

VOLUME 1

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From the president

Salutations reader!

I believe introductions are in order. I am Jaln Rodger; known by some as Lance of the Storms, Pan, or even “totes the bad guy that is doing this for the lolz”. This year it is my privilege, nay, honour, to be Suitably Appropriate Gaming Acronym Incorporated’s 20-something-or-other President!

I have had the pleasure of being with SAGA for about 3 years, since a workmate once told me of “this really cool club that I should defs join” because he was President. I thought, why not? I played in the famous Living Dungeon World and one of Craig’s D&D games, and from there I was hooked. It was an amazing time, and soon after I started being involved in board games as well.

Board games? These aren’t the average table-flip-inducing Monopoly kind of games, but a diverse range from strategic placement-of-units-and-troops-to-wage-war-in-Westeros games, to liking-the-green-camel-and-so-betting-on-it-because-you-feel-lucky games. Yes, we also do also sometimes play Monopoly. Actually, we have an event planned called “Terrible board games day” where you can drop in and say hello.

But this is nothing compared to my favourite thing that SAGA has introduced me to (apart from the amazing beautiful people of course, including *you*!). And that is: LARPs. At the time I was introduced to SAGA, I very much enjoyed the *casual* drink most weekends as students tend to (responsibly) do. And so, my costume box had already been developed somewhat, and everyone loves to partake in some dress-up now and then. Don’t we? Don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone.

But LARPs go a step further and get you to roleplay out the actual character, giving you a backstory and goals that you have to work towards. It’s similar to improv acting, only you’re the actor *and* audience at the same time. LARPs also allow you to be someone else, to throw on a different persona and wear it for a few hours, whether this is a mighty king, an evil visor, or a humble, but attractive, beggar. But enough about me. Please, tell me more about you and your beautiful deep-coloured eye(s). Why don’t we start off with something simple like, “What is your name?” Oh, don’t worry, I’ve left a space blank for you to write it in:

Now that the difficult question is done: what brings you here to my humble abode? Is it to pace around the room strategizing your next move in an epic board game? Or perhaps you wish to roleplay in some Dungeons (dragons optional)? Or perhaps even dress up like the sexy thing you are and engage in some romantic and scandalous handholding and high-fivery in a LARP?

Whatever your reasons, I welcome you. SAGA Inc. welcomes you!

What is SAGA?

As a club, SAGA Inc. helps facilitate the hobbies of board gaming, roleplaying, and LARPing. We meet every Tuesday and Thursday at 6pm in Kirkwood Village and play these games, creating social connections and putting you in contact with over one hundred others who share an interest in table top gaming.

Board Gaming

SAGA has a massive collection of games (listed in this OoC) and we provide a warm, dry, and safe gaming space. Attendees gather and play these games together, and it's a great way to have fun and meet people. Our games are more enjoyable than the household Monopoly! Resource management, worker allocation, battles: the games are interesting and engaging.

Roleplaying

Roleplaying is a little more difficult to describe. You may have heard of Dungeons and Dragons, Titansgrave, or AGE. They are role playing games: a group of people collaboratively tell a story. In many games, players will create their own characters which they play with conviction, then the game rules help determine how the story moves forward. The game plays out in the imaginations of the participants as they narrate their character's words and actions. Many games also have GMs, who play the world at large and help by being an adjudicator or referee over the rules. SAGA has many talented and award-winning GMs to run games for you and others.

LARPing

While most role playing games take place around a table, there is also Live Action Roleplaying (LARP). Some find that they enjoy more immersion than in table top role playing and so players dress up as their characters and role play on a set of some kind. It's basically a play, but without any audience to watch. It is for the fun of the players alone. Often written and run by GMs who cast players in roles. Those are three shallow descriptions of the hobbies SAGA Inc. helps facilitate for the community. We recommend trying as many as you can. You do not need to be a SAGA member to give gaming a try: we are welcoming of non-members who want to come to a session or two! To try and provide a range of, this year we are doing 'Theme Days' (more information further on in this OoC) where every week we focus on a different game theme.

Meet the committee

President



My name is Jaln, pronounced like yarn with a Ja- sound at the start (don't worry everyone gets it wrong), and I am the President of SAGA Incorporated for the year of 2017. This is my first year filling some large shoes left by my predecessors, in which I will hope to bumble though and somehow keep this mighty ship that is SAGA afloat. I have been with SAGA for two and a bit years in which I have seen how the community thrives and friendships have formed through it. The SAGA I have seen is most understanding and accepting and even encouraging people to let their nerd flags fly high, with great taste in clothing.

This year I graduate with a B.Sc., which will give you an idea of how wizened and old I have become (not very). During the day, I play around with electronics and breathe in too much solder. I try to make most nights

at SAGA, and hope to run a more D&D and meet lots of new faces.

My goal for SAGA is somewhat of a boring one: to keep SAGA working well. To keep it a place for comfort, joy, and ridiculous stories that make people cringe and bury their faces in their hands.

If you want to talk or even just say 'Hi' (please say 'Hi' more than once, I am terrible with names but I remember faces!) feel free to send me an email or Facebook message, or, you can always go old fashioned and use the mouth and everything and make nice around me.

Quartermaster



I am Ciarán, your quartermaster for the year. I stand on the bridge between worlds. I am part of the team that will be bringing you Theme Days this year as well as the guardian of SAGA's board games and a keen LARPer. If you want to play a game that is weird or whimsical, I am probably your guy.

