

# Fuck the Audience

- So my character is a redneck fighter? A stupid, mean motherfucker?
- Yes.
- Why is his courage 3 out of 10?
- That's because he's a coward.
- So he's this mean killing machine with a reputation for mayhem and destruction but also a coward?
- Yes.
- How can he even fight?
- Only in a frenzy, I would imagine.
- Of course. So he's such a wussy he just gives in to the Beast every time there's a threat.
- Yeah.

This is what you get when you have to explain random generated characters to players who assume that you've

## The Author

Juhana Pettersson is an example of a species known in Finnish as *enkälärppäaja*, a *l'mnot-a-larper*, or a larper in denial. He is 22 years old and lives in Helsinki, Finland.

He has been involved in the creation of a number of rather questionable larps and writes a column for *rpg.net* called *No Good*. He is a free journalist and an aspiring filmmaker.

actually written them. This is an example from a Vampire game where all this makes perfect sense.

I've never made or been involved in the making of a larp, which I sincerely believed to be a good game. Traditional rpgs, sure. Larps, no. All of the games I talk about here are old games. At least here in Finland, larp is dead. All progress is made in the field of games that don't rely as much on simulation. We've got a lot of good games. Stuff that's well organized, well produced by our standards, well written and so on. Nice little games, that are very safe. But not very interesting.

The problem with larp today is an excess of responsibility. The larps we have now are very safe. Safety rules. Safety regulations. Political correctness. After all, we wouldn't want anyone to get hurt. Just a bit of fun. A lot of effort has been put into making games safe, or even idiot-proof.

I want risk. The risk of offending, hurting, of being horribly bad or boring. I want cheap, innovative games.

This article is a retrospective of the weirder games I've made. These are not good games. They were all made by a younger man. They're all technically *WoD*. But they certainly were cheap.

## Back in High School

I've always wanted to do a larp in which the lines between the player and the character were deliberately blurred. Sadly, this is dangerous territory and I've only had the balls to try it once, in my very first larp ever. I was a second-year student at the Kallio high school. It was an art school, and I went there because my mother told me that unlike normal schools where I would

characters wouldn't be too hard to play. About half of the players had never played an rpg before, much less larped. 30 players, and 1.5 hours of game time. We figured that we'd market this as a fast forward game so that nobody would get too bored.

Because we wanted to have interesting relationships, we did a survey of the players, asking them to explain their personal relationships and attitudes



have to study stuff like chemistry, in Kallio I could study stuff like writing and spoken word.

In others words: easy living.

The game was called Kallion keijut (the Faeries of Kallio), and I did it with Pyry Waltari, also a student at the school. The idea behind that game was to have everybody play faerie versions of themselves during a normal school day. This way the rest of the student population and the teachers could handily double as NPCs, and the

towards the other players, individually. Based on this data we then created some fictional relationships. The idea was to base everything on fact, but twist it. Best friends became lovers or secretly hated each other, or both, and so on.

By the time the game was played, my first lasting relationship was on its second month. I can't remember if we lost our respective virginities before or after the game, but it happened around that time. Just to give you

some idea on how mature a basis things were. I reasoned that I couldn't ask of my players anything I wouldn't do myself, so I wrote a really festering, dysfunctional and repressed love affair for myself and the girl, who also played. She ended up screaming at me at the top of her lungs in the school lobby. She might have also hit me, but I'm not sure.

I remember a passing girl, a non-player, remarking to her friend, "This is just sad. A month ago it was kisses

and cuddling and now they're already making scenes".

I still have no idea how it worked for the rest of the players, but I suspect that most of them were just confused. I remember that Jukka Seppänen kidnapped the princess and carried her towards the place where the students gathered to smoke. Then I came onto the scene with my bad guy character and we had some sort of a scene. Or something.

Oh, those were the days.



I still haven't heard of a game where the line between the player and the character would have been deliberately blurred with the intention of creating the best possible mindfuck.

### **My vampire speaks Klingon**

By the time I got onto my next larp project I was also being recruited into the narrative pool of the Helsinki Chronicle, a campaign Vampire: the Masquerade larp that's been running for something like seven years already. I lasted for three years, and based on that experience I think of myself as something of an authority on mediocrity.

