). The first that fittingly interferes gets a dagger: chose the one to survive by stabbing the other one to death. With the dagger he or she also has the intuition that to discover Corris’ true identity, both figures could be questioned separately. A maximum of ten questions is possible.

- If the players choose the Dark Side to kill, then it lies panting on the ground, telling Corris that it can only go back to where it came from. To achieve that, Corris must admit to his negative traits (bad temper, impatience, volatility, readiness to hate, despair, fear). Then the Dark Side reunites with him.
- If they choose to stab Corris, he is now dead. The Dark Side congratulates them, reunites with him and Corris resurrects, deeply wounded. (*This would, of course, augur badly for the priest’s trial.*)
- If they do not decide, we flip a coin and they have a 50:50 chance.

How does the scene work? Two NPCs dressed in black quarrel with each other. T. (*the player of Corris*) stands in the background. If they ask the real Corris a question, he answers in a way he sees fit. If they ask the dark Corris a question, we tell him what answer to give.

The Monster

Three years ago, a big evil came through the anomalies. Since it seemed impossible to fight (whenever someone tried to kill it, it just reassembled itself), the High Priestess banned it with Calia’s help into a clerical prison. However, the High Priestess let it loose a few days ago, pretending Calia took her blessing from the prison. The believers were deeply shocked – another success for the High Priestess.

Note: The prison was sealed with moon runes – one of them is “corrupted” which facilitated the jailbreak. The players can get this information from the NPCs.

The creature has roamed the premises since then, causing chaos and devastation. It would be great, if the players could catch it...

...or destroy it. One week ago, two Ruri (from the same dimension as the monster) arrived. Their lord ordered them to kill his rival (the monster). They have a weapon with which the monster can be killed. The weapon is a sword, drenched in the blood of their Lord (Count Erles of Yawona). Does Marius have a problem with this? (*Marius is a good priest and his god dislikes undead. The Lord of the Ruri, however, is a vampire.*)

2 (expandable to a bus full of) Ruri

Ruri are classical ‘gypsies’ and dress like them. They talk, if possible, with a Russian accent. They come from another sphere and serve the vampire Count Erles of Yawona. They were sent by their lord to get rid of the monster in the cellar. The monster was a rival of their lord and only in the sphere of their lord can it be completely destroyed. So the Ruri have a short sword with them, drenched in their lord’s blood. They are happy, if the heroic players do their donkey work for them. To

kill the monster with the sword, it needs to be hit ten times. *(Actually this should read: “only with something from the sphere of their lord can it be completely destroyed...” or it would be inconsistent. These kinds of slips and plot idiosyncrasies are common. Often, they go unnoticed. If they are noticed, it is usually possible to find a logical in-time explanation. If not, they are acknowledged as out-time mistakes.)*

Ruri drink, joke and like to laugh. They come from a dimension where everything is evil. They serve their vampire out of their free will! and do like giving him their blood...

The siblings

Sledjana

- Seer (cards – she can lay the cards for the players/NPCs etc.)
- has divined the whereabouts of the monster (near the cellar)
- several fields of knowledge
- has old bite marks on her neck

Nikola

- “thief”
- protects Sledjana
- maybe he tries to steal from the players

Marius Stern Senses Something – the Demigod-Plot

This is another character plot, this time for the player of Marius Stern.

Among the travellers is Sorbo who arrived a few weeks ago. In truth, he is a demigod but this part of his essence he obviously forgot when he came through the portal. However, that does not prevent Marius Stern from noticing it! Sorbo is a hero aka Hercules. He has fulfilled 10 of the 12 tasks that will make him a demigod. The last two are pending, therefore he has soul-bound (*meaning no-one can take them from him*) scrolls with tasks on them that will dissolve once the tasks are fulfilled. Only, he does no longer know what to do with them... Marius should explain this to him, and then help him solve the problems...

1. Task: He needs to win a tug-of-war against 10 men (he has NPCs to help him portray his superior power)
2. Task: He needs to rescue a damsel from a monster.

The Good Vampire

This Plot should take place Friday night!

Vampirism knows many different interpretations. Ours follows the classical Vampire-System (*This is another pen & paper system*) – you do not turn into a vampire just because you have been bitten, you need to be sucked dry and drink vampire blood to become undead. Whoever is bitten and has at least 1 HP left (*in games using rules, how many hits a character can take is usually defined in HP – hit points; if a character falls to 0 hit points, he or she will fall unconscious and, if unaided, dies*) survives without late sequela. The HP lost cannot be healed (like blood magic). (*To regain hit points lost in this way, the character needs to have a night's rest*).

The vampire is only a few weeks old. He tries hard only to take blood from willing victims and, when he does not get that, drinks only from animals. Animal blood, however, is not good for him because with it he takes over certain traits of these animals.

The vampire possesses a yearning call that works like an empathic message but has nothing to do with mental control or commands. It reaches those that are basically willing to assist him (so those that are empathetic enough).

Corris hears his sad call. If he follows it, he finds the vampire who has long forgone blood and begs him to feed him. It is obvious that only his iron will holds his hunger in check. If Corris debates too long or too heatedly with him, he will lose his control and attack him. (Also, there could be a problem because Marius does not particularly care for the undead.)

The Ruri, too – if they are already there – follow the vampire’s call!

Possible solutions:

- death
- healing his vampirism
- giving him blood – this will only prolong his suffering

Surprisingly enough, there was no moral dilemma for Corris – he just told Marius Stern to kill the vampire. Even though “death” was listed as a possible solution, it was unexpected how uneventfully the scene passed.

There was also another scene to test Corris’ resolve that was only invented on the premises and therefore never mentioned in the plot: Corris was faced with two dying comrades, forced to choose only one of them to save.

The “because it’s cool” Cutscene (Friday Night)

Horried screams can be heard from the forest. One of the corrupted werebeasts is chasing an innocent victim. When the players are moving to investigate, there will be a sudden time-freeze. The players are informed that they should not “hum and close their eyes” but merely stand still – in other words, they are frozen in time. After they get “comfortable”, Corris will be removed from the freeze and is now confronted with an otherwise frozen scene.

He can change his friends’ position, but he cannot rouse them. If he moves to the forest to investigate (we will be telling him where the screams came from since it is easy to forget in a stressful situation), he finds the werebeast in the process of overwhelming a highly pregnant (with twins) woman. If he moves the victim away, she will be saved. He could also kill the werebeast... Here he has the one chance to examine one of the corrupted weres.

What he can learn:

- something is different – maybe their aura (*in this rule set, there is magic to investigate a creature’s aura*)
- there is an effect on it, similar to a spell
- it is not a spell, it is a miracle (*meaning a deity – in this case Astris – has cursed this creature*)
- he cannot decipher the structure of this effect, but he can remember it and recognise it later (water from the river, pitcher in the temple, people from the village)

This was among the few scenes that did not work out very well. I had not considered that everyone would want to see/hear the scene and that it would be boring for the other participants if Corris just talked to that woman, somewhere away, while no-one else could move. Also, we had not considered what to do with this pregnant character, once Corris has saved her, as she was actually also playing one of the novices from the temple. In the end, it was decided that she had come from another world and was sent back home using the holy portal.

The Bad Book – va'rakh this!

