



OUT OF CHARACTER

Issue 2, 2016

Cover art by Quentin Bourne, 2016. Keer'lan the hobgoblin warlord sits in the Granite Citadel...

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CHAOS THEORY: CIARAN SEARLE

In the last issue of Out of Character, esteemed leader and misguided fool, Robert Vincent asserted that Lawful Good is the best and most interesting alignment to play. Here is why he is wrong.

Chaotic Good is the best and most interesting alignment to play because it deals with the complex and fascinating subjects of freedom and change. When you play a Chaotic character, you are playing a living, breathing person and not a walking rulebook.

You have not been given a fair representation of what it is to be Chaotic. A Chaotic Good character sees problems with the status quo and wishes to change it. They feel that the law and authorities can't be trusted with the wellbeing of the people. They know that they must take things into their own hands if good is to prevail. They are a risk-taker, a rule-breaker, but dedicated to the cause of good. They are not simply "disrespectful".

Just as Robert feels his precious "Lawful Good" characters have been maligned by players who do not understand how to play them, so too does he commit the very same crime against Chaotic Good (Ooh, crime! How will his lawful heart take it?). Let's take another look at Robin Hood. Robert mentions the Chaotic, "steal from the rich and give to the poor" Robin, who defies Prince John and the laws of the land. What he fails to realise is that this is the Robin Hood that the stories are all about, the Robin Hood we care about.

Merry and Pippin are a poor example of "Lawful Good" characters. They are wilfully disobedient, and this defiance is what allows them to succeed. Pippin won't simply go along with Denethor's mad scheme, despite the fact that he is in charge. Merry sides with Eowyn, riding into battle despite specific orders to the contrary. They are good. They are heroes. They are not lawful.

Let me quote Robert directly here, with his most incorrect paragraph of the article:

"But now it comes down to why I think lawful is better than chaotic. Basically, it is very difficult to play a likeable disrespectful character. Chaotic aligned characters usually come across as selfish and rude. Lawful characters get a leg up on the fact that liking something is more interesting than not liking something, that believing in something is more interesting in believing in nothing, that fighting for justice is more interesting than just fighting."

Let's tear everything apart bit by bit shall we?

