



College of Wizardry: The Magic of Participation in Harry Potter Larps

Edited by Jaakko Stenros and Markus Montola

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Pohjoismaisen roolipelaamisen seura

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Preface

The Nordic larps we usually participate in are often artistic, personal, societally relevant, and deeply meaningful. However, playing is hardly ever as joyous as at *College of Wizardry*. It has been a while since we have had this much fun at a larp.

Markus played Sebastian Dolohov – yes, *those* Dolohovs – a Senior Auror student from House Faust, in the original run of *College of Wizardry* as well as its sequel. Jaakko played Professor Koli Löyly, a teacher of Magical Theory, in the Rerun. We both have a long roleplaying history, starting from tabletop roleplaying games in the late 1980s and expanding to larps in the mid 90s. For over a decade we have also been interested in analyzing, documenting, and researching roleplaying games.

Having ‘fun’ is one of those things that are hard to account for, measure, and make sense of in a scientific sense. Hence it is seldom used in academic literature. Due to its non-specificity and vagueness the term has also been out of vogue as a design goal in Nordic larp. Actually, the detachment and complacency the word implies has lead to ‘fun’ being branded, in jest, “the f-word of Nordic larp”.

Yet there is no better description for what *College of Wizardry* was like: It was fun. It was fun to pretend to be a student or a teacher in a magic school. It was fun to live in the wondrous Czocho castle with its hidden passages, imposing tower, and beautiful surroundings. It was fun to cast imaginary spells, to get caught up in teenage drama and the bickering of the teachers’ lounge, to encounter marvellous creatures, and to fight off monsters. It was fun to inhabit the world of Harry Potter for a weekend. And it was fun to do so with people who have larped for decades – and people who were at their very first larp.

However, even though *College of Wizardry* was a lot of fun, we cannot just leave it at that. Once you put on the scholarly spectacles, you can never really get rid of them. Thus the need for this book.

This book attempts to capture and document some impressions and experi-

ences of the first three runs of the larp. There are about two dozen text pieces here, documenting player journeys, analysing the larp, and opening a window into the lives of the characters through their own words.

Most of these stories are written by the players. With the professors being in charge of their own lectures, and players creating textbooks, alchemy systems, and the CzochaBook social media site, the boundaries between players and game masters were not entirely distinct. Everyone who has contributed to this book is likely to feel a degree of ownership of the game.

The book relates to two traditions. First of all, there are all the books relating to *College of Wizardry*. Three different book artefacts were created for the larps: the people playing faculty members created two textbooks, one for the Premiere and one for the Rerun. For the Sequel the student players compiled a college yearbook. These books were diegetic items, existing as props within the fiction. Our book is about the larp, but unlike the design document created for the larps – itself almost a book – this book does not tell how *College of Wizardry* was supposed to work and how things work out in theory, but about what actually happened and how the players feel about it.

Second, this book is part of the tradition of documenting experiences of certain larps in book form. A decade ago larps were written about, if indeed they were documented at all, perhaps by one or a few people (for example, in the annual Knutepunkt books and later in the *Nordic Larp* book). A few years ago documentary books about single larps started to become common. These books are mostly written by players of the larp and feature numerous voices about a single game (e.g. *The Book of Kapo*, *The Book of Just a Little Lovin'*, *The Book of College of Wizardry 4-6*). They can be considered a way for the players to take charge of their experience. However, documentation books by larp designers and organizers have also developed from reports to more polyphonic books (e.g. *Life under Occupation*). In this tradition, individual texts often do not aim for objective overviews, but for personal accounts and normative statements. A rich picture emerges from reading multiple voices on the same event, although it is good to bear in mind that these kinds of accounts tend to be quite positive towards a larp. People with more critical views tend not spend as much time noting down their experience in article form.

This book is divided into four parts. This introduction is followed by an overview of the three *College of Wizardry* larps, written by the editors. In the second section, *Student Life*, the players of Juniors, Sophomores, and Seniors reflect on their journeys to the larp in Czocha, and on their adventures during play. First Nicolas Hornyak details what it was like to travel from the United States to Poland to participate in the very first *College of Wizardry*. Then Justine Kiermasch tells what it was like to participate in the Rerun as a Potter fan who had missed her owl but decided to conquer her fears about participating in her first larp to get a glimpse of that magic. Ben Morrow then provides an account of his experiences of joining the Sequel without having participated in the Premiere. Lynne Gilberg had been largely absent



*Editor Jaakko Stenros
as Professor Koli Löyly
in the Rerun.*

*Photo by
Christina Molbech*

from the larp world for a long while; this was her first larp in a decade. She tells the story of coming back to a hobby. Juhana Petersson, who participated in both the Sequel and the Rerun, compares the two and finds *College of Wizardry* surprisingly personal.

In the third section, *Embodying Magic*, the practice and design of the larp are discussed. The open and trust-based design is discussed first by Gustav Tegby, reflecting on what it was like to craft a satisfying larp for oneself, and then by Maury Brown and Ben Morrow who debate the merits of the open design. Juhana Petersson tackles the question of how to include Harry Potter in a larp set in the world of *Harry Potter*. Sebastian Svegaard analyses larp as a fan practice. Markus Montola summarizes the player feedback collected through a post-larp survey. The section concludes with two organizer accounts on how *College of Wizardry* came to be, one by Dominik Dembinski, the other by Agata Świstak.

The fourth section, *Ludic Curriculum*, covers teaching at the college. Christopher Sandberg details how he created the Artefactorium and the textbook *Eternal Guide* for the Premiere. Anna Westerling explains how she designed her lessons to create maximum drama. Daniel Sundström offers the student perspective on what it was like to attend the lessons. Mike Pohjola writes about the lessons he gave and the design of the larp in general through the experience as Professor Bombastus Bane in the Premiere and the Sequel. Martina Ryssel explains how she created a new, non-canonical subject of Technomancy for the Rerun.

In addition, the book contains snippets of diegetic material from the larps. Emilie Hall shows select passages of her character diary. Eline Demeyer reveals a devastating letter her character received. The book also features a few original songs written for the larp, contextualized by Rikke Sørensen. Nicole Winchester lets us read an essay her character wrote to the Headmaster as an application for a college Masterclass.

These texts are accompanied by spectacular photographs by Larson Kasper, Christina Molbech, Maciek Nitka, Karolina Staël, and Nadina Wiórkiewicz. The delightful visual surface was created by the players and organizers who had put considerable effort into their props and costuming, but of course the biggest impact was provided by the location itself. Zamek Czocha was very much a character in the larp, and capturing the castle's nooks and crannies as well as its majesty is important in communicating what it was like to be there.

It is our hope that this document captures and communicates at least some of the magic of Czocha College of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Helsinki, May the 10th, 2017

Jaakko Stenros & Markus Montola

◆ Jaakko Stenros & Markus Montola

Design for Co-Creation and Trust

In the *College of Wizardry* larp series, each run portrays three days of magical studies at the Czocha College of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The first three runs of the larp were set in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* world, after which the series was detached from the Potterverse, and a new fictional background was created for it. This book discusses the *Harry Potter* runs of the larp.

Although it was set in the world of *Harry Potter*, *College of Wizardry* was not set in the Hogwarts castle, but in the Polish Czocha college, where select graduates from schools such as Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and the Durmstrang Institute would continue their studies. The larp was set in the present day, more than 15 years after the defeat of Lord Voldemort in the Second Wizarding War.

The larp covered the first days of the academic year, beginning with the students arriving at the college, followed by two school days of lessons and extracurricular activities and culminating in the Opening Ball. The players played students (Juniors, Sophomores, and Seniors), professors, and other staff such as janitors or ghosts. Professors taught Potterresque subjects ranging from Magical Theory to Defence against the Dark Arts and from Magizoology to Potions.

This article provides a general overview of *College of Wizardry*. First, there is the story of the production of the larp. This is followed by a discussion of the design of the larp and how it changed. The chapter concludes with a brief consideration of the legacy of the larp.

The Story So Far

The *College of Wizardry* larp was organized jointly by Polish and Danish non-profits

Liveform and Rollespilsfabrikken. The organizers found each other at the annual Nordic larp conference, Knutpunkt 2014, and announced the larp six days later. When *College of Wizardry* tickets were first released, very little information about the larp was available, aside from the connection to the world of *Harry Potter*, the picturesque but hard-to-access location of Czocha, and the names of the organizers. Nonetheless, the larp sold out in a few days.

This *Premiere* run of *College of Wizardry* was held in November 2014. It brought together not only the Danish and Silesian larp traditions, but players from a dozen countries. By most standards, *College of Wizardry* was a huge success. Most of the players were happy or very happy with the larp, and wanted to return to Czocha for a Sequel. Indeed, *College of Wizardry* dominated many discussions on larp in the following months, sparking debates about larp tourism, the next step in professionalization, cross-cultural larping, and so forth. The larp was particularly praised for creating a believable, enchanting magic school, with working game mechanics for spells. Being beginner friendly, bringing new people – mostly *Potter* fans – to the hobby was also celebrated. There were also critical voices. Some character groups had been sidelined, there were culture clashes relating to expectations of what larp designers are supposed to provide, and there was criticism of larp tourism when it turned out that few local larpers had been able to participate as players due to the high attendance fee.

Interest in the larp was not limited just to the international larp community. Photographs and video went viral online and has appeared in a hundred places, including publications such as *Vice*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Teen Vogue* (Raasted 2015). No larp before had achieved such a level of visibility in the mainstream media. When the tickets to two further *College of Wizardry* larps became available in mid-December, they sold out in 90 seconds and crashed the servers.

Suddenly, it seemed that *College of Wizardry* was starting to operate on a global scale. That brought along challenges few European larps have had to deal with. The world of *Harry Potter* is not only a fun fiction for shared fantasy, but also an extremely valuable intellectual property. Despite their positive attitude towards the project, the IP holder Warner Bros had to ask *College of Wizardry* to drop the connection to *Harry Potter* after the third, already-announced game. After all, *College of Wizardry* was gathering momentum, becoming quite visible in the media and turning into an on-going larp series.

In April 2015 a *Sequel* for the *Premiere* run was held in Czocha, with a majority of the original players returning. This time the larp covered midterms at the college. A week later a *Rerun* of the first game was staged with a new set of players. The design was tweaked, and communication about the proceedings improved, leading to less confusion relating to expectations. Both runs were again overall very successful, demonstrating that the experience was repeatable. At the same time there was some vocal criticism that a major part of the game design was contributed by the players of the professors – without acknowledging them as designers.

The Rerun was the last *College of Wizardry* set in the Potter world; the series now lives on with an original mythos, with half-a-dozen larps played at Czocha every year.

Organizer Design

Discussing the design in connection to *College of Wizardry* is not a simple task. The design-as-experienced in the larps is a sum of design elements created by the organizing team, the characters developed by players, elements developed by players of professors, elements that emerge in play. In addition, design elements traditional to different (mostly Polish and Nordic) larp cultures, were introduced into the larp either intentionally or as a reflex by organisers or by players leaning on their ‘herd competence’ – their basic assumptions about how larps are played. Furthermore, the design changed between the Premiere and the Sequel and before the Rerun.

College of Wizardry, as experienced, was a result of a complex set of design choices. The explicit design created by the organizers concentrates on setting up a coherent enough playground for the different characters. The larp had a 40-page design document that detailed the world (relation to Potter fiction, school, character groups), how to play in that world (rule mechanics as well as preparation and roleplaying tips), and the structure and schedule of both the experience as a whole, and the three school days in particular (off-game timetable with workshops, and a diegetic lecture plan with special events like the sorting to Houses and the opening ball). This document, along with the briefings and workshops held before runtime commenced (tackling creature comforts like food, lodging and safety, as well repeating the basic game mechanics), were the key sources of information on design for the players.

As Czocha was a college-level magical institution, all students were already somewhat established magic users; graduates from Hogwarts and such. Thus, the simple magic system was also very powerful: anyone could pretty much attempt to cast a spell for whatever effect they desired. Just make sure the target of the spell understands what you are trying to do, and create a Rowling-style incantation to go with it. According to the rules, the target of a hex was the person who determines the actual effects of the spell, including whether the spell was successful at all or how long its effects would last. This elegant magic system was created for *College of Wizardry*, but has roots in the Polish tradition.

In magical combat, though, there was an additional restriction: Students could not use a specific spell more than once. In practice, duels became battles of wits over who could remember more spells from Potter books, or come up with their own, typically ending at some point when one of the combatants could not remember any more protective spells.

The organizers also provided quests and other diegetic content in the form of numerous “random encounters” with an assortment of interesting supporting

characters and creatures. There was also the so-called “NPC bunker”, where players could go to and request the organizers to set up various sorts of events. For example, it was possible to order a pregnant cyclops for a lecture, or a pack of werewolves to hunt characters in the forest, or a Dementor attack. There was also an owl mail system, which characters could use to write letters to their families outside the school and even expect replies.

Using these methods to set up scenes or encounters for one’s character required a certain mindset of taking initiative of one’s own experience. *College of Wizardry* was very much designed to be a curate-your-own-larp experience, which the organizers would then support with numerous systems. Perhaps the most extreme of these was the explicit permission for players to change their characters at will if they could not make the larp work otherwise. In theory, if making your larp function required you to decide that your character was a Quidditch prodigy, you were allowed to do that change – although not many players went to extreme lengths with the option.

Furthermore, the organizers sought to design a robust game experience that no player could ruin for others, where all the tools could be used without worrying about damaging the larp as a whole. Indeed, *College of Wizardry* exemplifies *brute force game design* (Fatland & Montola 2015); there was an abundance of plot threads that players could pick and choose from. In practice, not all plots lead anywhere, as only the ones people picked up were elaborated. But since there were so many play opportunities to choose from, most players who threw themselves into it found lots of interesting content to keep them occupied and entertained for the full three days.

As long as the rigid structure provided by the school stayed in place, the larp would happily churn on. Some plotlines fell by the wayside, and occasionally the Czocha College faced a number of simultaneous Potter-style mortal dangers, which meant that the totality of the events at that moment did not always make sense. Even then, the structuring of the story around a school always provided an intact framework. No matter whether you saved the world yesterday; in the fashion typical for the supernatural Young Adult fiction genre, the professors would always expect you to show up for your midterms.

Not only is a school a system that every participant was familiar with (both from Potter and other fictions and from their own experience), but built into it was a structure to help newcomers find their feet. Numerous newbie players requested Junior characters. Juniors were at Czocha for their first day of college; these characters were supposed to be a little lost. Guiding them in practicalities of the school (and larping) happened very organically.

A key ingredient in the robust design was placing a tremendous trust in the players. The combat system was based on trust, coherent character creation was based on trust, introducing new plotlines and NPC encounters was based on trust. *College of Wizardry* was very explicitly very co-creative. This was possible since the larp was not about winning, but about creating and exploring an interesting and



Sorting. Photo by Christina Molbech

meaningful experience. In the Nordic larp tradition there is playing ideal called *play to lose* (see e.g. Fatland & Montola 2015). The idea is to make choices as a character not for what brings a character closer to “winning”, but to abandon goal-orientedness for drama, meaningful interactions, and to create interesting play opportunities around you. Often the most interesting play is characterized by failing spectacularly, hence the name.

There was also a gossip mechanic, partly also built to operate based on trust: player were instructed to pass on any and all gossip they happened on. This was motivated by the notion that gossip creates play, so people can (and should) spread information about themselves and others. Secrets create most dramatic play when they are revealed. Players were trusted to choose the right person and right moment to pass on the gossip for maximum effect.

Connected to the centrality of trust was the idea that all actions and situations were supposed to be opt-in. In the playground of *College of Wizardry* the players should always get to choose when to participate. Lectures were in no way mandatory to the players – the professors might demand presence, and even think up fun-to-play “punishments” for caught truants, but there was no ill effect for players to missing a class. Players were also free to ignore plot elements they were not interested in as long as they respected the experience of others.



Initiation. Photo by Christina Molbeck

Similarly, as schools and school fictions feature bullying and harassment, it was important to include those elements in the larp. However, it was emphasised that such behaviour would have to be opt-in. In the same way the lessons were opt-in, and players were allowed to come up with excuses to skip them if they had better things to do, many exercises during the lessons were also possible to avoid without loss of face.

The policy on gender and sexual orientation of characters was a particularly successful part of this design for inclusion. The college was explicitly defined in the design document as equal to all genders, and likewise queer characters were defined as normal. Character sketches were written in a gender neutral manner and queer play was encouraged. It was still possible to play on sexism and homophobia, but those were defined as clearly aberrant opinions within the world of the fiction.

Afterwards many players were in awe of how well the trust-based larp with minimal rules did work when everyone was co-operating and invested in playing. The flipside of this is that there was very little game master oversight during play. It was always possible to find an organizer if one was needed, but they did not have a presence in most encounters between players. Although it was rare, some players did occasionally abuse the system – or at least use it in a way that was perceived ques-

tionable from the point of view of another player hailing from a different playing culture.

Even though *College of Wizardry* called itself a play to lose larp on its website, it was not so much about playing to lose, but playing together for shared magic. And for the most part it worked wonderfully.

Player-Created Design

The organizers prepared a playground, but it was ultimately the players who populated it with unique characters and filled it with interesting action. All players were given the possibility and responsibility to develop their own characters and social relationships, and to create unique props, student clubs, plotlines, and the such, but some groups, such as the faculty and the prefect students, were actually tasked with creating lessons and other content that was necessary for the larp to function. Much of this can be understood as fairly typical carrying out of diegetic tasks, as normal labour in larp (cf. Jones, Koulu & Torner 2016), but when the preparations crosses over into working out how other players will be able to use the elements a player brings into the larp, it makes sense to start talking about *player-created design*.

Player-created design was most prominent in the Premiere. The first *College of Wizardry* sold out before any kind of a design document existed, and many of the participants were not only veteran players, but veteran larp organizers. Some of the professor players decided to invest significant time and resources into the larp, and as a result a diegetic textbook was written for the students to read, a huge amount of props was created, an alchemy system for brewing potions was created, numerous spells were designed, and so forth.

There was no (clearly communicated) precedent for how the co-creation of the college was supposed to happen between organizers and players of faculty in the Premiere. Each professor was expected to run six hours of lessons for the students, which required lecture planning (based on or inspired by the Harry Potter fiction) and coming up with fiction-appropriate, playable way of conducting the teaching. In effect each professor was game mastering the larp for their class for the duration of the lesson. The larp organizing team and the numerous NPCs supported the professors, for instance providing them with materials to aid teaching. Many examples of game mechanics, metatechniques, and props created by the players for the larps can be discovered from the other articles in this book. Outside the classroom, faculty play consisted of interpersonal relationships, school administration, and assisting students in responding to various simultaneous and often narratively conflicting crises. Since the brute force design of the larp made the last task time-consuming, and the design provided no guidance for how to prioritize between the different duties, it took some experimentation to make faculty play an enjoyable and somewhat coherent experience.

One of the most ambitious player-created projects was the Czochabook, a

Facebook-style social media site in which players could interact as their characters in preparation for the larp itself. For some players the hundreds of hours they spent in the Czochabook became a critical part of the overall experience, while at the same time many players entirely ignored it – as is perhaps typical for internet roleplay surrounding larp.

Criticism and Iteration

Despite the rave reviews *College of Wizardry* has gotten in the player surveys (discussed elsewhere in this book), the design was neither flawless nor to everyone's taste, and it has been criticised both fairly and unfairly. While some issues were sorted out after the Premiere, others remain integral to the vision; even an inclusive larp like *College of Wizardry* is not a good fit for every kind of player and their expectations.

As discussed above, much of the actual content of the larp was created by the players, more so than in typical larps in Poland or the Nordic countries. This turned out to be a double-edged sword. While tapping into player creativity and mutual trust was one of the ingredients that made *College of Wizardry* truly take off, the varying expectations on what parts of the experience were to be produced by organizers lead to significant confusion during the preparation and the early stages of the larp.

The players were expected to contribute quite much to the preparation and structuring of the play experience. The character sketches sent out to players needed to be fleshed out by, for example, creating social connection. The importance of this task was not evident to all players. The school structure did bring quite a bit of institutional social structure (for example being a Senior Auror student in House Faust) that created numerous play opportunities, but recruiting of rivals, boyfriends, or members of secret societies were largely left for the players. To many participants, contacting unfamiliar people to sort out possible friends and adversaries felt new or uncomfortable. The numerous Facebook groups created ahead of the larp helped this task tremendously. Ultimately, the range of larp cultures present among the players would have made it impossible to meet all expectations. While some players had expected a full character with fully mapped out relationships, others were equally surprised that they received any character sketches at all, feeling that these restricted their character creation.

Since the Premiere the communication of the expectations has improved, although differences in larp cultures are exceptionally difficult to change even by addressing them directly. The other changes after the Premiere sharpened the design; for example the dysfunctional janitor characters were cut, the school textbook was integrated into the design properly, more time was allocated for preparatory workshops, and so forth.

The idea of supporting opt-in play also became a stronger guiding principle. For example, the NPC encounters were scaled back after the Premiere, since many

players felt that there were too many events that they felt pressured to participate in. Instead, the impressive creatures became invitations to play that could be declined, while ordering NPCs from the bunker was better integrated by teaching players how to use it.

The Legacy

College of Wizardry started the trend of organizing impressive larps based or inspired by on well-known works in picturesque Polish castles. Simultaneously it is deeply rooted in two larp traditions, Nordic (specifically Danish) larp (Stenros & Montola 2010) and Polish (specifically Silesian) larp (Wicher 2016). Although the larp and its design are brand new, many of the elements used build on more than a decade of work. Of course, since players arrived from all around Europe and North America, they brought in influences from a much wider world of larp.

In addition to the conscious choices made by organizers and players, and the expectations and traditions relating to the local larp cultures the players came from, the experience of *College of Wizardry* was moulded by Harry Potter fandom. A sizeable portion of players had little or no background in larping, but were intimately familiar with the Potterverse. Harry Potter larps have of course been organized since the turn of the millennium in many countries from United States to Finland (cf. Bowman 2015). Although many players had experience of these earlier Potter larps, the organizers were not building on any particular Potter larp tradition.

Larping, at least in the Nordic context, is usually not seen mainly as a fan practice. However, since so many of the players of *College of Wizardry* were not only Potter fans, but involved in (or at least aware of) the fandom, the activities around the larp started to become similar to Potter fandom. For example, the Facebook groups relating to the larps were often filled with links to fan art and memes relating to Potter. The creation of new material for the larp also started to look suspiciously like fan fiction. After some of the larps there was even slash fiction written about certain characters from the larp, just as there is an abundance of slash on canon Potter characters.

The *College of Wizardry* series has inspired quite a bit of discussion. Having been run successfully numerous times and after garnering unprecedented amount of press, the larp was, for a time, *the* larp to talk about. In addition to the numerous newspaper stories, reviews, blog memoirs, and sprawling discussions of social media, the larp has stimulated interesting takes on, for example, larping while queer (Paisley 2016), brute force larp design (Fatland & Montola 2015), and labour in larp (Jones, Koulu & Torner 2016).

The three larps documented in this book were only *the starting point of the College of Wizardry* phenomenon. In addition to the ongoing saga of the de-potterized *College of Wizardry* (Nielsen, Raasted & Sonne 2016; Raasted 2016), an American version of the larp, *New World Magischola*, by Maury Brown and Ben Morrow of the

Learn Larp LLC, was run four times in the summer of 2016 at the historic environment of University of Richmond, Virginia. Rollespilsfabrikken and Liveform are running a German version, *College of Wizardry: Nibelungen*, in Zamek Kliczkow, Poland, in February 2017. In addition to these adult larps, a family version for kids and their parents, *Trylleslottet*, was played in Danish, at Czocho, in October 2015, with more runs planned for the future. Special edition of the larp has been staged in the educational context of Efterskolen Epos, a larp-oriented Danish boarding school, with another planned for Østerskov Efterskole. The series has inspired several spin-offs, for instance the Norwegian *Trolldomsakademiet*, with several others in the works. And the list goes on.

The impact of the original *College of Wizardry* success is not limited to its direct magical descendants. It has also led to creation of other high-end larp productions in Poland by the same production teams, such as the *Downton Abbey*-inspired *Fairweather Manor* series in Zamek Moszna, and the *Vampire: The Masquerade* larp *Convention of Thorns* at Zamek Ksiaz. With several other projects being planned at the time of writing, we are certain to return to Poland soon again.

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College of Wizardry – “The Premiere”

Credits: Agata Świstak, Agnieszka Linka Hawryluk-Boruta, Aleksandra Hedere Ososińska, Charles Bo Nielsen, Claus Raasted, Dracan Dembinski, Dorota Kalina Trojanowska, Freja Gyldenstrøm, Ida Pawłowicz, Mikołaj Wicher, and Szymon Boruta, with an additional staff of over twenty.

Date: November 13-16, 2014

Location: Zamek Czocha, Poland

Length: 4 days with a runtime of 3 days

Players: 138 players, 33 NPC players

Budget: €35,000

Participation Fee: €180 for players, €70 for NPCs

College of Wizardry – “The Sequel” and “The Rerun”

Credits: Agata Świstak, Agnieszka Linka Hawryluk-Boruta, Alexander Tukaj, Aleksandra Hedere Ososińska, Charles Bo Nielsen, Claus Raasted, Dracan Dembinski, Dorota Kalina Trojanowska, Freja Gyldenstrøm, Ida Pawłowicz, Krzysztof Kraus, Mikołaj Wicher, and Szymon Boruta, with an additional staff of over twenty.

Date: April 9-12, 2015 & April 16-19, 2015

Location: Zamek Czocha, Poland

Length: 4 days with a runtime of 3 days

Players: 142 players, 25 NPC players

Budget: €78,400 shared budget for both Sequel and Rerun

Participation Fee: €280

◆ **Emilie Hall**

A Diary of a Junior

These are some diary entries written in-game by Rhiannon Lihs Feiersinger, a Junior Magizoologist in House Faust, during the *College of Wizardry* sequel. They offer an insight into the life of a half-blood student, who kept mostly to herself, who discovered that she is actually a pureblood, gained status and nine cousins, a mother she thought she lost, and a ton of money and power on the pureblood political scene. The entries chosen depict the stormy love story of Rhiannon and her boyfriend Alexander Domejko, the jealousy caused by rumours created by the PPP (the mean girl clique of Czocha) and the importance of her friendship with Jayden Rowan.

