

Larp as Life

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Abstract

Some hints and tips for larpers who have decided to go pro and make their living from larp.

Introduction

I have been a larper for over 20 years. Yet before I discovered the international larp community, I had no clue such experience was in demand. Thanks to that fateful meeting, people encouraged me to go farther with larp. I forever will be thankful to the team of edu center POST for opening those doors for me.

Now, as an internationally known larp scholar and the owner of a larp company, I would like to share some further encouragement. How larp can become part of your life without distracting from it.

Larp's future looks brighter than ever. As larpers, we often do not want to stop larping. Many of us feel that, as larp adepts, we should "spread the gospel" and with that, hopefully, make everyone's life better, easier, and more fun. A fascinating number of amazing projects and new forms of larp have blossomed throughout the world as a result. And larp as a business as well.

Having my own share of endeavors in this area, I considered that some of this accumulated experience could actually be of use to few other curious larp practitioners.¹ In Belarus, I own a larp company that has many ongoing projects. As a dedicated larper since 1996, it was only a dozen years ago when

1. Most of this essay is based on lectures: "Faces of Larp" read at Palac Krobielowice in Poland on the 2nd of September at the Larp Design Conference 2016 and "Going Pro in Larp: how and where we can use it" read on Gniales 2016 "Passerelles" on the 30th of October that year in Paris.

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moral encouragement from J. Tuomas Harvianien prompted me to shove larp into every corner of my life. In time, I began to earn some money with it.

Here are some bits of lore I have accumulated as a professional larpwright and organizer.

Ethics

Going from being a regular larper to a professional larper, I had to change my approach toward larp design. In some larp cultures, these are normal everyday principles, but moving from larping with friends to larping with clientele reminds one of some basics. Our workers, the NPCs, need to know them too.

Respect: First and foremost, the cornerstone: respect. One should respect the clients and treat all accordingly. Lack of it demonstrates a lack of professionalism as much as disrespectful communication does.

Obligation and Responsibility: These two words should become part of your core. They should not be feared or avoided. They should be embraced and worked with. No one should go pro without as from now on you have obligation before you clientele and responsible for than at your event.

Pro-Growth: Never stop learning. Much of what we call “larp” actually borders many practical disciplines. Learning more about them is essential to evolve and get better. The world’s specialists in all fields never stop growing and changing — why should larpers?

Distance: Keep a professional distance from your clients, the players. This is informed by many generations of professionals and their own introspection about their mistakes. It is important to present a clear message about the nature of your relations with others on a specific project in order to avoid misunderstandings in the future and frustration on all sides. All should be clear and explicit.

Subculture

In most cases, your own larp subculture should never be considered your primary or only market. The larp subculture is our family, where we were born and nurtured as future larp professionals, and we should treat it accordingly. In having business relationships with larpers, you should already be at a somewhat higher niveau in your work in a way that they cannot immediately compete with you. To put it simply: to transcend the subculture and go professional,

you should already act as a professional out of the gate and be a tough pro larp organizer with which to compete. Larp society can form one source of income, but shouldn't be the only one.

Here are some categories related to the subculture and pro larp profits.

Larpers

Larpers are the source of most of your value: specialists, partners, laborers, NPCs. Yet my own experience and those of other organizers from around the world tell me that larpers are very difficult to work with on a professional level.

Events

Any larper will gladly pay for high-quality events such as festivals, conventions, balls, tournaments, competitions, larps, etc. Such events are always in demand and may attract quite a crowd if appropriately packaged.

Products and Services

Owning a larp company, you might have your own products you could sell or rent such as crafts, costumes, scripts, scenography and other things. Your larp company might even gather specialists who would want to offer services to larpers and larp designers: classes in fencing, kung fu, dancing, acting, costume making and other fields, for example. One can make objects, costumes, and other artwork that then could be packaged and sold.

EntertainmentThe most popular area where larpers are starting to go pro is the entertainment industry. Yet it is very different from doing larps for fellow larpers. Once you get the hang of it, there are different types of income with different approaches and demands in this industry.

Corporate

You are invited to sell your larp project to a company as entertainment. Well done, if that is the case! If you attract desirable clientele and do well, it might just get better and better from there. But if you do not do well, it might have consequences difficult to recover from. So before going this route, ask yourself if your larp company is mature enough to play in that league.

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Regular

This means the regular events which you promote and to which you sell tickets. The principle is comparable to concerts in clubs or movie theaters. You need to find, groom, and manage your customer. The good thing is that it often can form a form of subculture community which, if you “feed the flames”, will guarantee you will not go out of demand.

Popular

If you become known and form good connections, you might get invited to a festival, convention, birthday party, concert or some other event where you will be one of the many activities. It also may be something you haven't done before, so you will have to think of how to format your larp in a way that makes it quick and easy to get into. Such events are not only good for advertising and promoting your company, but, with a proper approach, could also be a good source of income.