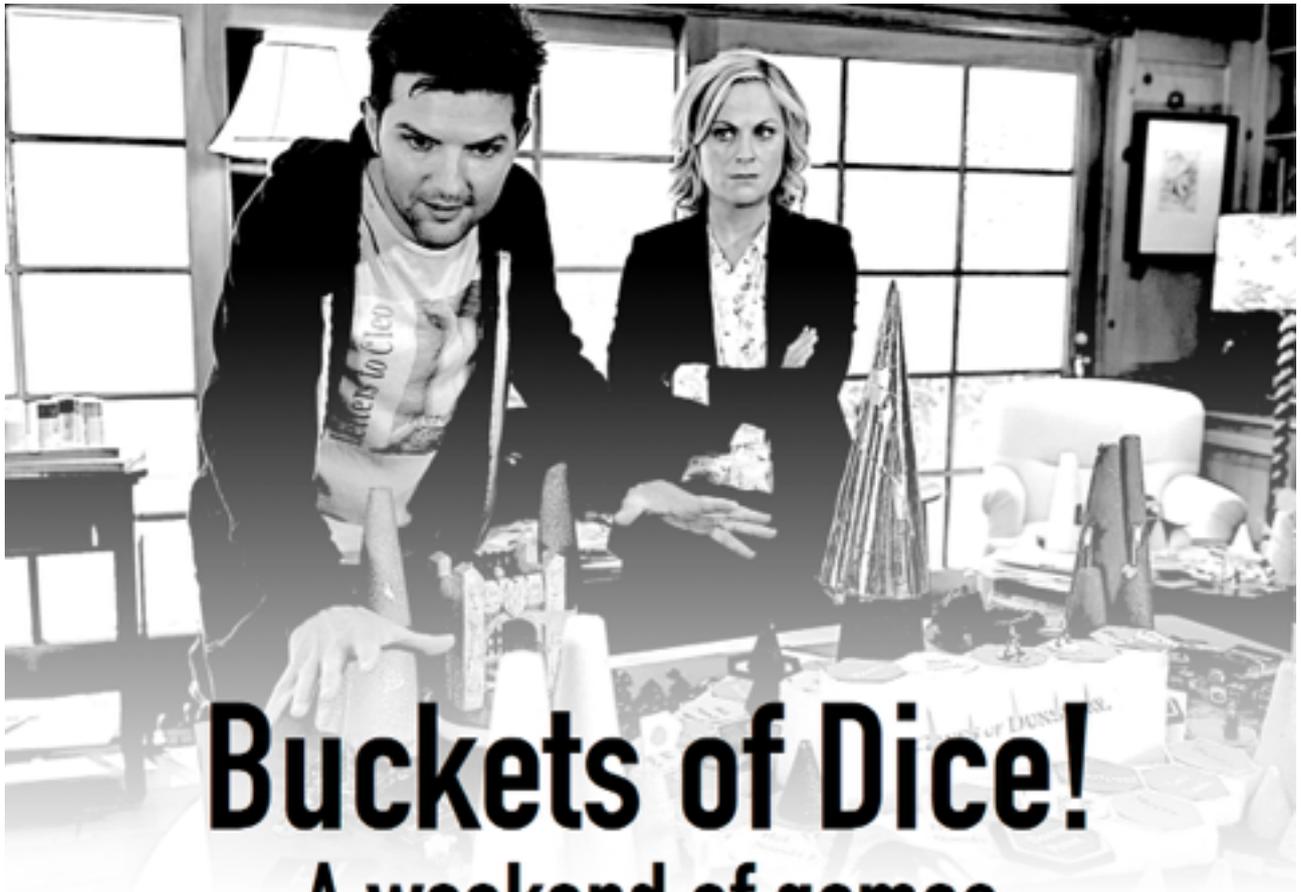
Apparently, it is difficult to play a likeable disrespectful character. Han Solo, Jack Sparrow, the Monkey King, Robin Hood and Harry Potter would all disagree. Yeah, that's right, Harry Freakin' Potter is Chaotic Good, blatantly so! He breaks almost every rule at Hogwarts, he doesn't trust the Ministry of Magic to take action so he does it himself, he drops out of school to chase Voldemort's horcruxes, he frees known criminals Sirius Black and Buckbeak, he even creates a secret rebel army on school grounds. Harry Potter is the epitome of Chaotic Good.

Not only are Chaotic characters some of the most charismatic and well loved characters in fiction, they are also far from being people who don't like or believe in anything. The nine alignments are probably better defined as a "What" axis and a "How" axis. Good-Neutral-Evil is the "What" axis. It's the general outlook of the character towards others, from benevolent to malevolent. Law-Neutral-Chaos forms the "How" axis. How does the character think that good or evil should be done? A Lawful Good character wants the best for people and believes this should be done by following the laws of society. A Chaotic Good character wants the best for people and believes this should be done by doing whatever they can for the good of all, even if it is at the expense of a corrupt or ineffectual authority. This is why I like to call Chaotic Good "Unlimited Good". Chaotic Good characters are no less committed to something than Lawful Good characters, they just have a different method.

Getting off topic slightly, in some rare cases, the axes are flipped and this is how we get evil characters who think they are improving things for society. Avatar: the Legend of Korra has two good examples of this. Zaheer's "What" is Chaos, he believes that freedom trumps all. Kuvira's "What" is Law, she believes that Order is the most important thing. Unfortunately, Evil is their "How", which is what corrupts their causes, despite beliefs they hold that aren't explicitly evil.

So now we know what Chaotic Good actually is, why is it the best? A Chaotic Good character is a driving force and a true adventurer. If we think about it, most lawful characters should be conducting themselves in civilisation, adventuring requires something of a chaotic bent. In an adventuring context, the lawful character is far more likely to shut down an awesome plan than the chaotic character. Chaotic Good is the best alignment because it allows you to do what's right and awesome, instead of only what's right.