Shortly before the attack on the temple, chronicler Genera broke the seal of a highly magical, evil book, just because she is a nosy young woman. A very strong demon has been imprisoned in the book and the book includes the knowledge of how to release him – now it is only a question of time until he can free himself...

The warden of the book is obviously very desperate. He doesn't even know how to read – he just needs to prevent the seal from being broken. He could not do that because when the attack came, he was physically involved (with one of the priestesses). He is now desperately searching for help.

The book consists of:

- warnings in an unknown font (translation) (*The term 'translation' functions as a directive. This is meant to be a simple cryptographic exercise.*)
- torn descriptions of how to reseal the book (the demon has already managed to damage it)
- adaptive pages for the reader (the demon was trapped until ... began, to read in the book... Michael Ende kind of storytelling)
- a lock on the last part of the book

What has to be done:

- translation of the warnings
- resealing of the book
- not listening to the suggestions of the demon
- not opening the last lock

Resealing

- mechanical restoration of the book (crafting)
 - reforging the chains (Marius) (*this is a direction of and for the GMs that the player character Marius is able to forge*)
- producing a magical seal (air-drying modelling clay)
 - colour
 - symbol
 - put magic in

Mission “Plot(s) for Aron”

- Astris tries to corrupt him (makes offers, maybe reaching him over his chaos helmet?) (*the chaos helmet was an evil artefact the character gathered in another game*)
- traps and lock to the room of the High Priestess (*Aron was the only player who was able to disarm traps and pick locks*)
- keeping the other players alive (Attacks!)

Any other ideas???

What needs to be done to master the trial?

- cleansing of the river
- solving the mystery around the desecrated temple
- save the werebeasts
- prevent the suicide of the new superior
- reinstate the holy portal
- talk to the avatar of Calia
- not too many of the innocent villagers' souls can be sacrifices

All three GMs had a say in whether they thought Corris succeeded in his trial, depending of what they perceived during the game. It was decided that Corris' efforts were sufficient.

What side quests are there?

- Marius Stern's Demigod-Plot
- Monsterbusters
- the good Vampire
- Va'Rakhs magical parasite
- the Bad Book
- several stranded travellers
- attacking villagers

Ideas:

- The werewolf offers Corris to turn him into a werecreature.

I wrote the following text, being in the flow while describing a certain scene and thinking about how Calia might comfort Corris. I then left it at the end of the plot. Since it fit well, I, as GM, whispered it into the player's ear when he had bested the trial and was receiving the title of High Priest. It is another instance of recorded storytelling.

I have seen you cry, you are beset by guilt, you are torturing yourself for each decision that has led to harm, but I am here to hold you, to heal you and to help, since no sanction on this world could further your wish to do good. You, yourself, know when you have failed. Rebuke and punishment would only drive you into the arms of my dark sister, but you shall learn from your mistakes, not despair. To live means to learn, this is the wisdom I am offering you, and it is a lecture that is hard to learn, as hard as the first lesson I taught you: to use temperance. Or do you think it is right to be aggressive, just because you tire of talking? This is not the way to honour me. Meditate over the fine line between determination and self-righteous anger. I do not demand that you be idle. It is not my goal to curse you with passivity through my credo of love and tolerance. I am only saying that, sometimes, you need to reflect on your motives more. To attack a creature, only because it does not succumb to your will is not an adequate solution to a conflict, to my mind.

I know the soldier you used to be craved strict rules and was oh-so-willing to refuse to think for himself. But this part of your past is forgiven and forgotten. You are my priest now and what you need is to trust in yourself, not more rigid rules. I deem you worthy of serving me, I want you to learn to feel the same.

What is missing from this outline are most of the NPC character descriptions. They were kept in a separate document and will, due to reasons of space, only be included in the NPC-version of the plot (see Appendix Ic).

APPENDIX 1c – NPC Plot

In the Name of the Moonlight

This was the final title of the game.



Fig. 13: This picture shows the dead High Priestess, the priestess Keneira on the right, the new senior on the left and Corris up front in the altar room.

Calia

Originally, what followed here was a description of a belief that was taken from a famous pen & paper background. To prevent copyright infringement, I have substituted the name throughout the documents and will merely give a short explanation of how the goddess and her nemesis work.

Calia is a moon goddess. She is sometimes fickle, as the moon waxes and wanes but is generally a loving, caring, gentle, forgiving and very tolerant deity. Most followers are women (therefore the whole NPC congregation was female). She protects travellers, craftsmen, fugitives, lovers and the night. She is also patron of non-evil werebeasts who are often persecuted because many do not believe that any werebeast can be non-evil. Her symbols are the moon and stars.

Her nemesis is her sister Astris. She stands for pain, despair, secrets, darkness without light and the kind of oblivion that causes ignorance and means suffering.

The Surroundings – Ayvorra's Deep South...

IT we play in the Southern Region, a county in Ayvorra's deep south. Ruler is Viviana the Lightbringer. Ayvorra is a peninsula west of Whenua. Roughly, the Southern Region is divided into two parts: one inhabitable and the other uninhabitable. The uninhabitable region is strewn with portals, cracks, crevices, dimensional rifts etc. that lead to all imaginable worlds, times, spheres... Therefore, safe travel is almost impossible. Then there is a grey area where the anomalies suddenly stop, after this the habitable land begins. Very few things coming from the anomalies travel beyond

the grey area – nobody knows why, it is as if there is an invisible wall. Nevertheless, there are (hybrid) creatures from all kinds of races living in the Southern Region. The cloister, where *In the Name of the Moonlight* is going to play, lies amidst the anomalies. There is hardly any contact to the rest of Ayvorra. Not far away is Ruhs, a small isolated village.

The Place – History of the Temple

We play in an honest-to-goodness Calia temple. The building itself was erected as a mill (*the location truly was once a mill; that is why I chose this background for the temple*), a few hundred years ago. When the anomalies shattered the Southern Region, the surroundings became less and less stable and when the people left, the mill was abandoned. Approximately a hundred years ago, a group of Calia pilgrims came through a portal. Realising in how much of a precarious situation the land was, they decided to rebuild the mill as a temple, to help the stranded travellers from the various spatial and temporal anomalies.

Calia's Portal and the Oracle Well

Calia supported them with a great miracle: she blessed the place, where from now on a holy portal should connect all the anomalies. With the help of an oracle well, each priestess of Calia can make a divination to help the stranded travellers. The holy portal beyond sends them back home, if there is an opening. Divinations only go as far into the future as the next new moon.

Inexplicable Horror – The Death of the High Priestess

Latira was a moon elf and founder of the temple. She was always calm, composed and dignified, had a sympathetic ear and was friendly to everyone. There was only one great misfortune: she fell in love with a moon elf who came through one of the anomalies, but he died for unknown reasons. She mourned him for a long time, but Calia's love helped her overcome her loss. (*This is "false" information for the other NPCs. As the GM-plot shows, Latira's lover was assassinated, the assassin killed by the priestess and shortly after the incident, she lost her child, then fell from grace.*) Nevertheless, the incident had marked her.

Less than an hour ago, a group of werebeasts raided the temple. Since then, there has been chaos. The High Priestess is dead, one priestess wounded, all others are in shock (why did our mistress leave us?). None of the congregation feels any clerical might in her.

The High Priestess had her own quarters. The priestesses realised that it is locked, which is surprising.