I ran a Kickstarter in 2014 to publish a game of my own design, based on Werewolf but played in the dark. My favourite board game is possibly Summoner Wars, which I need to get around to playing more.

I have ties to theatre and tend toward the more free-form kinds of roleplaying game. My favourite RPG system is probably Fiasco, as it lets

me tell all sorts of strange stories.

In LARP, I have been getting into the writing side of things since last year, with my past projects being a heavily improvised game based on a play about amnesiacs telling stories (Brokenville) and a time travelling marriage counselling service (T.R.Y.S.T.), and am currently working on S.W.I.P.E.

If you want to learn a new game of some sort, find out more about Theme Days or even just find out what "S.W.I.P.E." stands for, come and find me and I'll be happy to help you out!

Secretary



Alys is our secretary for this year. Or, at least, she was. Look, we told her that the minutes from the 2012 AGM were cursed, but she didn't believe us. Or maybe she did, and just believed that she was stronger than previous secretaries. Regardless: the last we heard from her, she was piling the club's paperwork in her car and commenting that it wasn't nothing that a good 3 a.m. study session and some hot cocoa couldn't fix.

No, that's a lie. I mean, it was, definitely the last we saw of her. But after a concerted effort, fuelled by a case of V and a little overexposure to *Stranger Things*, we managed to jerry-rig an antenna and get a call through to her cell phone. The signal was weak and kept dropping out, but from what we could gather, she was trapped. Or perhaps hiding; or maybe both. Regardless, she seemed frightened that she would be found by a beast she named "The Quorum", and insisted that we second her motion to hide. The committee will keep you briefed on her status.

In her spare time, Alys enjoys playing board games!

Treasurer



I'm Mutu, Wearer of Shorts. I'm the guy with long hair and a beard that ranges between scruffy and neatishly trimmed. I'm currently a master's student in philosophy and am all kinds of nerdy (Actually only a few kinds). I love roleplaying, which has become my primary hobby. I love participating in the creation of great fiction, and the social aspect that comes with it. (I also dance and board-game and rant and Larp and rant and do some outdoorsy things when my knees aren't too shite, which is sadly seldom, and am frequently sarcastic.)

I've been roleplaying regularly for about 7 or eight years (and a little before that). My favourite character that I've played so far was a cowardly, then emo, then cowardly again, outgoing, pacifist, fashionista elvish bard called Leena. My favourite game so far is the Dresden files (uses the FATE system).

Promotions



The promotions officer may or may not exist, we are currently unsure and searching through the piles of code in the website to try and find them. All current signs are that they were sucked into the computer and became lost in a world of zeros and ones.

Pray that this does not happen to you.

What's on this year?

Intro Nights

SAGA • 28 Feb/02 Mar

Board games galore and plenty of pick up role playing games on offer from our talented and experienced GMs. Whether you're an old hand or barely have a clue what I'm talking about, there will be something fun you can do!

Non-members welcome.

Meet and Greet

SAGA • 04 Mar

Eat food, meet people and maybe play some games too! Location TBD, some food provided.

Hydra LARP convention

Wellington • 24–26 Mar

An epic LARP convention held in Wellington. An entire weekend of live action roleplay with amazing people attending from all round the country. Catered and at a scout camp, so you don't need to sort out accommodation. Register now! <http://hydra-larps.nz/>



Cerberus: LARP convention

Dunedin • 21–23 Apr

Dunedin's first LARP convention. Cerberus will be held at the Tirohanga Camp site and will be catered so no need to worry about food or accommodation! Another weekend full of live action role play and amazing people. Register now! <http://cerberus.nzlarps.org>



Minicon I

SAGA • 29-30 Apr

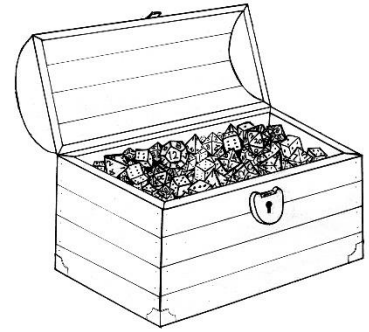
A weekend of gaming with SAGA! Non-members welcome, gold coin donation per day, members get free entry!

This also falls on International Tabletop Day, so join us, and people all over the world, to celebrate!

Buckets of Dice

SAGA • 02-05 June

SAGA's biggest event of the year, Buckets of Dice is roleplaying, board gaming, LARPing, a quiz night, breakfast and general nerdyness over Queen's Birthday weekend. You don't want to miss this, it's gonna be amazing!



Minicon II

SAGA • 01-02 July

Another weekend of gaming with SAGA! Non-members welcome, gold coin donation per day, members get free entry!

Chimera LARP convention

Auckland • 11-13 Aug

Chimera is NZ's oldest and biggest LARP convention, and well worth going to! With onsite accommodation, it is convenient for out of towners. <http://chimera.larpnz.nz/>

Phoenix Larp convention

SAGA • 25-27 Aug

SAGA's annual LARP convention is back for its fourth year! We have outgrown our usual location and have moved to Glenroy Lodge just out of Horarata. This year we can provide both accommodation and catering for the weekend and are once again expecting to be joined form LARPer's all over the country. Pre-registrations are now open. More information on our website.