<3 <3 <3 Alexander Domejko <3 <3 <3

He's so loving and handsome! Never had I imagined that the tall, shy Healer miracle would fall for me – the fiery dragon! He makes my heart beat so hard, I think it'll jump out of my chest any day now! And when he holds my hand – my stomach is filled with butterflies! This is the man I will one day marry – I think I love him more than anyone! He's saved my life on multiple occasions – I am forever in his debt! But the rumours... I don't know how to handle them... He and Tink really do spend an awful lot of time together... And they do go on trips together... No... I can't believe the PPP – stupid bitches! They'll get what's coming to them! I'll end them! Or maybe just make them feel my pain! Poison! I'll poison them!

The Port

Damn that Jayden Rowan! "Don't become the monster you're chasing, Rhiannon!"



*Alexander Domejko (played by Quest Leite) in the second castle, during the lycan diplomacy mission.
Photo by Christina Molbech.*

I hate him – because he’s right... I just planned to calm my nerves with port wine and a cigarette, before I would go to Francesca and Elva with the poisoned candy I had spent an hour making prior to curfew! But he’s right... If I hurt them, I would probably get expelled or punished and what kind of future would that create for me and Alexander? If I become the monster, will Alexander still love me? Will I be able to handle the consequences of my actions, if I overstep the boundary between good and evil? No, I will not... Good for them that I have Jayden in my life – he has this ability to clear my mind and calm me down. He usually says to me that my eyes burn with dragonfire when I’m angry – I think he was blinded by the sheer flames in my grey eyes that night. His voice was a tad shaky and he exhaled softly when I agreed not to hurt them. He calls me his first passed test. I don’t know what it means – silly Irishman...

I Will Bring Him Back to You

They are actually doing this – they’re throwing themselves to the wolves, literally! Alexander has gone back and forth between me and the group. Kissed me multiple times and promised me to come back. I asked him to take care of himself – and to promise me he’d come back to me! He did. The last thing that happened before they left still makes my stomach turn and my ears ring: Jayden walks over to me, grabs me and hugs me tight, and whispers in my ear : “I will bring him back to you,



*Rhiannon Libs Feiersinger and
Alexander Domejko, at the Czocho
Spring Ball 2015.
Photo by Christina Molbech.*

Rhiannon, even if it costs me my life!” Did he just say that?! Now I can be calm... *or not!* I need my port! Drinking half a bottle while standing on the bridge isn’t at all a danger to my health, nooo... It isn’t cold at all... I’m not crying to the point where I can’t breathe... No, a ton of people haven’t asked me if I’m okay, or offered to bring me inside and help me calm down, only to have their heads nearly torn off by a sobbing dragon...

The Potions cellar is the only place where I can find peace... But maybe there’s a way to resolve this. Maybe I can brew up something to help me calm my nerves... Combining a sleeping potion and a long hours potion – adding Murkwood as a stabilizer – my drunk self and I decide that this is the way to go. Let’s get the brewing on! Double slinging the ingredients into separate cauldrons – I’m a Potions master! This will definitely stabilize my mind – more port in my system, yes ma’am! Down it goes – it’ll work in about 35 minutes, as far as I’ve calculated!

Saved by Love

They’re back! Oh my, I ran so fast towards Alexander, that I slammed my head against his chest! He kisses my tears away and holds me so tight, that it’s hard to

breathe – but he’s home! I realize that Jayden is there too – I feel the urge to slap him across the face, but I don’t – I hug him with all my remaining power and tell him that I’m glad he’s home. He looks relieved – yet again the dragon decided not to devour the phoenix.

I walked with Alexander and Aurore de Mortemart to the second floor of the castle – Alexander needed more booze to handle all the crazy stuff that happened to him during the lycan mission.

I sat down with Aurore and felt my body numbing out... This isn’t supposed to happen. Alexander came back and instantly grabbed my hands. I asked if he was still holding them, because I couldn’t feel it. His look grew stern as I told him that I did something stupid and that I would love him forever. He repeatedly asked me what I had done and what was in the potion – I couldn’t breathe and he had to pull the memory of my brewing out of my head to know what to cure. I heard Aurore pulling out vials and the rest of her healer’s kit, while my eyes started to cover in grey mist. When everything turned black, all I heard was Alexander singing to me and all of a sudden I felt his hands around my heart and lungs – he held my pulse and breathing steady. Aurore must have poured antidote down my throat – I returned to life with a sharp inhale and my body started cramping up. I felt the urge to throw up but I couldn’t... Of course Alexander, being the Healer he is, insisted I puked – as in *Regurgetario*-insisted. Making me puke with magic? Thanks dear, I love you too... But I owe my life to those two – I’ll never be able to repay them!

Spring Ball

Willow had been hyping about my Spring Ball dress ever since we found out we were cousins... Oh dear... That’s a hoop skirt... And a lot of blue fabric... Willow, why is there a fox collar – *with big ass diamonds on it?! Are those high heels?! How do I even move in this crap?! Breathe, Rhiannon, it’s just another test of life. Well, let’s hope I pull this one off! Makeup---* why me?! Oh well, this has to be good enough. I mean, lipstick is almost perfect, eyelashes corrected, and hair sort of cute? Well, time to go find the other Juniors and walk down, all the stairs. Fuck, fuck, fuck... Oh, it looks like I’m floating! Wonder what Alex will think of it. Why are they all gasping and looking at me? Why are they calling me beautiful?

The way you looked at me, when you came up the stairs? That’s everything to me Alexander!

I’ve never felt more beautiful than when you dropped your jaw, told me I was beautiful and kissed me! It made it all worth it!

We walked down all the stairs – I didn’t fall to my death, so yay! Entering the Knights Hall, I’m sure I heard a wave of gasping – but then again, we are a couple that stands out! You, with your tall mountain-man beauty and me in my giant dress! We walked into the row of students and who other than frigging Jayden Rowan stood across from me! He looked at me, so proudly, that I almost burst into tears

while blushing! You held me so tight and after the opening speeches, we went onto the bridge – neither one of us wanted to dance. We just revelled in the company of friends and each other. I love you, Alexander Domejko. I always will!

"The Czegocha library also served as the Artefactorium (in the Premiere and the Sequel), which was a central place for study of arcane texts and items.

Photos by Christina Molbech and Nadina Wiórkiewicz (on the right).





Student Life

◆ **Nicolas Hornyak**

Turning 21 with the World of Harry Potter

If you were to ask me what I thought about Poland, I'd probably note, with reverence, that it's an old place.

It most certainly feels so at least, especially when compared to my homeland, the United States. Our woods and fields still feel rather new – and perhaps truthfully so, as only one country has ever existed there after the colonies. But the lands of Poland have seen multiple states rise and fall. Even today, the shells of buildings barely stand in the countryside, and the air is almost revolutionary despite the millennia which have passed.

It's perfect for witchcraft and wizardry.

I remember when my friend texted me about this larp. Signups had just opened, and she said tickets were selling out like crazy and to grab one before they were gone. My first thought was "Poland? How could I possibly make that happen?"

My second thought was "I turn 21 a week after that. This is a perfect present."

The next few minutes were a blur, if only because I ran clear across a college campus to my room and computer to snag a ticket. The rest of the day was spent in a stupor of "I'm going to Poland in November, and I'm doing so on a whim". I didn't know how to plan the trip by myself, or how I would get there, or even if I possessed the money for plane tickets and hotel rooms. I didn't know what to expect, only that come November, I would explore a 12th century castle and play in the world of Harry Potter the weekend before my twenty-first birthday.





*Nicholas Hornyak alias
Aleksander Zamoyski.
Photo by
Christina Molbeck*

Meet Aleksander Zamoyski. He is nineteen years old and hails from Warsaw. But he is nobody's typical hero. Aleks is a pureblood bully who isn't afraid to call you some sort of mudblood if you so much as don't like *Quidditch*. He's smug and radiates confidence, but only because he's capable of defending himself with a wand and putting a few good shots in you. But his grades are sub-par at best, and he's rude to just about everybody. This doesn't make earning points for his House so easy.

This was my character as written. However, when it came to prepping our characters, we were given incredible leeway. None of the organizers minded if we wanted to overhaul our characters. We only had to run things by them if we wanted items like time-turners, portkeys, and other things which need special attention from the organizers.

I wasn't inclined towards any of this, though. In some true, Nordic manner, I wanted my character to explore a social problem that was and continues to be a hot-button topic in the United States today. The ultimate twist and secret of my character, then? He was a victim of domestic abuse.

I did a lot of research as I crafted the character's history. Aleks inherited a love of *Quidditch* from his father, but didn't think he was good at it. And he couldn't imagine trying to fly on a broomstick again after his father died in a botched Auror mission. Afterwards, it was noted that a muggleborn blew their cover.

That muggleborn cost Aleks a father alone, but afterwards, his mother began to beat him and his little brother. Was it because she was drinking or perhaps out of grief? I never answered that question. But it was inevitable that Aleks developed a fairly decent dislike of mudbloods because of this. (This also made it much easier to roleplay spite and hate.)

In crafting the story, I knew that this larp session was a one-and-done deal. I knew that while I would love to see his secret out, his stories told, and his persona redeemed somehow, Aleksander could also sink even further into his psychological problems, social issues, and perhaps experience enough woe to turn him to the Dark Arts. It was upon this balance that I risked everything, in the hopes that the tale might come around for a happy ending.

The Magic Castle

November rolled around, and I was off to Poland. After over eighteen hours of traveling, the bus finally pulled up to the Czocha castle grounds. I was a little loopy from a lack of rest on the way over. I'd successfully reconvened with fellow Americans on the east side of the Atlantic, and between chattering excitement and much-needed naps, all the larpers were rearing to play.

As evening crept upon us, we saw Czocha for the first time, and I was awed. Pictures can't capture the true magnificence of this castle. But being there in person – and then knowing we'd have free reign to explore – was amazing to the point that when my phone went missing, I couldn't complain. It seemed a small price to pay. I wasn't stressed out or overwhelmed. After all, cell phones aren't quite that common in the world of witchcraft and wizardry, and Aleks wouldn't dare be caught dead with one.

When things really got underway, we started with workshops. Workshops are the Nordic form of the announcements and briefings I see in the United States. In the Premiere, the workshops covered safety terms and made sure everybody knew the game mechanics by teaching them one last time. We learned about casting offensive and defensive spells, as well as the mathematical potions system. We were also given instructions on gossip, whereas any rumor was fair game to blow out of proportion. Finally, we were turned loose until 19:30 and told to report outside the gates for lay on at that time.

I picked up character ties left and right until the beginning of the larp, if only to play a Sophomore better. Despite all my preparations, I felt nervous. I was about to larp with incredible people, but many remained strangers. And there I was in a foreign country, thankful that everyone would speak English during the game.



Zamek Czocha, the Magic Castle. Photo by Christina Molbech

I played in House Faust, which had won the House Cup for the last two years, and whose Seniors wanted a three year streak. Already, the stakes were high as the game began. Nicolas Hornyak was left back in my room. Aleksander Zamoyski was on the loose.

Three Days at the College

“Move,” Aleks ordered. The audacity of this Junior to take a seat that so clearly belonged to House Faust, and on the first night, too! Probably a Mudblood as well. She ought to be set straight.

“W-Why?”

“We’re a family. I sit with the Faust,” Aleks said rudely.

“Well!” she huffed, grabbing her bag. “I guess I know which House I *don’t* want to get into.”

Interesting. Aleks thought as he sat in the empty chair. *Not many Juniors would’ve fought back like that, even if only for a moment.*

“I accidentally said ‘I sit with the Faust’ back there. I think we should make that a thing,” he joked to a nearby housemate, who grinned back. Inside, Aleks was

scheming some.

She doesn't want to go to Faust now, huh? It would be a shame if she was sorted here anyway. She'll regret fighting back for the next three years, then.



Of course, none of this hostility is real, but I'd made a huge choice: I opted to alienate myself from my American friends for the larp. The player of that Junior was Shoshana Kessock, a fellow larper with whom I've roleplayed relationships spanning mentorships and deep-seated friendships. I've also designed games with her guidance and helped run some of hers. Sticking by her would've been a good choice during the larp.

I didn't make that choice. Even better: another American player, Josh Harrison, was right next to her when it happened. A grand first impression indeed! I would later discover that he was a Lockhart, and so I spread nasty rumors of all kinds about his character. Fun indeed, but risky. To keep playing now, I would have to throw myself to the strange hands of larpers hailing from all around the world.

With that, I ate dinner and headed to my House's common room. Classes started tomorrow.



It'd been an irritating day. First day of classes always made Aleks feel like an idiot. He always did better in the heat of an encounter. Fortunately, his classes this semester included physical education and physical defense. But every morning, there would be Defence Against the Dark Arts and Potions before lunch.

It wasn't shaping up to be all that pleasant of a start, of course. He got House Faust points in D.A.D.A., but Potions had gone horribly wrong. Their potion turned a bloody red, rather than the deep blue elixir they were trying to make. They were sure to get a bad grade, and Aleks sulked about it quite a bit.

Physical Education was the harshest blow, though. Because of the no-fly zone due to the werewolf threat in nearby Germany, they couldn't even play *Quidditch*! Now they were stuck on the ground. And of all the things they could do, the muggles had come up with *muggle Quidditch*! Aleks wanted to puke.

This is so awkward. He held the broom between his legs, and not a twinge of flight shuddered through him. Completely disenchanted.

Professor Steinberg coached them through drills, and the entire time, that famous seeker was watching. Apparently, he was scouting for the Polish National Team. But Aleks thought he had no talent whatsoever, and he certainly wasn't good at this. Wasn't much good at anything.

And then he was a beater for a game. More than once, he hit the opposing chaser with a bludger, allowing Link, his roommate, to swoop in. A couple of times,



A Quidditch match starting. Due to the werewolf situation in Germany, a no-fly zone was imposed on Czocha, so the students had to practice by foot. Photo by Christina Mollbech

he even scored off the steal. Link was an incredible chaser to say the least, and Aleks was pretty happy to cheer him on.

The shock came after, when Link said that Aleks wasn't so bad himself. Then the seeker said there was a lot—a lot—of potential talent at Czocha. And Aleks could've sworn those eyes were on him as he announced tryouts later that day.

Am I actually good at something besides fighting?



Aleks couldn't believe his eyes, so he asked the question. "What are you?"

He stood alone in the Forbidden Forest just outside the college, save for a magical creature with goat legs and ram horns. "I'm a satyr."

Of course you are. Aleks thought, trying to ignore the thoughts of sexual deviancy satyrs were known for. He glanced around and spotted Link coming through the castle gate. With him was Maryla, a Mudblood-turned-tolerated-friend-and-rival. *Act natural.*

Eventually, their cautious conversation around the fawn turned to the rumor of the golden snitch. Apparently, Czocha was missing theirs after it flew off into the Forbidden Forest. The three of them knew that finding it would be a long shot, but it was worth points, and they had nothing better to do on their break. So they hoofed it down the stairs and roamed the woods for a while.

Of course, they didn't find it. But when they returned to the woods near the gate, the satyr had moved on, and in his place were two dryads. Or rather, one dryad



*A poor house-elf as a
guinea-pig.
Photo by
Christina Molbeck*

and one half-dryad. Because the latter was not only clearly half-human: he was half-Faust, and apparently died on the same day house ghost Corvus did...



“Ah, you’re just in time! For *three points from Faust, one from Libussa, and one from Molin!*”

Are you fucking kidding me? Aleks thought as he arrived with the other late students. He’d been on time in the cellar where the class was supposed to take place! And then when the professor didn’t show up, they’d gone searching. A good load *that* did them! Aleks sat at the end of the benches in a huff. *Herbology sucks.*



"Come and dance with us," lure the elves. Photo by Christina Molbeck

He fumed all the way through re-potting a stinky plant and into the Forbidden Forest, where the professor fed his house-elf something poisonous and told them to find dittany to cure it. The house-elf's cries of "Please hurry" were pitiful. It may have cost House Faust points the night before, but it was a magical creature, and for that, Aleks abhorred Professor Radek for the treatment.

And again, he told himself he wasn't good at anything. Nobody found any dittany; it'd all been plucked. Poor house-elf. Hell, poor Aleks. Tryouts were almost upon them, and he doubted himself again...



Quidditch tryouts went better than he thought they would. For all it mattered, Aleks could be deadly accurate with bludgers.

But that wasn't what sent him reeling. What got to him was that for the first time in ages, he thought he might be good at something else. Something new. And perhaps he could try becoming a *Quidditch* player instead of an Auror. After all, the Ministry of Magic faced numerous problems with the latest scares of the Dark Arts. Families uprooted and imprisoned for their relatives, priceless artifacts destroyed left and right—he didn't want to become an Auror who did things like that.

Something concerned him more at the moment, however. Far below the bridges into the castle, three elves danced around in the nighttime fog, and Aleks was horrified to discover somebody with them, clearly enchanted. If only that man hadn't been Link.

"Link!" Aleks called down.

"Oh, hey Aleks," he replied, his voice higher than normal as he slurred. "Come dance."

Aleks growled and started down the stairs behind him. He never made it all the way down; Link met him there, but so did an elf. Aleks drew his wand.

"Stay back!" he ordered, pointing it. "Link, come with me."

"Come and dance," one of the elves called out melodically.

"No! Later! But Link, I need you right now," Aleks lied.

"I want to dance..."

"Link, I'll let you dance in a moment, but I need to talk to you! Alone!"

"Come dance with us."

"Later!" Aleks shouted back. "Link, come with me!"

It took some coaxing, but Aleks finally managed to lead Link back up the steps where, of all people, Professor Crumplebottom, former staff speaker, was waiting.

"What's going on here?" she asked, Irish accent thick on her throat.

"I'm just helping my friend. Hold on," Aleks replied as he emerged into the light, turned, and pointed his wand through the doorway. "*Finite incantatem!*"

A moment passed. Then: "What happened?"

"Elves, m'boy," the professor replied.

"Oh."

Then Aleks started laughing. "They got you good, didn't they?"

"Shut up!"

"Anyway, leave them alone," Professor Crumplebottom said. "And if they become a problem? *Disperseo* should do it."



*Professor Radek and the
half-dryad
in the herbology class.
Photo by
Nadine Wiórkiewicz*



The next day wasn't good. At all. Every time it seemed to be getting better, it got worse. D.A.D.A. was boring, House Durentius sabotaged his potion in Potions class, and Physical Education...well, that was alright. He spelled two witches trying to evade him in an exercise, although he couldn't hit Link when he tried. But the first real tragedy came from *Quidditch* tryouts on break. Aleks was terrified about the haiku they'd all been asked to write up because his was so personal. Link practically shoved him forward when his name was called. And then, in seventeen syllables, he confessed his dead father loved *Quidditch* and now his mother beat him. He left in tears.

He didn't want to think after that. Just finish the day. Finish the day without

further incident. There was a ball tonight. He'd gotten a date. He only needed to make it that far.

And then Herbology. That damned Professor Radek brought the half-dryad in.

Damian used to be human, but then he tried to absorb a dryad, and thus nature, in order to become more powerful. The dryads cursed him for the attempt, and so he lived like one for 150 years.

Throughout the class, the Sophomores and even some curious professors debated what to do. They talked about putting him out of his misery. They wondered if Damian's soul could survive a transfer. And eventually, it came down to their attempt; they attached the sapling of a magical plant to his bark, and considered spells which might drive Damian's spirit into the sprout. Then, Aleks remembered the spell Professor Crumplebottom taught him. So when he brought it up, of course he was asked to cast it before the class.

He did so, hesitantly. He hoped it would save Damian. But it killed him instead...



"Professor?"

"Yes?" he replied as the class walked away from the now-glowing sapling they planted in the Forbidden Forest, in memory of the half-dryad named Damian.

"Did I kill him?"

"Well, no. I think he was dead before this."

"But was it the right thing? Casting that spell?"

Aleks barely listened after that. He earned another point for the feat, but it stung more than anything. A point for a life, and he even forced a smile about it. Pathetic. He really wasn't good at anything but fighting, and now, killing.

Except...maybe Quidditch is the way out.

Please let it be the way out...



Aleks wasn't entirely sure how things had escalated to this, but he knew exactly how he'd gotten himself into this, and it was because of House points. It'd all started when he'd spotted his D.A.D.A. professor on the warpath, headed to the fields on the castle grounds. Aleks asked if he could help, and Professor Glossop didn't necessarily reply in the affirmative, but he doubted that following at a distance for a bit would cost him points.

But when he spotted three students and his roommate stumble off some stairs ahead, somebody called out words that sparked terror in his heart.

Death Eater.



Fighting a dementor. Photo by Nadina Wiórkiewicz.

Aleks hoped it wasn't true. That it was a mistake. But just because You-Know-Who had been defeated sixteen years ago didn't mean dark wizards and witches had disappeared.

The situation spiraled out into a soft chaos. Professor Glossop led Aleks and Link into the fields. On the other side, four lanterns surrounded a giant rune of unknown purpose. Between it and them stood a masked man – clearly a Death Eater. And as the professor exchanged words with the man and ordered him to leave the college grounds, he insisted he was welcome, and even if he wasn't, none of them could stop him. Aleks didn't believe him, but he knew better than to utter a single incantation until Glossop did.

A lot of people might die. Aleks thought, glancing at the lit windows and walls of Czocha Castle. He gladly obeyed when the professor ordered him and Link back. Aleks retreated a fair distance before noticing that his roommate barely moved.

Come on, Link! Aleks thought angrily. Surely, his roommate couldn't be so stupid as to stick around and not get help with him.

"Confundo," he heard the whisper and glanced at the man hiding against the nearby wall.

Son of a... and Aleks was gone, steadily swaying in place, his thoughts as abstract and absent as any person bewitched. *Centaurs? Where did that come from?*

"Stupefy," Aleks felt the blow more than he registered the spell, and he crumpled into a heap of robes in the brush. When he came to, a Death Eater was kneel-

ing over him, and he dared not move against the wand brushing his chest.

There was more than one Death Eater...



Aleks ran for his life. They might have gotten him earlier, but something came for them all. At first, he thought it was a werewolf when they heard it and his captors ordered him to hide. As the creature attacked the female Death Eater, a squad of Aurors engaged from across the field.

“*Stupefy!*” he screamed as he approached, intending to handle the werewolf and then the Death Eater for a better escape. Only then did he feel the temperature drop and ice run through his blood.

A Dementor! Aleks thought before making a break for it, wand in hand. *Please no one hit me!*

“*Avada kedavra!*”

Holy shit! That was too close!

Aleks almost screamed, but training and instinct kicked in. He put on more speed as he approached the battle lines. Professors and Auror students were in sight.

He saw the ledge of the rock wall. He jumped and flew over, tumbling into the small path and ducking to avoid even more spells. He was safe again!

But soon enough, as the battle died down, he looked at his hand and noted the damage to his wand. He would have to borrow a spare wand until his was repaired, and those tended to be finicky in his hands...



Aleks stood on the dance floor, and Bea held his arm as that seeker announced the names of those who’d made the team.

When he finished, Aleks cheered for the Faust housemate who had made captain. He, however, hadn’t made the cut. He really wasn’t good at anything but fighting and killing.

The pain hit as he danced the Czocha Polka and waltzed with his date. It burned slowly, and he ached for freedom, for release—there was so much buried in him, but none came out. He was so strong, but so weak to not speak the words that mattered. For a while, it seemed a miracle to even survive the night. It really felt like his last celebration.

Then, Corvus called him over as he took a break. “Aleks? I have someone to introduce to you.”

The house ghost motioned to a ghost the boy had never seen before. “I would like you to meet Damian.”

Aleks almost couldn’t believe it. He hadn’t killed Damian. He’d brought him back!

He cried on the spot. He'd helped give life, and that made all the difference.



After that, it all went to hell.

Aleks stood behind Link, wand outstretched at a bearded man before them. Link said he'd defend them if Aleks threw every offensive spell in the book at this shade of Grindelwald. He nodded, but feared the worst.

And yet, there were a *lot* of students, professors, and even a couple of honest-to-God Aurors who stood against Grindelwald in the Forbidden Forest. Some students might have resurrected him, but they would fight him back into the ground. Even if it meant dying.

"Alright! Enough! Are we just going to stand here, or are we going to kill this *fucker*?" Caitlin the Auror yelled. Aleks smiled at that and raised his borrowed wand, adding his Blasting Curse to the rest. *Surely, he won't survive this.*

A second later, he froze in terror. Grindelwald lived, and began to stalk their way.

"*Protego!*" Link shouted.

"*Stupefy!*" Aleks screamed as the dark wizard advanced.

Suddenly, Link dropped, and Grindelwald skulked over his form. Aleks stumbled back in his dress robes.

"No! Get back! *Reducto!*" Aleks screamed. Grindelwald glided to the left and started tossing curses at the Sophomore.

This is it. I'm going to die.

And then he felt a little tingle through his arm. Some odd connection newly forged, as if...

The wand is a match! Aleks thought. This wand belongs to me!

"*Protego!*" he screamed against a purple curse. The Shield Charm blocked it as Grindelwald started casting a widespread spell.

Oh no you don't! Aleks thought. "*Protego horribilis!*"

I need help! He realized as another curse flew from the dark wizard. "*Protego Totalum!*"

Then, and only then, did other witches and wizards join the fray, tossing in as many spells as they could.

Together.

"*Expulso!*" Aleks added, and Grindelwald crumpled against the bombardment. All fell silent through the forest.

A moment later, he stumbled over to Link's form. "Link? Link, no!"

He knelt down besides his roommate, putting his head to his chest and listening for a heartbeat. "Link? Please, Link, you can't die..."

And then he heard it. It was faint, but it was there. He could make it! He just might make it!