The Werebeasts

The werebeasts are marauding the countryside and of course they have a reason for it which we will explain to those who would like to play them (and also to all those who have a problem not knowing.) We need a leader (M.S.?) and 2-6 werebeasts who appear a few times for fights. For the leader we have planned a longer role-playing scene that will also require a few ambitious NPCs that can help us stage a spirit walking.

The Village and its Problem

Some distance away, next to a catchment lake, is the village Ruhs. Recently, its inhabitants turned melancholic, then desperately sad and then aggressive. There is a reason for this that we do not want to tell you so that you have more fun playing.

Nevertheless, we need NPCs for the recurring attacks of the villagers. It is important that there are a fixed number of attackers. *It is necessary to mention this because, usually, NPCs just attack in waves for a few times and then let the players recover without regard to how many times they were “killed”.* First they will arrive as normal farmers, then as undead and finally as spirits. The players should try to save their souls, otherwise they will fall to Astris, Calia’s dark sister. If anyone wants to have more background nevertheless, we’ll be happy to oblige.

Corris and his Problems

During the game, Corris’ evil traits will separate from him, forming a dark side. This figure is only visible to those to whom it wishes to show itself, so mainly Corris. It is dressed in black, masked and with a grey warden symbol (maybe also a sash + glowing light).

This figure can and should (but only after consulting a GM) be portrayed by different people. The purpose of this character is to appeal to Corris’ conscience, set the others against him and to generally thwart his efforts. Should anyone have nice ideas, relating to former LARPs, we are all ears.

Examples of sequences:

- While a player lies on the ground and all efforts to help him seem to fail: “I can save him. Do you want me to? You just need to say it. You need to ask me. Say it, Corris. Please...say “Please help me!”
- It is time for you...to go and serve...me...I have a hell to rule.

The Monster

Three years ago a great evil came through the anomalies. Since it seemed impossible to fight it (whenever it was defeated, it just reassembled), the High Priestess Latira used Calia’s help to bind it in a clerical prison. The beast seems to have broken free for unknown reasons. Has Calia removed her blessing from the prison and endangered all living souls nearby? Nobody is keen on believing that...

2 (expandable to a bus full of) Ruri

Ruri are classical “gypsies” and dress like them. They talk, if possible, with a Russian accent. They come from another sphere and serve the vampire Count Erles of Yawona. They were sent by their lord to get rid of the monster in the cellar. The monster was a rival of their lord and only in the sphere of their lord can it be completely destroyed. So the Ruri have a short sword with them, drenched in their lord’s blood. They are happy if the heroic players do their donkey work for them. To kill the monster with the sword, it needs to be hit ten times. (See GM-plot for explanation of this inconsistency.)

Ruri drink, joke and like to laugh. They come from a dimension where everything is evil. They serve their vampire out of their own free will! And do like giving him their blood...

The siblings

Sledjana

- Seer (cards – she can lay the cards for the players/NPCs etc.)
- has divined the whereabouts of the monster (near the cellar)
- several fields of knowledge
- has old bite marks on her neck

Nikola

- “thief”
- protects Sledjana
- maybe he tries to steal from the players

The Man without Memory

Attention, this part wears W’s well-known noble savage torso!

Among the travellers is Sorbo who arrived a few weeks ago. He does not know who he is but has something godly that will attract the attention of our player with clerical sense (Marius Stern). (*Clerical sense means that the character can feel if there is godly power invested into something.*) Sorbo is carrying two scrolls that describe heroic feats, but he does not know what to do with them.

1st heroic feat: Win a tug of war against ten men.

2nd task: Save a damsel in distress from a beast.

The NPC who decided on this part got the two scrolls (see Appendix Id).

The Vampire**This Plot should take place Friday night!**

Vampirism knows many different interpretations. Ours follows the classical Vampire-System – you do not turn into a vampire just because you have been bitten, you need to be sucked dry and drink vampire blood to become undead. Whoever is bitten and has at least 1 HP left survives without late sequela. The HP lost cannot be healed (like blood magic). The vampire is only a few weeks old. He tries hard to only take blood from willing victims and, when he is not able to get that, drinks only from animals. Animal blood, however, is not good for him because with it he takes over certain traits of these animals.

The vampire possesses a yearning call that works like an empathic message but has nothing to do with mental control or commands. It reaches those that are basically willing to assist him (so those that are empathetic enough).

Corris hears his sad call. If he follows it, he finds the vampire who has long forgone blood and begs Corris to feed him. It is obvious that only his iron will holds his hunger in check. If Corris debates too long or too heatedly with him, he will lose his control and attack him. (Also, there could be a problem because Marius does not particularly care for the undead.)

The Ruri, too – if they are already there – follow the vampire’s call!

And the Huntsmen have been after him for quite some time...! (*The huntsmen do not occur in the GM plot! This is because they are ‘parking characters’, i.e. characters that NPCs can play whenever they have nothing to do and are bored. They were only invented as a time-filler subplot. However, the NPCs playing these characters reported that they had a lot of fun.*)

The “because it’s cool” Cut-scene (Friday Night)

There are desperate cries coming from the forest. One of the werebeasts is chasing an innocent victim (a pregnant woman). If the players move to investigate, a time-freeze will be proclaimed. This time-freeze is not “real”. Everyone should move to stand comfortably, only Corris must not know about this, because he is going to be excluded from the freeze and confronted with the frozen scene. That should give him the chance to save the pregnant woman from the werebeast. Whatever he does, he cannot rouse anyone. The scene will end on a command from the GMs.

PS: We still need a pregnant woman.

The Book – not Corris’ Problem for a Change

There is a man in the temple who cannot read but is warding (according to his own story) a very dangerous book. This book has a seal that is now broken. Desperate, he tries to repair the seal, because otherwise a relatively mighty demon will be set free.

The book consists of:

- warnings in an unknown font (translation)
- torn descriptions of how to reseal the book (the demon has already manage to damage it)
- adaptive pages for the reader (the demon was trapped until ... began, to read in the book... Michael Ende kind of storytelling)
- a lock on the last part of the book

What has to be done:

- translation of the warnings
- resealing of the book
- not listening to the suggestions of the demon
- not opening the last lock

Resealing

- mechanical restoration the book (crafting)
 - reforging the chains (Marius)
- producing a magical seal (air-drying modelling clay)
 - colour
 - symbol
 - put magic in

NPC-Characters – The Inhabitants of the Temple

The Followers of Calia

This short description is the NPCs’ general knowledge of the priestesses and novices. The congregation itself got more detailed descriptions. (See Apendix 1c)

Senior Priestess Saraferi (M.K.): Loved the late High Priestess Latira like a mother. Was raised by her and has taken to her calm, composed and dignified demeanour over the years. As she is the senior priestess, she is now leading the temple.

Healer Priestess Kenaira (H.S.), healer and ex-soldier, friendly but sometimes temperamental.

“Confessor” Novice Lindra, older woman, has found faith recently. Talks to the ghosts of the deceased (or someone else?). In charge of the emotional/spiritual welfare of everyone around. Loving, caring woman whom everyone likes.

Collecting Novice Aseris, blind but sees lines of force and can therefore see the anomalies. Her task is to search the vicinity for stranded travellers.

Chronicler Novice Genara, extremely nosy but lovely woman. Her task is to make lists about all attendants and everything that happens (yes, notes are enough and she mainly has to be able to read them herself).

