



LIVE ROLE PLAYING

Frequently Asked Questions

rec.games.frp.live-action

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This pdf version maintained by Brian David Phillips.

Aimee Yermish

IMPORTANT NOTE

If you ask ten Live Roleplayers a question about Live Roleplaying, you will get twelve different and often contradictory answers. There are as many different styles of LRP as there are LRP groups (or, some might say, LRPers!), and none of them want to be pigeonholed. However, in order to be kept to a reasonable size, this FAQ must contain many generalisations. The best way to find out how any given group roleplays is to ask them. This said, if anyone has any suggestions, complaints or compliments about this FAQ please mail me <sjoilf@yahoo.com> and I'll see what I can do.



This html version of this FAQ is available at:

<URL:<http://www.interactivedramas.info/>>

and maintained by Brian David Phillips, PhD.

The "official" html version of this FAQ is available at:

<URL:<http://www.ookami.com/LARP/FAQ.htm>>

and maintained by John Cressman, aka Blackwolf. Okay, actually, I hear it's no longer maintained, but hopefully that can be resolved.

a Russian (Windows Cyrillic) version of the FAQ is available at:

<URL:<http://www.geocities.com/Area51/1755/lrp.htm>>

You can also obtain a version at <http://www.netlrp.uk.com/library/lrp-faq.htm>.

[...FAQ last updated 14th July 1999. Added a comment about the html version of the FAQ (above)...this is an archive version of the FAQ as posted on 09 December 1999...]

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1. What is rec.games.frp.live-action for?

rec.games.frp.live-action is for the discussion of all aspects of live roleplaying. Topics include discussions of upcoming games, advice on playing, advice on hosting, advice on prop construction, and comparisons of rule systems.

For more information, see the Mission Statement and Posting Guide. Before posting, please read that document. The Mission Statement and Posting Guide is posted regularly. It can be found on the World Wide Web at

<URL:<http://home.clara.net/arianrhod/Aldebaran/Information>> .

2. What is Live Roleplaying?

This is a very simple question and one which is actually amazingly difficult to answer. One reason for this is that there is a vast range of games out there, and any attempt at a comprehensive definition of Live Roleplaying immediately starts to become unmanageable.

2.1. A Description in Brief.

As in any roleplaying game each player takes on the role of a fictional character, or sometimes a dramatised version of a real historical or living person. You play your character much as you would in any roleplaying setting but even more so. Instead of saying what actions your character takes you actually take those actions for real. Game mechanics are in place for handling difficult situations but for the duration of the game you are the person you are portraying. The border where physical portrayal stops and abstract rules start is the main difference between various styles of LRP, and can range from rules for anything beyond speaking to someone being handled in an abstract way to as few rules as are possible whilst keeping fights safe.

2.2. A Description at Length.

What is this live-action stuff, anyway?

What is this live-action stuff, anyway?

The Interactive Literature Foundation (ILF), in an attempt to bridge all the various forms of live roleplaying, uses the following definition: "Interactive Literature (IL) is any dynamic art in which multiple participants interact at the same time, to create a story." The basic idea is somewhat like improvising a play with nothing but knowledge of the background and motivations of your character. Sometimes these will be decided by you, sometimes by others, depending on the style of game you play. Each of the other players will have a character he or she is playing, and the interaction of the characters creates a story. For some styles of LRP, this is the entirety of the game. For others, there is an adventure gaming element, where your character might have some specific goals to achieve, either alone or with the help of others. This might range from "Rescue the kidnapped princess from the bandits" to "Prevent the rise of Hitler's Nazis to power", again depending on the style of game.