“I need a Healer!” Aleks screamed in the flurry of excitement – joyous or hopeful at the defeat as frantic Healers searched for the wounded.

They were alive. They really were alive.

After the Larp

All things, even wonderful things, must come to an end. The Premiere ended with House Faust winning the first House Cup of the school year. By then, I was content to drop the act and meet everybody’s players. The game was called, and throughout the castle, we partied into the night.

The first thing I did was find my American friends and offer them hugs from me, as opposed to insults from Aleks. We grinned, we cleared the slate without a second thought, and got to talking with everyone else.

Our new community embraced us with open arms. My best friend hailed from Slovakia, and my date lived in Finland. Some other new friends asked us where we lived, and when we said New York, we were immensely flattered to hear that they thought we were Danish. After all, it’s not every day you’re compared to what you consider the larp heroes of the world.

At some point in the night, though, I stepped outside with a drink, searching for the chilly air of the Polish countryside. Our little castle still seemed tucked away in a little, magical corner of the world, and I never wanted to forget the feeling. So I leaned against that bridge alone, thinking about how Aleks somehow found love and redemption through the tears I cried for him. In a way, I owed him a lot. I was never popular in high school; I didn’t even have a date to my Senior prom. But he moved me to grow again and taught me how to hope. He reminded me of the worthwhile costs of friendship and love. Perhaps that is the true magic of Harry Potter. Without a doubt, those are lessons I will treasure forever.

Sometimes, though, you start to think about how you ended up at the *College of Wizardry* in Poland. You remember taking a chance on larp in college with a few friends from high school. You recall that it took months before you were larping regularly, and even longer before you found other larps to play. Nearly three years later, you’ve traveled to Europe just to play pretend and renewed your youth as a magical teenager who got the girl, saved the day, and somehow made up for his sins along the way.

Age 21 is an important milestone in the United States, because three years after you’re allowed to vote, you’re allowed to drink, and that’s when you’re really an adult. In that moment, on the bridge at Czocho, I think I’m ready to turn 21.

◆ Justine Kiermasch

First Time Larper Experience

Ever since I was a child, I have had an interest in larps as well as most things connected to roleplay. I was always a very imaginative child, played in the woods, pretending to be someone from *Sailor Moon*, *Power Rangers*, or *Transformers*. I loved, and still love roleplay and adventure video games, I played text-based RPGs, and tabletop roleplaying games. So why did I wait until I turned 28 to participate in my very first larps?

The larps in my area never appealed to me. It is not really because of the settings, but more about the game mechanics. I do not think I would enjoy sitting in the woods, living in a tent, and hitting someone with a fake sword while yelling out my skill levels, or simply waiting for something to happen while drinking beer. I do not know if there are larps that really work this way, but this is how I imagined them. Even when playing tabletop, I tried to avoid rules and points.

More importantly, I was a coward. Larpers always seemed like an elitist group of geeks in more or less awesome costumes. I was afraid that they were thinking something like: If you are a noob then do not you dare to show up and destroy our play with your noobish ways of playing or thinking, and if you don't know a 300-page rulebook by heart, do not even bother to try.

It came to pass that in October 2014 an article about the *College of Wizardry* premiere appeared on my Facebook wall. I watched the trailer and instantly was like “OMGOMGOMG this is the best thing ever! I need to go there!” I never received my Hogwarts letter in real life (that damn owl for sure went missing), but now was the chance to fix this. I watched all the trailers and documentaries, read the design document, and without considering my cowardice, that this larps was in English, that I'd have to get to Poland on my own all alone, and that it was my first larps ever with

people I had never met before, I decided that I needed to be a part of this. That this was magical, like a dream coming true. I simply *had* to do it.

The tickets sold out in a heartbeat, but somehow I was lucky enough to get one. It was an intense moment: I jumped on my bed like a little child that just had learned about being accepted into Hogwarts. That is what it felt like.

At first I was scared and excited. This was to be a real adventure in my basic everyday real life. I had gone skydiving just some months before, so this should have been no big deal – but this larping thing scared me more than jumping out of an airplane. In fact, I was afraid of everything about this situation: Afraid of the people who seemed to have had started larping before they even started walking, afraid of not being accepted as a newbie, afraid of doing something wrong, afraid of finding no-one who would want to play with me, afraid of having a lousy costume. I was even afraid of asking too many questions.

All these fears turned out to be unfounded.

Larp is a group effort. You have to collaborate to create something beautiful, and that at least was something I was not afraid to do. I was up for putting work into this and – here is the thing – so was everybody else! As soon as I started reaching out to people before the larp, interacting with them on CzochoaBook and Facebook, they also started reaching out to me. It was not easy at all to ask someone you never met to be a relation. “Hey, I just met you, and this is crazy, but be my best friend... maybe?” This was strange, scary and awkward, but also gave me a lot of confidence as everybody I approached appreciated the effort and were kind and awesome. They talked with me about larping in general and tried to help me with my insecurities. They gave me a lot of helpful advice and with this amazing support I soon felt comfortable. Moreover, when someone asked me for a relation, I understood that it is not awkward or strange to do that. On the contrary, I was excited and happy about it, and felt honoured to be someone people wanted to play with.

What followed was a crazy and awesome time. I think I had nearly as much fun preparing for the larp as actually playing it. I even managed to make some props on my own – something which I can recommend to everyone else. Because the feeling of “I can’t do this” is just something inside your head. Having a prewritten character with a short description of the person, notes on a possible light and dark side, a lot of suggestions for relations, and ideas about what to do and questions to ask yourself in preparing the character, was also something I surprisingly liked very much. It gives you a direction, and an idea, and it helps you not to get lost. However, it is also just something to build on – and that is exactly what I did. Soon my character Freya became real. I could hear her thoughts inside my head; feel her anger, excitement, and all the other emotions.

Freya was ready. But what about me? Facebooking with strangers on the internet is one thing, but it is something completely different to meet strangers. I am glad I was able to meet some players in Berlin some days before the larp. I could do the last preparations, and share a beer in a bar. Otherwise, it would have felt like being

thrown in at the deep end of the pool.

When we were waiting for the bus that would take us to Czocha it started to feel real. Or maybe unreal. All these people I just knew from pictures started showing up. There were happy, smiling faces everywhere as everyone was excited. A lot of people greeted me, even hugged me. It was like meeting old friends, not like meeting strangers. I have to admit I was still afraid of approaching some people on my own, but this faded soon. I felt good, I felt excited. And I was so thrilled when people started to recognize me. “Hey Freya!” they called from every direction. This was amazing. When we finally reached the castle, I felt euphoric. It was real. It was really happening!

Yet I *still* did not feel like I could pull this off. Not even after I changed into my character’s clothes, got Freya’s wand and cloak. Suddenly I thought about all my friends from home and what they had said. “This sounds awesome, but I don’t think I could do that.” Would I be able to do this? Standing there with my friends from House Sendivogius and waiting for the larp to start I was about to find out. What if it does not feel natural? What if I sound like an idiot? I definitely sound like an idiot if I try to pretend to be someone else in front of a mirror. Sometimes I even sound like an idiot while being myself! I still was not Freya Jónsdóttir – the charismatic, bold, adventurous, and fun witch from Iceland, Quidditch captain, a troublemaker soon to be an Auror. I was my nervous, over-excited, and anxious self, trying to find a way into character.

The game started. We were standing in a courtyard outside the castle. The House Faust began shouting their slogan as everyone started to walk towards the castle. I still had no clue what was going on. And then, spontaneously, I shouted “Rise Phoenix, rise!” the battle cry of Sendivogius we had agreed on before the larp. It felt like the right thing to do, and it was: It was not me shouting it but my character. And then something unexpected yet totally fitting happened: the House repeated my shout. This was it; the world changed. I was not Justine anymore, now I was Freya. As I continued to lead my House in the cheering with each shouts the ‘real’ world faded away.

If my friends now ask me what larp is about, I do not have a short answer to it. I could simply talk about it for hours, because it is not just a simple hobby. You cannot fully compare it to acting, because it is so much more. It is one of those things you have to try on your own, to learn how it feels and what it can give to you. But more importantly: I cannot agree with my friends who tell me they could never try larping because they would not be able to pretend to be someone else. Sure, it can be intimidating at first, but so can every adventure. It is not something you can fail at, if you are just willing to try it. It never felt strange for me at all. I never had to think about what my character would do, because I was willing to let this world into my head and become a part of the fiction. It feels natural, because everyone is agreeing on being in this world and following the same rules. There is no one there to laugh at you, since everyone is in it. You are safe to be whoever you want to be.

For the following three days, I was a Sophomore student in a magical world. It was an adventure and great fun for me. It became a story about friendship and betrayal, love and hate, wrong and right. It was a beautiful piece of art. Freya did not have a good time in the end, and there was no happy end for her. Nevertheless, it was a pretty intense and awesome story. Indeed, it was one of the best experiences of my whole life, an adventure where I not only became a witch, but fought Inferi, Dementors, and an ancient monster. I was a student at a wizardry college, saw minotaurs and dragons, had fun with my friends. I broke rules, became part of secret societies, tried to fight evil, all the while being also a silly teenager. I lived my dream.

While being a part of an amazing larp I not only had a great experience, I learned the world is not that bad of a place, and that there are still kind and awesome people. I also learned that you can get very attached to people you just know for about three days and miss them like hell.

I learned about myself. I do not need to be afraid of trying new things. There is no need to be afraid. There is magic in this world, you just have to open your eyes. Stretch out your hand and there will be other hands reaching out to you.

◆ Ben Morrow

Discovering Peripheral Opportunities for Play

Among your responsibilities as a player in *College of Wizardry* was to create your character relationships in collaboration with the other players. Since I was playing for the first time in the Sequel run, I knew that I had a particularly challenging task of inserting my character in previously created stories.

My character was the same House and year as the one player from the United States that I knew previously, who had helped me put together my character concept and history. So, when I had received my character documents, I immediately began to plead and pester the players who had made themselves available on the Facebook group of the Premiere run. I needed them to not only open up their created histories to me, but also to trust me. Sight unseen, they were inviting a complete stranger to become a part of their game experience. For all they knew I could have been a huge asshole with an abrasive personality, whose presence would only detract from their enjoyment. Were I in their position, I would have felt fairly cautious, almost reluctant, to immediately include a complete unknown in close proximity to my character.

However, I was welcomed with real enthusiasm. Not as a tolerated presence, but as a long lost friend who came to a party six months late. The warmth of that welcome was exceptional, and made reaching out to ask to be part of folks' stories incredibly easy. I was both awed and humbled by it, since if I was being honest, I'm not sure I would have done the same for someone in my position. That in mind, I was determined to try to generate memorable play for those people who had made me feel so included. I wanted to reward them for helping me, make their investment



The author attending herbology class. Photo by Christina Molbeck.

in me and my character pay off, give something back for the great gift that I had been given.

Imagine my surprise when I didn't have a single class in common with any of the people I had worked with to form history, friendships, and rivalries with over Facebook. It was an easy mistake to make: The group that was active over Facebook and over the diegetic social network Czochabook was significantly smaller than the actual player population of the game. I didn't have a real grasp of just how many people were at Czocha for *College of Wizardry*. I knew the number, but only as an abstraction, not in regard to what it actually meant: that they were players that I would seldom even see, let alone have the time between classes and activities to have a conversation with. How was I going to bring the amazing game experience I had quietly promised to these new friends?

As is often the case in a larp, the problem itself becomes its own solution. I had history with characters that I would not get to interact with. There was one rather obvious and simple way to bring that history into the game: to talk about that history to anybody that would listen.

In spite of the approximately 130 participants making the game too large to interact with those players, it seemed very possible that what I could say about those players' characters to other players could find a way to the right ears. And if it didn't,

it was still plausibly interesting conversation with the people who were accessible around me, so I had nothing to lose by trying.

My first impression that it had worked was when someone who I hadn't talked to about it, confronted me with what they had heard, an almost word for word recitation of what I'd said myself. These messages that I was sending across the word-of-mouth-social-network were being noticed and heard. I was delighted. I had to do more.

It might be a common weakness while playing in a larp to become excessively self-interested, to put all one's focus and attention on one's own experience or performance. This doesn't seem very surprising to me, mostly because a great deal of time and energy is put into crafting a character, creating a costume, making choices regarding how to behave and perform. I can admit to doing this myself. The experience of actively driving interesting gameplay towards other players felt very different though, and as I contemplated it, it occurred to me that directly interacting with other players was a tiny bit stressful for me, likely from performance anxiety, and that this peripheral interaction did not carry that same level of stress. The gameplay that I was trying to create by talking about other characters was opt-in: easily ignored if it was not of interest, easily taken up by any individual player who was intrigued enough to listen, and interested enough to comment on it to someone else. It was immensely satisfying, so I wanted to do more.

When some new characters were introduced into the game on the second night of gameplay, I took particular interest in a guidance counselor and also a published author. I had no history with this character – to my knowledge game masters had dropped the character into the game spontaneously – but it occurred to me that if he had several books in our diegetic world, I could probably take some creative liberties with my character's opinions about the books and their contents. As I began telling this story, it occurred to me that I didn't need an in depth history with a player to potentially drive play towards them. I could invent, falsify, and outright lie, and any of those things could potentially bring a curious player towards interacting with the character referenced by my narrative. When players revealed an issue of internal strife, I tailored my endorsement of the counselor to their level of skepticism. Players seeking help earnestly were given a full endorsement with a touch of skepticism for believability, "This man's books were phenomenal, and you can trust him. At least the early ones. The later ones may have merely been to sell more books. But his skills are genuinely that good and I'm sure he can help you." Players who appeared reluctant to see the counselor were given a more cynical endorsement, "This man's books were very interesting, but I'm not sure if his claims can be believed. I'd suggest going to see him to find out for yourself actually if he's fraud or not." In one spectacular case, where a player asked for an expert Healer to do something entirely unethical, I endorsed the counselor as greed-driven author who appeared to have no scruples at all, and that he'd likely perform the unethical act if the player made the case that he'd have a book to write about it.

It then occurred to me that I didn't have to make any declarative statements at all about a character, I could merely ask questions which could themselves spark curiosity. Who was that? What are they like? What do they want? It seemed to me that by engaging in peripheral play, it wasn't actually that significant what I had to say about a character. What seemed to matter was that I was demonstrably focusing attention away from myself, and pointing that attention to another player.

In spite of the great fun that I had with this, it appeared that I had only two distinctly verifiable successes at the game's end, when players talked to me about their experiences. One was from the counselor's player, who noted that while we didn't play much together, just one brief conversation descending the main stairs, I had driven a lot of gameplay to him when his visitors mentioned they had come to see him at my suggestion.

The other confirmation came from my rival who was also kind enough to report back to me after game's end. During the game, as people told her sympathetically that they'd learned what kind of bully I'd been to her character at a previous school, she grew more and more anxious of our eventual confrontation. My presence in the periphery of her gameplay created a sinister, stalking vibe. She was quite surprised when I finally spoke directly to her, in order to apologize for our regrettable history. It appeared that the fact that I wanted to make amends was not part of the message that other players shared with her. I feel this unintended development was far better than any that I could have planned myself, and how it emerged by letting the story of the rivalry be told by those characters who were interested enough in it to repeat it to each other.

With that in mind, I feel that discovering the gameplay opportunities that were available to me in other player's periphery was part of what made my *College of Wizardry* experience so incredible. I consider two verifiable cases where it worked to be an overall success. I believe that the peripheral play doesn't itself need to be so significant or memorable to the others that were involved in it, it just has to contribute enough to improve their overall experience. Finally, I feel strongly that creating this indirect play alleviated a lot of my own performance anxiety, and that alleviation of stress meant I could be a better player for others to also interact with directly.

◆ Lynne Gilberg

Return to Larp

I was in awe when I saw the pictures and heard the tales of the original run of *College of Wizardry*. Aside the odd blackbox scenario here and there, I had been happily away from the larp scene for more than ten years. However, those pictures made me insanely jealous. This larp seemed all new, it looked like the dreams I had about larping back in the late 90s. I could almost taste the atmosphere. I tried to convince myself that it was all hype, but I knew better.

As rumours started spreading about a second run my jealousy flared up again, for I did not think I could participate in it. It was too expensive, it was too far away, I had not played for so long, I had never been away from my children for that long, I would never get a ticket anyway... The list of obstacles seemed endless. My husband thought otherwise though, and told me to at least try to get ticket.

Months later, I sat staring at my computer. The ticket purchase had gone through. I could not believe it. Seconds later I found out that two old larper friends had also scored tickets. There was much rejoicing, but soon reality of the situation descended on me: I was actually doing this and I did not have any equipment at all. I had swept my closets clean of all larp gear years ago. The last time I had played anything this long, it was completely acceptable to wear the same costume the whole larp, and no one would lift an eyebrow even if it was made of velveteen. I knew that this was no longer the case. My own fashion sense had also evolved since then – along with my need for comfortable bedding and other such comforts.

Doubts began. Had I truly grown apart from larp? Would I even be able to take on a character again? I remembered being quite good at that in my late teens, but I knew that the larp scene had changed quite extensively since then. What would I do and would I fit in?

Playing to Lose

Then my character arrived – and it was horrible. To boil it down, I was to play Clarissa, in essence Sandy from *Grease*, just without Danny. Luckily, the instruction was that you could change the character as much as you wanted, as long as you stuck to the basic identifiers of the character (House, name, year). So I tossed “Sandy”, and wrote my own. I went into writing mode and got creative. This process made my insecurities fade away. Creating my character and talking it over with my friends got me really excited about larping again.

I did not have a whole lot of time for the preparation though, and I also needed to read up the extensive background material. Thus, I decided to make Clarissa really quite stupid as I thought that would be fun to play. I would not spend time trying to ‘win’ the game but aim at creating fun and intense play around my character’s weaknesses. She would be obvious, but also fun and caring and fiercely loyal to her friends. She had depths too. She was a lonely child with old and wealthy parents. As she was easily bored, she had started experimenting with drugs, and had developed an addiction to a potion she made with a friend and a Potions professor.

As Clarissa, at least as she was at the beginning of *College of Wizardry*, was taking shape, I was excited. Not just to attend *College of Wizardry*, but to attend as her, to play this very role. I had started feeling for her in a way that I had not imagined possible.

Under My Skin

As a player I had not changed that much. A decade had passed, but I still avoided combat, both physical and magical. I only cast one spell during the four days and it did not even work. Very much like when I played a witch in 1998, and my only spell cast was to charm a person who was immune to magic.

However, in the decade that had passed, I had forgotten something about larp and myself. It struck me on the first night at the castle, as I was trying to fall asleep. I had forgotten how much I merge with my character, what it feels like when a character gets under my skin. The sensation was both thrilling and heart-breaking. Thrilling, because I loved having all of these feelings boiling inside my body, and heart-breaking because, as it turned out, Clarissa lost her one true love. The larp for me progressed into a love story. It was not what I had planned at all, but during the first day playing, Clarissa fell madly in love with an old boyfriend, that she had tossed aside. He did not want her back and Clarissa, though she was filled with flaws, did not want to use magic to get him back. This meant that she had to watch him go to the Great Ball with another. This sent me into the next turmoil of contradicting feelings. At home I was happily married adult; here I was a clueless lovesick teenager. I had a hard time keeping the two separate.

When I returned home after the larp, I had to read up on this phenomenon,

bleed. It has been much debated in larp circles, but it did not emerge until my departure from larp a decade ago, so it was a new concept for me. *College of Wizardry* had been the most immersed four days of roleplaying I have ever experienced, so the need to talk to my co-players was strong, and I was obsessively on Facebook every two minutes, in fear of missing a post by a participant. Looking back on the post-larp anxiety a couple of months later, I realize that I was in a bad shape, longing for fictional people and that my case of bleed was intense.

However, no matter how bad the bleed was, I would not approach *the larp* any differently. I got a taste of magic, a couple of days off from my daily life, and generally much more than I bargained for. I got an experience of a lifetime, a fantasy come true. I became that young witch and loved every minute of it. So is it surprising that it was hard letting her go?

Playing *College of Wizardry* was simultaneously something new and fantastic – and strangely familiar. The stunning surroundings at Czocha made the wizard world believable in a way I had not experienced before. Yet, for me the magic did not come so much from the Harry Potter inspired world, but it was found between the characters and in cracks and secret passageways of the castle. The setting made it more believable than I would have thought. It seemed like everyone else felt the same way and it made us all quite immersed. It made the whole experience incredible, but it was also reminiscent of what I was used to be like when playing the summer scenarios in Denmark. Only more fantastic. I was able to immerse into my character, perhaps even more than when I was younger.

In *College of Wizardry*, I learned that after all, I am most definitely not done with larp yet.

◆ Juhana Pettersson

Into the Night

Sometimes hard games are easy to shrug off while light games leave you reeling. *College of Wizardry* is a fun, lighthearted game. It's entertaining. Or at least this is my understanding of how the game experience was designed.

When I played in the May 2014 rerun my experience was hard and full of bleed. Sure, I got my share of wizard duels and Minotaur attacks, but the serious stuff ended up characterizing my experience and gave me food for thought for a long time after the game.

This year, I've participated in two larps that I'd characterize as serious: The baroque and debauched *Inside Hamlet* and the intense and minimalistic *The Zeigarnik Effect*. I walked out of both games with interesting experiences and ideas, but it wasn't hard to continue my normal existence. *The Zeigarnik Effect* was quite the mindfuck, but I knew that going in and prepared for it. In *Inside Hamlet*, I knew I had to keep watch on my limits amidst the general turpitude, and successfully did so.

In short, I knew what I was getting into and this knowledge meant I was able to adequately prepare myself. By contrast, with *College of Wizardry* I didn't expect anything really serious, and the Sequel I played a week before the Rerun game was exactly the kind of featherweight tomfoolery I had signed up for.

Perhaps embarrassingly, I was myself one of the bastards who brought in all this serious stuff that fucked me over.

Muggle-born Avenger

My character was a Senior student and a Muggle-born, meaning a wizard born to non-wizard parents. In the hierarchy of the Wizarding World, the muggle-born were



*A proud muggleborn
wearing
a Mudblood-shirt.
Photo by
Larson Kasper*

often considered second-class citizens, and this was reflected in *College of Wizardry* as well.

Building on the character description provided by the organizers, I created a serious young man with a deep reservoir of anger at the prejudice and bad treatment directed at muggle-born everywhere. I was also a member of the secret “Fight Club”, where we fought duels with few rules and no oversight. Thus, I decided my character was okay with magical violence, and it also gave confidence to me as a player because it meant I had a place to practice the rules for magical conflict. After a few duels, I knew the basic defensive and offensive spells by heart.

I decided that if someone tried to fuck with me, I would fuck them right back. If I saw a Muggle-born being mistreated, I would intervene. A fellow player

MLF

MUGGLEBORN LIBERATION FRONT
THE TIME OF PUREBLOOD
SUPREMACY IS OVER.

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*stop
wtf
stupid
hag
hush!*

- Mossy

MLF

MUGGLEBORN LIBERATION FRONT

THE TIME OF PUREBLOOD
SUPREMACY IS OVER.

THIS IS YOUR FIRST
AND ONLY WARNING.

IF YOU PERSIST WITH YOUR
HATE, WE WILL RETALIATE.

MUGGLEBORN STYLE.

Do your worst!

*We are so glad you acknowledge us.
/Rowley*

THE TIME OF PUREBLOOD
SUPREMACY IS OVER.

THIS IS YOUR FIRST
AND ONLY WARNING.

IF YOU PERSIST WITH YOUR
HATE, WE WILL RETALIATE.

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MUGGLEBORN LIBERATION FRONT

THE TIME OF PUREBLOOD
SUPREMACY IS OVER.

THIS IS YOUR FIRST
AND ONLY WARNING.

I PERSIST WITH YOUR
HATE, WE WILL RETALIATE.

RN STYLE

MLF
MUGGLEBORN LIBERATION FRONT
THE TIME OF PUREBLOOD
SUPREMACY IS OVER.

THIS IS YOUR FIRST
AND ONLY WARNING.

IF YOU PERSIST WITH YOUR
HATE, WE WILL RETALIATE.

MUGGLEBORN STYLE

even made T-shirts with the word “Mudblood” in front. Mudblood is a slur directed against the muggle-born. I wore the shirt with the expectation that it would get me into a fight.

It didn’t. In the entire game, I only had a single incident where someone went after me because of the shirt, and it was trivial. Otherwise, all conflicts in which I participated were started by me. After a while, I realized that bullies are not attracted to aggressive people who can fight. Instead, they would target the weaker and less radicalized Muggle-born. I wasn’t around when that happened.

This was quite frustrating: A prejudiced system would softly push radicals like me to the side while those trying to keep their heads down endured bullying of a more direct sort.

After the War

The May rerun had a somber atmosphere of moral relativism and creeping, banal evil. The certainties of the events depicted in the *Harry Potter* novels were long past, and we were at the stage where the monsters of yesterday were becoming the establishment figures of today.

In the emotionally charged aftermath of the game, it felt like being in Germany after the Second World War and watching Nazis and their collaborators assume their places among the new elite. The comparison might be a little overblown given the frivolous nature of the *College of Wizardry* games, but that’s emotional bleed for you.

In Germany, emerging groups like the Communist Red Army Faction were motivated in part by this seeming re-emergence of all the old fascists. At the end of my larp, I was left contemplating two choices: A career in magical terrorism, or trying to endure being in the system and accumulating the power to fight from the inside.

In this game, the old fascists were Dark Wizards and followers of Voldemort who had ostensibly shifted their loyalties after his downfall. I tried to be there every time these people congregated and directly participate in the discussions. Bizarrely, this gave me a tiny amount of insider status and respect from some of the people I most despised, and who I assume despised me for ideological reasons. This is what made me feel I could play this game from the inside, if I had the endurance for it.

Two scenes in particular brought a lot of these themes into the open: A lesson of Magical History, and a discussion entitled “The Crimes of the Aurors” conducted by a professor who was a former Dark Wizard.