Communication Novice Janú, newly ordained, a bit shy. She is a glowing follower of Calia and very communicative but a bit insecure in all regards. She is there for the care of the guests.

Guardian Wolog: a soldier who found Calia after being stranded at the cloister. He remained here to protect it.

Classical fighter, plate armour (if available) (*"if available" here means the GMs have no plate armour but would like to borrow one*), chainmail or the like, various weapon skills, conscientious, loyal to the temple. Would protect the priestesses with his life.

Cook Kedra (E.S.): takes care of food and drink. Believer, originally comes from Ayvorra. (*This character was actually preparing the food for the people. She was intended to have had a character plot as well, but in the hustle of creating the LARP, I forgot to make one so she had nothing to do but cook and was a bit disappointed.*)

Temple Guests (in addition to those already mentioned)

Two friendly guests from far-far-away

Incubi (*An Incubus, in this setting, is an evil creature, a demon that is very pretty and lives off the positive energy it takes from seducing women.*) maybe with hidden demon marks (e.g. small horns). (*These horns would be latex appliances that can be attached to the skin using spirit gum.*)

They are searching for their master who, allegedly, has been incarcerated here centuries ago and whose presence they have felt since they entered the cloister. The High Priestess was very friendly to them and they were given a room. They only talk well of the deceased... Because it is difficult amongst a bunch of Calia believers nevertheless, they snuck in undercover. Now that everything is less "holy", they really feel at home... (*The goal of these characters was to free the demon from the book. The goal of the players was to reseal the book so that the demon could not get out. If there are links between characters and warring motivations, the plot becomes more unpredictable but also more fun to play.*)

8 HP, 2 natural armour (*armour means the hit points are increased and the character can take more damage before he dies*)

Aura: Egotist, demon. (*Magic or miracles that can read auras will know this creature as an evil demon.*)

Powers: through cosy togetherness a drain of life (returns 1 per half hour – dire exhaustion), can raise their HP maximum through this power. Demon claws, astral travel, teleport, minor aura disguise (not recognisable as demons in the astral sphere) (*This is a list of spells or magical trinkets that the NPC playing the character will be allowed to use.*)

Disadvantages: holy symbols of good/neutral gods cause pain, can be banned demon ritual knowledge – they can summon mightier demons

3-5 Huntsmen

- "semi-intelligent", uneducated
- remainder of a formerly well-structured bunch of Huntsmen (founder of the group was Ershorsh, the huntsmen still worship him as a hero – "he could do anything! He drowned wale!"; after he died – he was eaten by a monster but the huntsmen do not like to talk about this – others tried, fairly unsuccessfully, to continue leading the troop)

- have been following a vampire through the Southern Region for a few weeks (*This ties in with the “good Vampire” plot, again creating possibly warring interests.*)
- carry an artefact that makes anomalies and undead visible – or neither of them, depends. It is not very reliable but the huntsmen have not yet discovered this – they were lucky so far. For a deposit, they would consider lending the artefact.
- have killed the monster once before – and would do it again
 - and again
 - and again...
- want to extinguish the undead (villagers)
- extremely vicious – fight with all means
- think the Calia priestesses are poor, deluded women worth protecting
 - (Corris probably falls into the same category at first – oh, another one...)

This group is a fun troop and it may wreak havoc, but it was not designed to irritate people OT! The way these characters are designed, they could easily become annoying. Please play them with consideration and cut back if necessary.



Fig. 14: This picture shows two huntsmen and the warden of the 'bad book'. The armour is real metal but not necessarily authentic (mail may be made using lighter material; plate armour may look 'fancy' but have no actual fight value). The weapons ('wooden' cross, doubleheaded axe and morning star) are made of latex-covered foam.

Falkor – Ranger à la Robin Hood

He is a kind of charming rogue, likes to play, to laugh and to make eyes at beautiful ladies. He has often accompanied Aseries when she was collecting people and knows the safe spots of the surroundings. He would probably also find a way to the village Ruhs. He has been at the temple for two years and so far there hasn't been a

chance for him to get home, although at home his beloved wife Ennairam awaits him. He reveals little to nothing about his past, he lives in the moment. The NPC playing this character is cordially invited to animate this character by adding kith and kin.

Empathy with animals, herb lore 2, tracking 2, navigation etc. *(contrary to the demon's magical powers, these are mundane skills; herb lore 2 would mean the character can search for healing herbs and such and that he is better, i.e. faster, in it than someone with herb lore 1)*

Master Magical Theoretician Luxor Federreich and his Aid Bedlan Brimmstein

Chatterbox. Wanted to examine the anomalies of the Southern Region because no-one really knows where they come from. Has various theories that he wanted to verify. Did a highly complex magical ritual to teleport safely to the centre of the Southern Region but, since that was so strenuous, forgot to consider that he would also need to return. He is much too proud to admit that, otherwise he would have long since asked the followers of Calia to help him. Instead, he pretends to have planned to stay for years anyway yet secretly searches for a way back. He comes from the capital, Astaar, which is in the county that is called King's Realm, and he is a real city child, ill-equipped for this isolated life. Luckily, there are always new guests. He likes to offer them help and advice.

Most beloved spell: conjuring warm words. *(This, of course, is a joke, not an actual spell.)* Education: theory excellent, praxis insufficient.

His poor aide (maybe there are even two of them), looks somewhat differently on the thought of remaining here for much longer. He wants to finish his studies and desires to return to his friends, family, civilisation. On the other hand, he likes to invent fancy theories just as much as his mentor does.

Theories concerning the formation of the anomalies:

- a reality catastrophe
- overlapping power line capacities *(the first two point are nonsense examples)*
- a godly joke
- the work of spiteful demons
- a failed heroic feat
- and much more

Funnily enough, the magician was played by a man who is a doctor of chemistry in real life and who had a good time baffling people with technobabble.

NSC Character Ideas – Suggestions welcome *(This, like some other instances in the text, directly addresses the NPCs.)*

- Merchant – has things the players might need
 - dotty (little idiosyncrasies)
 - fearful – afraid of sharp object, the magical parasite, women, illness, undead, magic
 - sells curiosities + amulets

There was also a very important figure, the avatar (i.e. a manifestation of Astris' power) that posed as a merchant. The NPC playing him was separately briefed and there are no notes about his character apart from what is written here. His dark machinations, however, were very successful. He almost drove Corris to despair and he managed to disrupt an important religious ritual by spilling (theatrical) blood on the altar, because the trusting priestesses had allowed him to enter the altar room.

- elf warrior with Tourette's syndrome
 - very beautiful
 - tragic background
 - cursed by a witch that drove her from the elf wood
 - searching for the bad witch
 - very epic
 - very elegant and polite
 - only sometimes...orkcunt
- nature freak living nearby that nobody knew existed
 - comes over to ask what's wrong with the river
 - on a strange, spiritual trip – very spaced out
 - thinks he is a medium
 - drug oracle
- strange fabulous creature (many eyed demon)
 - likes Aron (as a person or his artefacts...)
- a traveller who got lost
 - just wants to get home
 - comes from a peaceful place
 - philosopher – gives reason for many pleasant discussions

APPENDIX 1c – Player-NPC Character Descriptions

Saraferi; suicidal priestess, reluctant Mother Superior

Saraferi comes from a peaceful place on the home world of Calia. As a child, she already followed Calia and lived with the feeling, "the goddess is always with me, she protects me".