<http://saga.org.nz/phoenix/phoenix-2017/>



Minicon III

SAGA • 07-08 Oct

Another weekend of gaming with SAGA! Non-members welcome, gold coin donation per day, members get free entry!

Medusa: LARP convention

Hamilton • Date TBC



Medusa is back for its second year! It's a fast growing LARP convention in Hamilton and has limited on site accommodation with priority for out of towners. <http://medusa.larpnz.nz>

Minicon IV

SAGA • 09-10 Dec

Another weekend of gaming with SAGA! Non-members welcome, gold coin donation per day, members get free entry!

Kapcon 2018

Wellington • Jan 2018

Kapcon is a huge gaming convention held annually in Wellington on Wellington Anniversary weekend. It is very similar in structure to Buckets of Dice, you will find a massive variety of people from all over New Zealand attending for table top, LARPs, flagships of all styles.



Find our events calendar at <http://saga.org.nz/calendar> for more details

Boardgames

Saga has an ever-growing library of board games. You can play them on SAGA night, or borrow them to play yourself. If you want something specific, check out our Trello page and put the games you want either in the “put in the bag!” column, or in the “let me borrow!” column. <https://trello.com/b/zs9KCAIE/the-saga-bag>.



Or if you don't want to sign up to Trello, you can always ask our quartermaster Ciarán, message the SAGA Inc. Facebook page, or post on the “Looking for Group” page.

Ciarán's top 5 SAGA games to try out this year:

5) Jamaica:

I've not seen this game hitting the table all that much lately, which is a shame. It's a fun and GORGEOUS little pirate racing game with some fun flavour. The rule book is laid out a little strangely so hit me up if you want to play and I'll help you out.

4) Libertalia:

Sticking with the pirate theme for a moment, this one offers some great decisions about which crew to use when, and has that excellent quality where you can pick apart your various choices in discussions after the game to figure out how you could have nabbed even more loot.

3) Lanterns:

A tile laying game that can fill a reasonable short period of time. I would recommend it with its full complement of 4 people. I love that where you sit and the rotation of the tiles played affects which cards you get, very neat.

2) Roll for the Galaxy:

This sequel to the very popular Race for the Galaxy is preferred by everyone I've talked to about it. As the dice game of the space themed card game implementation of Puerto Rico, it has a long and illustrious family history.

1) Scythe:

We just got it. It's got mechs and farming. It's big and beautiful. Play it. MEEEECHS!!



The full list

7 Wonders

+ 7 Wonders: Catan, Cities, Leaders,
Wonder Pack

Agricola

Alibi

Apples to Apples Go

Arkham Horror

Battlestar Galactica

Brass

Camel Up

Carcassonne

Ca\$h n Gun\$

+Ca\$h and Gun\$: Yakuza

Castles of Mad King Ludwig

+ Secrets of Mad King Ludwig

Catan

+Cities & Knights, Event Cards, Seafarers,
5-6 extension, The Great River

Chinatown

Chrononauts

City of Horror

Colosseum

Colt Express

Cosmic Encounter

DC Comics Deckbuilding Game

Diplomacy

Dominion

+Alchemy, Dark Ages, Prosperity, Seaside

Doom: The Boardgame

Dungeon of Fortune

Egizia

Elysium

Family Business

Finca

Fluxx

Gang of Four

Ghost Stories

+White Moon

Hanabi

Incan Gold

Jamaica

Junta

Junta: Viva el Presidente

Kill Doctor Lucky

King of Tokyo

+Halloween, Power Up

Kingsburg

+To Forge a Realm

Lanterns

Libertalia

Lord of the Rings

+Sauron

Lords of Waterdeep

+Scoundrels of Skullport

Love Letter

Mahjong

Munchkin

+Axe Cop, Cthulhu

Once Upon a Time

+Dark Tales

Pandemic

+On the Brink

Power Grid

Princes of Florence

Race for the Galaxy

+The Gathering Storm, Rebel vs.
Imperium, The Brink of War

Red Dragon Inn

+Red Dragon Inn 2

Rococo

Roll for the Galaxy

Saga

Save Doctor Lucky

Scythe

Sentinels of the Multiverse

+Promos, Rook City & Infernal Relics,
Vengeance, Villains, Wrath of the Cosmos

Smash Up

Splendor

Star Craft: The Boardgame

Steam

Talisman

The Middle Kingdom

Ticket to Ride

+Ticket to Ride Map Collection: Volume 2
– India & Switzerland, Alvin & Dexter, The
Dice Expansion

Tobago

Trax

Treehouse

Tsuro



Stash Inc

Presents:

Prime Potluck



This year we are taking a step away from the 'Living World' format of past years and are going to focus on both our board, and role playing gamers by introducing our theme days. Every week, alternating Tuesdays and Thursdays we will be focusing on a new theme, including, but not limited to Co-op day, Fantasy day, New GM day, and Euro day.

Participating in the theme is not compulsory, so if the day's theme doesn't interest you come along anyway, there will be other games available.