In the history lesson, Voldemort’s war was presented as a complex affair with many different viewpoints, including those of former Dark Wizards. The way this lesson played out made the events seem like something that was retreating into the murk of history. Who can say which side was right?

Flyers for the Muggleborn Liberation Front from the Rerun. Photo by Nicole Winchester



*In the night.
Photo by
Christina Molbech.*

I decided to take a cue from my source of inspiration for a lot of the things I did with my character, social justice and black Twitter, meaning the Twitter sphere formed by a number of African-American activists who strive for racial justice. I decided that for my character, the Aurors were almost as bad as the Dark Wizards, because their job was to preserve the privilege of the old pureblood families from upstarts like me. They only differed from the Dark Wizards in terms of tactics, not ideological core.

I deployed this line of reasoning during both the history lesson and the “Crimes of the Aurors” debate, but in retrospect, it didn’t make my game any happier.

Banality

I've played *College of Wizardry* twice, once as a faculty member and once as a student. The shift in perspective has a significant effect on how the game feels. From a student perspective, the face of the school and the faculty might look very different from what it looks like from a teacher's vantage point.

In the Rerun, the college as an institution seemed to have accepted Dark Wizards back into the fold in the spirit of moving on. Looking up at the faculty members when everyone at the school gathered together at the main hall of the castle, it seemed as if half the professors were evil in some way. Not like Snape, who's kept in check by powerful figures such as Dumbledore and McGonagall. Evil in a perfectly ordinary, everyday way, supported by the institution they were working for.

By chance, these characters tended to be the most visible ones in many public scenes, leaving other faculty members into the background.

From the perspective of a Muggle-born character such as mine, the total effect was of an institution vaguely hostile to my presence. I would imagine that studying in a racist institution as a member of a minority group might feel somewhat similar.

The Dark Wizards did their dark shenanigans at the school, but we were essentially impotent to do anything about it. The Unforgivable Curses could fly left and right, but in the end, the issue was swept into the privacy of the Teacher's Lounge, away from the prying eyes of those such as me.

As a student character with limited agency, there was nothing I could do. These issues would not go away by casting spells and being a hero. They could only be affected by the grinding martyrdom of a political activist with an unpopular position.

Just like in real life.

Bleed

The Rerun hit me hard and gave me a lot to think about, much more than the Sequel I played a week earlier. The Rerun was also a pretty grim game, and very different from what I had expected. I may have been the engineer of my own misery in choosing themes for my character that would play very close to home, but that didn't make it any less forceful.

A lot of the bleed came from the way the game experience tallied with my off-game experience of being a politically conscious person in today's Finland. Watching the rise of the right wing, both in its economic and racist incarnations, is depressing stuff.

As a fictional experience, there was not a lot of light in my experience of the *College of Wizardry* rerun. We were all going deeper into the night.

◆ Eline Demeyer

A Letter from Nurmengard Prison

I have just recently picked up the idea of larping from a friend who did a few larps in Belgium. She told me stories about how much fun she has had which made me want to try larps as well. I did not find a suitable larp that appealed to me at first though until a neighbour posted the event of *College of Wizardry* on my Facebook to mock my love for Harry Potter. It just felt right to have this one to be my very first experience in larping. I hoped to experience all the feelings I associate with this universe: joy of attending a magical school, being terrified of professors, and having to face your fears. Even if it was just play, it was perfect for me.

I played a character named Rilla Lihs, a young witch who lived in Germany, in an area struck with fear of the Werewolf Rebellion that started after the Second Wizarding War. She was a half-blood and took care of her younger teenage sister – a Squib. Six months before school was to start at Czocho, her father had been killed by a werewolf. Rilla was devastated by the death of her father, who had helped many werewolves in the past. The Ministry had caught the killer only days before Rilla left but had refused to give out the werewolf's name. Rilla had to wait for the date of the trial to find out, but the owl carrying the information about the date got lost. A few days into the school year, Rilla would get a letter written by an old family friend – her 'uncle' Bastian. In the letter, Bastian told her he was the werewolf who had killed her father. She would never get the chance to say goodbye to one of her oldest friends, losing another family member in the process.

That was the backstory I created for my larp experience. Before the larp, the organisers informed the players via email that we could send letters during the larp – and that we could receive letters from home created by the organisers. To me this

was the perfect opportunity to mess around with my given character without really involving anyone else. I did not want to inconvenience anyone with this little experiment of mine. I asked the organisers to write Rilla a letter from ‘uncle Bastian’ with the above story. I just had one request: “Break my character’s heart. Make me bawl my eyes out.”

They did an amazing job. Their letter made me speak incoherently, gave me red eyes from crying for hours, and it opened up some interesting storylines to play. I knew the letter was coming but never specified when, only adding up to the anticipation. I didn’t have any problem playing ‘surprised’ and the people at my table sure gave me some terrifying looks when the post girl mentioned ‘Nurmengard prison’.

The events and emotions that were set in motion by this letter gave me an amazing opportunity to completely reshape Rilla as a person. She was hurt and I could feel her pain. It was intense and it wouldn’t have been possible if it weren’t for the organisers who wrote this letter. I was scared I’d need a break from the larp because I had worked on this character for so long and could relate to her in ways of feeling protective of family and friends and the pain would hit me hard. But I continued playing to see what would happen. Among running into the arms of the school counselor crying like a baby and having an open, comforting talk with her mentor, my character somehow got involved in some mindless Quidditch play to lighten her mood.

From that moment on, her protectiveness took over – which was never the plan to start with – and Rilla would make sure no one from her new family at Czo-cha would ever get hurt even if that meant running head first into battle. She had little to lose, so she would at least protect what was left.

Even though this was my first experience with larp, asking for help to ‘break’ my character was an excellent idea. It gave me new opportunities, ideas and made this three-day journey into the wizarding world even more magical.

17.04.2015

Murmuugard

My dearest Pilla!

When you read this letter, I'm probably already dead. There are no right words to say this, but I need you to know, that your father was a great man. He was like brother to me for my entire life. I can't forgive myself for what I've done that night, when he died.

I don't know if somebody has told you, who did it. And maybe this letter is not the best way to do it, but I could never say it to your face. I can't look at myself in the mirror, because the very only thing I see in the reflection is... a monster. I am a monster. I'm horrible. It was me, who killed your father...

When I understood what I did, I went to the woods to hide, and I thought that I will forget somehow. But in the end, I couldn't. I will always regret what I did. To the end of my days I will always regret. And I will pay for my sin.

If you still read this letter, I need you to know that you and your sister are the only light in my

life, the only good thing I have ever had. After they execute me, they will send you all my belongings they let me keep here. These are not much, and you can throw them away if you like.

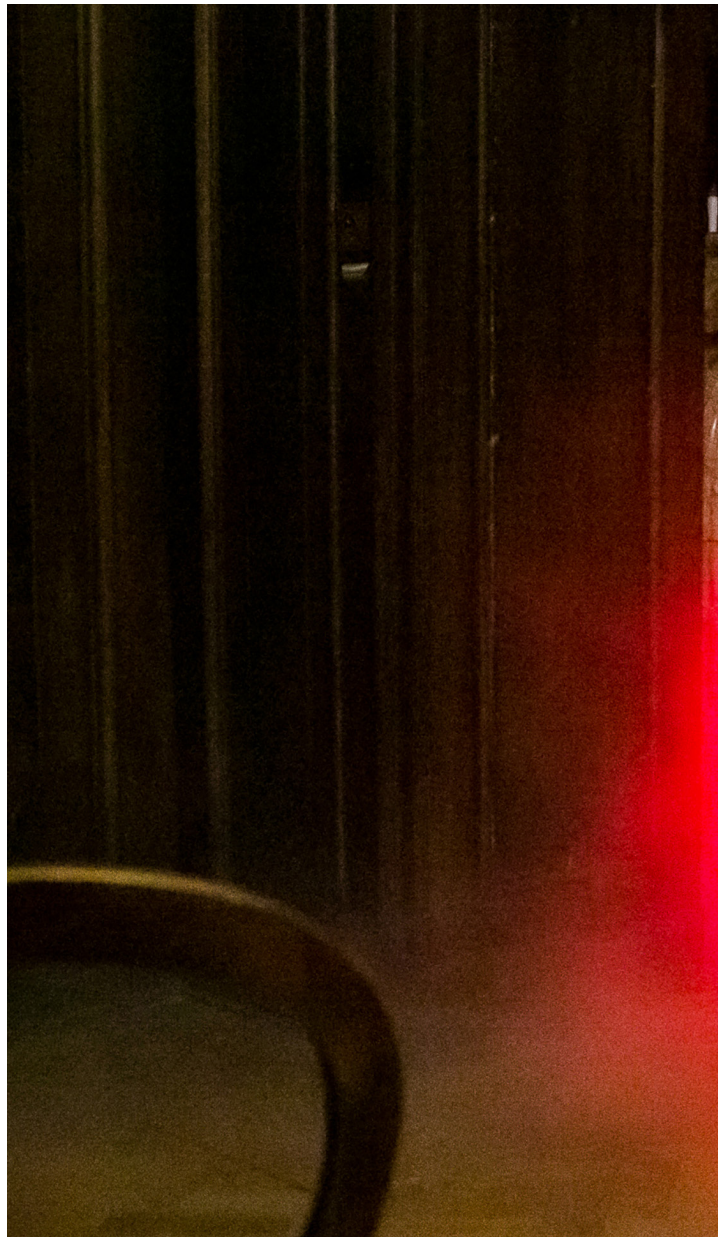
In these final words I cannot ask for your forgiveness. I know I have ruined your and your sister's lives. But please, for one moment in the near future, think kindly of me. For one second try to remember only good things we had together.

Always be kind and full of joy, and take care of your sister. I can't even wish that we will meet someday again, but I can hope, that your life will be happier than mine. Farewell, Pilla. I am so, so sorry.

uncle Bastian

P.S. I really loved you.

*Magical artefacts, being, and moments
at Czocho.*
Photos by Christina Molbech.





Embodying Magic

◆ **Gustav Tegby**

A Castle Made of Sand

This article takes a look at the design of *College of Wizardry* and offers a personal account of how those choices affected play during the Premiere and the Sequel. To contextualize these reflections, a few words about the author are in order. I work as a dramaturg and playwright and have participated in approximately a dozen larps, starting with *En stilla middag med familjen* nine years ago, and have subsequently played, among others, *Monitor Celestra*, *Inside Hamlet*, *Just a Little Lovin'* and *Mad about the Boy*. These are larps that placed focus on character psychology and personal relations, and where my characters' narrative function and expected dramatic trajectory were rather well defined. Thus my background is mainly in what is known as Nordic larp – metatechniques and heartbreak instead of swords and sorcery. *College of Wizardry*, however, could be said to fall somewhere in between these extremes, and thus marked rather new territory for me.

The Premiere

College of Wizardry offered what is usually referred to as a *sandbox design*, that is to say a world to be explored and played with rather than a specific story to be experienced. There was no clear main narrative but plenty of smaller ones that could be pursued or ignored by the players as they saw fit.

The characters were prewritten but with a lot of room for individual interpretation. They had a lot of group affiliations (a House, a path, a year, and sometimes also a membership in some secret society or another) but no prearranged personal relations. The players were offered very few ready-made arrangements but plenty of contact surfaces. In other words, *College of Wizardry* was not a *pay and play* larp:

the character preparation required work. While you were told you could more or less show up and just go for it, in reality this was exceedingly difficult (of course, depending on what kind of player you are and what character you had).

For me as a player this was the first time it was up to me to create all my own relationships, causing a palpable anxiety not unlike the one often experienced the first day at an actual school (except, here I only had three days to get to know people, and my character was supposed to have attended for two years already). Having no specific narrative function meant that I, just like all the other students, was potentially very disposable. The upside of this, of course, was tremendous freedom. For better and worse, nobody really depended on me (which is, I guess, a fairly accurate summary of contemporary first world life in general).

The version of my character that I finally settled on, Max Feiersinger, was a majorly awkward Senior, with no social graces whatsoever, an unhealthy obsession with his dead mother and very-much-alive twin sister, and a fairly loose grip on reality. I loved him dearly, but he did make the larp very difficult for me at times, mostly by extracting himself from every social situation possible.

The location of Czocho castle certainly lent itself magnificently to the sandbox design – rarely has a larp location been more suitable to being explored. It was actually so great it almost became too distracting, as we spent much time initially just walking around starry-eyed. Also, it felt like we should know the location since we supposedly had spent two years there, something that didn't come easy (the excuse that rooms had magically shifted location “again” were certainly used more than once for latecomers to class). More importantly, it was just very hard to find any person you were looking for, to the point where I mostly had play with smokers simply because those were the only people I knew where to find between classes.

Most larps include the challenge of playing characters who are supposed to be well-acquainted but whose players have never even met in real life (or, if they have, they are now someone completely different). Here, an additional factor was that the world was a well-established one that included a good deal of specific lore, and that a fair portion of the players were hardcore Harry Potter fans. As is so often the case, the difficulty this caused was not so much a question of actual situations where encyclopaedic skills were needed, but more of anxiety that sometimes made you hold back due to fear of putting yourself in a situation where your lack of in-depth world knowledge would be obvious.

When it came to actual activities, the larp presented a few basic features that emulated everyday school life: First, there were the lectures you were expected to attend. Second, you had to find a date to the ball. Third, and most importantly for most players, the five Houses competed in the House Cup. Though all three activities were technically mandatory, ignoring any or all of them brought little consequence. Well, anything you did could make you earn or lose points in the House Cup, but if you decided your character wasn't into that (as I and a lot of players did) then nothing. My hunch is that, generally speaking, the more of a Harry Potter fan



House Points were displayed with colorful liquids in the hallway, where the students could always see which House was ahead of the others. Photo by Christina Molbeck.

you were, the more likely you were to be invested in the Cup, as this is kind of a big thing in the early books, while for a lot of the rest of us it didn't really matter that much. The somewhat arbitrary way that points were rewarded or deducted by the staff during the Premiere run might have contributed to this.

Play to lose is by now a well-established practice in Nordic larp that was mentioned, but not given a lot of weight, in the vision presented for *College of Wizardry* – likely because the designers specifically described it as a larp designed to being able to cope with a lot of different playing styles. The larp included plenty of side quests that were clearly meant to be 'won' or solved (e.g. find the spell that helps the dryad trapped in the forest get her soul back), though in those cases you were competing against the game, not against other players. This however might have helped set a style that contributed to the feeling during the Premiere run that the House Cup was something you were meant to actually strive to win as a player. Of course, you were free to ignore this, and many did, but to play a fuck-up was made difficult by the fact that losing points for your House might cause off-game irritation among your fellow House members.

So, what was provided was an everyday structure. However, as we all know, larps (and even more so, stories in general) very seldom focus solely on everyday life, and this certainly was no exception. After all, every single character could do



*"Need a gnome? We've got
you covered."*

*Photo by
Christina Molbech*

magic! The dead were brought back to life, werewolves ran rampant, people got lost in time and space. At some point, it felt like a Harry Potter movie where every single student was, well, Harry Potter. And fair enough, everyone is the main character of their own story.

However, this also meant that a certain epicness fatigue kicked in. Those stories that fared best were generally those that climaxed rather early in the game. On the other hand, when on Saturday somebody came rushing into the dining hall screaming about Death Eaters attacking, the general attitude was something close to "Again?" and "Dude, it's totally your turn this time.". Personally I had an episode a few hours before the end of the game when my character went into a fit due to unpleasant flashbacks, but I had not foreseen that this would lead to me being dragged through the hall as people screamed for a medic. Which was a very reasonable reaction for the other characters to have, but as a player I at this point felt outright

embarrassed for causing a ruckus over something as banal as being temporarily possessed by my dead mother (yes, that was the bar by then).

Most players had a fantastic time at the *College of Wizardry* Premiere. For me, it was certainly an enjoyable, but also quite frustrating experience, where I time and again felt that not having understood the larp's style and prerequisites made it less of a blast than it could have been. Fortunately, I was to get a second chance.

The Sequel

The second run benefited from a number of external factors. First, the on-site workshop had been expanded by a couple of hours, and while the tempo was still hysterical, there was now room for more than rushing through the rules. Second, the design team had drawn some very sound conclusions and downplayed the ready-made puzzles and adventures available on the grounds a bit, lessening the feeling of adventure overload. Third, the returning players (approximately 60%) having, I guess, learned from the just mentioned previous inflation of epic, held back somewhat and focused even more on the everyday college intrigues (though still added extra flavor with magic). Fourth, the small but important addition of the midterm exams meant that there was actually something to be gained or lost by focusing on classes. Which made them more important to attend – and, paradoxically, more fun to skip. When my character didn't go to his astronomy class in favour of a date, it was a decision with some weight for a bookish twentysomething – come to think of it, that was actually probably the most difficult decision he had to make during the course of both larps.

Also, I so far haven't touched upon one of the largest strengths of the design because it didn't become apparent until quite late in the first game for me and many others: the non-player character production team could make any being available for the players if only they asked. Your long lost aunt needs to appear out of nowhere in 20 minutes, only to steal your fortune and disappear again? Not a problem. Need to have your resurrected mother manifest only to be interrupted by Death Eaters? No sweat, and we'll throw in a smoke machine as well. An organized attack in the woods by werewolves? We've got you covered.

While larps these days frequently have high production values, the degree to which *College of Wizardry* entrusted you as a player to use those resources as you saw fit felt quite special. In essence you could game master your own entire larp (well, if everybody would have done it the whole time, I guess the system would have broken down). This time around, I made sure to use that opportunity, and was again and again amazed at what was delivered.

Most importantly for the second game, I had learned some lessons and this time prepared accordingly. First of all, the importance of planning. Keeping in mind that my character was no social animal, this time I did not depend on spontaneous interaction (though in the end there was plenty of that as well). Instead, I planned

enough activities and relations with other players at specific times. Not just “our characters should hang out” but “lets have a picnic on Saturday afternoon”.

Secondly, logistics are important. I made sure to live with the people I had the most plot with. And we actually made arrangements off-game about how and where we should meet, meaning that finding people became less of a nuisance. Thirdly, I opted for ruthless playing: This was the only choice that felt like a mixed bag, but as a player I was somewhat more egoistic the second time around, in that I skipped a lot of elements that were less interesting to me, without worrying too much about the effect it would have on others.

Finally, I changed what didn't work. In the character brief I received from the game organizers, apart from being awkward my character was also described as something of a genius (as I found out, a lot of characters were). That turned out to be pretty difficult – and stressful – to try to convey, and just way more effort than it was worth. So this time around I skipped that aspect almost completely. Actually, during the second game I didn't even bother to have a very consistent character (I don't in real life after all). Instead, I switched wildly between kind-hearted, amoral, downright creepy, brilliant, and mind-numbingly incompetent (well I guess you could say ‘weird’ was the common denominator), depending on the situation and what seemed to generate the best scenes with the other players present at the very moment. Again, that kind of freedom is one of the perks this particular kind of larp offers.

Conclusions

College of Wizardry is a strange beast. While the design was certainly fine-tuned for the Sequel, all the basic concepts remained intact, and a lot of what initially felt like flaws from my perspective – the lack of strong narratives, defined relationships and a clear overarching theme – became perks once I had managed to wrap my head around them, and could see what was offered in their stead.

So, was it all then a question of expectation management? Sort of, yes. The obvious expectation here was “like Harry Potter.” Of course, compared to the books the characters were older, the time and place different, and there was no main story about a chosen hero. Apart from that, however, the organizers made a point of not setting things in stone concerning style, theme, etc., to give room for many different kinds of players and playing. That works for a sandbox larp, but only up to a point. 120 players larping closely and intensively together will unavoidably affect each other's experiences profoundly. Therefore, I would argue that such an approach from organizers essentially means that the players themselves are left to collectively and gradually negotiate the common denominators of the stories told. That can often be a beautiful thing – and to some degree it happens in all larps. But while the plus side of this approach is that the silent majority of the players will more or less have their way, those who came in with a different set of expectations might feel bewildered

or cheated, and are left to adjust their play accordingly. Sometimes it can be done quickly and sometimes it takes five months and a sequel to do it.

So worth it though.

◆ Maury Brown & Ben Morrow

Autonomy, Agency, Communication, and Trust in Open-Ended Combat

While it can be hard to identify any singular United States larp tradition, one of its strong characteristics is a focus on combat and combat resolution. U.S. larp emerged from the tabletop roleplaying game tradition, where the dominant influence was Gygax and Arneson's *Dungeons and Dragons*, itself derived from wargaming. The most prevalent larp experiences in the U.S. are combat-driven: the boffer larp tradition is named for the soft weapons that allow you to hit others without injury and *Mind's Eye Theatre* uses a system built on rock, paper and scissors to resolve all sorts of skill tests as well as actual combat. Other games use chance-based board game mechanics adapted for larp, ranging from big foam dice to drawing cards from a deck. While much of larp is performance, for many games in the U.S. the point of the performance is to serve as a prologue to the violence.

Coming from the U.S. larp scene, we were at first unsure how to play in *College of Wizardry*, where these mechanics were not in place. We'd been conditioned to believe that casting spells on people needed a system of combat resolution. How could a wizarding duel be resolved without one? How could you know whether a Confundus charm successfully confused you? How could you know how long you were confused? If there was a dispute about an outcome, was there a game master present to adjudicate the results? And when the battle royale emerges at the end, how would you resolve multiple spells' effects occurring simultaneously? How do we know who goes first anyway? How do I escalate the issue when I suspect someone is cheating the combat system? And perhaps most important of all, since status

is (obviously) derived from magical skill, how can anybody know who to respect if there was no way to zap everyone else into submission (which is clearly what magic is for). How can I make other people do what I tell them do if I don't have a combat system to enforce compliance?

While some of the above remarks may approach farce, those concerns are actually representative of what a lot of players want from their larp systems: an understandable, consistent and fair means of resolving conflict that informs others of the power hierarchy. In *College of Wizardry* there was no combat resolution system: all spell outcomes were decided by the person affected by the spell, no arbitration, no disputes. Coming from the U.S. tradition, it was easy for us to imagine that this would mean a larp full of grown adults screaming at each other, arguing the combat results with red faces, and people coming to physical blows completely overwhelmed with the frustration of not having the means to force other players to agree to their version of what just happened in our game of pretend. "No, I am not dead, YOU are dead." No enforceable rules must lead to chaos, right?

Chaos did not emerge. The lack of chaos was quite notable, in fact.

So how does combat and conflict resolution work without a referee to decide what happens, or without a system of points that determine an outcome? It works because of autonomy, agency, communication, and trust.

Autonomy

The player in *College of Wizardry* was an autonomous entity operating within the world, given ownership of both the character and the larp experience. The player was not there to take custody of a pre-written character and to deliver a performance in line with a game master's vision. In fact there was no expectation to behave a certain way, according to categories such as "lawful good," nor was there a main plot to discover and unravel, or specific outcomes that were necessary in order to advance it. While these elements may, on the surface, not have to do with combat, they are ultimately quite important to it. When a game is designed with a hierarchy and an overarching plot, some characters must be advantaged with in-game power and influence in order for the game to "work" as intended. In contrast, the *College of Wizardry* game design did not rely on certain characters behaving according to pre-determined outcomes (dwarves always beat goblins, for example, or elves only have ranged weapons and are not good in close combat). Other than professors, whose combat prowess was understood to be unassailable by a mere student, there were no expectations that a particular character demonstrate a universal show of either might or weakness. Just because you were a Senior, or an Auror did not mean you automatically would prevail in a duel with a Junior Healer.

With a design that did not rely on character classes to establish a power hierarchy, the results of combat and conflict could be left open-ended without consequence to a larger plot or the game experience. There was a non-diegetic skill



A group of students are trying to subdue a werewolf casting spells in concert. Photo by Christina Molbeck.

element to combat, as a player had to remember spells and conjure them quickly and appropriately in the heat of the duel; failing to call an offensive or defensive spell often led to the character's defeat. Any character could prevail in any duel, and the game would not break, though individual character history, reputation, and demonstrated skill led to the anticipation that some characters would be better in combat than others. Without having to base one's combat prowess on a character comprised of attributes, skills, and experience, a player could decide how her character would handle a combat situation, including the choice to engage in one at all. An ostensibly stronger character could choose to lose a duel, creating dramatic play. A character perceived as weaker could make a show of bravado and have a realistic chance of prevailing, rather than knowing she was doomed to failure based on the points available to her.

Agency

In *College of Wizardry* you could use any known spells from the *Harry Potter* universe, or you could make up your own spells. The only rule was that you could not use the same spell two times in a row in combat, but you could add "maximum" to the end of a spell and it wasn't technically a repeat, an action which could help buy yourself time to come up with a new spell. In addition, the person who was the target of the

spell got to decide the spell's effects, including whether it had any effect at all. As a result, no player was ever forced to have anything happen to their character that they did not consent to. Giving agency to the victim of a spell, not to the perpetrator, is a “play to lose” structure, a play style common in Nordic larps that encourages players to steer toward actions that may result in unfavorable, yet interesting, outcomes for the character. Any concept with the word “lose” in the title is anathema to most Americans, for whom games, including larps, are something one tries to win, often at all costs.

The U.S. style system of using a points-based combat resolution is a play-to-win structure, set up to encourage players to consider the probabilities of winning a combat situation given their skills, strengths, class, and experience relative to their opponent.

In a mechanics-heavy game, one player can compel another player to play a certain outcome by the force demonstrated via experience points, accrued skills, or another rules-gimmick. This could not happen at *College of Wizardry*. A player who cast a spell common in the *Harry Potter* canon, such as *Silencio* or *Expelliarmus* had a reasonable expectation that the other player would be aware of the charm and know the intended result. However, the mere fact of casting a spell did not guarantee that the desired result would be achieved. Since the recipient of a spell had the agency to create the spell's effects, a recipient could deflect the spell using a defensive maneuver, or have a reason that the spell would not take effect, such as knowing the countercurse or being in possession of a charmed object that negates the spell. The spell could have minimal effect – akin to being glanced with a sword – or an unintended effect such as a *Tarantallegra* causing judo kicks instead of dancing. This deviation from intent could be justified diegetically by the casting wizard's apparent lack of skill, a mispronunciation (recall Ron's difficulty with *Wingardium Leviosa*), magical interference, or some other rationale. Furthermore, a player could decide to become gravely injured after being hit by a seemingly innocuous spell, and the casting player would suddenly have an unforeseen consequence to contend with. The lack of predetermination of spell effects opened up possibilities for surprises and improvisational play, and gave agency to players and not to a system of rules enforced by a game.