Nevertheless, her childhood was pretty harsh, because her family was so poor (mother a seamstress, father a smith but unable to work – he lost his hand). Since she had seven siblings, her parents would have had to give some of their children away to bring the family through an especially harsh winter. Saraferi was too young to really work, so it would have been her turn to go, but Calia guided her through a portal and into the arms of the High Priestess who became a new, loving mother for her. That was 25 years ago.

The High Priestess raised her in Calia's faith. She taught her elven serenity, dignity and composure. Taught careful consideration in all things, to take responsibility for others and, especially, to have empathy. Be self-assured and determined, but not dominant.

When, two years ago, the High Priestess' lover died, she observed with sadness how Latira almost succumbed to pain and despair. When she also lost her child, she really began to worry. But her worries seemed unnecessary, since few weeks later Latira returned to be her former self: confident, with strong faith, an example to her sisters. Saraferi will hold fast to this image. Her idolisation of Latira will only be broken once the shrine of Astris is revealed. Then she might admit that there have been dark times in the High Priestess' past...

When Saraferi began to have dreams, heavy with meaning, a few months ago, she turned to the High Priestess who blinded her and deceived her (as she had already fallen to Astris).

When the game begins, Saraferi is deeply disturbed, more so than the other members of the temple. Not only did she lose her High Priestess and the attention of her goddess, she also lost the only family she ever had. With her, however, the pain is the least noticeable. She has always been a strong person with the welfare of others close to heart. That is why she is determined to show good faith and to set things right in the temple, before succumbing to her own pain. Deep down inside, she has already decided that she cannot live with what happened and she got hold of poison that she will take when she thinks that the others have sufficiently been taken care of.

If Saraferi was less desperate, Corris' faith and the fact that he can still hear the goddess would prove a glimmer of hope to hold on to for life. As it is, he is merely the only one she trusts with restoring order to the temple and taking over her responsibilities. Talking to Corris somewhere during the game, she will make a slip that reveals her suicide plan (something along the lines of: and then I can finally go). If asked how she feels, Saraferi says she is immensely sad but that one must not succumb to sadness, that there are things to do and duties to fulfil, that she must be a model for the others etc. If asked of her theories of why the goddess left this place, she says she has none.

Saraferi's duties:

- senior priestess
- in charge of the holy portal – knows how to handle the divination well

- relieved Latira of many organisational duties
 - giving rooms to the guests
 - managing the victuals (what, how and for whom)
 - lists who was here already, where they came from, what needs to be kept in mind (taboos, faith etc.)
 - managing liturgy texts – holding masses (what, when, who, how?)
 - the prison in the cellar – how does it work?

Plot tasks:

- teach Corris how to use the portal
- try to arrange things in a way that the temple will still go like a clockwork once you're gone (delegate your duties in a way that the others do not notice you are withdrawing)
- give Corris hints (for your character this is unintentional) that you are planning to commit suicide – we hope he will prevent it, but if he does not then you'll swallow the poison! (depending on how the plot evolves – Saturday afternoon the earliest)

You had the following vision within the last two weeks:

I dreamed the full moon was swallowed by darkness. A female voice told me: See what happens before your own eyes.

The High Priestess counselled you as follows:

Calia sees your doubts and that your faith is not strong enough. Look into the mirror, there you see what “happens before your eyes”. You need to spend more time with me, praying.

Lindra; confessor, Priestess

Lindra was called fairly late in life. She has always been a farmer's wife, birthed and raised 10 children in total, and decided after the death of her husband to find personal fulfilment at last. For that reason she travelled from Beec (where she used to live) (*this is another county in Ayvorra*) to the Southern Region and arrived at the temple unharmed. She is a patient, pragmatic and wise woman, who always gives help and good advice.

She is there when the other priestesses have problems.

Lindra sees the ghosts of the deceased every now and then and talks to them. The ghosts sometimes tell her things about her surroundings, sometimes things about their lives. It is as if Lindra talks to these ghosts in another dimension, since the most magically gifted people who have taken a look so far only saw a glowing echo that might once have been a presence. Or is she crazy...? Even those who think she is like to open up to the old woman, as she is candid and discreet and her good advice is real, even if her ghosts are not.

Lindra's duties:

- pastoral care of believers and guests

Plot tasks:

- Lindra realises immediately that the spirits who are showing up are the souls of the dead villagers – what happens when they also realise...?

Aseris; Collector Novice

Aseris was born a slave in Goldland (*one of the countries the Austrian LARP community invented almost 20 years ago*). She has always been blind, but has a kind of “second sight” that lets her see the world, similar to the astral sphere, as a

construct of forces. Because of her unusual gift, she has been exploited for magical searches from an early age and then, when she had done her part, she was locked away for fear of the exact same gift. When one day she found a portal, she fled through it to escape her fate as a slave. She ended up in the Calia temple and was shy and introverted at first, but bloomed in the faith of Calia. She knows little about her homeland, except for power and life lines.

Aseris is a cheerful person who likes to laugh. She loves to explore things with her hands that she cannot see (so everything that does not live). Because of her gift, she is the only one who can move freely through the unstable reality of the Southern Region without getting lost in one of the anomalies.

Aseries duties:

- once a day she wanders through the land surrounding the temple (to collect stranded travellers)
 - once a month she does a longer round
- she accompanies the hunter when he lays traps (meat)

Plot duties:

- arrival with the players. Aseri is usually protected on her travels by the power of her goddess (magical armour 6 and true combat strength). For a few weeks, the High Priestess has failed to protect her, however. This is why an orc, who came through one of the anomalies, was able to strike her down. The orc flees when he hears the “heroes” arrive (theoretically they can chase and kill him). Aseris tells them who she is and that they are close to the temple and that she is very confused because the creature could hurt her...
- company for the players whenever they want to leave the temple premises

You had the following vision within the last two weeks:

I looked up to the sky, following the stars. But then I looked away and I could not find my way any longer.

The High Priestess counselled you as follows:

You are afraid Calia could leave you, but her love is endless. Stay with me, I will pray with you for the salvation of your soul.

Genara; chronicler; novice

Genara was born in the village that lies near the river. She has always been extremely curious and never listened to curfew orders. So one day she showed up at the temple and because she liked it much better here – new things to see, alien creatures etc. – she stayed. She is bubbly and lively, but since the High Priestess died she has been rather sad and subdued, particularly Friday evening. She is very nosy and asks question upon question upon question...

Genara's duties:

- make lists (who is there, when were they sent back)
- keep a cloister chronicle
- record visions

Plot tasks:

- somewhere during the game, she shows the players the visions from the last months
- keeping records of the residents
- keeping records of important events
- can get plots going when we tell her to

- because she is so nosy, she broke the seal of a mighty, dangerous book...so she should make sure the seal gets rebuilt without letting on that she is the culprit

You had the following vision within the last two weeks:

A white wolf crossed my path. I followed her to her den. There she transformed into an incredibly beautiful woman with long, white hair. She pointed at the cave where I could see her black whelps. She said: My children are corrupted by darkness.

The High Priestess counselled you as follows:

Meditate, you have sinned. I will help you pray.