~



Buckets of Dice!

A weekend of games

Join us for... • Boardgames • Roleplaying games • LARPS
• Friday night quiz • Monday Breakfast •

Beginners and long-time gamers alike welcome!

Queens birthday weekend, 3rd-6th June • saga.org.nz/bod16

Also coming up this term:

Long Boardgames Day

15 May, 9am-10pm

Kirkwood H7 & 8

*Gold coin entry for non-saga
members*

Minicon II

16 & 17 July, 9am-10pm

Kirkwood H5, 7, & 8

*Gold coin entry for non-saga
members*

From the Quartermaster - Term 1 Acquisitions

Castles of Mad King Ludwig

One of my biggest regrets this year is that I played this game for the first time the day after the previous OoC came out with my Top 10 list of games to try at SAGA. This game is amazing and would certainly have leapt to the top of the list. Don't be put off by the intimidating looking set up, this game is actually pretty accessible. My favourite part is the Master Builder mechanic, which has players taking it in turns to price different rooms for the others. Balancing the supply and demand to try and get the most out of the shared marketplace is a lot of fun.

Libertalia

With a lot of tactical decisions revolving around timing as well as just the right amount of backstabbing, this game captures the feel of being a pirate crew beautifully. The stunning and highly thematic artwork adds a great deal to the experience of the game and the sheer variety of possible combinations of card powers will have you up at night, scheming for your next game. Libertalia also handles the lower and higher player counts pretty well.

Camel Up

If you've ever wanted to scream profanities at little wooden camels, this is the game for you. Do you want to get in first with a risky but lucrative bet, or hold off until you feel you've got a sure thing? This game manages to create an almost manic energy as the camels develop a kind of personality as you mock the underdog and beg your favourite camel to stay ahead of the rest. Grab a bunch of friends, the more the merrier where this one is concerned.

Rococo

Don't let the theme of dressmaking put you off, this is an intense and very clever worker placement game, with countless options and tough decisions. Although it can be a bit of a brain burner at times, there's a very satisfying feeling when you come upon a strategy and think "I know exactly what I have to do next." There's quite a bit to unpack here, so I'll recommend a few plays to get to really dig into it.

Elysium

This game abstracts out from its Greek gods theme with a peculiar but innovative purchasing mechanism, but brings it back in with the beautifully illustrated and thematically powered cards. The deck is made up of five of the eight sets of God cards, which allows for a huge amount of variability and replayability.

Colt Express

You are sure to draw some attention playing this game. The big, over the top cardboard train is simultaneously completely unnecessary and completely necessary for this larger than life robbery game. Prepare to have your best laid plans explode in your face as you rush around a moving train in search of loot.

How character creation influences the game

An extract from the president's GMing blog

Robert Vincent; bandgelo.tumblr.com

I want to help you guide your players into making characters with personalities and goals that make it easier to play in your game.

Now, as some of you have probably already realised I am extremely sympathetic to GMs. They put a great load of work into running games, this can be hours of prep, scheduling, and stress time. The onus is generally on them to produce a game of substance as they control the world and have agency over everything but for the player characters. GMing is by far the most demanding role at the table, and is usually a thankless one.

But when it comes to percentage of roles at the table the GM makes up maybe 20% of them if there are four players. It then seems misinformed to say that 20% of the people around the table are responsible for 100% of the fun. Sure if the GM is being awful it can be not fun for anyone, but is it not the same for when a player is being awful? I have played games where the GM was doing a great job but one player ruined it for everyone, or for someone. Sometimes it wasn't even the player being awful, they just had a character that caused the fun to be taken away.

When your players make characters you need to make sure that they are each making a character that will play the game. It sounds weird but here is an example of when this didn't happen:

The players are playing D&D, their characters are coming up to this dangerous cave. The game is that they will go inside and rescue one PC's father - who is a powerful wizard. It's a good idea because they're heroes and saving people is what they do, the wizard will reward them with magical items, their friend wants to reconcile with her father, and they need his help with their quest. One of the PCs then stops.