In short, in *College of Wizardry*, the game design did not allow one player's reactions or outcomes to be determined or forced by another player. A player who expected to gather power and wield it indiscriminately, supported by game mechanics that allowed him to do so, would find that experience unavailable in the game. That player had to learn to negotiate with other players, who had agency equal to her own.

Communication

In order to play an open-ended combat system, individual players must communicate well with fellow players so they can create a shared experience and results. With-

out a given combat rules system, players share the risks and rewards of spontaneous and dynamic co-creation, the thrill of discovering how play and story will emerge. Each player in a combat situation must give communication clues to the other player, which can occur before, during, and after the combat scene. This communication can take the form of body language, shared eye contact and understanding, pre-game or off-game discussions to establish scenes, and in-game dialog that reveals hints or motivation.

Pre-game: two characters have a rivalry that is developed from their character backstory and/or pre-game relationship building.

In-game: Through direct conversations between the two characters, a disagreement and grudge is established, and each character hones a reputation for their combat skills. Other characters become aware of the rivalry, take sides, and bolster the reputation of the characters as formidable foes, blowhard naïfs, or some combination that helps give an expectation of the outcome of the duel. A confrontation takes place and wands are drawn. Eye contact is established, and bodies face off. Nods between the dueling players indicate readiness and renewed consent. Player dialog escalates and one player makes a dramatic flair prior to casting a spell, moving her wand in a direction to indicate how the responding player could/should react. Finally, the player gives a verbal cue before casting the spell: “How do you like being covered with pus-filled boils?? *Poximus Maximus!*” The recipient of the spell now chooses how to play its effects (Does the spell hit or do you deflect it? Do you get boils? How many? Do they hurt, itch or tickle? Do they make you drop to the ground writhing, run away in horror, or laugh?). Although the outcome is unknown, the communication between the players has given a shared intention to work within.

Off-game: Players can temporarily go off-game to plan an in-game situation and come to agreement about the scene and even the outcome. In addition, debriefing after the game can allow for discussion among the players about how the combat was enacted and resolved.

Trust

This game design of open-ended combat is essentially an honor system, and trust of one’s fellow players is essential. Trust that another player will pick up play when you bid it to them. Trust that you are not ruining or breaking a game with your actions, even if they are unexpected. Trust that fellow players will not exploit a situation, trust that they would not deliberately and repeatedly thwart your game experience, trust that they will act on balance with magnanimity and not manipulation. In practice, the lack of a combat rules system precluded some of the behavior that can be abused in mechanics-driven games, creating a lack of trust: min-maxing, loophole exploitation, power-grabs, GM bullying, etc. In the larps that rely on systems of rules and mechanics to resolve conflict, trust is placed in those rules and mechanics, not in fellow players.

The lack of intrusion of combat mechanics allowed *College of Wizardry* to be an immersive experience of being a witch or a wizard attending a magical college. That experience could not have occurred with breaks to arbitrate conflict through artificial mechanics whose existence overtly demonstrates that this is a game. In addition, although combat was an option at *College of Wizardry*, violence was not the ultimate goal or inevitable result. It was entirely possible to have a magical experience only ever using one's wand to cast *Lumos* to light up the castle's secret passages.

This approach affected us profoundly with a uniquely different feel than larps we had previously experienced. Coming away with it, we wanted to share this experience with others by bringing a similarly designed larp to North America. *New World Magischola* is a wizard school larp that premiered in the United States in summer 2016, using an open-ended combat system described here. In total there were six NWM events held for just under 1000 participants in 2016. We are excited to introduce hundreds of people to the joy of playing in the world of autonomy, agency, communication and trust.

◆ Juhana Pettersson

Avoiding Harry Potter

I played a student counselor in the *College of Wizardry* sequel. The professor of Defence Against the Dark Arts, Bombastus Bane, had asked me to assist in his class. I talked about my own heroics, and listened as Bane had the students read aloud from the textbook, from an article written by Bane himself. (Or in reality, Bane's player Mike Pohjola.)

The article discussed different ways of defending oneself against the Killing Curse, one of the classic three Unforgivable Curses of Harry Potter lore. It referenced events clearly recognizable as the death of Harry's parents and the deflection of the curse when it hit baby Harry. However, instead of talking about these events as fact, it turned them into history, and suspect history at that.

According to professor Bane, unconfirmed reports of a single incident were no basis for a good self-defense strategy. Dodging or hiding behind statues is the recommended method for avoiding the curse.

That scene was one of the very few in the entire larp where the character of Harry Potter was referenced, even obliquely. I was playing in a Harry Potter larp without Harry Potter.

In the Rerun game, I played a student. One of the classes was history, and we discussed events that had happened in the Harry Potter books. This time, however, the viewpoint was different. We were looking at them after some time had passed, after the events had become muddled, and without the certainty of the omniscient narrator describing events in a novel.

That scene brought home the relationship between *College of Wizardry* and *Harry Potter*. The larps used *Harry Potter*, they might have been about *Harry Potter* or commented on *Harry Potter*, but they couldn't really be described as "*Harry Potter* larps".



*The author as the school
counselor at the Rerun.
On the table there's
the book where the faculty
kept tabs
on House Points.
Photo by
Christina Molbech.*

Many players had a downright gleeful attitude to this reinterpretation of book events into history. It felt like a game of its own: What kind of a funny twist could I give the official *Harry Potter* canon? Thus, in the Rerun, there was a discussion titled “The Crimes of the Aurors” highlighting the many indignities suffered by so-called Dark Wizards at the hands of the dictatorial Aurors.

This playful attitude could also be seen in the Sequel, where for most of the characters, the events of the books were something that had happened to older people. Individual students might have family connections to specific book events, but largely, the novels didn’t describe things that were relevant to the characters right now. This left the books open to creative reinterpretation as a bit of fun between players.

The unmentionable name of *College of Wizardry* was “Harry Potter”. I don’t know how consciously the players in both games I played did it, but despite the fact that he was both an important historical figure and played a role in current wizard-

ing politics, he was almost never mentioned. In fact, I played two games and cannot recall a single mention.

All larp is co-creation, and in this co-creative work it seemed that there was a collective desire to put some space between the official canon of the novels and this game.

At least in Finland, *Harry Potter* is a popular subject for larp. Many of the games feature the characters directly: You can play Harry or Ron sitting in Professor Snape's class.

In *College of Wizardry*, the approach is different. The games happen at the Czocha College of Wizardry, conveniently set in the real-life Czocha castle. They share a world with the novels, or at least a version of it, but by the virtue of simple geographical distance, they're also distanced from them.

The school is not the same. It's similar, with House points, professors and so forth, but the details differ. Instead of House Gryffindor, there's House Sendivogius.

Some of the characters are connected to the novels. Both games I played had a student called Dolohov, related to the Death Eater Antonin Dolohov of the books. There were Dementors and Stupefy and Cruciatus spells. But a lot of stuff was created specifically for the larp: The characters, the school, recent history.

This marked the world of the game as distinctly different from the world of the novels. For me as a player, it gave a feeling of being allowed to improvise and make up stuff and expand. It didn't have to be about Harry: It was about the stuff we created.

The games were described as taking place in the world of *Harry Potter*, but the thing is: There's no "world of *Harry Potter*" for the simple reason that it's fiction. There are only the interpretations different people have of things that anyone can read in the books or perhaps see in the films. This means that whatever was taken from the books and used in the larps didn't really map one on one. Everything was used according to the tastes of whoever happened to be making the decisions at that moment.

This is obvious. Every time we use material in creative work, we make an interpretation. For me, this was perhaps more obvious than for many because I didn't come to the games as a *Harry Potter* fan. When I signed up, I hadn't read a single book or seen a single movie. I went through all of them in preparation for the games. Because of this, I had all of it in recent memory when I was reading game material or playing the larps.

Both games I played were recognizably *Harry Potter*. The differences in style were apparent in small details and overreaching questions of the atmosphere of the game.

J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* is mostly black and white. Dark Wizards are evil and the heroes are good. Both the Sequel and the Rerun complicated this picture to some degree, but the Rerun really went to town with moral grey areas. This is

what made it feel like a comment on the simple world of the novels, instead of an experience attempting to replicate them. In *Harry Potter*, there's one or two Snapes or Umbridges, but the fundamental character of Hogwarts is decent. Standing down in the hall as a student in the Rerun and looking up at the professors, it seemed like half the faculty were Dark Wizards of some description.

The overarching character of the game was markedly different from the books.

In details, many of the differences appeared because in a larp, a lot of stuff gets improvised and a lot more created by the organizers to fill in gaps in the fiction and make it playable. The idea of witches and wizards as a sort of ethnic enclave separate from the mundane world changed subtly into ideas of controlling normal people, combining technology and magic, and referencing real world history such as WWII.

In the books, many real-world issues are scrupulously avoided, and playing in the game, I felt this might be because they're too serious. It's hard to have some good wizarding fun when someone brings up the Holocaust. And indeed it was: Both games, and especially the Rerun, became more adult because of these details.

In the Rerun, I had perhaps the most *Harry Potter* scene imaginable: A grounds-keeper reminiscent of Hagrid came to our common room, asking for help to heal a baby dragon so it wouldn't be put down. We needed to do it in secret because of issues with other Houses and professors – and because the Ministry of Magic was involved.

I thought: Wow, this is really spot-on *Harry Potter* stuff. I also thought that it was too twee to work in the grey banality-of-evil tone my personal game had taken, so I decided to leave it for others and seek out something that didn't conflict with my experience of the game. In other words, it was too Harry Potter to work in my *Harry Potter* larp experience. My College of Wizardry had diverged too far from Harry Potter, creating a clash in styles.

◆ Sebastian F. K. Svegaard

Larp Fandom

As someone who has written Harry Potter fan fiction and works with fandom and fannish productions, it was impossible for me not to think of *College of Wizardry* in this context as well as larp. When I discovered the existence of diegetic fan fiction, the idea for this piece was born.

The following, then, is informed by my everyday work as a fandom scholar, but also as a fan, a writer of fan fiction, and, not least, a roleplayer. It is not a work of academic research, but it uses some of the academic work previously done about fandom as starting points.

Larp as Fanwork

From the point of view of the fandom scholar, perhaps especially one who larps, it is easy to see (some) larping as a form of *fanwork*. Fanworks are transformative creative products made by fans or fandom. These transformative works, called so because they are created by transforming (aspects of) existing art works, take many shapes. Fan fiction is probably the best known form, but visual art, comics, crafts, poetry, composition, music videos, theatre, and roleplaying also fall within the realm of fanwork, and that is only mentioning some of the existing forms. In this first part, I will try to explain why it is easy to approach larp as fanwork.

A commonly told story (be it true or not) of the origin of larp can be roughly boiled down to “playing D&D for real with toys”, which in the eyes and ears of this fan scholar sounds a lot like a transformative work based on *Dungeons & Dragons*. Once I had that thought, I kept finding more threads to weave together fandom and larp. To begin with, fans roleplay as a purely fannish pursuit. Online text-based

some who are always or never. Chatting to your friends, haggling with sellers, posing for photos and responding to remarks made to your character is, in my opinion, a strange and yet a very fun experience. How much a cosplayer is portraying a character, more than visually presenting as them, is probably more a matter of preference than any unspoken rule, though this is entirely guesswork on my part as a very casual cosplayer with only a few events under my belt.

When we add to that the constant presence of larps that are set in a pre-existing world from another medium, be it books, film, games or something else, the case for (some) larps as fanworks becomes an easy one to make. We often think of and talk of larp as related to the worlds of performing arts, but we tend not to see larp as connected to fandom in the same manner, though it is quite clear that some of it is. An added bonus of seeing larp as a valid form of fanwork might help getting larp under the umbrella of transformative works, granting some protection under the US copyright law.

Within fandom, especially *Harry Potter* fandom, there is a tenet that “the movies are just expensive fanworks”, simply another transformative work or fictional extension of the (original) canon. I think we can place larps like *College of Wizardry* here as well. Not as expensive by any means, but a fanwork with live-action performance, with attention to look and feel, and with reimaginings and extensions of the canon.

Role-Play as Fanfic

Reading *College of Wizardry* as a fanwork opens up interesting comparisons with other types of fanwork. In creating their characters, each player creates a work of fiction, a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk* where the whole of the character is the fiction. It is interesting to view the entirety of the character as a (somewhat collaborative) fanwork, encompassing the background story, the costuming and preparations, the actual roleplay, the stories told after the larp, and the spin-off larps the same character might join. If we agree to make a slight jump and consider this entirety of the character a fanfic, even though it is not all written down anywhere, it is possible to compare and contrast to other forms of fic and of the relationships between creator and character. Therefore, in the following, when I say “fic”, what I mean is this complex, multi-media fiction that is the character.

In the vast seas of fanfic, we find among some of the least popular genre staples the *Mary Sue* and the *Self-Insert* tropes; and they are not quite as dirty as they might sound. Mary Sue, named for one of the first of her kind to be known to fans, is a term for the slightly too perfect an OC who gets to interact with all the main characters, to have all the best adventures, and to catch the hottest hero/heroine as well. Mary is often top of their class, attractive, well liked, has a special talent (or more), and a distinctive physical trait. Mary is not always female (a male version is sometimes called a Gary Stu), but is often also a self-insert – which does not refer

to an insertion of a body part, but instead the insertion of the author's self, by character proxy, into the fic.

These types of characters are often somewhat ridiculed or derided, though many writers admit to having fun writing them, and people constantly enjoy reading this type of story; self-insert fics are often considered "low" culture even within the world of fiction often considered "low" as a whole. The addition of any OC into a fic is often scrutinized by readers for anything that smells like Mary Sueing.

However, a self-insert fic is not necessarily a Mary Sue fic; the self can often be so obscured that it is undetectable to the reader. At times, it can be obvious, though, and this type of fic often features an OC suddenly finding themselves in the middle of the adventure, though this OC may well just be a regular person with no special features of the kind Mary Sue tends to possess.

All the characters of *College of Wizardry* are OCs, except for the ghost of Mad-Eye Moody present in the Rerun and the Sequel. I would say that they are not Mary Sues, but what about self-inserts? These OCs are all the main character in their own fic, not minor characters to one or two main characters. This is, of course, different from any written fiction, and to compare to the above, while Mary is often a main character in their fic, other OCs most often are not. Such a roleplaying OC as a *College of Wizardry* character is a whole other kind of self-insert, an insertion of the bodily self into the fiction, and whatever parts of our mental selves we bring (or bleed) into our characters as well. As opposed to the regular self-insert OC, our characters at a larp are not us, they are usually not meant to be us, and similarities can be either accidental or a deliberate strategy of the player to aid the experience of the game.

Nor is the typical roleplay character a Mary Sue, though arguably some approaches to play have more in common with it than others; play-to-win is very different than play-to-lose. While some play for their characters to succeed and be the hero of their own story, others play to fail and be the anti-hero or villain. Some had traits common to Mary Sues, chiefly the characters who had direct relationships to famous people of the Potterverse. Even so, players (and character writers) tended to choose minor characters to be related to, to have acquaintances rather than best friends, and thus avoiding the Mary Sue stereotypes, much as most fic writers do.

This only strengthens the view of the character as fic, as it looks as if players write their characters as one would create a successful OC in a fic. We invest in a successful portrayal of a character, attempt to create someone who will give to the story, not just to our own self-gratification, and in doing so, we act exactly as the author of a fic would.

The Fans of Larp

If there is a certain layer of meta-fiction in the self as the character as the fic, it gets even more meta when taking a closer look at the phenomenon of *Dirty CoW*. *Dirty*



It is very unusual to have a player portray a canon character in a Nordic larp, but the ghost of Mad-Eye Moody was visiting Czocho both during the Sequel and the Rerun.

*Photo by
Nadina Wiórkiewicz*

CoW is a webpage – and linked Facebook Group – that deals in *College of Wizardry* fic. There was certainly a lot of *shipping* going on at the larp, in the form of play centred on romance and sexuality. “Shipping”, shortened from relationship, is a fandom term for the desire to see two or more characters in a romantic or sexual relationship. After the game, it was possible to observe a lot of speculation about the direction of characters’ love lives, and while I am not aware exactly how it came to be, *Dirty CoW* is now a thing. The writers behind *Dirty CoW* kindly responded to a couple of questions from me regarding this article, true to form using pseudonyms, and one of the things they told me was that they were responding to “all of this tension” at the game.

The page is dedicated to fic written about characters from the game. Currently

it has 15 pieces of fic, and these exhibit some distinct stylistic features that set them apart from most other fic. While the group states that it is a nondiegetic off-game group, the way I read it, the fic occupies a unique space somewhere between in- and off-game. The wording used in the group to announce a new fic suggests it could as well be in-game, though the comments to such posts are off-game; a logical shift, as they are made on Facebook by players, not characters. According to the amazingly creative people behind *Dirty CoW*, they made the choice to present their works as off-game so that: “If we can create a tiny shield between a player and their character being fucked by a ghost, we’ll do that.” This, fortunately for me, fits very well with what I theorised about the group, and it is emblematic of the in-between state of the fic.

The stories themselves are not labelled fic or stories but *dirt*, a thing that makes me, again, wonder at the divide that seems to be created between larp and fandom. Digging up dirt and posting it is more the kind of thing we find in gossip columns/blogs or blind items. In fact, the fic at *Dirty CoW* are a lot like blind items of gossip columns, which are also often mere rumour or even fiction. There are also certain similarities to the format of gossip blogs seen in for example the TV show/books *Gossip Girl*.

The dirt use no names, distinguishing them strongly from other fic, but a single initial in place of names seems to be the standard, or even no identifier at all, instead going for something as vague as “he”, “she” and, notably, “professor”. At the same time, some of the characters are clearly identifiable to everyone, while others likely are to those who know them from inside the game. *Dirty CoW* thus presents itself as balancing somewhere between various spaces and genres.

Aside from the lack of identifiers, the fic at *Dirty CoW* is also distinct from other fic in a few ways, and this is probably due to the way they get a little close to reality (or home?) and also to a sense of propriety and property, precisely because they are written about larp characters. By writing about characters portrayed by someone you know and perhaps played closely with, the writer enters further into the realm of the real, and thus also closer to a barrier that a lot of people feel exists between the real and the imagined. A fictional character, even one that has been embodied on stages or screens, is far removed from the real and exists very strongly in the fictional world. Having been that character personally, or having the physical memory of having known that character, changes the degree of fiction and the level of alibi needed and provided. Perhaps this accounts for the extra layers of anonymity in *Dirty CoW*. The writers of *Dirty CoW* shared that they had considered making the stories in-game, but figured that not everyone wants to engage in that kind of play. This suggests that there is indeed something at stake that is distinct from other kinds of fic – and that this might have to do with the difference between embodied play and fiction about purely fictional, unembodied, people, and the sense of ownership a lot of us feel for our characters.

While I have so far never met a fanworks creator who did not use a pseudonym, the *Dirty CoW* pen names take a specific form; all are alliterative and consisting

of two words, none identify the person behind it in any way, not even a hint towards the House(s) or character(s) they favour. The genres of the fic and the content is also different from what is seen in other fic. Most notably, the *Dirty CoW* fic has only one male/male and one female/female relationship portrayed and 12 female/male. (The fifteenth fic is four pieces of poetry that I am not counting since they are a slightly different genre.) On *Archive of Our Own* (or AO3), one of the largest fanworks archives in existence, a search on the *Harry Potter* works archived gives a result of almost twice as many male/male fic as female/male. There are currently no non-erotic pieces of dirt, although not all of them have progressed to the point of being really dirty as some are works in progress, which also marks a difference to the fic on AO3, where there are nearly as many non-erotic works as there are male/male works in the *Harry Potter* fandom. In this way, *Dirty CoW* has a lot in common with fora dedicated to specifically erotic fanfic.

This shows very clearly that *Dirty CoW* is based off of personal reactions and relations built at a game, rather than by a desire to see favourite characters be together. The ratio of same-gender to different-gender fic at *Dirty CoW* corresponds reasonably to the expected ratio of heterosexuality to non-heterosexuality, if one can even make that kind of claim with such a tiny sample, whereas the works at AO3 shows the preferences in a much larger section of *Harry Potter* fandom. Again, this points towards the influence of ourselves into our characters. While the characters at *CoW* were all conceived by the organisers as gender and orientation neutral, the fic points to us as players playing closer to our own identities, and so, when writing fic about it, we also write about ourselves in a way. Not only that, but if (and I have no way of knowing) some of the fic is written about relationships that played a part in the game, the players of the characters who are the subjects of those fics, will have the bodily memory of that relation in them and might well react to it accordingly. In other words, *Dirty CoW* is not just fic, it is also, at least partially, a part of the greater fic of each character. There is also the possibility that perhaps queering a character you know personally, have played with, maybe know the player of, is a very different matter than queering a purely fictional character. Just as the names of the dirt are removed to create a layer of protection, perhaps the preservation of sexual orientation is for similar reasons. Therefore, even if a writer might want to see the hot Quidditch player and the cute professor together, it might be uncomfortable to write if the author is aware of sexual orientations that run counter to that pairing.

With this in mind, it makes sense for *Dirty CoW* to be portrayed as being off-game, because unless each writer pseudonym hides players of all the characters in each fic (which is unlikely), it would essentially be someone else playing our characters for us. *Dirty CoW* is unique both as a fannish space and, I believe, also as a larp space. It takes to new heights the practice of larpers writing epilogues for their characters. In addition, while I have several times wondered about the divide between larp and fandom, perhaps it is because of how clearly *College of Wizardry* is a fanwork that something like *Dirty CoW* has come into existence. Looking forward,

it may also be a step in closing that imaginary divide. By creating fic about the larp they have played, the writers at *Dirty CoW* has taken both fannishness and larping to a new place, one where the larper as fan becomes visible and undeniable, and I, for one, am both intrigued, entertained and impressed.

I leave you with one more thought about the fans of larp: there are certainly fans of particular larps too. Those who go to every restaging of a game, who put on a restaging to tweak it a bit and see what happens, and who seek out the larps based on their fandom(s).

◆ Markus Montola

College of Wizardry Survey Results

This piece reports some quantitative results of the feedback surveys conducted for the three first runs of *College of Wizardry*. Two different survey forms were used; one for the Premiere, and another for both the Sequel and the Rerun. The Premiere had 138 paying participants, the Sequel and the Rerun had 140 each. Of those participants, 33 played non-player characters in the Premiere, and 25 in the Sequel and the Rerun respectively. The response rate was 62% out of the total 418 participants: 112 premiere players, 74 sequel players, and 73 rerun participants filled the survey. Only a few of the NPC participants gave feedback.

There were respondents from 19 countries; 45% of them being Danish and 21% Swedish. The average age was around 30, with individuals ranging from 18 to over 70. 12% were attending their first larp, while 48% had larped for a decade or more.

In light of the surveys, *College of Wizardry* was an extremely successful larp. In the Premiere, 91% of the participants agreed – totally or somewhat – with the statement “I had a great game”; in the Sequel the number was 89% and in the Rerun 85%. When first-time larpers were removed from the data, 74% of the Premiere, 64% of the Sequel, and 63% of the Rerun players agreed with the statement “*College of Wizardry* was my best larp ever”. Although such a statement does not directly measure the “bestness” of a larp, it serves as a powerful benchmark for differentiating great larps. Out of the players who had larped for a decade or more, 70% of the Premiere players, 55% of the Sequel players and 56% of the Rerun players agreed with the same statement.

The character relation web of *College of Wizardry* was constructed with fairly



*The author, as Sebastian
Dolobov, studying flyers
at the tavern.
Photo by
Christina Molbech*

broad strokes. In the Premiere, there were three main character types: students, teachers, and other staff. The non-teaching staff had a hard time fitting into the larp in the first run, so that segment was mostly eliminated for the Sequel and the Rerun. After this removal, *College of Wizardry* was well-balanced in terms of desirability of different character types: Out of the students, 10% in premiere, 5% in sequel and 2% in rerun agreed that “I should have chosen another type of character”. For teachers, the numbers were 0%, 17% and 10%.

The simple structure was possible due to the large number of supporting characters ranging from permanent characters (house ghosts) to visitors (ministry officials staying at the school for half a day) and quick encounters (monsters to be defeated). The number of players in supporting roles answering the survey was too low to evaluate their satisfaction of the larp, but it appears that their experiences were not as good as those of students and teachers.

Throughout the games, there was some inequality in the design between Paths. In the Premiere, for example, 83% of the Auror students stated that they had good play experiences from their Path, as contrasted with 41% of Unspeakables. In the Sequel, 90% of Aurors agreed, compared to 27% of Curse-Breakers and 23% of Unspeakables. There was significant improvement in the Rerun, however, where all Paths scored well above 60% – except for the Unspeakables still lagging at 38%. Students found Houses much more valuable than Paths for providing good play experiences: Some 80% of students agreed that “My House provided me with good play experiences”.

When looking at the combined answers of the Sequel and the Rerun, it appears that *College of Wizardry* seems to have done a good job in terms of gender balance: 21% of women and 23% of men would have wanted “more power and agency in the game”, 4% of both women and men felt that their character was “too central for other players’ playing”, and 34% of women and 36% of men felt that they “missed all the action gameplay”. Interestingly, 10% of women and 26% of men agreed with the statement “I furthered my storyline or character relationships through erotic or sexual play”. 1% of women and 3% of men agreed that they had “ethical concerns about this game” – however, no reoccurring concerns emerged in the open answers.