Beginning with our intro week on Tuesday the 21st of February and going through to our Potluck Day on Thursday the 1st of June

Tuesday	Thursday
28/2 INTRO WEEK	2/3 INTRO WEEK
7/3 Regular SAGA	9/3 Indie RPG DAY
14/3 Co-op Day	16/3 Regular SAGA
21/3 Regular SAGA	23/3 Fantasy Day
28/3 Sci-fi Day	30/3 Regular SAGA
4/4 Regular SAGA	6/4 Female Creators day
11/4 Miniatures Day	13/4 Regular SAGA
18/4 Regular SAGA	20/4 LARP DAY
25/4 Euro Day	27/4 Regular SAGA
2/5 Regular SAGA	4/5 New GM Day
9/5 Ameritrash Day	11/5 Regular SAGA
16/5 Regular SAGA	18/5 Dress-up Day
23/5 Terrible Games Day	25/5 Regular SAGA
30/5 Regular SAGA	1/6 Potluck Day

Eldritch Horror review

By Robert Vincent and Chloe Sutherland

At last the time has come; the deep ones have broken the elder sign that kept their master asleep. Cthulhu rises again, and madness fills the dreams of every living thing....

It's the Roaring Twenties - a time of alcohol prohibition, flapper dancers and ritualistic murder on every street corner! In Eldritch Horror, you and up to seven friends play investigators who have discovered the existence of the occult and have committed to thwarting the plans of the unknown emerging evil. Together, you travel the globe and work together to combat the inter-planar assaults from one of four Elder Gods.

The odds are low. The stakes are high. Eldritch Horror was the lurking monstrosity that has awoken and subsumed all previous Lovecraftian themed games. Fantasy Flight has previously released Elder Sign and Arkham Horror (each in a similar vein, thematically) and have clearly taken note of their past successes and failures. Forget either of those games – if you must submit your Strength and Sanity to a game, this is the one.

Eldritch Horror – while it may not bridge the gap between traditional board gaming and roleplaying – at least serves pull the two distant shores closer together. *Authors Note: Speaking as someone who would rather pick up D&D than Dominion I consider this a compliment; I invite readers to make their own calls.*

At the start of a game, each player chooses an investigator to play. These characters will traverse the globe, encountering deadly monsters, forbidden libraries and mind-boggling other worlds in an attempt to solve enough of the Elder Gods 'mysteries' before the Doom Track reaches zero. The game play is quick (once players pick it up) and fun but it is the characters that make this game shine.

Characters each have unique values in five stats – Lore, Influence, Perception, Strength, and Will – as well as two unique abilities/powers. Where in some games, some of these traits would be more desirable than others, Eldritch Horror seems to make a concerted effort to value and reward excellence in each stat. For example, while Charlie Kane (The Politician) may not know which end of a gun to grab (STR), his ability to grease palms (INFL) and get assets to other investigators will see him welcome in any game.

Characters are well constructed – the balance of stats and abilities almost perfectly complement the various archetypes – encouraging 'in-character' actions and decisions and promoting an immersive gaming experience. Your character feels distinct, they feel cool, and when they are devoured (or thrust into a coma ...or are driven insane) it sucks in that soul crushing way that only a co-op game can.

Do I like Eldritch Horror? I didn't initially. It's not intuitive. Its rules are many, not always clear, and the provision of two separate rule books only helps to muddy the waters. When you're losing, it can be difficult to understand why. When you aren't losing, it's very likely (at least in the early days) that you have failed to comprehend (or full forgotten) one of the many rules in carrying out the board's role as Antagonist. Eldritch Horror is a game that needs to be understood to be enjoyed and when you do it's amazing.

Pandemic Survival

By Rose Nichols

In December, I went on the gaming trip of a lifetime to Barcelona representing the UK in Pandemic Survival. After all the teams arrived, we had a cocktail mixer where we got to meet the competition and Matt Leacock, the creator of Pandemic. There were a few photo opportunities, I got him to sign my Pandemic Legacy board and become Facebook friends.

Pandemic Survival is a unique experience as you are playing a co-operative board game competitively, and in my case against the top teams from around the world.



The Semi's: 12 boards set up down a long table, in the middle of DAU gaming convention in Barcelona. Screens dividing each team, timed turns, with limited communication between team members. One infection deck for all teams announced by an MC, all player decks exactly the same. Each team has the same roles; the only difference is in the decisions each team makes, judges following each turn, announcing cures and outbreaks. Last year's reigning champs (Spain) competing again, a local video crew filming them. Tension is high.

I observed the first round of the semi-finals, taking notes and observing strategies of different teams. Who chose to focus on the virulent strain, which of them was focused on curing first, and the ones who chose to keep their boards clean. Keeping the board clean was definitely the way to go, for their scenario. It was nerve wracking watching teams fall one by one to the disease, until only those left would progress to the finals.



Then we were up, our game was interesting, do we clean red or yellow first. This decision would dictate which colour became our virulent strain. We chose to make yellow virulent, and managed to get red under control. A cheer goes up as another team gets the first cure of the game, a turn later we get a cure. We eradicate a disease, just before an epidemic that knock a few teams out. Phew. We get another cure, but so do other teams. We are close to the fourth cure, and progressing to the finals, we have it planned and can do it on my teammates next turn. The French team beat us to it, winning the game and taking the last spot in the finals.

The next morning, the Finals took place. France managed to win, beating the Spanish team along with the US and Japanese teams. It was an amazing experience, an intense competition, and a whole lot of fun.

