

FROM TABLETOP TO LARP AND VICE-VERSA: DESIGNING WITH CROSS-POLLINATION IN MIND

Jason Morningstar | jason@bullypulpitgames.com

[Presentation Notes]

Overview

Who I am

- Jason Morningstar
- Bully Pulpit Games

What I am Talking About

• My experience designing larp-y tabletop games and tabletop-y larps, with ideas for further polluting both ends of the continuum.

What I am not talking about

- Theory or research
- Games and techniques I don't know, which are many

Key Points

- It's nerds all the way down
- We should steal from each other more
- You are very smart and doing many of these things already

Nerds, All the Way Down

Larp and tabletop roleplaying obviously exist along a continuum rather than being discrete and isolated activities. But if you put them on a line, the two extremes have pretty clear affordances (relations between concepts and their users - a knob affords twisting, etc).

Like...

Or Another Way to Look At It...

[Mixing desk image]

Affordances

- Larp affordances, broadly: Concrete (kinesthetic, tactile), synchronous but with distributed action.
- Tabletop players struggle with the lack of abstraction and the deeply unsettling implications of distributed action.
- Tabletop affordances, broadly: Abstracted (representational, ephemeral), easily asynchronous but with cohesive action.
- Larpers struggle with the lack of physicality and the terrifying range of artificial non-diagetic mechanisms.
- Notice anything missing?

The Good Stuff They Share

The following things are the molten core of roleplaying affordances, and are wildly variable across games and cultures of play:

- Degree to which the activity is performative, immersion (perhaps easier to achieve with larp and often desirable to the point of being a given), degree of illusion and thematic coherence, often closely aligned with immersion.
- Shared Imagined Space, Social Contract, agreement and endowment, and other techniques for managing a community and its shared fiction.
- The structure of the experience: Ephemerality/repeatability, scenography (whether physical or otherwise), length and intensity.

Flipping the Script

[SLOW DOWN AND TAKE A LITTLE TIME EXPLAINING THESE]

As design constraints those affordances have been fruitful to me:

- What happens when a tabletop game embraces a kinesthetic, tactile experience? (CDC, where when you die you enter a larp-like role as a Swamp Ghost - also mention The Skeletons)
- What happens when a larp becomes asynchronous? (Maroons, where divided players process time and space differently)
- What happens when you distribute the action of a tabletop game? (Sirai, a tape larp/board game hybrid)
- What happens when you abstract thematic elements of a larp? (The Climb, where halfway through the game half of the players become GMs who perform a radio play for the other half)
- What happens when you build a tabletop game that is played to fail? (Fiasco, where the goal is to be dumb and not get what you want)

Do Dumb Things

- The traditions of your preferred form are not holy writ
- From the perspective of another culture of play you have huge blind spots
- An assumption you question is a design constraint you can use
- It is actually hard to fail, because the middle ground is where all the interesting stuff happens.

Hey Cape-Wearing Freaks

[Image]

Poaching from Tabletop Games

- Ditch the GM
- De-prioritize immersion
- Embrace randomness and useful abstraction
- Make play asynchronous or episodic
- Provide non-diagetic play aids

Hay Basement-Dwelling Malcontents

[Image]

Ripping Off Larps

- Make your players get up and move around.
- Require ritual and tactile objects.
- Eschew randomness and learn to love thoughtful metaplot.
- Make things happen simultaneously in different spaces
- Make your game last for 24 hours, or 30 days like The Beast

Conclusion

- Question your assumptions
- Think about affordances
- I love you all

Ludography

Anders Berner, Jakob Hedegaard, Kim Holm, Juliane Mikkelsen, Peter Munthe-Kaas, Frederik Nylev, and Rasmus Petersen. 2011. Kapo. Copenhagen, 2011.

Jason Morningstar. 2013. Carolina Death Crawl. Chapel Hill: Bully Pulpit Games, 2013.

Jason Morningstar. 2013. Maroons. Unreleased.

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Aleksandra Sontowskia and Kamil Węgrzynowicz. 2016. The Beast. Warsaw: Naked Female Giant, 2016.

Thanks

Thanks to Paul Beakley, Caitlynn Belle, Chris Bennett, Derek Guder, Daniel Hodges, Mo Holkar, Larry Lade, Kevin McIntyre, Marshall Miller, Steve Segedy, Evan Torner, David Rothfelder and Autumn Winters for thoughts on the development of this talk.