On the mental side of things, 85% of women and 92% of men in the April games felt “psychologically and emotionally safe”, and 93% and 97% “felt safe playing with other players”, despite the fact that 54% of women and 43% of men said that they “had emotionally rough experiences in the game”. Players who had rough experiences were very appreciative of the larp: They scored higher on “best larp ever” and “great game”. In fact, none of the players who had emotionally rough experiences disagreed with having had a great game – in any of the three runs.

College of Wizardry was also a beginner-friendly larp. Looking at the replay and sequel respondents, 100% of the first-time larpers and 91% of others “would recommend this larp to other people with zero larp experience”. 91% of the 22 newbies had a great game, 91% “felt psychologically and emotionally safe”, 95% “felt safe playing with other players”, and most importantly, 76% intended to “participate in *College of Wizardry* in fall 2015”.

Each larp culminated in a grand ball with dances and drinks in a fashion sometimes closer to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* than *Harry Potter* fiction. About half of the players agreed that the “availability of alcohol improved my game”. In the Sequel and rerun, 5% stated that the “alcohol use of other players detracted from my experience”, while 89% disagreed. As a curiosity, among the Premiere professors, the availability of alcohol improved the game for 86% of the players. Port wine was abundant at the teachers’ lounge.

Looking at the Rerun and the Sequel together, the median spend on *College of Wizardry* was €600 and the average spend was €650 per player. That sum is based on players’ own estimation, including tickets, travel, lodging, costumes and props.

That number is a rough guess: A significant number of players commented on the difficulty of estimation, and raw data had to be significantly cleaned-up to reach an estimate. For instance, estimations lower than the participation fee were deleted from the data. The larp has been criticized for being very expensive – especially by people who could not attend the larp. It is interesting to note that as the standard fee was €250 (covering organizer expenses including location, food, lodging, cleanup, transportation), on average that accounted for only 38% of the total amount players spent on the larp.

Highest reported investments were in the ballpark of €2000, which is partially explained by many such players flying in from the United States. Indeed, while the Danish and Swedish players spent an average of €550-600, average players from the US spent €1300. On the average, women spent €660 while men spent €630. Average first-time larpers spent €750.

When it comes to time investment, one question covered mental and social preparation, and another covered physical preparation. The first question was supposed to include the study of game materials, relationship work and such, while the second was about costumes, props, makeup et cetera. The median for both types of preparation was 10 hours, and the averages were roughly 32 hours for both. A small group of players skewed the average significantly upwards: Indeed, many players reported spending 300-500 hours on one of those categories, one claiming to having spent “6-7 hours a day, minimum” preparing in Facebook between August and April. Time investment was gendered; women spent 42 hours on mental and social preparation and 38 on costumes and props, while men spent 25 on both. Again, these numbers are only approximates due to difficulty of estimation and extensive data cleanup.

The time spends above explicitly excluded the time spent on CzochaBook. While a median player only spent 3 hours in CzochaBook, the average for the Sequel was 42 hours and the average for the Rerun was 10 hours, individual estimations running up to hundreds. Even though the self-reported data is admittedly unreliable, it appears that a small portion of players became heavy users of CzochaBook, and that the Sequel players who already had a working social network from the Premiere were the heaviest users of the tool. 54% of the Sequel players and 40% of the Rerun players stated that the use of CzochaBook improved their game, while 13% of players of both games stated that their larp would have been better if no one had used it.

One of the major pieces of feedback from the Premiere survey was that players requested more character relationship workshops to be organized on site before the game. This was a reoccurring theme in the open answers, and 59% of the respondents also requested them in the survey. When three hours of workshopping were added – mostly focusing on group dynamics and character relationships – 67% of the Rerun players found them valuable. In the Premiere 57% of the players “felt ready to play when the game started”, which improved to 73% for the Rerun, probably due to workshops.

Perhaps due to the extensive preparation of some players, some 47% of the players “felt guilty for underpreparing” for the larp at some point. In the Premiere, 53% of the players “felt intimidated by other players preparing so well”, a number that decreased to 33% for the Rerun. On the other hand, the well-prepared players “inspired” some 75% of other players in the different runs. Two-thirds of the players stated that character relationships created before the game were important to their play experience.

In conclusion, the evaluation survey paints a picture of *College of Wizardry* as a larp where everything clicked together. Although not every detail was perfect as such, the resulting combination was a larp that gave excellent experiences for an overwhelming majority of its participants: experiences that many of them will treasure for the rest of their lives.

◆ Dominik Dembinski

A Dream of Magic

For most people the tale of *College of Wizardry* started in the spring of 2014 with the announcement of Liveform's and Rollespilsfabrikken's first joint project. However, the roots of this project go way back.

In 2012, two groups of Silesian larpers – Liveform and Splot, won the most influential Polish awards for the best larp scenario and the best player. They decided to join forces and see what they could achieve together. First they started by creating the third edition of the Hollywood-style dieselpunk larp *New Age* and helped with creating a larp in the world of *The Witcher*. Both of these projects were very successful so they decided to come together officially and formed Liveform, an association which set out to create a new quality of larping.

One of Liveform's projects was helping Kamil Bartczak organize *Geas: Burgkon the Second*, an international larp in Grodziec Castle. It was here that the soundtrack from *Harry Potter* movies started playing in my mind. I hummed it for the whole event, dreaming of something that still seemed impossible.

After this event Liveform started working on *New Age 2013*. This project was traumatic due to both practical problems with the location of the larp and emotional clashes between the organizers.

After long discussions some of us came to the decision that creating another larp would be a perfect way to regain motivation. We needed proof that the mistakes of *New Age 2013* were not a sign of our inability, but that we simply lacked experience, and that we would perform better with every new game. It was time to make a *Harry Potter* larp.

The perfect location was found in July 2013 – Zamek Czocha. Me and my fellow organizers spent a whole day just walking around the castle and being amazed by

secret entrances, underground tunnels, dungeons – and the astonishing view around the place. It was magical.

Afterwards I spent time trying to make the budget work, wrote e-mails to Czocha's manager, tried to negotiate a good price, organized fundraising *Harry Potter* larps for larpers and flashmobs in Katowice. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough. Nobody believed this project would ever become true.

Fighting impossible odds had become kind of my thing, mostly because I am too optimistic and stubborn to acknowledge when something is not possible. Over the years I had learned that to achieve the impossible you just have to be in the right place at the right time.

In this case that turned out to be a party at Knutpunkt in 2014. I would not have even been at the event if a friend of mine had not pulled out and left an opening for me in a car. *College of Wizardry* would not exist if I had not drunk too much at the last party and bumped into Claus Raasted. The whole Polish-Danish cooperation would not have materialized had I not been so annoyingly optimistic in presenting everything, the place, the crew of Liveform, the prices, the vision – with the biggest words I could find.

These words would have remained the drunken mumbling of an overexcited larper from Poland – if Claus had not asked me to repeat everything the next day. So I did – and the dream started to become reality.

A few weeks later the design and plot were ready. A few months later the larp was announced and it sold out in a few hours. And more than a year later I write this short account about a dream becoming magic.

*Zamek Czocha.
Photo by Christina Molbech.*



◆ Agata Świstak

Polish is the New Nordic

I have never been as touched by larp as in the moment when the Staff Speaker, professor Crumplebottom, gave an opening speech of the *College of Wizardry* Premiere. I was standing on the mezzanine of the Knight's Hall, not even paying attention to the oration. As a member of the production team I finally saw how ridiculously big a thing we have made and felt magic starting to happen.

The larp was big and loud from the very beginning, of course, when months earlier the widely loved world of *Harry Potter* caught the attention of non-larpers, while experienced players were drawn in by a few well-known names and organizations. Both the Danish and the Polish sides composed organizer teams of experienced people, and whole project was managed professionally from the start.

That was new to our Polish team, where many larps function mainly as social gatherings for wider groups of friends. This time we were working for a purpose bigger than setting up a nice party. The goals we set out for ourselves were few, but grand: creating a pleasant work culture, sharing it with the players, and changing the world.

The biggest problem we encountered during the production were cultural differences. We had not foreseen that the perception of gender and sexuality, and putting those into play, would be such controversial topics. While Polish character writers were focused on delivering a teenage college drama story, some players found the use of stereotypes and historical realities offensive. Subjecting the whole larp to such critique, though unpleasant to some, helped us to develop the world quite unlike to other Polish productions.

College of Wizardry was without doubt a caesura, setting new standards for Polish larp. We received accolades from people we considered leaders worth following:

trendsetters who inspired us, larp rock stars, and academics who taught us theory. Contact with them was almost bottomless source of motivation, and that was what Polish larp scene needed the most.

Practical side of the process was by far the biggest present change. In comparison with previous Polish productions, *College of Wizardry* set new standards of number of people helping with the project. That demanded changing the approach and inviting helpers to work with us on volunteer or sometimes even freelance basis. Up to that moment, giving and receiving aid from the crowd was not organized, and neither organizers or helpers could not demand specific rules about this collaboration.

Fact, that the game which took place at Czocha was considered “unsinkable” blockbuster also helped. It forced people to go outside their usual playing destinations – and since larp was considered a success, changed the perspective about where to look for good games.

Not only international audience have changed its perspective. The larp and its production process became an example for other Polish organizations – it inspired core game design of *The Witcher School*, using intellectual properties as possible game settings and popularized pre-game design documents.

Despite being a non-profit initiative, this project had shown us what is possible. It showed that we are talented enough to be seen in international scene, and that we can work in this branch and develop it just as well as the Nordics and other creators.

While Liveform as an organization is becoming increasingly focused on international collaboration, be it cultural, touristic, or educational, popularity of *College of Wizardry* allowed a group of really crazy people to take some steps in the path of becoming professional larp organizers. We have learned to associate sweet scent of old wood and dusty stone stairs with this life-changing adventure.

◆ **Rikke Munchkin Sørensen**

Hymn of Czocha

A number of songs were made for the Premiere. Most of them were House chants designed to convey a sense of unity within each House, but at the same time unavoidably at the expense of creating an underlying sense of opposition towards the other Houses. They helped set the mood of “us” versus “them.”

For the Sequel, I wanted to make a song that would unite us all as one group against the outside world rather than multiple factions against each other. A school hymn that could be sung by all in unison and create a sense of solemn pride and warm feelings towards the school and everybody in it: “Staff and students, living and dead.”

My vision was that it could be used as an opening song sung by all in the grand hall, complete with school robes and handheld candles, but I didn’t push it and it never came to pass. Maybe in a future run?

Those who knew it did however join in singing it as we marched into the school across the bridge at game start as well as on the second floor where the Sophomores were gathered, waiting for the ball to begin.

Most notably, we sang it together shortly after the game ended, all gathered beneath the balcony with wands waving in the air that was thick with the emotions of what we had just gone through together. As intended, parts of the lyrics seemed to work as both an ingame and an offgame reference: Czocha will stay with you forevermore...

The Hymn of Czocha, performed by Marie Møller, can be heard at: <https://soundcloud.com/kongeriget-baltha/hymn-of-czocha>



Burn (with the Warmth of Thousand Hearts)

Lyric: Cille L. Jensen (Skylar Amstel)

Music: Bjørn-Morten V. Gundersen (Kienan Watson)

Capo on the 4th fret

C Dm
Born out of ashes
Am G
We aim for the sun
C F
Glowing and knowing
G F
what we'll become
Unfold our wings
get ready to fly
a single beat down
and we soar through the sky
C F
And we burn with the warmth of thousand
G G
hearts
C Am
We yearn for combustion,
F G
a whole new start
C F G G
Sendivogius may come apart
F Am G G
But we'll always rise again
Courageous each phoenix
the bravest of all
though fear may besiege us
we rise to the call
We enter as flickers
and turn into flames
Diplomacy teaches
The name of the game

Chorus

With honor we leap
from ashes we fly
defending our morals
with sparks in our eyes
And we burn with the warmth of a thousand
hearts
We yearn for combustion,
a whole new start
Sendivogius may come apart
But we always rise again



Molin, Molin, Molin

Lyrics: Bjørn-Morten V. Gundersen, Anne Grove (Kienan Watson, Dina Herschel)

Music: Bjørn-Morten V. Gundersen (Kienan Watson)

Capo on 3rd fret

Am
Golem, Golem, Golem
Dm E
I made you out of clay.
Am
When you see him rollin'
Dm E
get out of the way
Am
Molin, Molin, Molin
Dm E
together we stay.
Am Dm
Always or never
E Am
the tree is forever

Goodbye Czocha

Lyrics: Bjørn-Morten V. Gundersen

Music: Bjørn-Morten V. Gundersen



*I feel so cold on inside
My emotions are crashing like a crushing tide
I see the faces of loved ones
No longer walking these corridors
I feel so warm inside
This smile is too big for me to hide.
I see the faces of loved ones
in my memories!
I know what I'm going through
But I don't really know what to do.
How on earth did I get this blue?
From meeting people as awesome as you!?
I know my castle is there
So what am I doing here?
Maybe it's just my fears
But it's bringing me to tears
I know the classes are over
After the party I'm finally sober.
I see the faces of loved ones
And think of things we did
I no longer feel driven
I know house points are no longer given.
I see the faces of loved ones
And I just wish to go back!*

Chorus

*I feel reality calling
to let this go, is just like falling
I see the faces of loved ones
I only knew their mask.
I thank for good times and laughter
I wish you all a happy ever after
We see the faces of loved ones...
And there's no need to be sad!
We had the time of our lives
And now we pay the price
Hear the Rooster cries
The Phoenix arise from the ash.
The Dragon roars with its might
The Golem a terrifying sight
the Lion the king of the pride
College of Wizardry

College of Wizardry
The place where we were free!*



Come, Come, Durentius Come

Lyrics: Anders Würtz, Anne Grove, Bjørn-Morten V. Gundersen, Thomas Mertz (Petri Schwartz, Dina Herschel, Kienan Watson, Octavius Landsvik)

Music: Bjørn-Morten V. Gundersen (Kienan Watson)

Capo on the 5th fret

Am Dm G Am
Come, Come, Durentius Come
F C Em Am
Follow the crow of the rooster
Am Dm G Am
Come, Come, Durentius Come
F G Em Am
The legends live on, when the heroes are gone

Am Em F G
Listen to words only spoken by few
Am Em F G
Travel the road where the ashes are new
Am Em F G
Don't be afraid to let go of your past
Am Em F G
Heroes must triumph for the stories to last!
Come, come...

Stare into darkness, stay on your path
When you meet death remember to laugh
Even in darkness there is a light
Pick up your wand and remain in the fight!
Come, come...

We seek no medals, we seek no thrones
Honor our deaths and bury our bones
Our names will live on in the tales to be told
We give our lives so you may grow old
Come, come...

Stay true to yourself, follow your heart
House Durentius will play their part
As our founder, reach for the moon
If we stand tall our time will come soon!
Come, come... x2

Hymn of Czocho

Rikke Munchkin Sørensen

Rikke Munchkin Sørensen

Czo - cha Col - lege, witch - craft and wi - zar - dry, Staff and stu - dents, li - ving and

8
dead: Lis - ten to the tide of the cen - tu - ries, Raise your wand to what lies a -

16
head. 1. Learn from your el - ders and learn from your peers, Find com - fort and
2. En - ter your house with a heart full of pride. Be lo - yal and

22
strength in the laugh - ter and tears. Ma - gic will flow through your
true to the friend by your side. Hearts will be bro - ken and

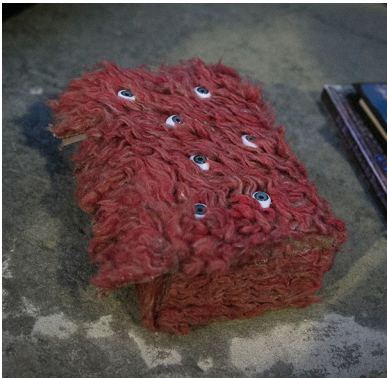
27
hands and your heart. Dis - co - ver your - self and em - brace who you are at
hearts be re - stored, But Czo - cha will stay with you for - e - ver - more. We're

33
Czo - cha Col - lege, witch - craft and wi - zar - dry, Staff and stu - dents, li - ving and

40
dead: Lis - ten to the tide of the cen - tu - ries, Raise your wand to what lies a -

48
head!

*The teaching was supported
by artefacts magical and
mundane as well as
the occasional baby dragon.
Photographs by
Christina Molbech and Larson Kasper
(on the right).*





Ludic Curriculum

◆ Christopher Sandberg

Filling the Professorship in Magical Artefacts

The candle burned at both ends for Wizard Professor Orethisius Pentermain Miclariotic. In itself nothing remarkable – observe any sorcerer even briefly and you will notice they are passionate, living at full speed. The thing with Mic was, his candle burned in reverse.

Accepting the professorship in Magical Artefacts for the Premiere run of *College of Wizardry*, two things hit me. I had not read a single book on the topic I would teach, and I didn't have a single magical artefact laying around. I had my work cut out, and it would only grow that more stressful when I realised there was no study book, and indeed no such collection. How to curate the castle collection? How to lecture on it?

Then and there – about half a year before the opening day of the fall semester would bring a hundred eager students to class – I started growing my professorial beard. And more importantly, I started hoarding anything that could pass for or be turned into a legendary magical artefact – and everything I could find on the legendary artefacts of spellcasting. This is an account of how I ended up editing a two-hundred-page text book on magic and putting together The Artefactorium.

My guiding principle, which I like offer to the reader, is this counterintuitive method: *let the treasure show you the map*. The magic is there, if you look long and hard enough. You will know when you have found it, and you can draw the map back from there. Integrating the treasure into the larp will be easy, because you have ended up with something selected for that very end. Do not presume to start with the right answer, but listen to everyone's questions. Your job is to be hungry for what you will find – everybody else's is to guide you there. Larp is at heart a collective creation, and the more you support others' dreams, the more spellbinding it gets. The



Excited students, unpacking artefacts. Photo by Christina Molbech.

trick is to keep your artistic integrity, while collaborating. And the way to achieve that is by listening, both to others and to your own intuition. Anything “I made” for *College of Wizardry* was an emergent process of mutual inspiration and creativity. Indeed, all this was done with the help of the organisers, the Faculty, and the stellar students in my *Sorcery Summer School*. A very special thanks to Oskar Hejll and Liselle Angelique Krog Awwal for their invaluable help with prop making. And to my family and friends for patience and generosity!

Things Become Real

I decided that I needed three things to teach magic. Firstly, I wanted my students to participate in dry, high-level discussions on the intricacies of their latest ‘magi-cademic’ homework. Secondly, I wanted to be able to do magic. Or, slightly more realistically, I wanted to pull off believable close-up stage magic. Thirdly, I wanted to show real *objects* of magic. Let my students pick up and touch things that would feel genuinely mystical.

I pestered my street magician friends to teach me how to casually *Leviosa* a feather. I scoured thrift stores for the building blocks of the Artefactorium. But, first I needed to know way more about the world of Harry Potter, to figure out how to have a meaningful exchange around it in class. I revisited the books, the films, Pottermore and wikis and took extensive notes.

One thing I have learned over years of larping, is to do all notes diegetically,

ideally even in-character. That way you can bring something like a sorcerer's journal or scrap book, for easy reference during the event itself. Together with the Potter stuff, I started to collect everything I could find with online searches such as "legendary items", "mythical artefacts" and "magic objects". Along the way I read the design bible and corresponded with the organisers about larp minutia – fast-editing the material to fit the world.

At first, this was for me to learn about Potter's magical items. And at first the text really was *Mic's Notes on Magical Artefacts*. But I started to wonder, *why not put this into a compendium for my students?* There would be no magic debate without academic publications to pour over during library study breaks. *Why not give it to all students?* The larp at that time had no curriculum and no study material. My notes were already diegetic, and getting quite comprehensive, with snippets on most areas of the Potterverse, from beasts to brooms. I decide to make it available to all at the castle somehow.

From there it snowballed.

Just Add Muggles

I reached out to the organizers and other teachers, who jumped at the idea. I started formatting, illustrating, bringing in the other teachers' texts, editing, and ghost-writing topics when needed. And suddenly – after months of work – Mic's notes had turned into a collective grimoire, *The Eternal Guide to the Disciplines of Magic*, covering every aspect of the school curriculum. I am proud to say, I secured separate funding for printing, and the organisers could provide each player of the Premiere and Sequel with the book. The Rerun faculty produced their own *Wizardry Compendium, 2015 Edition*, recycling some parts of *The Eternal Guide* and writing lots of new material. And as of the latest runs, the castle actually has an all new leather-bound beast of a book for the classes.

I had to revisit the goal I set for myself in the beginning: classroom discussions on magical artefacts. I realized that the student players would never be able to digest all this in class, during the chaos that is larping. To solve this dilemma, I designed an online study group. A low intensity, mini-larp campaign, where I would post questions and the students would reply with small essays. The concept of an international epistolary *Sorcery Summer School* was born. The idea was that students could discuss magicademics "over owl" and in-character (with emotional emphasis in asterisks, such as *angry quilling* or *teardrops in the ink*). Helping us develop both knowledge and relationships and play with our burgeoning characters' backstories.

It worked beautifully, though it almost never happened, because none of us actually had a character yet. We did not even have names (aside from me who had the general go-ahead on Mic by then). Inspired by the motif of "Padfoot, Prongs et al.", I decided magical nicknames would fit the world. We would all take on a *Secret*



The Eternal Guide, waiting for the students. Photo by Cristopher Sandberg.



In-game letter to Prof. Miclariotic. Photo by Christopher Sandberg.

Sobriquets, and let our characters develop over time from there. I became Strigiformus, and there was soon a rich flora from Ophidian Obsidian to Ember. Later a guest professor in Defence against Dark Arts, took the not so obfuscating sobriquet Unfathomable Phantom.

Now the real fun began. The students contributed to texts and reached conclusions on magical theory I had not been able to make myself. Their ideas started to flesh out the study book, and guide my artefacts crafting. Along the way, I made quite a few artefacts students had discussed in passing. I was also able to plant secrets they told me, as well as intrigues and hidden codes, “easter eggs”, in the book itself. The fact that some of these secret messages merely led to a dusty tea-drinking society called the *Explorers of the Eternal*, would later give some intrepid students quite the in-game surprise.

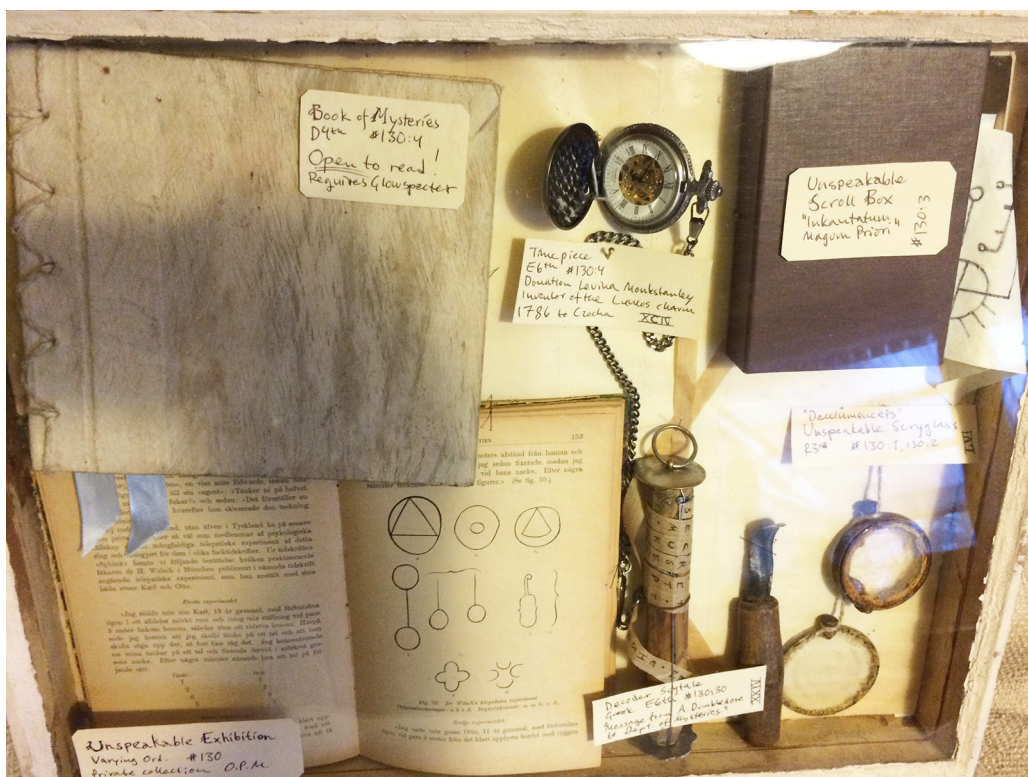
In the end, the book had the backstory and legends of Czocha created by the organizers and players, the study topics created by the faculty, and *every* item in the upcoming Fall Exhibition described in the *Legendary Magical Artefacts Index Magna*. I labelled each artefact with provenance and a hidden roman numeral on the back. This was in fact a page reference to the study book. A cheat I disseminated to my best students enabling them to pass Quickspell tests in class, or gallantly flick to the right page when showing-off during library research.

Charmed and Sipping Potions

My work on the Artefactorium sometimes triggered other teachers to do more. And putting their chapters in the book, I got equally inspired. So, before getting into details about the artefacts themselves, allow me to digress briefly into other magical disciplines.

I was, for instance, particularly charmed by Professor Greifenklaue’s spell index, created by Anna Westerling. A select list of common Potter Charms complemented with creations of her own, all designed to employ freeform meta techniques in a class room setting. Here you would find ways for student to improvise character through “memory telepathy”, share secrets and spread rumours – in effect an entire curriculum in larp empowerment. A workshop disguised as sorcery!