Death of the GM

By Ciarán Searle

(A note to D&D fans: Throughout this article, the author has used the term “GM”, meaning “Game Master”. This is a system neutral term for the facilitator of games. Feel free to substitute “DM” if you like)

There is something very satisfying about leading your players through an expertly crafted story and experiencing their reactions to your hard work. Therein lies one of the biggest issues with table top roleplaying, however: Being a GM is hard work. There are a few people who are born GMs. They will run game after game, sometimes several concurrent campaigns, and they will be happy. They have little interest in being a player, because that’s not what they roleplay for. Cherish these people and look after them, for they are a rare and special beast. I am not one of them. While I love to GM, I feel as though I need the opportunity to be a player as well sometimes in order to recharge or experience something different.

Having been a part of quite a number of conventions over the years, something I have never seen is a surplus of GMs. In many cases, certain individuals have to GM in almost every round simply to have enough numbers. This is fairly problematic, so here are three essential tips to help ease the burden and keep games happening.

1) Learn to GM!

This one is incredibly obvious and there aren’t any excuses. If you play roleplaying games, you should at least try running a game. Maybe you’ll be terrible at it. Doesn’t matter, run a game. Maybe it’s not really as interesting to you as playing other people’s games. Doesn’t matter, run a game. Maybe you’re a bit nervous. Doesn’t. Matter. Run. A. Game. Ask any GM at SAGA whose games you enjoy and I guarantee they will be able to give you some help in getting yourself a game going. Being a GM means you lessen the burden on other local GMs. I also believe that GMing improves your ability as a role-player. In short, you owe it to your community and your craft to learn to GM.

A number of people in Saga learned to GM in 2016. Here are the thoughts of a couple of them:

Jennifer Hay: “It really was nowhere near as scary as I thought it would be. Having a group of friends who know that you are new to GMing and are willing to accept that you might make mistakes really takes the pressure off you. I found that running a pre-written scenario before trying to create my own world was really helpful.”

Sally Hayes: *“As a GM it’s really helpful to have people who also GM the system you’re using, because it means you have a repository of experience and knowledge that you can draw upon if you stumble that doesn’t require you to spend time thumbing through a book or googling a question. It also means that if other players have a question, they may feel comfortable asking their party members for clarifications on rules without pausing the scene.”*

2) Be Better to Your GMs!

Hopefully now that you have tried it yourself, you know that being a GM is not easy. Depending on your style and the game you’re running, it can involve a lot of prep work. Luckily for everybody, it’s easy to make your GM’s life easier. Firstly, understand that sometimes GMs need a break. Try to be understanding if your game has to take a break for a week or even has to end prematurely. Secondly, help your GM tell their story. It’s easy to work against the GM, even willingly attempting to break their game. Don’t. If your GM tells you that adventure lies to the West, don’t go East.

Sally Hayes: "I've only run one game so far, but I already have a greater respect for the GMs that run games I'm in - I try harder to make sure I listen while they describe the scene, I find it easier to distinguish between character knowledge and player knowledge and I just generally have a better grasp on the rules of the game. However, I think sometimes this can make people overconfident or obnoxious (i.e. "if I was GMing this game I would have made X call instead of Y") - remember that those people are the ones you complain about to your friends when you get them in your game."

3) Kill the GM!

Don't literally kill the GM. That doesn't help anybody. Just don't use one! There are a vast number of incredible games that don't have a GM role. All you need to do is read the rules and get one to the table. I have recently had the joy of participating in a GMless campaign of Society of Dreamers. It was one of the best campaigns I have been in, and the lack of a central GM gave us a real sense of discovering the mysteries as a group. Each person had their own input into the story, which created an incredible and complex web of detail. If you want to dip your feet into GMless gaming, I can heartily recommend any of the following:

- Fiasco- For varied stories about things going terribly
- Society of Dreamers- 19th Century science/supernatural mystery
- Final Girl- For stories emulating slasher films
- Ocean- Amnesiacs trapped in a mysterious underwater base
- F**k Youth- Young people doing young people stuff
- A Penny for my Thoughts- Amnesiacs rediscovering traumatic memories
- The Quiet Year- A year in the life of a post-apocalyptic community
- Enter the Avenger- For stories about revenge
- Dream Askew- For queer focussed stories about post-apocalyptic life
- Ribbon Drive- For stories about road trips. Uses music as a mechanic
- A Taste for Murder- For stories about murder mysteries
- Downfall- For stories about the downfall of a flawed society
- Shock: Social Science Fiction- For stories about social issues in science fiction societies
- Restless- For stories about zombie-like creatures and the survivors who run from them

Five free RPGs

By Jan-Yves Ruzicka

Not everything of value has a cost. Throw off the chains of your corporate overlords. By this time next week, you could be playing one of these games for the cost of printing.

(I've limited this list to one game per author, which is a crying shame really because there's a bunch of filthy communist RPG-authors out there who release scads of free material.)

Lady Blackbird | John Harper

<http://www.onesevendesign.com/ladyblackbird/>

Lady Blackbird is a rollicking adventure of a gaslamp/aetherpunk game, designed to handle up to five players and one GM. The system fits in a remarkable amount of layered design, including (still!) one of my favourite experience/levelling systems in any game ever. The story follows the adventures of an escaped princess who's taken up with a group of smugglers as she tries to escape an arranged marriage, and joins the action just as they've been taken prisoner. It's a great game to introduce people to roleplaying, and can handily take up 4-5 sessions if the GM wishes it. John Harper, has plenty more free games on his website (<http://www.onesevendesign.com/>), and he's even hidden a copy of Lady Blackbird's sequel, **Magister Lor** (http://www.onesevendesign.com/ladyblackbird/magister_lor.pdf), on there if you look hard enough.