At this stage, it becomes useful to talk about the two principal styles of live roleplaying. Whilst the distinction is by no means cut-and-dried, most groups will

be able to identify parts of their style with aspects of these two extremes. For want of any generally accepted terminology, these will be referred to as the "Theatre Style" (TS) (also known as Simulated Combat, Abstract Combat, Card Waving, Interactive Literature {though the ILF considers all forms of live roleplaying to be IL}, et. al.) and "Live Combat" (LC) (also known as Simulated Combat {confusing but true}, boffer, rubber sword, etc.). The principal distinction is that in TS type games, combat is generally handled by abstract rules or does not take place at all. There is no physical combat in a real sense (though it is sometimes played out after the abstract method has determined the course of a fight). Conversely, in LC style games combat is handled by attempting to strike an opponent with a safe padded weapon; when you strike your opponents, there are rules or conventions which determine how badly wounded they are. It must be stressed that the terms "Live Combat" and "Theatre Style" are used only as labels for some very sweeping generalizations in this FAQ. Their use does NOT mean that combat is what these games are all about (it isn't - they're about roleplaying), nor does it mean that you need to be a trained actor (you don't, the skills of being a good roleplayer are very different from those of being a good stage or screen actor). In fact, there was a long debate about what terminology should be used in the FAQ. Certainly few of the Live Combat groups would call themselves by that label, and, although the label is sometimes self-applied, most "Theatre Style" groups would not want to be pigeonholed as such either.

To give two very general examples (there will be more clarifications later), in an LC type game, your character might be a member of a mercenary group in a fantasy/medieval setting. The group might be hired by a rich merchant (played by another member of the club) to find a valuable piece of jewelry he lost. How you go about doing this is up to you. Maybe when you find the item, you discover it contains plans for the invasion of the kingdom. The so-called merchant is a spy! Do you inform the authorities? Are you so angry that you kill him yourself? Will you keep quiet about it if the "merchant" pays you enough? Well, that's where your conception of the character comes in.

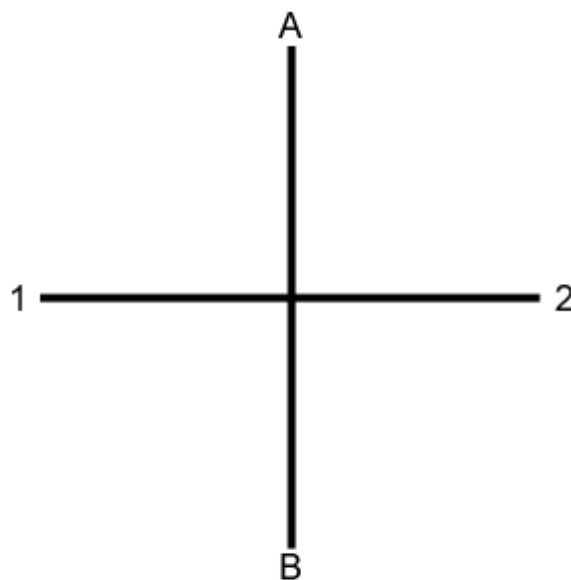
In a TS type game, the characters are, more often than not, created by the people running the game. You are given a packet or dossier containing this background information - maybe you're this young Danish prince. You're pretty depressed because your father died, and your uncle took the throne, marrying your mother. You have a few friends you can trust, such as Horatio, and a few you're not sure about, such as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. And now Horatio wants you to come with him and see this ghost. Now Horatio, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern et. al. are other players, each of whom has a similar dossier with his or her goals, motivations,



and background. The story then unfolds as the characters interact - it might be similar to the way Bill wrote it, or it might be utterly different - the survivors might even get into double figures! Again, it's all down to the way you and the other players interact. (Hamlet analogy (c) Scary Kevin)

It is important to stress that these are all generalizations. There are certainly LC events in which the organizers have prepared characters for the players, and TS events in which the players create their own characters. While it isn't the most common format, some groups do run single-shot LC events. Most Mind's Eye Theatre events are really a theatre style game with an ongoing plot. Many Cthulhu Live events would also fall under this heading.