Janú; newly minted novice

Janú has lived her life as a slave in Choros (*a newer Austrian LARP country*). Choros is a neighbouring country of Whenua and has a dominant race (Kerdos, recognisable by their superhuman gifts and eerie dark eyes) and a subjugated race (Doulos – everything that is not Kerdos). Choros is at war with Whenua. (*This is no longer true. The two countries now have a peace treaty.*) Janú travelled with the baggage train and was freed when the Kerdos were defeated. Fleeing the battlefield in panic, she stumbled upon a portal and ended up at the Calia temple. It took her a year to get used to the idea that she is not inferior. Realising her adequacy, however, she embraced the Calia faith. For her, this new world beyond her home country has been nothing but big, new and beautiful. She is gullible, inexperienced and easily intimidated.

Janú's duties:

- supporting the other temple inhabitants
- language talent – she is there to communicate with various travellers
- caring for the guests

Plot tasks:

- is in love with the beautiful, muscular man who showed up at the temple with a lost memory – she wants to help him

Kenaira; healer, novice (*H.*)

Alignment: Neutral (*Alignment is used to give the GM a vague idea of what to expect from a character. Good alignment would mean the person is helpful and caring. Evil alignment would mean the person is egotistical and uncaring. Neutral means the person is neither too good nor evil. All the other priestesses have a good alignment. I chose this unusual background because it exactly mirrors that of Corris – a former soldier finding peace in Calia. The NPC did not know how similar her background was, however, and played more naturally than she probably would have, had she felt the character served a message.*)

Kenaira is from Gelahad, a very rough world which is made up of culturally highly developed city states that are constantly at war with each other. Those who do not fight are soon “elated” into the caste of servant – a hardly glorious, unfree position. Apart from the city soldiers, there were a few independent organisations, mercenaries who fought not for a city but for honour and gold. They were among the freest people. Kenaira was one of them. In the middle of a fight, her regiment (the Black Snake) was interrupted by the intervention of a mighty magician. Kenaira is not sure what happened next and she does not like to talk about things she knows little about. Arriving at the turbulent yet tyrannical and war-lacking Southern Region, Kenaira

never really felt like going back home. Instead she spent time doing what she felt a calling to do: heal. The little she knew has improved well over the years (five have passed so far). That Kenaira is now a novice, too, has to do with an epiphany she had during a near-death experience.

Kenaira is a very calm woman and nothing surprises her anymore. If someone really wants to annoy her, she falls back onto her soldier nature and is LOUD. In times of crisis, she usually keeps a cool head and her composure – yet she also leans towards a harsher command tone.

Kenaira's duties:

- mundane healing
- herb Lore/poisons – potions for and against

Plot tasks:

- Kenaira was unarmed when the attack came but confronted the werebeasts and is wounded; she can report that the wolf only pushed her aside and that none of the attackers reacted to her calls and accusations
- a few days ago she received an anonymous love letter and now tries to find out who drafted it (*This was a subplot for this NPC character that was never realised because there was so little time to pursue it.*)

You had the following vision within the last two weeks:

I bathed at the spring near the temple, but the water was bitter and the plants along the riverside died.

The High Priestess counselled you as follows:

You are afraid your own impurity could bring corruption. I will perform the rites of cleansing with you.

APPENDIX Id – In-Time Texts

These were the notes to the Asteris Ritual that the players could find in the High Priestess' chamber and had to counter.

auspicious days: June or July (*here was another mistake; I originally chose to call the months by the names I thought were used in Corris' background story, but I made a mistake and used words he never heard of instead*), both times the 2nd, or better the 3rd day

Obsidian bowl (for the blood)

holy water (at least two pitchers)

3 Belladonna (only the juice)

fly amantia (for the concoction)

feather of a nightingale (best a large flight feather but a rectrice will do)

eye of an undead beholder (*this is a beast from another fantasy world, it lives underground and is extremely evil and dangerous*)

Onyx dust (mortar!)

tears of a child (fresh! no older than 24 hours)

blood (spilled in hatred)

scroll of darkness (already prepared)

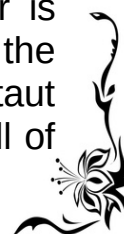
prayer of darkness (once in the beginning, once at the end)

the stone

These two scrolls, printed in a more harmonious font, were in the possession of the NPC playing 'Sorbo'.



And before the moon concludes its orbit, and before the Lyrr is overflowing, and before the firmament is shaking, do find ten of the bravest who think they are fit to hold a candle to you and make taut the rope and then make them see that you are stronger than all of them.



Once upon a time, it is said, when everything was new, it was to be that something tried to destroy order and replace it with the oldest of all curses. And it was Lianna the Pure who stepped in between the fighting brothers and it was Gragramor, the dragon, who carried her off into the skies. And the brothers were reunited in their search for her. So it is that you must find a damsel in distress to save from a beast, in order to restore peace.



APPENDIX 1e – Storytelling

This is another rare instance of recorded storytelling. (Two others are at the beginning and the end of the GM-plot.) It was the introduction for the four player characters of the above plot and I, as gamemaster, had drafted it before and because I did not send it via e-mail before, I read it to them.

It is a normal day in a normal tavern that – like all days and taverns that are merely waypoints of a journey – does not deserve a name because of its insignificance. Those who save worlds, lose friends and meet absurd manifestations have much to tell but surely not in what tavern they took breakfast, after it was all over. It is where you meet, like you have done countless times before, without being able to tell exactly how or why, just as if fate had guided your steps. Maris Stern comments that he appears nowhere by chance, that his god always leads him to where he is needed. Corris murmurs that, originally, he had intended to be somewhere else entirely but that his goddess is a goddess of travel and that the world is an oyster. Va'rakh knows the universe has a centre, a focal point where everything meets and so everything is connected – but he does not mean to preach and keeps silent. Aron smiles friendly, and nods. He thinks that, at the moment, he has more say in where Marius appears than his god does. After all, he keeps an eye on the priest with the dire heart condition, so that he won't stumble and break his neck. But Aron, too, does not partake in the banter of his old comrades. He watches a young damsel on another table whose cleavage interests him more than any talk of gods. (And her cleavage does not particularly interest him.)

Nevertheless, a small glass of wine, a small glass of mead, a small glass of beer later – or were there several, large glasses? – the world looks different and the conversation becomes lively and boozy. What tales there are to tell! The resume of these entertaining but not world-changing discussions is that it would be nice to spend the next few miles travelling together, since to get a footsore with friends is preferable to getting a footsore alone.

On the first, especially starry night under the open sky, Corris starts from a dark dream. Marius (who had little luck with sleeping) is already making beans with beacon while he is quietly ranting about insects. Aron is sitting opposite of him, his gaze dark, stirring his coffee stoically. Va'rakh is very definitely still asleep. His snoring has been warding off wild animals almost throughout the night.

It takes a while for the mood to rise, but when it does and the group is finally ready to leave, there are already the first sarcastic remarks coming from Aaron and Marius sports his usual “a well-fed paunch is a happy paunch” grin. Corris considers telling them about his dream when suddenly there is a flash, followed by general disorientation. The surroundings have changed and with them the time of day, the crisp morning yielding to a serene evening calmness. All four of them, each in their own way, realise that – without having meant to – they just travelled through a portal.

TIME IN.

After the time-in command at the end of this short introduction, the player characters entered the game. Originally, this text also featured a mistake. I had forgotten one of four characters in the descriptions. Reading the text aloud, I corrected this mistake without any of the players noticing.