I was equally inspired by Staffan Rosenberg and Johanna Koljonen, who created a delicious, molecular gastronomy based potions system. That is to say, every stage of potion making, from ingredients to final brew, was an edible, bubbly, colour-changing exposé of magical awesomeness. Staffan had purchased an entire bottle stock from a vendor friend, creating about a hundred and fifty vials with things like phoenix ash (smoked sugar). The nifty part was that there were doubles of everything. Same label, similarly coloured powder or liquid, but completely different mundane content. On every container was also a discrete number. Now, potion making worked by carefully adding these numbers into a recipe, indicating which bottle to take. Good students would know how to choose the right one (the players



Unspeakeable display case. Photo by Christopher Sandberg.

you've worked on for hours makes a profound shift in an instant, into something you have not so much made but found. I have taken that to heart, and the method I applied for the Artefactorium was one of tailoring items. In the end the only things I bought new, were special effects and specific Harry Potter paraphernalia, such as a time-turner. The rest consisted of thrift store items, things I had at home, borrowed, or found in the forest. I would set out for certain artefacts, knowing fully well I would end up with something completely different and no idea what to do with it.

The real task being then to figure out what it was! What magical artefacts were hidden inside these everyday objects. I assembled, prodded, pried apart, combined, altered, added new things. I used months cataloguing, disassembling, and welding together pots, stones, and trinkets. Hiding electrical wires, speakers, UV lights. Staining parchments, gilding, adding patina and traces of age-old wear. Slowly I watched my treasury take over the House room by room, to the dismay of my girlfriend as much as to the delight of our three year old daughter.

Then, in that elusive instant my friend talked about, there they would be! No longer an amalgamation of scrap, but mythical artefacts of magic. And by then, the items were extensively described in the central study book too, intimately familiar to the top students, integral to some plot or lecture, and ready to be prominently displayed in the castle library. Half by months of work, half by chance and virtue



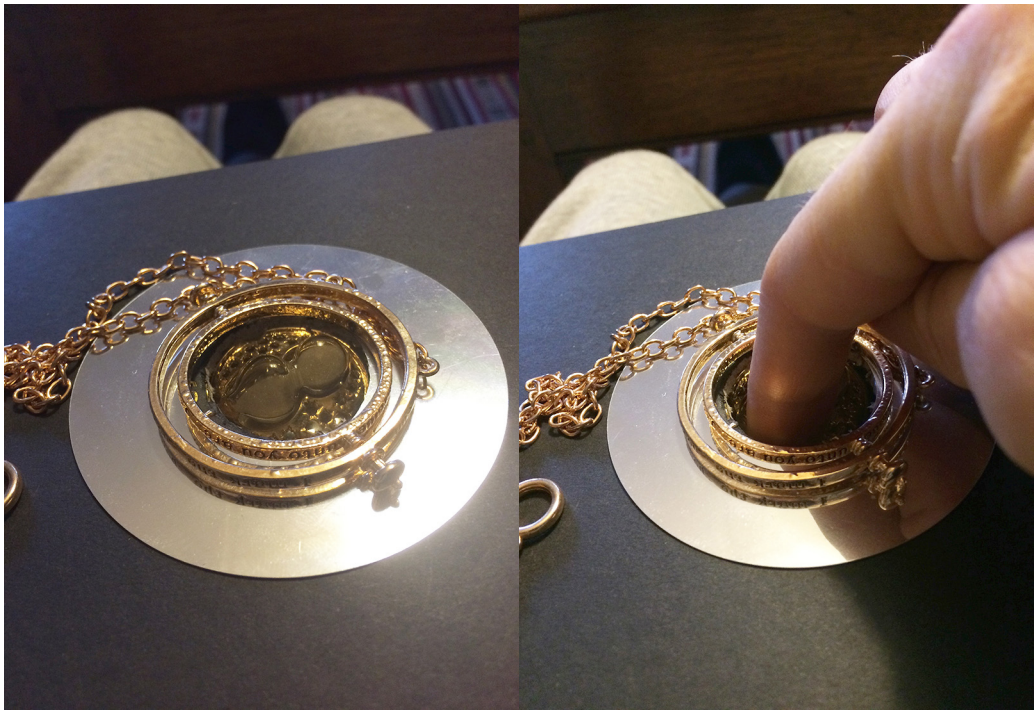
The phoenix Uri being born. Photo by Christopher Sandberg.

of the inert quality of the items. It is hard to explain, but let me give just some examples.

Artefacts of Magic in Play

Let me describe two of my favourite artefacts, the phoenix and the time-turner. I had been dabbling with flash-paper (nitrate wool), cutting it into feathers and building a phoenix. It was placed in a cage, in a corner of the room. In the soundscape I created for the Artefactorium, boiling and clicking noises fit for a laboratory, the phoenix intermittently made itself known through a looped score of wing-flaps and crowing. My plan was to eventually bring the bird out to show the Magizoology students – and having it go up in flames just as it was to be let out of the cage. The actual effect turned out to be quite stunning! Flashy enough to take a quarter of my painfully cultivated beard with it. During the little scene I also left a grey ash pile of smoked sugar on the floor. For days hence, professor Koppel would send potion students to my desk, to try to barter for the rare phoenix ash!

Remember how Mic's life-light burned backwards? One of the fabled time-turners rested on a silvery mirror in plain sight in the Artefactorium. A label on the display box reads "On loan [partly] to Czocha College. Held [mostly] at Department of Mysteries" Opening the protective glass lid, you could touch it. You could try, that is. Pushing your finger towards the hour-glass suspended at the core of the amulet, would just hit nothing. Your finger continuing into the void of this



A time-turner lost in time. Photos by Sandberg.

ever falling-out-of-time artefact. The optical illusion was near perfect. You could even shine a torch at the thing, see the light reflected of the gold and crystal. But it would still be just air to the touch.

This chimerical artefact came about after many different experiments, inspired by the fact that the time-turner I had ordered arrived broken in two pieces. I had earlier procured a spherical mirror from a physics class supply store, and had a round mirror sticker and black box from old gift-wrappings. When they came together, I made a little dance in my study.

Later, during the larp, as I was doing my morning rounds of the Artefactorium, I found that a group of students had slipped a note down the broken time-hole. Then and there I felt all my efforts had paid off. The note was addressed to the Department of Mysteries, simply asking *when* they received this note! It was signed by the soubriquets of what would become the *Czocha Marauders*.

This note started an avalanche of events that would not only fill out the back-story of the broken time-turners in the Harry Potter world. It also made sense of the rather hipshot character description I had received, that Miclarotic was a time-turner addict. Setting out to prevent the catastrophe depicted in the books (when all known time-turners are destroyed), Mic ended up with a time curse, that making the professor absent-minded, eternally late, and ageing backwards. Incidentally this allowed me to play the Sequel as a young student, pulling pranks on my fellow Faculty members.

I started as a Professor knowing nothing, and ended up as a student with *all* the right answers. I knew the forbidden passageways to the library, how to find the darkest artefacts, how to ace my own Midterms exam. Everything, except how to dance at the ball.

But *that* is another story.

◆ Anna Westerling

Conjuring the Internal: Designing and Teaching Charms

I played the Professor of Charms in the first two games of *College of Wizardry*. The aim of the larp was to give players an interesting game, not a full simulation of going to school, so I developed principles for creating classes to generate interesting play. This is also a story of how you can use a magic wand to create diegetic **metatechniques**.

College of Wizardry had a very clear structure. Modelled after regular schools, it had a simple timetable consisting of classes lasting for 45 minutes, with lots of time for gossip in the hallways during breaks. This eliminated uncertainty as all the players knew where to be at any time.

However, I was worried about the actual classes. School classes are traditionally sites of asymmetric communication where one person talks to many people, who are listening quietly. This setup is unsuitable for good larping, where usually everybody gets to be an active collaborative storyteller. Typical lessons are not good for any of the things we larpers are used to take pride in; the interactivity, the participation, the co-creation. However interesting I could be as a teacher, it would not be enough: People were coming to this larp to play with each other, and not to be entertained by me.

You can create many-to-many interaction by working in smaller groups so that everyone has the chance to participate. A rule of thumb is that seven people can still participate fully in a group conversation – and that requires enough time for everyone to be heard. As I had 45 minutes per class, I decided to work with groups of two to four persons to ensure everyone had enough play. As a teacher, I could assign groups randomly in order to foster new connections between characters.

*Many students regretfully
spilled their deepest-held
secrets during the Charms
exercises.
Photo by
Christina Molbech*



Following Harry Potter and His Teachers

I turned to the faculty at Hogwarts for finding direction on how to conduct myself as a teacher. Although the staff of the Potterverse are many things, none of them is a good teacher. Dumbledore's blatant Gryffindor favouritism and Snape's personal grudge against Harry pale in comparison with Umbridge's penchant for torturing people. In Hogwarts, tweens are sent to detention into the mortally dangerous forbidden forest. My task at Czocha was not to be a good teacher, but one who created the maximum amount of drama for the students.

To me the most interesting Potter themes are teenage anxiety and romance, storylines such as the Triwizard Tournament and the following Yule Ball with all the drama involved. Apparently the organisers of *College of Wizardry* agreed with me, since the larp ends with a grand ball that everyone had to find a date for. I wanted to use my classes to add game to that ball, making sure all the players got the maximum drama out of it. I also generally feel it is more rewarding to play on relationships between the characters than adventure plots and quests.

The thing with teen romances is that they are usually secret. But after a while, playing on secret longings and hidden crushes becomes boring. At some point, you usually want to bring them out. Revealing secrets creates opportunities for players to move forward with their drama. Your character might not want to reveal any hidden information, but as a player you will want maximum drama, to have the other characters discover your secret Death Eater father, your creepy childhood, or the fact

that you were expelled from your last school. The challenge is how to implement that in a larp.

I have previously tackled this dilemma in 2007 when we organised *A Nice Evening with the Family*, a larp about bourgeois families keeping up appearances. As the point of the larp was to keep up appearances for as long as possible, until the surface would burst, we needed techniques for revealing the internal. Inspired by the Danish-Swedish freeform roleplay scene and particularly the earlier work of the Vi åker jeep collective, we used numerous *metatechniques*, game mechanics, to reveal secrets to players and characters during the larp.

The two crucial metatechniques we applied were *inner monologue* and *memory scenes*. To prompt an inner monologue, a game master would simply ask someone to say out loud what their character is thinking. While other players are supposed to hear this, their characters are not. In freeform inner monologue is usually used when a character has experienced something traumatic and you want to hear their inner reaction. Memory scenes are scenes where you, through play, enact something that happened in the past, something the character remembers. In a freeform it is typically used to make things emotionally more demanding: For example, before playing a break up scene, you would play the first date. The same technique can be used to create (possible) future events.

These are the two tools I wanted to bring into *College of Wizardry*. In a magical universe I just needed a wave of my wand.

Designing Charms

J.K. Rowling describes a lot of spells in the books. Unfortunately, many of them are impossible to use in a larp setting. For example, *leviosa*, the spell to make something fly, is hard to simulate in a larp since things don't fly. I went through all the Harry Potter charms, removed the impossible ones, sorted there rest into four different categories:

Body Charms are spells that change the body somehow. For example, *locomotor corpus* forces the person under the spell to move as the spell-caster says.

Charming the Senses are spells that change how you perceive things. For example, *silencio* silences your voice.

Mental Charms are spells that can change your mood, mind, or will.

Magical Charms are spells that affect the magic around you.

Some of the spells described in the books had to be adapted to function at a larp. For example, the spell *expelliarmus* is placed on the wand so that it leaves your hand. I changed it so that it was placed on the hand to throw away the wand. This was necessary since a player's hand can throw a wand away, but an inanimate object such as a wand can't really fly out from a hand on its own.

I went through all the spells that Rowling specified, sorted them, and added a whole bunch of new creations. All of these were described in *The Eternal Guide*, a

textbook given to all students and studied during the larp. Going thought Rowling's spells made it clear that she is not a systematic like Tolkien, but that she rather made the spells up as she needed them and gave them cool Latin inspired names.

Mental charms interested me the most. Although making someone's legs move around uncontrollably, it doesn't really take the game anywhere. With mental charms you can really do things that matter.

As Rowling created spells for a book, and not for a larp, the novels offer some mental spells, but not a whole lot. There are *legilimens*, which can be used for memory scenes, and a few others, but not many. I ended up creating a whole stack of new ones for the larp. My personal favourites were *esprige*, which basically made the character give an inner monologue out loud, and *amorosa*, which caused someone to become infatuated for a while.

The Mental Charms were also sorted into three categories. You could alter a person's mood, affect their mind, or change their will. Mood altering spells included *beautivate* and *confident*, the first made someone feel beautiful and the second confident. These were both positive charms that would give the character courage and the player an alibi to actually go the extra mile. The mind magic was used to pick someones brain, as the examples mentioned above: *legilimens* and *esprige*. The will magic contained *amorosa* but also spells such as *imperio* (which makes the victim obey the commands of the caster).

The Practice of Teaching

Each of the classes I taught was carefully designed. They always started the same way. First I would make my students arrange the chairs in a horseshoe, so everyone could see each other. The class opened with a mind reading exercise with *esprige*, going round the students pointing my wand at each pupil to see what they were thinking. I made sure each student got to speak, and it was also the opportunity for the players to reveal things they wanted to put into the game. Some of them revealed who they where going to take to prom, some thought about their Death Eater parents, and some just thought about nothing.

As this was an educational setting, I had the perfect excuse to explain and describe the spell before I casted it. I also said things to prompt thoughts about certain topics, saying, for example, that you can be thinking about prom or family secrets. This was intended to support players in revealing things interesting to other students. I started the round with a player I knew already and whom I trusted to come up with something interesting.

All of the mind reading sequences were kept quite short since I did not want any one student to dominate the room for too long. The purpose was to give the players a chance to get things out into play – so that I could catch what was happening in their game and use that during the remaining class. Not all thoughts revealed were impactful for the game but some of them. One student, for example, was

thinking that he would rather take another girl to the prom than his date while both girls were, of course, in the room.

We then went on to *legilimens*, the memory spell. As in any real classroom, I first demonstrated the spell in front of the class. I first asked for volunteers. If there were none I would assign students played by players I trusted would be able to show how it could be done. It was of course always awkward for the students to perform their first kiss in front of the entire class. Then we practiced in groups of three: the person that holds the wand, the subject, and the helper. The wandholders cast the spell on the subject and declare what type of memory they want to see, such as the first kiss. The subject then explains the memory, and after that the memory is enacted in play. The spell caster sets the scene: “You are behind the barn of the party. The two of you have snuck off and you look into each other’s eyes...” The players then play out this memory. First kisses are a particularly good topic, not only for creating teen drama, but also because they only include two people. However, the students could also choose to go for other types of memories, someone even revealed a traumatic memory of killing a muggle.

After *legilimens* we would move on to *amorosa*, the love spell. I would again demonstrate and make one student fall in love with another. I would try to get a feeling for the group, and find out which characters would serve as most interesting targets for a love spell. Once I made a pure-blood fall in love with a geeky muggle-born, which started a love plot between them. Other times it was just hilarious as my students confessed their love for each other. After the demonstration the students would again practice in groups.

At the end of each class I would always assign homework, but I never controlled if it had been completed. I told my students to practice the spells we had learnt in class. This was an alibi for players to go around and create play by casting spells at each other.

In each class a student would raise the question about the morals of using these spells, a topic which I avoided by postponing the discussion to months after the three-day larp. Instead, I approached my class like a theatre class where everyone knows everything about each other. I eased my scared students by telling that my classes are “a safe space” where they could safely reveal their secrets. That was, of course, a lie since I always spread what I had learned to ensure maximum drama for everyone.

Professor of Awkward Silences

I designed my own character in a way that would enable as much play for others as possible. With only 45 minutes for each class, I realized that keeping track of time and being strict were important features my character would have to have. My character ran a tight ship and would not waste time on talking. She was also conservative. I named her Mathilda Greifenklaue, griffin claw in German.

What I didn't expect was how insensitive my character would turn out to be. There were so many traumatic stories coming up during class, I could not possibly react to, or understand, all of them. I needed to push the class forward so that all would get their piece of the game. I think my students expected me to be shocked as they were revealing dark secrets, but in truth they were far too many for me to even remember. In the Sequel I even told my class that we had hired a counsellor for the college to handle all these feelings, while in my class we would be concentrating on spells. Thanks to my determination to push the game forward through some creative use of magic, the students named me Professor of Awkward Silences.

Consequences

In the two games of *College of Wizardry*, I taught twelve Charms lessons in total. I received a lot of positive feedback from my students; apparently the classes generated dramatic play not only in the classroom but also elsewhere in the larp. The spells were also used in the Rerun of *College of Wizardry*.

I had also, without intention, created diegetic metatechniques, bringing the techniques that were out of game in *A Nice Evening with the Family* into the fiction. This has been tried previously in different ways elsewhere, but I think the magic system was an elegant way to implement it here. Another side effect is that players were unknowingly educated in my classes on metatechniques. Hopefully I even taught my students something they can actually use in other larps.

As the larp ended I felt that I would miss my students. I would have loved to continue. When was I going to get to plan my next class with new exciting spells and teach the students all about them?

◆ Daniel Sundström

Strict Lessons Yield Fun and Play!

The first question I asked myself when signing up for *College of Wizardry* was: How will the lessons work? Usually, memories of school are hallmarked with boredom and ennui for most people, with the highlights being free periods, lunch breaks, or the final ring of the bell. The lessons themselves, apart from maybe a favourite subject or two, are usually remembered as boring, tedious, and long. So why would someone want to roleplay going back to school? More specifically, why would someone pay money to be stuck in fake lessons, learning fake subjects thought up by fake teachers giving fake exams?

The answer is: trust in the people playing the teachers. Knowing that the teacher players have worked hard to design my game experience during each of the lessons practically guarantees that I'll have something interesting to do during that time. Because of this lessons are bound to be super-curated, high-octane game experiences. And boy, was this the case!

The Format

Lessons were 45 minutes long, mostly with the same group of students and with the same schedule repeating over two schooldays. Attendance was “mandatory” – attending class was required in-game, while off-game nobody would care if you weren't there and unless you, as a player, brought it up you wouldn't face in-game consequences. So you wouldn't get into trouble for missing a class, or switching classes, or just going to the ones you enjoyed.

This was an excellent design choice since it allowed players to play on how

much you hate Magizoology or how boring Defence Against the Dark Arts always is – without actually having to spend game time doing something you, as a player, feel is boring. Also, by stating that this is common and “how things are done” at the school, it provided players with an alibi and a method for taking responsibility for their own experience, instead of getting stuck doing things they weren’t enjoying.

The Subjects

The lessons themselves varied greatly from teacher to teacher – but every class I attended was marvellous and provided huge opportunities for play. One notable example was Theory of Magic, taught by the bone-dry Professor Thorniwell, who only had a sense of humour when drunk on port. The teaching materials were super-dry theoretical works (real world academic texts with minor magical substitutions), but the lessons themselves, underneath a veneer of dusty discussion, allowed character play by letting you, as a player, present your ideas of magic and how it works. This allowed players to communicate the characters’ moral values and stands on topical questions by proxy. By designing for this and allowing for a lot of improvisation, the lessons worked as a sounding board upon which to project your character.

Another notable example was Potions. A system for actually brewing potions – primarily based on acidity and caustics – which clearly communicated effect by themselves was designed by the teachers, which allowed for *assumed competence* and *explicit failures*. By explicit failures, the system allows students who want to be explicitly bad at Potions to fail in a believable and tangible way: “*Orange, Longbottom? Didn’t you hear me state quite clearly that only one rat-spleen was needed?*” The system communicated failure with violent (but harmless) chemical reactions, making it instantly obvious when someone had failed. Its counterpart, assumed competence, allowed ‘good’ students to follow a set of simple instructions in order to visibly succeed in a demonstrable way, by the colour of the end result and the lack of violent reactions. The game used a colour-based and taste-based code for signifying potion effects to drinkers (red for health, green for poison and so on), and since potions created via the system also conformed to this system, this provided players with great gameplay opportunities using potion lessons as a means to acquire props with which to further plot elsewhere.

A third example is Charms, which consisted of group exercises where students took turns casting truth spells, secret-revealing spells, and other similar spells on each other, providing a plausible and believable way to get secrets, gossip, crushes and agendas out in the open and into play. This, paired with attendance being “mandatory”, worked beautifully to make students fear going to Charms (who knows what will come out?), while still allowing a way out for players wanting to reveal secrets of information in other ways. Also, sitting in a circle hearing players

*Working in the class.
Photo by Nadina Wiórkiewicz*



*The author, as TJ Talix,
attending Professor Bane's
D.A.D.A. class.
Photo by
Christina Molbech*



confess their secret crush while sitting next to them is hilarious when played in a school setting.

Conclusion

All in all, the lessons on *College of Wizardry* worked really well as set pieces of well-designed and curated gameplay which each player was guaranteed to experience, should they want to. By using the format of a strict school together with cleverly designed lesson formats and subjects, the rigidity and formality of setting expanded the creative space of character expressions while also being highly enjoyable. In short, going to school is a lot more fun when lessons are built to heighten drama, not impart knowledge.

◆ Mike Pohjola

Teaching Dark Arts at a Magic School

“You should never use the Torture Curse on a baby, especially an unborn one.”

This is a personal account of my experiences as a teacher in *College of Wizardry*. The larp was an emotional rollercoaster, with crying and laughing, grimacing and growling, cursing and charming, teaching and learning.

College of Wizardry was more or less designed based on the philosophy of “create your own character, but we give you a few pointers which you are free to ignore”. Players were given a one-page character description with things like nationality, age, previous school, and some pointers on where to take the character, and specifically told to throw anything out the window if they would rather play something else. In a way, *College of Wizardry* characters were opt-in.

This meant that characters were provided with no significant personal relationships to other characters, but players would have to create them amongst themselves before the larp. In my native Finland this is very uncommon, but more customary in the Danish larp scene.

There are many ways to do this. One is to contact individual players you already, and agree that you are my enemy, my old friend, or something in that vein. I used Facebook groups and one-on-one chats for that, and organized a live meeting of the Finnish players.

Another way was to start an in-game organization, such as an student club, and invite other characters to join it if the players felt interested in those themes. I created the Committee Advocating Natural Dark-Light Equality, C.A.N.D.L.E., a student association dedicated to making sure the both sides were heard in the whole Voldemort-Dumbledore debacle.

Third was to create a plot, and ask game masters to link other characters to it, or pull them in yourself during the larp. I did this, too, creating a mystery around the disappearance of my predecessor. I asked the organizers to give me both red herrings and something leading to the real culprit as well. Then I asked the game masters to spread rumour that my character was responsible for the disappearance. In retrospect this might have been more like an attempt to introduce the Finnish type of pre-planned secret-based plot to the larp than playing on the strengths of the *College of Wizardry* approach.

I'm sure there are lots of other ways to craft relationships besides these, but as this sort of thing is rarely done in Finland, I'm no expert.

In some larps leaving the social network to players can work, but it's not a very good method for creating a community. For example, the Harry Potter style network of family ties is hard to create, as family names had been predetermined. It's also hard to try to introduce a "murder mystery" after all the characters are finished, and trying to ask the organizers to find the culprit. I don't know if someone was actually contacted saying "Oh, by the way – you killed the previous Professor of Defence Against Dark Arts."

In Finnish larps family relations, multiple relations to other characters, plots and intrigues, murders and the like would have been an obvious part of a character description. The Danish argument is that you shouldn't pre-create relationships because some players might not want to play them: "In soviet Finland, the game plays you."

As far as I have understood, the Polish writers would have preferred to write more detailed personalities, plots and relations, but were instructed against it due to the Danish aesthetics. Similarly, some Finnish players had to press the Danish organizers into allowing us to create a unified timeline for the staff – to figure out who's been in Czocha for how long, who remembers which events, who used to be a student under whom, and so on. We felt it would be impossible to figure out our character relations without a broader structure, while the Danes felt it would be unnecessary hindrance to improvisation.

Although I personally I had a great time at *College of Wizardry*, and received very much support from the organizers whenever I did came up with some plot, faction or need, I believe a Polish-Finnish design would have fit this larp much better.

Professor Bane

I created myself a character: Bombastus Bane, Professor of Dark Arts. I mean – *Defence Against* the Dark Arts.

I wanted to make Bane seem as evil as possible without landing him in prison. Everyone "knows" he is a former Death Eater but no one can prove it. Everyone knows he teaches Dark Arts, but he's never been caught. He just looks so evil – cartoonish Potter evil that is. Bane is dressing in black, has a distorted face and voice,



Bombastus Bane, Professor of Defence Against Dark Arts. Photo by Christina Molbech

and hates the Head Auror Harry Potter with a vengeance. Sort of like Czocha's very own Severus Snape.

I went out of my way to have evil make-up, ridiculous Wicked Witch of the West hat, red-and-black robes and fresh tattoos where the Dark Mark would have been. And for the whole weekend of the larp, I only spoke with a scary voice – scary enough to hear students making fun of it during the larp.

To add a little twist to this, I figured Bane wasn't born bad and had a good "soul". This was reflected in his pearly white wand, his swan Patronus, his heart tattoo, and his tragic love for his Azkaban-incarcerated family. This was the inner layer of Bane that some got to see during the larp.

Trying to be as children's book evil as possible, on the border between silly and scary, made Professor Bane become fairly iconic as far as larp characters go. After the *College of Wizardry* premiere run there was a Danish children's Potter larp by the same organizers called *Trylleslottet* with no less than two Professor Banes, and I made a Christmas video greeting as him for the Danish organizers. I played the character again in the Sequel, and brought him back once more for the fifth run of *College of Wizardry* – revamped to suit the new Potter-free game world.

Family Tragedy

What some people knew is that Bane's mother, father and wife had been in Azkaban since the war. What no one knew was that his wife had been pregnant at the time of imprisonment, and had given birth to their son Vladimir in Azkaban. Vladimir had grown up there amidst Dementors and criminals.

Friday at lunch Bane received a letter informing him that his wife had passed away at Azkaban. Bane left the dining room to ponder on this in the Dark Forest. While I was there, I realized my natural Turkuist playing style would require several long hours alone letting the emotions wash over me. But I also realized the style of this larp would actually benefit from me making this as public as possible. So I let go of my private immersion and decided to quickly turn Bane's sadness into anger. He returned to the dining hall to attack a visiting Auror Caitlin O'Doherty, who had just spent a year in Azkaban "studying" the prisoners. Clearly she had killed Bane's wife!