Roll for shoes | DWeird

<http://story-games.com/forums/discussion/11348/microdungeons-i-roll-to-see-if-i-have-shoes-on/>

Not everyone is looking for the emotional complexity of **Lady Blackbird**. Sometimes you want something a bit lighter, a bit easier to bite into, and a bit more universal. **Microdungeons**, also affectionately referred to as **Roll for Shoes**, is a roleplaying game disguised as a blog post. Your characters will start off useless at everything, and over the course of the adventure, as they fail and fail and fail again, they will slowly get better at doing what they do. The rules fit on an index card, as do your characters' stats, making this the perfect beer-and-pretzels dungeon crawl.

Dream Askew | Avery Alder

<http://buriedwithoutceremony.com/dream-askew/>

Dream Askew may actually cost you \$5, but it's worth the money. Or find someone who can get it for free and play it with them!

Enough normal games. **Dream Askew** is a GMless, diceless game that looks at the apocalypse not as a chance to be macho and run around with big guns, but as an event that impacts people - oppressing them, marginalising them, and occasionally freeing them from the strangling constraints of Society Intact. Your characters are much less awesome and capable than in many other post-apocalypse games, but at the same point the token-based economy of the game means that not only do you **want** to fail, you still get to choose where you fail. The lack of a GM also means that it suddenly feels less about overcoming challenges and more about characters just **getting on**, despite the situations that face them every day. You might know the Alder better for her work on the amazing PbtA angst-fest that is **Monsterhearts**, or the map-making game **The Quiet Year**, but everything she touches is some form of gold, and **Dream Askew** is no

exception. The one caveat I would make is that this game really requires you to be active and clued-up: this isn't the sort of game that works if half the table just phones it in.

Society of Dreamers | Matthijs Holter

<https://societyofdreamers.wordpress.com/>

Let's talk more about crazy GMless dice less games, shall we? **Society of Dreamers** is a about the sort of science that people got up to back when science was new and sexy. The characters have gathered together to study a theoretical creature or creatures called **Mneomosytes**: not much is known about them, except that they exist in dreams. **Society** gets around the whole "We don't have a GM, what do we do?" problem in a couple of great ways: the first couple of scenes of the game are predetermined and give everyone some backstory and motivation, while the following scenes are decided (in one of the most thematic mechanics seen in a roleplaying game) by Ouija board.

Society is heavily focussed on providing a rules-light framework for story-telling, which does mean that it's lacking a conflict resolution mechanic beyond "the table decides". Every scene, one player is assigned "director", and I figure that between that and table consensus, Matthijs expects you to sort problems out like grown-ups. If you still want some uncertainty in your game, however, I recommend making up a deck of cards with "Yes, but", "Yes, and", "No, but" and "No, and" written on them, and draw them whenever a tense situation comes up.

The Tribunal | J. Tuomas Harviainen

<http://leavingmundania.com/2014/08/17/j-tuomas-harviainen-larp-collection/>

One free Larp to finish off. **The Tribunal** is an ultra-lightweight "nordic" Larp about oppression and conformity by Finn J. Tuomas Harviainen. It's probably one of the most-played Nordic Larps outside of Scandinavia, and being free certainly doesn't hurt its popularity. The players are all members of an army regiment who are witnesses to a crime. The wrong people have been accused, but the military wants a scapegoat more than it wants justice. **The Tribunal** is a great introductory Larp: you don't need any costuming or set dressing and your character sheets are one page long at most. Despite this, it's capable of producing some pretty emotionally-intense play.

Where can I find more free games?

There's plenty of places out there to find free stuff, but the key is separating the wheat from the chaff. Sites like 1000 monkeys, 1000 typewriters <http://www.1km1kt.net/> are a good starting point, but the task of separating the brilliant-yet-tiny games from the half-baked ideas is a rather large one. I tend to lurk around the Story-Games <http://story-games.com/forums/> web forums, which often produce their own recommendations for good games.

If you're into Larp, the RPGNet wiki has a good list of Larps https://wiki.rpg.net/index.php/LARP_Scenarios that are ready to run. Most of them cost, but there's a good smattering of free games in there as well.

The other place you can look is at SAGA. Find out what your role-players are playing (or excited about, or **want** to play...). Discuss what's new and hot with them. Pull out that PDF you downloaded, printed, and want to play. Become part of the movement. Join us, and help spread the gospel of free RPGs.

This was a great article last year, and as a new role player I found immensely helpful, so with permission from the author I have stolen it to re-publish in this Out of Character.

Lee Patrick has written up some tips for being a welcome addition to the gaming table. These are some common conventions of etiquette in the table top world - they're not always immediately obvious, but they help make everyone's experience good.!

Being a great role-player

Respect The GM

Accept your GM's decisions – discussion is fine, but arguing with the GM is not.

Sometimes you or your character will make choices that lead to nasty consequences – by all means mourn your character's losses and setbacks, but don't take them personally or let it sour the mood of the table.