"I'm not going in, it's too dangerous!" He says.

Suddenly, the game stops, the whispers are on the air.

"But that's the game." Everyone else thinks. "We sat down to play D&D tonight and this is the game."

The game stopped for a while as both in character and out character the other players try to persuade the character to come in.

Whether because they are afraid or selfish, the promise of reward or help is not enough. The other players give up and turn to me:

“We are going in with out him.”

Four of the five players had a great time, and very pointedly made that clear. The fifth, who stayed outside the cave, complains at the end of the night: “You need to work on your GMing, I didn’t have any fun.”

That ‘player’ didn’t have fun because they didn’t play the game. Now, I could have forced them into the cave. I could have attacked them with a pack of wolves that chased them into the cave or some other big threat that meant the cave was the safer idea.

But I didn’t want to do that. The player had made their choice to wait outside and I respected that and didn’t force them. I didn’t want to improvise some interesting turn of events outside the cave either because I was annoyed at this player and felt anything interesting (without forcing them to run into the cave) would be inconsistent with what was established about the area.

So I thought how could I avoid that happening again. It’s simple. During character creation make sure your characters have personalities that will play the game. Straight up say it “make sure your character is a character who wants to adventure, wants to hunt monsters, wants to solve the murder.” Because that’s the game.

Surely they’re there as a player because they want to play, so help them make a character that helps them do that.

This is why Good aligned characters are the most popular choices for D&D players. A good aligned character wants to help people, they are going to accept quests.

There’s nothing wrong with a neutral or evil character, but that player needs to understand that their character is the mechanism through which they play the game. Neutral characters go on quests for personal gain which can be very interesting! Scaling the tower of the elephant because there’s treasure inside! Evil can work too, but usually only if every PC is evil because otherwise there can be unwanted tension at the table - just make sure everyone is comfortable with your evil conduct.



PANDEMIC LEGACY

The game that keeps on giving

From our London Correspondent, Jan-Yves Ruzicka

Authors: Matt Leacock & Rob Daviau

Players: 2-4 (best with 4)

Play time: 60 minutes/session, 12-24 sessions total

BGG Rating: 8.63/10

Cost: \$119.95 at the Game Depository (<http://gamedepository.co.nz>)

Pandemic Legacy is like an iPod Classic. It's not the *first* game of its own particular genre - that accolade goes pretty solidly to Rob Daviau's **Risk Legacy**, which, if you can't guess from the similarity in name, shares many fine qualities with this game. Instead, **Pandemic Legacy** takes the experimental foray that Daviau attempted in 2011, and turns a pretty good (and well-received) but somewhat undersold game and into a commercial and board gaming powerhouse. And I'm really hoping that, like the iPod Classic, we'll see plenty more games of this style starting to come out of big publishers.

By now you will probably have encountered Matt Leacock's **Pandemic**. If you haven't, here's the rundown. The players are a group of paramedics, scientists, researchers and disaster specialists all tasked with treating and curing four major diseases which are currently running rampant all over the world. Each turn you must do your best to prevent outbreaks and contain epidemics, while also collecting enough data to assemble a cure for each of the four strains. However, on each turn you will also help infect the world, effectively "playing the villain" by drawing from the infection deck, and every draw from the player deck has a chance of triggering an epidemic and further destabilising the board. **Pandemic** is a solid light-to-medium-strategy co-op with a great mix of tactics and luck: if you count your cards right you should be able to work out when a previous hot-spot is going to flare up again, but a chance epidemic at the wrong time can throw everyone's plans for a loop.

Pandemic Legacy is the latest variant in the **Pandemic** franchise, and arguably the most revolutionary. Matt Leacock has teamed up with Rob Daviau, author of the sleeper hit **Risk Legacy**, to turn **Pandemic** from a one-shot board game into something more ambitious: a *board game campaign*. Sure, at its core is the standard **Pandemic** game, complete with your expected roles, diseases, cities, and events. But every game you play (and you'll be playing a few) will influence the world for every game to come.