Wands were drawn and death threats growled in front of horrified students, but eventually O'Doherty managed to drag Bane to his classroom to explain the thing.

"Your wife was very sick, had been for a long time," she said. "She would have died anyway. But what you must know is that she didn't die naturally. She was killed."

"BY WHOM?"

"By your son Vladimir."

"YOU'RE LYING."

"He wanted to save her from further pain. But now he will be accused of murder. Only you can help him, if you prove you are working against the Dark Wizards."

"ARE YOU THREATENING ME?"

"I'm trying to help you!"

Auror O'Doherty managed to convince Bane his son had killed his wife. All the fault of the Ministry of Magic, of course, but still. However, what finally broke Bane's heart was the Sorting Ceremony in the evening. Looking at the Juniors cheered to their new Houses, Bane suddenly realized Vladimir was nineteen, and this year he would have been a Junior.

If Vladimir hadn't grown up in Azkaban, he would have been sorted into Faust, and Bane would've been so proud. Or sorted into some other House, and Bane would have had petty arguments with him. And he would have been a part of all those student crushes and initiation rituals and other magically ordinary things that fill the life of a teenage wizard. And maybe his mother Miranda would have been there on the balcony with Bane watching him.

I cried, in and off, for an hour about this, first looking down at the ceremony and afterwards pouring my heart out to one of the witches. I still get a little misty thinking about that. What could have been.

Laurent Liaison

College of Wizardry wasn't all sad, far from it. It combined tragedy, comedy, romance, mystery, school life, and all the other great elements that make up the magic of J.K. Rowling's books.

The love of Bombastus and his late wife did not stop him from finding a little time for a secret romance with a student. In retrospect, this perhaps doesn't make sense in real-world terms – but there was an internal realism to the whole experience. In a sense, the emotions and events of a whole school year were packed into two and a half days.

Tatienne Laurent was Bane's least favorite student, a female Harry to my Severus. She was a good student, but as a muggle-morn, could not understand Bane's hatred for Aurors. Bane hated her guts, and she his. Too bad they had a mutual attraction going on. Something neither would be likely to admit. Bane's relationship with Laurent was one of the relationships I had crafted with other players before the game.

They had never spoken about their feelings until the day when Bane lost his wife. They met discreetly in a secret cellar, having descended many, many stairs. She wanted to discuss her studies, her investigations of the Torture Curse. Bane couldn't concentrate.

"LAURENT. I LOST MY WIFE." Laurent, unwillingly, consoled him. "YOU REMIND ME OF MIRANDA. YOU HAVE THE SAME SMILE." Five minutes later, they were doing the dirty against the wall.

By the next day Tatienne had already fallen in love with some other student. She and Bane met again at the cellar where someone had drawn a huge magic circle.

"YOU WOULD LEAVE ME FOR SOME PIMPLE-FACED STUDENT?"

"What you and I had, Professor, was just sex. Really good sex."

"I THOUGHT YOU HAD FEELINGS FOR ME."

"Professor Bane, I hate you."

"WELL, THAT'S A FEELING, ISN'T IT? DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? LOVE AND HATE ARE BUT TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN. THEY CAN NEVER BE SEPERATED."

"It doesn't work like that for me."

"LAUREEEEEENT, DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? I LOVE YOU."

Awkward silence.

In the Sequel she was still dating her pimple-faced student.

C.A.N.D.L.E.

Bane was the founding member of the Czocha chapter of the Committee Advocating Natural Dark-Light Equality. This was my own addition to the fiction, something I envisioned as a sort of "evil Amnesty." An ineffectual political association



CANDLE

Committee for Advocating
Natural Dark-Light Equality

- * Close down Azkaban, Nurmengard & Quasimodo Bay!
- * Release children born to imprisoned witches!
- * Stop Auror misconduct!
- * Freedom of speech also in Dark matters!
- * Freedom to criticize Aurors and Moll!
- * End persecution of families of criminals!
- * Minister of Magic should be elected by voting!

Crocho Chapter first meeting of the semester
this Thursday at 21:30 in Prof. Bane's
classroom. Bring your allies!

ALL DIFFERENT
ALL EQUAL

that wants to close down Azkaban, stop Auror misconduct, stop harassment of the pure-bloods, and so on. All perfectly reasonable political goals which just happen to be Death Eater friendly.

There was a solitary mention of a War on Dark Magic in the Design Document. It was a twist on the War on Terror, of course, and I expanded on it heavily. Bane's son had been born in prison and was kept there. The whole Bane estate had been auctioned off. Some players picked up on this and created examples of similar Auror misconduct for their characters.

In preparation for the Sequel, I introduced on Czochabook a discussion on a leaked journal of prisoner Aladdin al-Hazred, smuggled out of Quasimodo Bay prison. An obvious take on the *Guantánamo Diary* by Mohamedou Ould Slahi, excerpts of which had just been published in *The Slate* at the time.

As expected, many characters assumed C.A.N.D.L.E. to be a front for a Death Eater conspiracy. The first meeting was full of observers sure we were up to no good, and Death Eater sympathizers waiting to be organized for a revolt. However, we simply discussed human rights and whether to protest a Minister's visit to campus.

C.A.N.D.L.E. proved a nice starting point for meetings and relations, but since human rights or the War on Dark Magic were in no way relevant to any plots or characters within the larp, it did not really take off.

Lessons in Torture

Much of the larp was spent on magical schoolwork. Bane had recently become Professor of Defence Against the Darks Arts II (or DADA2 for short), having taught DADA1 for many years. This meant he would teach the students how to defend against the Unforgivable Curses, which are... "CLASS? YES! THE TORTURE CURSE, THE IMPERIUS CURSE, AND, OF COURSE, THE KILLING CURSE."

To learn how to defend against them, the students would first have to understand them and learn how to cast them. Since they are Unforgivable, this posed a bit of a problem, but Bane had it all figured out.

For the larp I had prepared two lectures, and Bane gave both of them three times. The first one started with a test on natural learning ability and on theory of the Unforgivable Curses. The second one was all about practicing the Torture Curse on other students. The problem is that casting Unforgivable Curses on people is unforgivably illegal.

Bane had found these great single-use Solberg wands that some unknown person had already imbued with the unforgivable Imperius Curse, one that controls the victim for a while. Unleashing that pre-prepared spell would be totally legit, unlike casting it. After all in a case like this, Bane argued, the legal responsibility for the

Flyer for C.A.N.D.L.E. Photo by Mike Pohjola.

Defence Against the Dark Arts II

This is an anonymous test. Do not write your name on it, because it may be seen by an Auror. This test does not affect your grades, but serves to inform the Professor of the basic level of knowledge the class as a whole has on the topic, and of the division of natural learning styles within the class.

What is your major?

AUROR

What is an Unforgivable Curse?

IT IS A SPELL BANNED BY THE MOM

How many Unforgivable CurSES are there?

3

What is/are the Unforgivable Curse(s)?

AVADA KEDAVADA, IMPERIO, CRUCIO

What happens if Aurors can prove you have cast an Unforgivable Curse?

THEY WILL LOCK YOU UP WITHOUT A PROPER TRIAL

Have you ever cast an Unforgivable Curse? If yes, which curse, and how many times?

"NO, I HAVE NOT"

Have you ever had an Unforgivable Curse cast upon you? If yes, which curse, and how many times?

"NO, I HAVE NOT"

I understand something better after I...

Try it out. * Think it through. * Read in another mind with Legilimency.

When I think about the worst thing in my life, I am most likely to get...

A nightmarish picture. * Horrible screams. * The sensation of running away.

In a grimoire with lots of pictures and symbols, I am likely to...

Focus on the pictures. * Focus on the writing. * Read everything out loud.

I like teachers who...

Put diagrams on the board. * Explain a lot. * Don't bother with the law.

I remember best what I...

See. * Hear. * Say. * Destroy. * Do. * Draw. * Dream. * Debate.

Dark 2

Kinetic 2

behavior of the controlled person is on whomever placed the Imperius Curse on the wand. So, the only way the students could practice (enduring) the Torture Curse was to do so under the Imperius Curse, which was perfectly legal for the students, as no student cast the Imperius Curse – they just unleashed it from their pre-prepared wands. Preparing those wands was illegal of course... quite unfortunate we'll never know who did that. It's all perfectly simple, legal, moral, and educational.

“PARTNER UP WITH ANOTHER STUDENT YOU WILL HAVE NO TROUBLE HATING.”

The victim-to-be would cast the Imperius Curse on the torturer saying: “Cast the Torture Curse on me for one second.” Then the torturer would torture the victim with their own wand. After this, the victim would tell the torturer what they felt. Then they would switch. At the end of the class we would discuss our experiences, and figure out ways to use what we have learned about defense.

In one of these classes Bane had one pregnant student. Bane did have a soft spot of sorts for protecting babies, and another one for Norah Asar. So he didn't want the baby hurt.

“Professor! Can the baby be accidentally hurt when you cast the Torture Curse on the mother?”

“NOT UNLESS YOU REALLY WANT TO TORTURE THE BABY. BUT THEN YOU WOULD HAVE TO TARGET YOUR HATRED AT THE BABY, WHICH CAN BE DIFFICULT.”

At this Bane remembered how his own pregnant wife had been taken to Azkaban to be tortured by Dementors.

“BUT REMEMBER CLASS, YOU SHOULD NEVER USE THE TORTURE CURSE ON A BABY. ESPECIALLY ON AN UNBORN ONE.”

Class snickers.

“IN FACT, YOU SHOULDN'T USE THE TORTURE CURSE ON ANY BABY.”

More snickering.

“TO CORRECT MYSELF, YOU SHOULD NEVER USE THE TORTURE CURSE AT ALL, SINCE IT IS COMPLETELY ILLEGAL.”

Learning to Teach

I'm not a teacher, but I played one in a magic school. And I learned quite a bit about teaching doing it.

I have taught writing for interaction at university level, and know first hand that a college teacher needs no pedagogical skills.

I decided that my Professor Bane would be not only possibly quite evil, but actually a pretty good teacher. I sought for inspiration in my university Swedish

*Test answers of an anonymous student. Notice the wonderful quotation marks around “No, I have not.”
Photo by Mike Pohjola.*

teacher who presented the class with a test of our learning abilities, and conducted her course accordingly. Bane gave his students a similar test, a bit more twisted and completely unscientific, but still, more than I ever did to any class that I actually taught.

The results surprised both me and my character. Magizoologists are verbal learners. Fair enough. Unspeakables are visual and mental learners. Aurors are visual and kinetic learners.

But both Curse Breakers and even Healers are what I dubbed Dark learners. Meaning that they learn by committing crimes, inflicting pain, breaking the rules, and so on. Nevertheless, none of the Healers had any prior experience with casting Unforgivable Curses. (Unlike many other Senior students.)

Based on these results I actually modified the classes giving some more reading, to others more practice. In the future I will be able to do this in real life, as well.

Getting the Style

Coming to the larp for the first time, the benefits of this style of larp design were very much lost to us Finns. But in the Sequel I was ready to make use of those.

The most obvious one was the huge cadre of non-player characters. I wanted to have a cool exam that is very playable. So I made an Easter egg hunt (with a crate of “dragon eggs” I had made at home) with monsters! The students would run around the courtyard looking for hidden eggs and fighting Dementors, werewolves, harpies, and Dark Wizards.

In a Finnish larp this would be pretty much impossible, or at least require an immense amount of preparation. Here I could simply e-mail Dracan Dembinski, the person in charge of the NPCs, and he would have them ready for me. Before the first exam, I just walked in to the NPC bunker and instructed them on what to do. And, boom, there were ten monsters ready to attack!

Both the NPCs and the special effects were available to anyone who asked for them in advance. And in my case sometimes just by walking in and asking if they’re not busy right then.

This may be obvious to players of many nations, but coming from Finland where game production is usually minimalistic and character writing extensive, having such resources at hand takes some getting used to.

Melanie

For the Sequel I wanted to up my game. Not only the teaching stuff, but the personal story, as well. And while I have the chance, why not do what J. K. Rowling didn’t do with the Harry Potter world.

The Potter books have a very strange racist backbone that is never truly dealt with. It’s just something everyone takes for granted. I speak of the treatment of

Muggles. It could be expected that an epic story like this would end with these two factions being united and wizards perhaps coming out to Muggles. This never happens. But in a larp it's possible to write your own ending.

I invited my friend to play Melanie, Bane's "daughter". She was not really his daughter, but a Muggle he had taken under his wing and introduced to the wizarding society. Everyone was told that this is Bane's real daughter, and some were told that she had been cursed to temporarily lose her magic powers.

In reality she had never had any magic powers, but Bane hoped to give her some. Bane set out to turn a Muggle into a witch. Psychologically this meant Bane had lost his fragile stability after news of his wife's death in the first larp. It would also mean he had devised an ingenious spell worthy of a place in history books, something that even the darkest Death Eater would consider a taboo.

It should be very difficult, of course, so I decided Bane would need to destroy a dragon egg in a ritual with twenty or so other witches and wizards. I gave them white masks reminiscent of Death Eaters, and the NPC department provided colored fire, smoke, fireballs – and offered even more cool stuff. We had the ritual in full view of everyone, but somehow nobody stopped us.

I'd also thought that making Melanie a witch might remove Bane's own powers. But I hadn't decided for sure. So Bane didn't know what would happen, either.

We had the ritual, Melanie became a witch, everyone lost their powers momentarily, but soon regained them. Except for Professor Bane. One of his favorite students noticed this, and wanted to have him test it. He came up with excuses, not wanting to try it out. Besides, his wand had been lost. As a player I decided to go for an open ending on that part.

But the favorite student managed to find Bane's wand and bring back it to him. And as soon as I grabbed it, the little *Lumos* led light on the tip lit up, just by accident. But in the larp it meant that Bane's magic had returned, after all.

Surprisingly, a happy end.

◆ Martina Ryssel

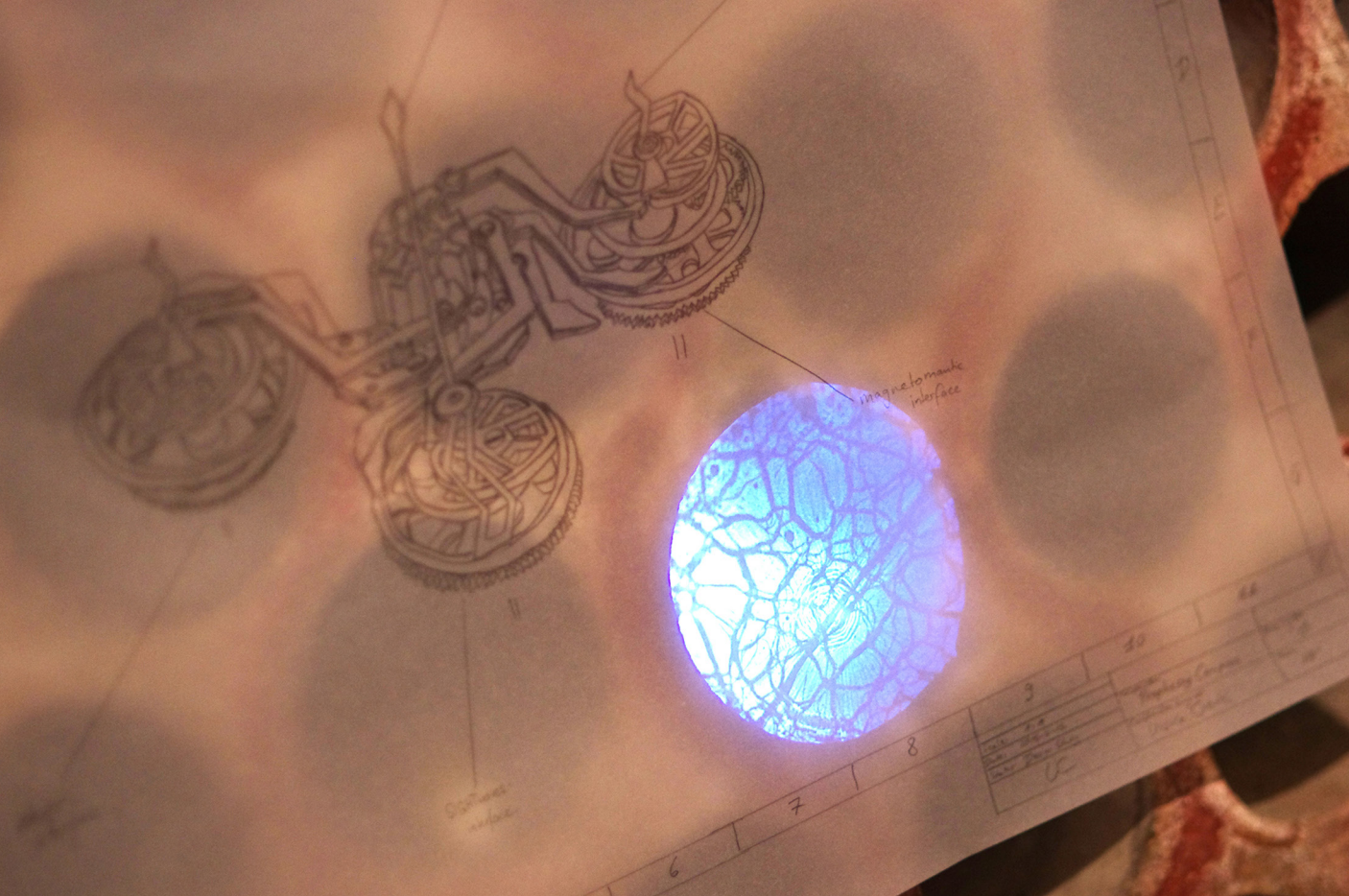
Technomancy – Introducing a Non-Canon Subject

When I was first presented with the fact that I would play a professor at the *College of Wizardry* rerun, it came with the information that we could either choose from the subjects that had been taught at the previous games, all of them more or less Harry Potter canon, or think of something completely new. I am not a teacher, but in my engineering job I deliver technical presentations. This is why Technomancy immediately sprang to mind. I decided to build on my tech presentation skills so that I would have at least one aspect of being a teacher that I was good at and felt secure with. Encouragement from the organizers settled the matter, and my motivation to put in time and energy soared.

The first task was a foundational one: What is Technomancy? There are numerous examples available in fiction, even if *Harry Potter* does not feature it. However, the *College of Wizardry* Technomancy had to fulfil three requirements:

Be understandable. Although there would be students playing at the larp who were supposed to be studying Technomancy for the third year, they couldn't be expected to spend hours informing themselves about the subject – nor could I provide a wealthy of background material. Thus I decided that my version of the subject needed to contain all the obvious things people might expect from Technomancy – and there would be a few things that I defined as advanced that I would be teaching about at the larp. Most of the basics I wrote down in my chapters for the teaching book.

Comply with the Harry Potter feeling and fiction. I knew that all of the other subjects taught at Czocha were at least partly familiar to the participants who had read the books. For Technomancy to fit in, I needed to find interfaces between my idea of



Construction drawing – turning the cellar into a Technomancer’s lab. Photo by Larson Kasper.

the subject and the participant expectations to the Potterverse. I did this by finding examples from the books that could also be linked to Technomancy – such as the time-turner, a device which allows the wearer to travel through time.

Be playable. It’s no use defining a subject around principles that cannot be part of the larp in any way. I would have loved to define large-scale technomantic devices, like rotating astrological towers, airships, and submarines, but then teaching would have been less practical and less satisfying. Thus I decided to limit myself to basics – easy electronic and mechanical principles – as the teaching could then incorporate the constructed devices for a practical lesson.

The Introduction

When creating a non-canon subject for larp, it is particularly important to write a good introduction to the topic in the text book. I started by describing the history of the subject, with an extensive list of examples of witches and wizards dabbling in Technomancy and notable technomantic devices. Two main goals were defined for Technomancy: The goal of creating a magic battery able to store magical energy for later use (adapted from the gold creation goal in Alchemy) and that of improving the compatibility of technology and magic (as tech and magic don’t mix well in the Potterverse).



The lessons – sharing the classroom with Potions. Photo by Larson Kasper.

Besides the intention of introducing the subject to the players and giving them a common understanding of what Technomancy would be like, I also wanted to make the book useful for lessons – and a source of inspiration for further game ideas. Thus I created Electromancy, a branch of Technomancy linking electricity and magic, and wrote a second chapter that describes a variety of electromantic components, examples for their applications, and, of course, warnings of their dangers. These were created as the basis for the creative parts of my lessons and also to serve as foundations for the students' own research.

The Lessons

Technomancy, in my head, was a subject that was perfectly suited to having practical, theoretical, creative, and even ethical elements in the lessons. This mix was important to making the lessons as interesting as possible.

For the practical part, I built some simple devices, such as an electronic alarm, a fan, and a bubble machine, from children's experimentation sets, and rigged them so that I could switch them on and off via a remote control. I taught the students a spell that could close an electric circuit without actually closing it with a switch, and, having asked them beforehand which characters would be good at that sort of thing, I chose to have them succeed sooner or later.

For the theoretical part, I chose deconstruction. In this context, it means analysing the contents of a potion or the components of a ritual, finding their actual purpose, and finding a technomantic equivalent that might, for example, have the same effect without the use of evil blood magic.

The third component was creative, and that was the most important one to me. Technomancers are basically inventors, and they need a high level of creativity and inspiration. In these parts of the lessons, I distributed construction paper and asked the students to come up with technomantic devices of their own; implement their own understanding of Technomancy. This was also the part of the lesson that, in hindsight, worked best, since one of the devices actually was built between lessons, and managed to scare off a Dementor in the evening.

Finally, we also had ethical discussions in class, mainly about one of the previously described goals of Technomancy, the construction of a magical battery. I had defined that if such a device was ever built, it would also be able to be accessed by humans without magical ability. This led to interesting thoughts about responsibility, equal opportunities, what defines a wizard or witch, and who has the right to deny or allow Muggles to access magic.

Outcomes

Although creating a non-canon subject was a key motivation for me when preparing for the larp, as *College of Wizardry* was starting I was actually quite nervous if a non-canon subject would work. Would it be received as well as the familiar subjects? Would the participants feel comfortable enough with it to let it be an important part of their game?

I have no clear answer to the question. On the one hand, there were awesome moments where we had great discussions, invented fantastic devices, and fought a Dementor. I even had a student who was not in my classes approach me to present his latest technomantic invention.

On the other hand, I feel like I missed many opportunities for such wonderful play moments. Either because some participants were shy about the subject (I was approached beforehand via Facebook about a few matters, but this was not followed up on at the larp itself), or because I, feeling insecure about what was and what was not possible with the kind of free, create-your-own-plot gaming style, did not involve myself more when approached.

In the final analysis my conclusion is still very positive. I saw students work with the book in my classes, even though I did not tell them to. I saw them get creative, question, work out their own ideas, and contribute their own perspectives to shape Technomancy. And recently, I am very proud to see that Technomancy has made it into the schedule for the next runs of *College of Wizardry*, so that others can continue to develop the subject.

◆ **Nicole Winchester**

Marya Kurowska's Masterclass Application Essay

Magic is a resource in the present world – perhaps it has been for some time, as tightly controlled and restricted as galleons or dollars. We imagine our magical abilities to be unfettered and boundless, encouraged by stories of ancient sorcerers, lectured by our professors to sharpen our skills and push our powers beyond their limits. However, the International Confederation of Wizards, along with the national Ministries and Councils of Magic work to enforce a structural and cultural hegemony of scarcity and secrecy. This belief that magic is fleeting and precious in the world, and that wizards are a special form of humanity to be given higher accord encourages a marked and worrying xenophobia that has only increased since the Second Wizarding War, a culture of superiority, and a lack of interest in fields of knowledge that could improve both our magics and our world.

The magiarchy refuses to see magic as a privilege, something we have a responsibility to use in service of the greater good, rather than ourselves. It refuses to see value in anything non-magical for more than entertainment purposes, though the very knowledge of the way magic is passed from generation to generation, and how it occurs in the non-magical population due to genetic research done by muggle science. There is no magic in our understanding of the biology of magic. The idea of scarcity must be put to rest, and the concept of secrecy must be re-examined and rebuilt for a world that watches and reads of vampires and werewolves and wizards, and loves them.

Wizards should expand their knowledge in the merging of traditional magical arts with emerging fields such as Technomancy to take true advantage of the technological capabilities to which the muggle world gives us access. Some of us may



Photo by Christina Molbech.

fear what we do not understand, but it is to our detriment. Our advantage, our privilege in this world is magic and it should be used to expand our knowledge and make this world better for all. There is much to be learned while still maintaining the Statute of Secrecy, though I question its relevancy in full at this point in history.

This is an essay that was written in March 2015, a month before the Rerun. The headmaster put out a call for applications for a Masterclass in Crystalmanancy, and my character Marya was convinced to apply by one of her best friends. The character interaction that informed this essay happened on Czochabook, where Marya went from just a hustler trying to scrape through school by selling cheatsheets, to a young woman who was infuriated by the social and economic inequities to which she was constantly subjected. I loved the opportunity to play that anger, and I loved the pureblood players for providing the bigotry for me to work against.

Unexpectedly, Marya was accepted to this class despite her radical essay. Unfortunately, I had to miss it due to illness – I found out later that the class would have been me – the girl in the Mudblood tee shirt – and four pure-blood supremacist members of the secret Iron Brotherhood, including her best friend. Why did I get sick that day?!



Would you like to spend a weekend in the world of Harry Potter?

This book documents College of Wizardry, a larp where participants live and study for three days in the Czocha College of Witchcraft and Wizardry. What is it like to study at a magic school? How is spellcasting best taught today? How is it possible to design, simulate, and enact an enchanted world that feels real through co-creation and trust?

In this book, two dozen player accounts and a cornucopia of images open up the experiences from the first three runs of the larp. Special sections are devoted to addressing player experience, analysis of larp design, and the practice of teaching magic.



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Photo by Christopher Sandberg