

Comments to Dogma 99

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

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

The Author

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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