Fortunately, WoD larps were very big in Finland at that time, partially thanks to the Helsinki Chronicle. This meant that there was a ready pool of people for whom the conventions of a certain style of gaming were harwired. Which meant that even games with incredibly flimsy concepts would attract players and get off the ground. Blue Rose Falling was the first larp project I did entirely by myself. It was promoted as a Vampire/Changeling game set in Moscow. It had a promo piece on the lines of "In the hills an ancient evil is starting to move. People have been disappearing..." and so on. It was promoted in the Web, under a fake name. Both of my fictional larp organizers were teenage girls because I thought that that would increase my chances of attracting my friends to the game. It's always more fun to fool those you know than those you don't. The game was a hoax. The idea was

to do a minimum of work, tricking the players into creating their own characters, ideally proocing them into bizarre excesses. The game was never meant to be played, although once the thing was over, some players wanted to do it.

Some of the players bought it line hook and sinker. One guy ended up creating a 9000-year old super-vampire, a Nosferatu child of Baba Yaga whose talents ranged from nuclear physics to the Klingon language. He was real exited about it. Another guy made himself something that actually resembled a character, even though it was an ancient True Brujah. I told him that the concept was fine but I thought he should also be the reincarnated Rasputin and a Tzimisce to boot. He said okay.

I changed a lot of proposed characters into clones of Lenin, and was dismayed when no one complained. I think the farthest we got was a character who was a noble werewolf channeling the soul of Rasputin, whose human form had somehow been replaced by a Lenin clone and who thus was something of a crucial character in this battle between historical figures.

Many people quickly adopted a "yeah, whatever you say" sort of an attitude. More power to them.

Because I believe in standing behind my work, I revealed the game to have been fake on Christmas Even under my own name. Got surprisingly little flack. The lesson of this is that you should lie and deceive your players. Who needs friends anyway?

## Bugs in the program

The idea behind American Dream: Happiness was to create a completely random-generated larp. Since Vampire was a genre very familiar to me, I decided to do a random Vampire game generator, generate a game and play it out. To keep things scientific, I didn't tell the players. I created a website for the game adorned with images of Britney Spears, with pages and pages of backstory that didn't have anything to do with the game. Obviously, since the game didn't exist yet.

The game generator produced three things: character statistics, character history and relationships/plot hooks. I asked a friend to make a computer program out of it and generated 11 games, from which I chose the best one.

The game was a success in the sense that it was a very believable crappy Vampire game.

This was the very first Java program my friend wrote. It was full of bugs. This made for queer situations in the game. For example, about half of all characters had a taxi driver as a father. Antti Kanner always played the Bishop. Every character was either blessed with Multiple Personalities or was Manic-Depressive, or both.

Here's an example of the material the generator produced, in abridged form:

Vampire no. 4 Count Brass  
 Clan: City Gangrel  
 Generation: 10.  
 Age: 183

Negative traits: docile

Derangements: multiple personalities

Citizenship: Canada

Relationship with sire: knew, found out to be a fucker

Parents: boneless suburbanites

Twist: weird powers

Mortal life: a rapist, policeman, successful

Fortunately the plot generator helps to flesh out the characters:

1 is Bishop and 10 wants to have something to do with him.

16 knows the secret of 10.

1 is Bishop and 22 wants to have something to do with him.

16 has an object, on its way to 8. Without knowing about each other, 14 and 11 want to steal it. 11 works for 12.

I fleshed out the characters a bit manually, but they we're still bizarre and bad. I'm under the impression that some individual players, used to surviving in bad games, actually had fun. Probably took a bit of effort.

Buoyed by the success of American Dream: Happiness I had a sequel under development for a long time. It was originally called American Dream: Excess, and I had managed to recruit an actual production team and everything. It was to be randomly generated so that each character consisted of a group of six text blocks drawn from six categories so that every character would be a balanced individual. Every block would include

bits of history, ties other characters, personality traits and so on. The player, consulting a manual written for this purpose would then have deduced things like age and culture of origin from the text material. The great

My games have been bad for a number of reasons, so remember that only experimental lack of quality is worth anything. The world is full of games that are worthless because the organizers decided that instead of



thing about this game would have been endless replayability, character equality (since writing lead characters would have been impossible) and unpredictability.

### **No feel good**

Instead of making your next game a grand production epic with submarines and theatre costumes, make a game that's going to offend and disappoint everyone. I guarantee that if you do it properly, it's a lot of fun.

doing a real game, they'd do a "camp" game. That's what reruns of Batman are for.

Start with weird sex, real religion, offensive politics and personal space and you're on your way.