Beyond this mark, mild spoilers abound. The fact that I have to put a spoiler warning in a board game review should give you an idea of the excellence of this game. If you're sold on the game by this stage, go buy it, assemble your group, and enjoy. If not - and you want to learn a little bit about the game (although no huge spoilers, I swear!), keep reading.

When you open the box, you'll find yourself in possession of:

- A slightly modified (but functionally normal) **Pandemic** game.
- The rulebook.
- A deck of *Legacy cards*, which you will draw as the year progresses.
- A series of sealed cardboard boxes, all labelled. Some of these will probably rattle if you shake them.
- A number of TOP SECRET sheets, which each contain a number of fold-out advent-calendar-esque "windows", all labelled.
- A sheet of upgrades and scars for your characters.

As mentioned, the rules are very similar to standard **Pandemic**. There are some new bits and pieces: for example, each city has an instability level, which starts at zero and increases every time the city experiences an outbreak. As the instability level increases, rioting closes airports and research centres, makes the cities harder to enter, and eventually makes them all but inaccessible. In addition, players in a city when an outbreak occurs contract "scars" (like PTSD, depression, insomnia, etc.) that will mechanically affect them as the game progresses.

The game starts to get more complex when you consider the long-term view. You will be playing between twelve and twenty-four games on the same board (so if riots break out in Beijing in your first game, you'll have to deal with that for a long time). At the end of every game, you get the chance to "level up" your team slightly, so they're more capable, or more well-rounded. There's also a nice "self-correcting" mechanism in the game: teams that do well at curing diseases receive reduced funding (represented by event cards in the deck) in their next game "since you're handling it so well", while teams that fail to cure the disease get more funding to help them succeed next time.

If you're like me, this sounds like a series of interesting changes to the regular **Pandemic** game, allowing for a bit of long-term play. But I haven't touched on the juiciest bit of this game yet, and that's *the plot*. In your first game, you're told to place a special marker on the board, and when it gets triggered, to turn over the first card in the legacy deck. What could that be, I wonder? I'll leave

that for you to find out, but I'll let you know that it's the start of something far bigger than a serial boardgame. As you proceed through the toughest year this batch of CDC troubleshooters have had to deal with, you'll get to find out why you have blank sections in your rules, what's behind all those doors on your TOP SECRET documents, and what's rattling around inside those boxes...

By now you probably have a couple of questions. The first one people tend to have goes: "Can you play the campaign again and again?" The short answer is: no. You're going to be modifying the board, putting stickers on cards, ripping up other cards - in other words, making irreversible changes to the game. But this shouldn't worry you! You're still going to get a good amount of gameplay out of the game - like I said, the campaign will clock in at somewhere between twelve and twenty-four games - and when you're done the board will be like a map of your successes and failures. Does this lack of replayability decrease the value of the game? Depends on what you're after. In my case, the sheer story that the game generates - the satisfaction of returning to a board you've come to know and love, of re-visiting battle-scarred cities, of returning to characters you've guided through hell - vastly outweighs any feeling of disappointment that at some point I won't be able to play this game again.

The second question I've heard is: "Does this mean I need to get a regular group?". **Pandemic Legacy** will run with up to four players (and I think four players is probably best, really), and you can swap characters between individual games, so there's nothing stopping you swapping in and out of the game as you see fit. But still, it's like being the one person watching the finale of *Buffy* in a group of die-hard fans: everyone else is *ooing* and *aahing* and you're wondering why some people have weird-looking scars and how come they're putting biohazard markers on the map and *what happened to Los Angeles?!* Much like a campaign roleplaying game, or a good TV series, I think the payoff gets greater for every game you're involved in; hopefully, by the time you get to game three or four you won't *want* to give your seat up to some wet-behind-the-ears noob who thinks this is just **Pandemic** with shiny tokens.