APPENDIX IIa – Player Character Background

This was one of my characters for a Victorian Age LARP (an acting approach LARP, hence only a background and no character sheet existed).

Claire Dupont

Claire is 25. She grew up in a Parisian orphanage – no pleasant upbringing. Hard work, a lack of love, periods of hunger, harsh punishment, cold, rivalry among the children – all this was on her daily agenda and steeled the young girl's will. But Claire had a patron. He visited the orphanage, sometimes he talked to her. It was a man with a distinguished appearance and expensive clothing. He treated Claire exceptionally well and kindly and told her, from an early age, to develop good manners. At the age of 14, he removed her from the orphanage. She lived with him for two years and he gave her the surname Dupont. A very old, stern woman – Madame Hivier (which was probably not her real name) – taught her all she had to know about proper etiquette. Claire's abilities were then tested in society.

The patron organised employment for her as a waiting girl with the family Desens, a not very cordial married couple. The husband wrote travelogues for several newspapers and his wife wanted to accompany him to the desert ("Ah, the excitement, the foreign land..."). There, at an excavation site, the wife fell ill. The husband set everything in motion to cater for her needs and wanted to organise a transport home, but his wife died before she could be moved. The husband blamed Claire for her death. He refused to keep her in service. She begged him to at least take her back to Europe, but he refused this as well. Victoria (*another player's character*) took pity on (and a liking to) her and employed her. In the unconventional Claire who is afraid of nothing and always friendly and happy, Victoria found first sexual consolation and later a one hundred percent loyal servant who, as she puts it, is: "The first waiting girl I ever met who is bearable."

Claire has been working as Victoria's waiting maid for the last six years and by now is her confidante as well as the confidante of her lover Bronach (*yet another player's character*). She knows about the accident that led to the death of Bronach's husband (Claire destroyed all evidence and helped Victoria get rid of the body in the moor).

She loves both women in a passionate, almost obsessive way. She would do anything to keep them happy with each other (meaning she also keeps the secrets of one from the other). She would never knowingly or willingly do anything to harm them.

Maybe Claire was a bastard and no orphan and her patron is her uncle or a friend of her father or someone like that...who did not want her to die miserably and who therefore helped her but lost sight of her when she changed employment in the desert.

Claire is a superficial catholic, doing everything that society expects from her (in England probably less than in France). Yet in truth she is not very pious and acts piously only for Bronach who is also a catholic. With her, she prays or goes to mass because Bronach seems to need that from time to time.

APPENDIX IIb – Character Sheet

The following is an authentic example of an old character sheet that was created using the rules of a specific German/Austrian codex. Satoria is a human mage, bad at fighting and a specialist in knowledge spells (i.e. those that create knowledge), who mostly keeps quiet about her other skills (such as healing).

Name: ~* **SATORIA**

Player: Elisabeth Schwaiger

MP: 27 *magic points – a measurement for how many spells the character can cast*

HP: 3 *hit points – a measurement for how much damage the character can take*

LARP-Days: 64 (100 + 295 = 420 points (394 spent)) *how many days the character has been played and to how many character points that amounts to*

S* 4 **Advantage:** Magic Sense (10) *lets the character perceive strong*
D 3 *currents of magic or magical effects*
I 2
E 1 ** strength, dexterity, intelligence and essence are the character's attributes; the smaller the number, the easier it is for the character to learn skills pertaining to that trait (see below)*

Skills:

Fight:
 Short Sword (G/S 6 = 21)**
 ** *in brackets are the costs depending on attributes*
 First Aid (G/K 4 = 10)

Knowledge:
 Reading & Writing (K/K 4 = 8)
 Knowledge: Artefacts (K/K 6 = 12)
 Knowledge: Demons 1 (K/K 4 = 8)
In this system, there are knowledge levels for some skills; 1 is rudimentary knowledge, 4 would be a grandmaster's knowledge
 Knowledge: Undead 1 (K/K 4 = 8)
 Knowledge: Runes & Symbols (K/K 4 = 8)

Magic:

Concentration 1 (E/E 6 = 6)

In this system, allows the character to ignore certain distractions while casting

Thaumatology (K/E 6 = 9)

An idea of how magic works in this world, without it, a person cannot do magic

27 Magic Points (E/E $2 \times 25 + E/E 3 \times 2 = 56$)

Meditation 1/2 (K/E $4/8 = 6 + 12 = 18$)

Meditation allows the regeneration of magic points in order to cast more spells; per level, 1 magic point is regenerated every ten minutes of meditation

Ritual Magic 1/2/3 (K/E $4/8/16 = 6 + 12 + 24 = 42$)

Everything that is not listed as a spell (which is fast and easily done) has to be done using a magical ritual; the higher the level, the more powerful the ritual can be

Bind Magic (K/K 8 = 16)

Creating magical artefacts

9 Magic Spells Level 1 (E/E $6 \times 9 = 54$)

In this system, a spell's level defines how many character points it costs to generate and how many magic points it costs to cast it

- Healing 1 (heals 1 hit point of damage to a character)
- Convey Magic (allows the character to give her MP to another mage)
- Magical Messenger (allows the character to send a message to another character by magical means)
- Recognise Poison
- Recognise Illusion
- Ice Dagger 1 (damages an opponent, reducing his or her hit points by 1)
- Gust (pushes another character a few feet away from the caster)
- Astral Sight (lets the character see ghosts, places of power, magic etc.)
- Know Language (lets the character speak another language of her choice)

9 Magic Spells Level 2 (E/E $12 \times 9 = 108$)

- Bright Light (allows the use of an electrical torch for in-time illumination)
- Magical Deprivation (allows the character to take magic points from another character)
- Stabilisation (halts effects of poison and illness for half an hour)
- Interrogation 2 (allows the character to ask a question which must be answered truthfully by the character under the spell)
- Read Aura (lets the character see the emotional state, nature and general alignment of a character)
- Invisibility
- Magical Search
- Break Magic (allows nullification of magical effects)
- Small Protection Spell (protects from minor spells)

APPENDIX IIIa – In-Time Poetry

This narrative poem was composed down-time by one of my characters for another character by the name of Sinead McKennit McDubh. It was then performed on a LARP.

When I was but a little child,
With childish dreams and childish fears,
I met a woman, dark and mild,
Who brought me laughter from the tears.

I loved her well, I loved her dear,
Although I never saw her more,
And I have kept her mem'ry near,
The way you value ancient lore.

She was our druid, Branwen McDubh,
And as I've told you quite brazenly,
Druid Sinead McKennit Mc Dubh,
There is a certain likeness I see.

So when you ordered me to approach,
And started serenely to question me,
And I cringed expecting dire reproach,
Holding helplessly on to my dignity.

I saw the likeness more deeply reflected,
In the fact that your words were stern and true,
Without haven ever really affected,
The wisdom and succour to be found in you.

I dared not keep silent, knew not what to say,
So I stammered quite embarrassingly,
Again you were kind, didn't force me to stay,
And never grew impatient with me.

You offered me guidance on learning my story,
How can I repay such charity?
What more can I do than speak to your glory,
And thank you for teaching me?

