

The Use of History in Larp

Following article is based on a promotion of the importance to understand and acknowledge the positive effects use of history can have on larps.

In writing articles and discussing the subject larp, it often comes to my attention that many larpers do not take time to reflect upon the thought

of where the ideas for a larping event arises from.

This lack of reflection may contribute to a doubtful communication of what many larp concepts are built upon.

It is common knowledge that many individuals outside the larp society lack insight on the subject of larp. Most of them may therefore gain a preconceived opinion towards larp based on the image presented by the mass media. Unfortunately this seldom compliments the larping environment and can be somewhat prejudice.

It happens that larpers themselves are asked what aspects of larping they find interesting. And when describing larp, their motivations and interests of it, the word 'inspiration' tends to be used remarkably often.

The question that remains is: »Where does the inspiration really come from?«

When thinking about it, there are many answers to this question, but I have chosen to direct my attention upon one great inspirational source:

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History

Most of us gained interest for larp, after many years of playing ordinary role playing games and reading fantasy- and historical literature. In the 1980's input for ordinary role-playing was primarily based upon a fantasy world where historical elements in one way or another took part. The story and setting where very often based upon the Viking or medieval period, and this trend continued in early larping. Therefore, the known environment with common guides of reference was a popular source of inspiration for the earliest larp events.

Fantasy settings for larp games have mostly been set in a time of superstition where the social structure in many ways was quite simple compared to later periods.

This, combined with many unanswered questions about the historical period of interest, gives flexibility to combine our own fantasy with historical factors.

One advantage of using the viking or medieval period in a larp setting is that the simple creations such as costume designing are somewhat less demanding to the player's competency in craftsmanship.

Social interaction of role-playing in a historical setting and in a different social class is not a new "invention". Back in time it was merely a way of amusement reserved for the nobility. In the late 1700's France, the outrageous Queen Marie Antoinette

caused a fury amongst the French people when she dressed up as a simple shepherdess and role-played with her court ladies.

Another example worth mentioning is that of the Russian nobility who in 1907 held a ball in the winter palace in Moscow where they had great pleasure in dressing up as nobility of the 1600.

Today re-enactors, at Lejre Experimental Centre and The Medieval centre of Denmark, still dress up and live as they did in the past. Even though it can be debated whether the previously mentioned nobility and today's re-enactors would be considered as role-players, fact is that history is the provider of a still increasing amount of inspiration that is used in larp by players and larp organizers.

But what are the advantages of implicating historical facts into larp today? And what are the future prospects of the historical larp?

Historical Larp

When we discuss Historical larp it is worth to distinguish between Historically correct larp and historical inspired larp.

Historical correct larp implicates all-important aspects of the specific time, from events that happened, clothing and weapons to the past structure of society and socially correct behaviour. Unless having a limited amount of players in the game, this type of larp is

very difficult to obtain. One must bear in mind, that most larp organizers create a larp from the supposition that players immediately have a common reference.

Historically inspired larps tend to be closely related to historically correct larp, but can also be based on having only a starting point in the historical time.

This means that the timeline may not be correct and that the historical information is limited. In other words, historically inspired larp is a semi-correct larp, where many aspects beneficial to the game are included. This gives the player a choice of which aspects she or he wishes to implicate in the game.

A reduction of the demands and an increased amount of freedom tend to aim at a broader player crowd.

Benefits and Disadvantages

Implicating history in larp has many benefits. To begin with, it heightens the knowledge of a specific period in time. For the organizers and the ambitious player it demands a great deal of research and is very time consuming.

It is important to know that this can have the disadvantage that, if the larp is historical inspired and not historical correct, the players are misled to believe that some nonhistorical parts of the larp concept are historically correct.

Of other advantages, a historical larp can have a more interesting and challenging gameplay, because of the richly faceted social situations history brings with it.

Different cultures contribute with many society structures, professions and a tremendous



amount of possibilities regarding a setting (costumes, weapons and the surrounding environment.)

The visual benefits are without doubt some of the most rewarding aspects of using history in larp.

Despite all the benefits of using history in a larp event, there are also reasons why historically correct larps can be difficult to obtain.

The primary reason is that there are a great amount of practical necessities that must be fulfilled to create a historical correct larp.

A correct setting, a good economy and a serious amount of research, hence a lot of time, are among the most important factors.

As very few individuals are involved with larp as profession, previously mentioned factors are limiting to the amount of comprehensive larps that are held. And when it comes to historical correct larps credibility is of greatest importance.

The Future

Today we are already witnessing the growing interest of finding alternative inspirational sources in History, and the interest is swiftly spreading to implement other cultures such as the Japanese, Chinese and Russian.

So the future for historical and historical inspired larp seems very promising.

Many dedicated larpers who have been in the environment for years still have the drive and devotion to advance and

develop the concept of larp.

My assumption is that we in the next few years will tend to experience more »luxury larps«, where an example of this type could be an event where everything is pre-arranged for the player, and all she/he has to do is study the material and learn her/his part.

For example a pre-French revolutionary event where 20-30 players play parts as nobility and the entire setting is arranged when they arrive at location.

Furthermore we will tend to experience a situation where larps that have communication and social interaction as the center of attention to some degree will replace physical larps.

The »fight« will in other words become a verbal character trait. More intrigue larps will appear.

And regarding the fantasy setting, we will here experience far more versatility.

So as speculative one can get when thinking of what the future might bring for the larp, one should always bear in mind that thinking, understanding, expressing and working from inspirational sources can be a helpful tool for creation and further development of our great interest for larp.