To conclude: **Pandemic Legacy** is a compelling "campaign board game" in which your actions affect not just this game, but all games to come. By adding in its own overarching plot (which in turn impacts the mechanics of the game in drastic ways), **Pandemic Legacy** turns a what was already a solid board game with excellent mechanics into a compelling series that'll have your gaming group coming back for more.

A quick list of GMing resources

Maps

- General map tool with precise scaling: hexographer.com
- World map tool: inkarnate.com
- Dungeon painter: pyromancers.com

Names

- fantasynamgenerators.com has many different lists for people, places, things, etc over many genres.

NPCs

- “Masks” on drivethru rpg - 1000 memorable NPCs for any RPG
- whothefuckismy dnd character.com
- writingexercises.co.uk has generators for characters, character traits etc.

Monsters

- More dependent on system - but check out the online community for the game you want to play. Eg. [Dungeon World Tavern](https://plus.google.com/communities/107111111111111111111) on google plus.

General

- Chaoticshiny.com has a lot of different generators - items, opinions etc.
- Lots of bundles of pre-gen monsters, items, etc etc are available on drivethrurpg.com for a small cost
- People - [ASK YOUR SAGA BROS KIS](http://ASKYOUR SAGA BROS KIS) (like us!) People find all kinds of stuff which they love to evangelise about.
- Robert’s GMing blog (Personally I find it really makes me think! Genuinely useful) - Bandgelo on Tumblr.



LARP 101

by Lee Patrick (and Rackle, a bit)

LARP stands for Live-Action Role-Playing - it's basically dressing up and pretending to be other people for a few hours. It's a mixture of acting, storytelling, improvisation, and gaming. LARP is your chance to jump into a fictional world, or a historical setting, and have an impact on how the story ends.

There's a huge variety of characters and worlds available - I've played games set at a psychics convention, a high school in Lovecraftian Innsmouth, a zombie apocalypse, a reality TV show on a submarine, the Mary Celeste, and the New Zealand flag committee. You can find yourself playing the hero of the story, or the villain, or the power behind the throne, or anything else you can think of.

So how does it all work?

Usually, once you sign up to a game, you will receive a casting survey. This will let your GM know things like what gender you want to play, what kinds of plotlines and themes you want to explore, and what kind of character you want to be. Everyone's surveys go back to the GM, who uses them to cast the game.

Next, you'll receive a character sheet. These vary in length and detail, but they're usually one or two pages long. Your character sheet gives you everything you need to know about the world the game takes place in, as well as backstory, personality traits, relationships, and goals for your character (you don't have to follow your character's goals obsessively - they're there to provide a starting point for the character, but they're not intended to be hard and fast objectives that you have to achieve to win the game).

Just like in a tabletop game, you decide what your character would say and do - but then you act it out. For this reason, theLARPs we play here are often about social and political plots - it's easier to actually act out an argument, or investigate a mystery, than to slay a dragon! Mechanics such as "who wins in a punch up?" are solved in a variety of ways - from paper-scissors-rock to drawing playing cards. However there are also 'Boffer' LARPs which heavily revolve around combat with foam weapons - these aren't super popular in New Zealand though. Also, sometimes in LARPs you can make your own character - this is more common in campaign LARPs than one-offs as you might need a bit of time to develop backstories and relationships if they don't come pre-made.

If any of you have played pre-made murder mysteries & the like, this might be sounding quite familiar! When you try LARPing, you'll probably find it's actually just an easy little step along from roleplaying, party games, or improv games that you've already tried. You don't need to have any experience with acting, or even with gaming, in order to start LARPing. If you're not super confident, you can request a character who's not central to the action, or just let your GM know that it's your first LARP so that they give you an easier character to play. Or you can just jump straight in - there are no penalties for over-enthusiasm.

One of the good things about LARP is that there's no audience, so no one's watching you and judging your performance. Also, depending on the GM, you may be able to request a character with a close relationship with someone you feel comfortable playing with. LARP GMs want to get more people invested in LARPing, so we're pretty happy to accommodate requests that will make playing easier for you.