APPENDIX IIIb – In-Time Song

My best friend, who is a professional singer, transformed the poem from above into a song. In-time, it was my character that did the work. The song was then performed, and will probably continue to be performed, for a LARP audience. Stanza two of the song will have to be adapted as my character met Branwen's ghost in the course of a recent LARP and "I never saw her more" is thus no longer true. This is another instance showing how LARP texts tend to develop.

SHINEAD'S SONG

LYRICS:
ELISABETH SCHWAIGER

MUSIC:
BIRGIT RUBICA

1.) WHEN I WAS BUT A LIT-TLE CHILD WITH CHIL-DISH DREAMS AND...
2.) LOVED HER WELL I LOVED HER DEAR AL-THOUGH I NE-VER...
CHIL-DISH FEARS I MET A WO-MAN DARK AND MILD WHO BROUGHT ME LAUGH-TER...
SAW HER MORE AND I HAVE KEPT HER MEM-RY NEAR THE WAY YOU VAL-UE...
FROM MY TEARS. I AN-CIENT LORE YOUR KIND NESS IS NOT
EA-SI-LY SEEN YOU OF-TEN AP-PEAR STERN AND STATE-LY BUT WHO-
EV-ER BLAME-LESS IN NEED HAS BEEN AD-MIR-ES YOUR GEN-TLE SIDE GREAT-LY

3.) SHE WAS OUR DRUID BRANWEN McDUBH
AND AS I TOLD YOU QUITE BRAZENLY
DRUID SHINEAD McKENNIT McDUBH
THERE IS A CERTAIN LIKENESS I SEE

4.) HAVING BEEN TESTED IN HONOUR AND STRENGTH
MY PATH SO FAR WAS NOT SO ENDEARING
I CAME THROUGH STRENUOUS TRAVEL AT LENGTH
TO BE CAUGHT UP WITH YOU IN A HEARING

5.) SO WHEN YOU TOLD ME TO APPROACH
AND STARTED SERENELY TO QUESTION ME
I CRINGED EXPECTING DIRE REPROACH
HOLDING ON TO MY DIGNITY

6.) I SAW THE LIKENESS MORE DEEPLY REFLECTED
IN THE FACT THAT YOUR WORDS ARE STERN AND TRUE
WITHOUT HAVING EVER AFFECTED
THE SUCCOR TO BE FOUND IN YOU

7.) YOU OFFERED ME GUIDANCE ON LEARNING MY STORY
HOW CAN I REPAY SUCH CHARITY
WHAT MORE CAN I DO THAN SING TO YOUR GLORY
AND THANK YOU FOR TEACHING ME

APPENDX IV – German Abstract

Liverollenspiel (oder LARP) ist ein improvisiertes theatralisches Performancespiel mit persönlichkeitsentwickelnden Tendenzen, das üblicherweise über ein Wochenende gespielt wird und als Freizeitbeschäftigung dient, die ohne Zuschauer auskommt. Das Ziel dieser Thesis ist die Grundlagenforschung im Bereich des Liverollenspiels mit Bezug auf seine narrative Komponente. Das in dieser Arbeit präsentierte Wissen wurde durch Organisation von und Teilnahme an diversen Liverollenspielen in Österreich und Deutschland im Laufe der letzten zwölf Jahre gewonnen.

Diese Diplomarbeit erklärt Liverollenspielen anhand seiner Elemente, wie zum Beispiel der verschiedenen TeilnehmerInnen (SpielleiterInnen, Nicht-Spieler-Charaktere, SpielerInnen), der verschiedenen Ebenen des Spiels (in-time, out-time) und der zwei Hauptherangehensweisen – Erzählen und Ausspielen. Liverollenspiele werden erst anhand ihrer literarischen, historischen oder rein fiktiven Wurzeln kategorisiert, um schließlich durch ihre gängigen Konventionen definiert zu werden.

In dieser Arbeit wird gezeigt, dass Liverollenspiele eine Vielzahl an Texten produzieren, zunächst als Vorbereitung auf das Spiel (Plots, Welthintergründe, Charakterbeschreibungen, ...), dann während des Spiels (Liedertexte, Gedichte, ...) und schließlich als Reflexion auf die Performance (Down-Time-Texte, Berichte, Fotos, ...). Liverollenspielplots und ihre veränderliche Erzählstruktur mit verschiedenen Erzählsträngen werden im Detail erklärt. Ein kurzer historischer Überblick bringt Liverollenspiel in einen realen Kontext.

Diese Daten eröffnen den Weg für eine Analyse die Folgendes zeigt: LARP-TeilnehmerInnen erschaffen multimediale *imaginary entertainment environments* (imaginative Unterhaltungsumgebungen, vgl. Mackay 29); Erzählen und Darstellen sowie reale Befindlichkeiten der TeilnehmerInnen durchdringen alle Ebenen des Liverollenspiels; reale/r und implizierte/r AutorIn so wie ErzählerIn scheinen in der Figur des Spielleiters/der Spielleiterin zu verschmelzen; LARP beinhaltet die meisten zeitlichen Aspekte klassischer narrativer Genres; wie die Wahrnehmung alle Sinne betrifft und Kreativität im Umgang mit den Eindrücken und der Umgebung verlangt; LARP Charaktere sind sowohl klassisch durch Sprache, Aussehen etc., als auch durch Fehler in der Darstellung und die spontane Interaktion geprägt.

APPENDIX V – Curriculum Vitae

CURRICULUM VITAE



FIRST NAMES/SURNAME: Elisabeth Josefine Schwaiger

ADDRESS: 7/3, Rudolfsplatz
A-1010 Vienna (Austria)

DATE OF BIRTH: 15 November 1983

NATIONALITY: Austrian

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

- 1994-2002 PUBLIC GRAMMAR SCHOOL WITH A STRESS ON SCIENCES
Lise-Meitner-Realgymnasium
7-9, Schottenbastei, 1010 Vienna (Austria)
- 2002-2013 STUDY OF ENGLISH
COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AS OPTIONAL SUBJECT
University of Vienna, Department of English
2-4, Spitalgasse, 1090 Vienna (Austria)
- 2008
4 – 24 Aug SHAKESPEAREAN PROJECT (theatre course leading to several performances)
- 4, 11, 18 Aug SCHREIBWERKSTATT (Writing Workshop)
Internationale Sommerakademie für Theater in Graz
(International Summer Academy for Theatre in Graz)
Theatre Academy organized by "FREIRÄUME"
16, Monsbergergasse, 8010 Graz (Austria)
- From 2001 Extensive experience in Live Action Role-Play regarding all participant functions
- From 2005 Extensive experience in Improvisational Theatre as an actress, including several performances

Eigenständigkeitserklärung

Hiermit versichere ich, dass ich die vorliegende Magisterarbeit selbstständig und nur mit den angegebenen Hilfsmitteln verfasst habe. Alle Passagen, die ich wörtlich aus der Literatur oder aus anderen Quellen wie z. B. Internetseiten übernommen habe, habe ich deutlich als Zitat mit Angabe der Quelle kenntlich gemacht.

Erklärung zu Bildzeugnissen:

Auch bei den Bildzeugnissen habe ich mich bemüht, sämtliche Inhaber der Bildrechte ausfindig zu machen und ihre Zustimmung zur Verwendung der Bilder in dieser Arbeit eingeholt. Sollte dennoch eine Urheberrechtsverletzung bekannt werden, ersuche ich um Meldung bei mir.

Wien, 17. Jänner 2013

Unterschrift