Elite

In this category, I consider irregular events for which you prepare a long time. It could be a big larp, festival, convention and your main efforts are focused on maintaining a high quality to make your mark.

Education From my perspective, education is the noblest area for larp. It is also the most demanding, and the sphere in which larp has been used for the longest time and has thus the most theory behind it. Working in edu-larp is not profitable, but it *does* grant us the tentative understanding of many powers and effects of larp.

There are three systems I had to develop to describe difference in approaches required for specific larp projects. One system means dividing up the audience by target group, while the others are the target clientele and target educational goals.

While designing a larp, it is important to keep in mind who is this larp for:

Children

Larp business for children is one of the most high-demand areas and good for the professional growth of the larp company. But if you think dealing with children is an easy feat, think again. Cuddly, smiling, fun kids are also the most legally protected group in any country. If you cause any kind of harm

to any of them, their legal guardians may eat you alive. All the more if you, for some reason, decide that documentation of procedures are unnecessary, safety measures are for “softies” and amateurs, and the quality of the larp may vary. Here, we need to understand that we are responsible for every single effect on children our larp has experienced as a result of the larp — not only legally responsible, but as a decent human being. And if you are not willing to accept that level of responsibility — both good and bad — then perhaps the professional larp and edu-larp industry are not for you. Stay in your comfort zone, larping for and with friends.

Teenagers

In many legal respects, teenagers are similar to children. But on a larp level, one can do more complicated plots, expect higher quality from the larp, and go to more interesting property. With older teenagers, one can go further and deeper with storylines and communication, among other things.

College Students

Educational larp for students should have definite and specific goals they can “grasp” by the end. Such games can be more complex, challenging, and informative. But one also has to make lengthier and more thorough workshops and debriefs, as much of the lesson depends on those working well. Often such larps emphasize knowledge already acquired during lectures or through homework.

Adult

Adult educational larps I usually use when working with clientele such as parents of kids in school, seniors in business schools and during some business projects.

Special

Larps can also be made for people with special needs as the target audience. These larps pay the least perhaps, but yield the most moral satisfaction.

Among the target clientele inviting our company to do larp projects, the approaches differ among them.

Educational System

By this, I mean the educational establishment, part of institutionalized public educational system. In some countries, everything incorporated into the curriculum could be regulated by norms and rules of many sorts. It is best to have an official representative of the institution look through one's larp plans to avoid undesirable misunderstandings.

Private Educational: Some education takes place outside of the establishment. Here, one has more freedom and it is less regulated.

Business Educational: What I mean by "business educational" is reminding oneself of the fact that, for business-oriented clients, a certain degree of slick packaging is preferable.

All larps, whether the organizers comprehend it or not, have many dimensions of personal development. For my own convenience, I have divided these into three emphasis areas:

- **Moral:** The social and moral education of values and psychological pursuits of self-consciousness and self-awareness is a sphere of development.
- **Intellectual:** Information and knowledge and mental skills can also be developed.
- **Physical:** Athletic and action learning are also potentially developed.

Psychology

As a practicing psychologist, I provide the following services through larp: Diagnostic, Therapy, Prevention, Correction, Development.

Corporate

Larp could be used within different companies, frequently proving effective at fulfilling company goals. Even within such serious institutions as the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus, larp can be used. To acquire corporate clientele, or even work inside a company, one might want to look into following areas where I found larp very applicable: HR, Simulations, Skills, Knowledge, Athletics.

Theatre Many useful skills for larpers and larp designers come from the infinite rich and beautiful world of theatre. Larp communities have lost so many to this world. They crossed to other side and, engulfed by the theatre world, could not

cross back into larp. Many professionals one could not even imagine are found here, and they can bring your company, and perhaps the whole community, to a whole new level. Larp and theatre are different. However, theatre skills as stage fencing, acting, public speaking, playwriting, character development, actor management, stage management, deroling, etc. are there to enhance the arsenal of tools at your disposal.

ArtAt some point, larp manifests the many creative impulses of all participating in it, and reaches the level of art. Admittedly, not right away. Admittedly, not with most larps. But when organizers and NPCs, like music conductors or movie directors, manage emotions and experiences in people, then it creates a certain picture and transfers experience. Many larp projects I have worked on are nowhere close to being called “art,” and I am aware the medium is still evolving. But I can vouch for the fact that going professional with one’s larp activities is the best way to get on the art track.

Research

Finally, one essential area for larp to develop is the preservation of all knowledge and theory accumulated. No other field preserves it beyond those who do larp research. Thanks to this field, I started my ascension into the professional larp world in the first place. One joins this conversation through Conferences (academic, gaming conventions, etc.), Publications (articles and periodicals mostly), and Projects (international and local research, etc.)

Thank you

and

Larp On