Christchurch has a couple of big LARP-related events a year: Buckets of Dice, which this year has two flagship LARPs, plus a LARP characterisation workshop & smaller laps, and Phoenix in August, which is a whole weekend of LARPing. There's also usually a LARP or two at Saga's smaller events like Minicon and the 48-hour event. There are also several LARP events nationwide - check out nzlarps.org for more details on those.

If you have any more questions about LARP, talk to anyone on the committee - they probably know the answer, and if they don't, they'll know who does!



LARP 102

by Ciaran

LARP is an exciting hobby and we want you to be part of it! Recently we did a survey looking at how we can get people into LARPing more or what might be stopping people from playing; here's a quick rundown of some of the most common obstacles keeping people from Larping and how you might be able to get around them.

1) There aren't enough opportunities

There are quite a few! Through SAGA alone, there are multiple one off games throughout the year as well as large one-off games at our major conventions: Buckets of Dice and Phoenix, which is dedicated to LARPing! If you still can't get enough, a few of us travel to conventions and weekend games around the country.

2) The social stigma

Sometimes LARP gets a bad rap in the media, but it really is one of the most social hobbies you can do! You'd be surprised at the response I get from telling people about my LARPing. Sure, many people say it's not for them but they usually agree it sounds like fun.

3) It's intimidating

I'll agree it can be a bit intimidating. What if you can't stay in character? What if your costume isn't very good? It's easy to have those questions running through your head. If it's any help, in a LARP, everyone is working together to build a shared narrative. While they might oppose you in character, in reality everyone is on your side!

4) I don't understand it

Maybe this resource will help! <http://whatislarp.co.nz/faqs/>
In Christchurch, most of the games we run are one-offs. They are called Parlour LARPs or Theatreform LARPS. You may have seen people running around in medieval garb with foam swords in the media. This is called Boffer Larp and is more frequently done in the North Island. Our games usually revolve around relationships, political maneuvering and mystery.

5) The genres of games I've heard about don't interest me

Make some noise and tell us what you like, you might be surprised what's on offer! I've been in games about Sci-fi, horror, dystopian futures, fantasy, office jobs, art, history, superheroes and any so much more! We boast a number of talented LARPwriters who are willing to take on all kinds of projects.

6) I'm too busy

There's not a lot I can do about that, but LARPs run frequently and are often in the evening on a weekend. Most of the games we offer are also one-offs, so you're only committing to a few hours one time.

7) I'm too embarrassed

Don't worry! You are good enough. As long as you put yourself in your character's shoes, you'll soon find that embarrassment melting away and oh the stories you'll have! We seek to create a safe space where everyone can participate without fear of judgement. Feel free to ask us about the steps we take to ensure everyone can participate comfortably.

8) The costs/costuming involved

Plenty of LARPs involve little to no costuming, let us know if this is a requirement or if you would like to borrow gear from someone who might have collected more.

9) I don't feel included in the Christchurch LARP scene

That's a real shame and I'm sorry if we haven't made you feel included! Don't be afraid to approach us about LARP though, we're far more interested in getting new people into the hobby than in keeping it to ourselves. We're a friendly and diverse bunch and we want you to see for yourself if LARP could be something you're interested in. If there are certain people you want to avoid, talk to someone you feel comfortable approaching

10) I've had a bad experience with LARP in the past

Every now and then, everyone has a bad game. It's up to you whether you can see the potential for fun there or whether you don't feel like giving LARP another go. If your experience was about more than just a bad game, there are a number of things we put in place to help you communicate that you are uncomfortable during a game and it is always ok to simply walk out if you feel the need.

11) I just have absolutely no interest in trying LARP

Fair enough! You know what you like and this isn't for you. That's ok.

If you want to know more about LARPs coming up or you have any questions, please feel free to email me at quartermaster@saga.org.nz
Ciarán Searle