Don't get too caught up in the exact wording of rules – the GM may have a different interpretation of the rules than yours, and that's their prerogative. Figure out what you want your character to do, and let the GM tell you what to roll. This lets the GM and the other players keep track of what's going on, and it means everyone's working from the same rule set when it comes to dice rolls.

Let the GM know if you can't make it to a game you've signed up to. Not being able to make a game is usually not a problem – shit happens, but it can be inconvenient if you don't let anyone know.

If you're playing in a system you have run before, keep in mind that you are not the GM –let someone else run the game their way.

Respect Your Fellow Players

Don't hog the spotlight – let everyone in the game have some of the focus. Consider how your character's actions will impact other players – feel free to discuss or negotiate your plans with your fellow players. This particularly applies to PVP tension or fights.

If you're running a game, and your best friend/boyfriend/brother is playing, treat them like any other player. Giving your best friend's character special treatment is likely to make the other players resent you and your friend.

If you want to watch a game, ask the GM and the players, and don't be surprised if the answer is no. Gaming involves a certain amount of putting yourself out there, and many people may not be comfortable doing this in front of uninvolved spectators. If there's loot involved, share it around equally. Finders keepers absolutely does not apply here; even if you were the one who actually found the treasure chest, the rest of your party still contributed to the adventure, and they still deserve their rewards. In the same vein, be generous towards the other players in trying to create a good story – for example, if your troll fighter character finds a magic wand, consider giving it to the party wizard.

Be helpful to new players if they ask for it, but don't assume that they need or want everything explained – give them some space to shine and to work it out for themselves.

People often bring snacks to gaming – feel free to bring food for yourself and other players, but don't feel like you have to. (If you're the GM, you never have to. That's what players are for.)

Respect the Story You're All Telling!

Pay attention to the story – don't distract yourself, other players, or the GM.

Keep player knowledge separate from character knowledge. You may know things as a player that your character would have no way of knowing – for example, if someone else in your party went into another room and was told by the GM that the room contains a huge, sentient, malevolent jellyfish, keep in mind that your character doesn't know about the jellyfish and won't have dug their rusty sword of Jellyfish slaying +2 out of the bottom of their pack.

Gauge the atmosphere of a game and act accordingly – if you're playing a game that involves subtly and diplomatically figuring out solutions to complex political problems, it may not be a good idea to swing in on a chandelier, brandishing an axe.



Dark Dungeons ©1984 by Jack T. Chick LLC

Used in parody...

As a GM, it is considered rude not to teach your players the secrets of the occult when they have memorised enough of the D&D player's handbook.

Have you really enjoyed your time LARPing, and now want to try your hand at writing a LARP but don't know where to start? Have you already written a LARP or two but want to see how other people write theirs? Do you have absolutely no idea what a LARP is and are just here for the board games/RPGs? (if so then this article is probably going to be interesting, but may not be what you are looking for.) Regardless of your reasons, welcome to our first part of the four-part article series

How to write LARPs part I

By Jan-Yves Ruzicka

Most of my Larps start with a cool idea. That might be a cool idea for a game mechanic, a setting, a theme I'd like to explore, a world I'd like the game to be set in, a set of characters...anything, really! This is the thing that makes me want to write a Larp in the first place.

The next thing I need to do is work out the big picture. What is the scenario? How would you pitch this game to potential players? Who is in the Larp? What makes it interesting? What's the mood of the Larp? If you're a fan of visualisation, you might want to visualise what the Larp might look like - what's the space going to be like, is it lots of people talking as one group or lots of little groups of two or three? If you like writing stuff down, you might want to write all this down as your vision or abstract of the Larp.

OK, now we start getting into the concrete planning. I work out the main details. This should answer the following questions:

How many people is this Larp going to be for? Lots of people means the Larp will be hectic and chaotic, with a number of intersecting or parallel plots. Only a few people mean that the game will be more intimate, with people spending more time talking to the same people. The number of people in your Larp may be influenced by the mood, the scenario, or even the logistics of a given event, if you're writing specifically to run for a given event.

What sort of Larp is this going to be? Is it a boffer Larp, where people hit other people with foam weaponry? Is it a parlour Larp, where everyone is constantly scheming and negotiating to fulfil their (conflicting) goals? What provides the conflict: are people struggling against each other, or the environment? (E.g. different factions trying to win votes, vs. a crew on a spaceship trying to solve a problem before time runs out); or is there another mechanism by which conflict is generated? Is the game going to be rules-heavy or rules-light? Are there special things that require their own rules and mechanics (e.g. magic, technology, picking locks, status, physical or emotional intimacy)? Are there any games you can lift the rules from?

It might also be worth working out: why doesn't everyone leave or call the cops? This might not be that sort of game, but if it is, you'll want a reason to provide as to why people don't just leave the haunted house when they realise it's haunted.

You may also want to work out the writing team for your Larp. Is it going to be just you? Would you like to bring someone else in to help write it? In my experience, another writer means another pair of eyes to check details, and another imagination to provide plots and details, but two people means you now have to coordinate things. While we're at it, how many people will it take to run the game? GMs will need to keep the plot going, help with rules queries, and arbitrate contentious scenes - in a chaotic PvP-type game you might need perhaps 1 GM per 10 players; other games might need less.

OK, you have the big picture done. What next? (Note: next steps biased towards parlour Larps.)

Your first task is probably going to be figuring out the main plot(s). What's going to keep everyone engaged during the game? How many sides are there, and how many people are on each side? Is there one big plot, or perhaps two plots going on alongside one another, or maybe three or four! As you think of each plot, it's also worth jotting down relevant points regarding the back-story for the plot, and key players. These are going to be some of the characters in your Larp. (Note: at this stage, it's also perfectly fine to write "3-5 lackeys" under a plot – we'll detail them soon).

When I write Larps, these main plots might take up, say, 50% of the required characters (more if it's a smaller game): the other 50% may not be involved, or (while having a stance on them) may just not be key players. To give other people something to do, you may want to add in some side plots. These are a lot less ground-shaking than the main plots, but are still important. Things like budding romances, long-lasting vendettas, arguments between friends, potential business side-deals...these can all be your side plots, and will all suggest involved parties. For added fun, ensure that people opposed to one another in the main plots are allied in a side plot, and vice versa. (Note: at this stage, I'll still have a bunch of people who are only involved in one plot, or even who aren't involved in any plots. That's OK! We'll iterate and integrate and stuff later.)

At this stage in my process, I have a couple of sheets of paper scrawled with notes. Let's turn this into something useful. Note that this is possibly the most hand-wavey bit of the process for me – you may find these notes super-unhelpful.

Make a folder on your computer (or on Google Drive if you're collaborating) for this Larp, and inside that make a folder labelled Characters. Inside that folder, start making a document for each character. I tend to name my characters as soon as possible: I find it a lot easier to start thinking of someone as a person with goals and motivations when they have a name. Each document should list all the background you have on a character (even if it's just "This guy is involved in this plot").

Now we have an outline of all our characters, it's time to build relationships. Some people you'll be able to draw relationships between, based on plots: if you're involved in an argument with your friend Althea, you're going to have a relationship with them. It's worth adding some more relationships here as well. Who would hang out with whom? Which couple are drinking buddies? Which couple are, well, a couple? Not every relationship needs to be attached to a plot or a goal: people also need to be tied to the group so they feel invested in the game.

And finally, you should give people goals. This bit is slightly optional – a few people I've talked to really want to move away from goal-driven Larps – but goals are a really good way to make sure people have stuff to do (even if you implicitly sprinkle the goals through the character's backstory and relationships rather than just listing them on the sheet). A character with only one goal is probably going to end up bored on the night...

These three steps – of filling in backstory, building relationships, and providing goals – can always work iteratively. What I mean by this is: you can write some backstory, realise there's a relationship there you need to fill in, do that, and on the next character sheet add a goal related to that relationship, continue working on characters, and then on your second sweep suddenly realise that your first character needs a goal or two. Think of it like making a sculpture: every time you pass through the character, you're revealing a little more detail, and exactly which detail you add is informed by your overall knowledge of the Larp as a whole. You don't make a sculpture of a person by doing the arm in exquisite detail, then the face, then the body: you make a sculpture by creating a rough outline, and then slowly filling in the details.

(Note: I don't actually know how you make a sculpture, I just assume it's like this. Please msg me if I have this metaphor wrong.)

At some point, you'll find out that your characters are all sufficiently detailed. There's enough plot to involve people, and everyone has enough backstory to feel detailed and three-dimensional. At that point, I guess you're ready to run! If you're feeling super-organised, you can always run a "test" game, take feedback from that game, and alter the characters for a future game. I have not had a chance to do this yet, and cannot comment on how effective this is. I'll leave this task to others who have done this.

Bonus Round: The Grid:

So, here's another technique you can use to flesh out your characters, and make them more three-dimensional. I'm pretty sure this happens in Nordic Larp a lot, but I can't find any concrete details.

To start this process, you'll first need to create the grid. To do this, identify two or more divisive issues that different people will have different opinions on. These might be:

Purely in-game: e.g. in a game about choosing the next king of the realm, certain characters will be naturally inclined to back a given candidate because they grew up together, or they did them a favour this one time, or similar.

Purely out-of-game: e.g. you, the writer, wish to explore the theme, "anything short of a democracy will gradually drift towards despotism", through your characters.

a combination of the two: e.g. you determine that the realm is currently in massive debt to its neighbours. Characters may take various stances on this issue, based on both idealistic and practical factors.

In some games, you'll only have two issues - that's fine!

Next, you can place existing characters on the grid. If people turn up in the same spot, you get to start asking yourself: "Are these people similar? How do they differ, if they do?" You might have found yourself another issue.

Finally, you can fill the gaps. Where are there big gaps on your grid? Can you put someone in those gaps? Alternatively, can you place new characters so they agree with another character on one axis, but disagree considerably on another? This provides people with non-ideal allies, and should hopefully lead to interesting play.

To join the discussion on LARP writing, and just LARPs in general, join the #larp channel on SAGA Slack <https://sagainc.slack.com/messages/larp>

Handy links and interesting things

Find us online

Our website: <http://saga.org.nz>

Facebook Page: www.facebook.com/sagainc

Trello: <https://trello.com/b/zs9KCAIE/the-saga-bag>

Slack: <https://sagainc.slack.com>

Looking for group

If you want to organise a game or see who is going to be there on a specific evening “SAGA Inc. – Looking for Group” on Facebook is where you want to go. It’s great for organising both one-off games and long term campaigns, as well as grabbing people for larger board games that require some organisation.

Tinyurl.com/z46psz

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