Prof. Brian David Phillips suggests that LARP deals with two continuums that intersect into a quadrant (alignment):



- 1 - Standalone scenario (Usually Created Drama with Provided Characters)
- 2 - Serial or Chronicle Campaigns (Usually with Player Created Characters, Ongoing Story Acts)
- A - Live Combat
- B - Theatre Style

1 and 2 represent the nature of the piece in terms of whether it's a self-contained unit or part of an ongoing campaign or chronicle while A & B represent the degree of realism in the portrayal of conflict (touching and hitting simulations). Live roleplaying games fall into various quadrants.



2.3. Does this have anything to do with Dream Park?

Yes. Many system designers were inspired by the Dream Park novels by Larry Niven and Steve Barnes, although the concept of LRPing predates these novels. The origins of LRP are somewhat shrouded in mystery. The first LRP group in the world was probably Treasure Trap at Peckforton Castle in the UK, although the concept soon developed in parallel in the US. Basically, people thought that it would be lots of fun to play their favourite roleplaying games for real in the woods - and it is. Also in parallel, the murder mystery style parlour games which have been around, arguably, for centuries, and certainly (in commercial form) since the mid seventies, along with tabletop RPGs, have grown up into the TS type games of today. Some would argue, however, that the extent of roleplaying and interaction within the "Dream Park" is minimal with the emphasis being on problem solving, thus making LRP an evolution in terms of emphasizing playing a character different to oneself in personality as well as abilities and setting.

(Dream Park may one day become a reality. There was a group in the US called "The Dream Park Corporation" whose eventual goal was to make Dream Park a reality, but alas, Dream Park Corporation is now out of business, having gone bankrupt in 1997. The technology is still in the early stages but who knows what may eventually be possible.)

2.4. What these games are not.

These are **not** games of "killer" or "assassin": the emphasis is on dramatic roleplaying and interaction between players. Most live games involve a large number of players (from thirty to several hundred at a time) who walk around and talk with each other, acting out as much of their characters' actions as are allowed within the rules. Unlike many tabletop roleplaying games (D&D and other games of its ilk), most live roleplaying games have a strong emphasis on player-player interaction as well as interaction with the world which is controlled by the Gamesmasters (GMs); in fact in some games, the GMs have no input into the events of the game beyond interpreting the rules after the game has started, making the games very social events as well as intellectual and creative challenges.

3. Why do it?

Because it's fun! People Live Roleplay for a whole number of reasons. Some for escapism because it's lots of fun to be someone else for a few hours or a few days at a time, for the social aspects of the game and the opportunity to meet new people and for the pure exhilaration of letting your mind run wild in a world of complete fantasy. Some players of LC style games like the opportunity to get away from their desks and do something physical in the fresh air.

4. It's not dangerous, is it?

No. There are a variety of different systems used, but all groups who run any kind of live games consider safety **very** important. There is no running around in sewers, no swinging sharp steel, and no real demon-summoning. Game masters and players alike stress that these are **games**, not substitute realities. Groups which use "live" mechanics have systems for handling combat, magic, and thieving which are designed to make sure no one gets hurt, and many of these groups also have medical insurance. There may be the odd bruise or ankle-twist, but nothing more than you might get walking through the woods or in a game of soccer or basketball, and it's certainly safer than hockey, (American) football or rugby. Groups which use "abstract" mechanics use systems based largely on index cards, rendering the whole event little more dangerous than a walk in the park. There is more description of these systems later in this document; rest assured that these are not dangerous or satanic games. [There is further information explaining the falsehood of this sort of accusation, which is frequently levelled against roleplaying games in general, in the rec.games.frp.* FAQ's]

5. Who wins?

Everyone and no one. Everyone has fun. "Winning" isn't the point of live roleplaying games, it's the taking part that is the fun. (Yes I know you can say that about any game but LRP games are probably one of the few where it is true.)

Yes, sometimes you'll come away from an adventure having accomplished your goals, sometimes you won't. Most games are set up so that it isn't possible for everyone to "win" all the time. If there's no chance of failure, success doesn't have



much sweetness. Dramatic roleplaying and creative interaction are what's really important, and what's really fun. Some of the most legendary scenes happen when people are "losing". More so than in any other form of gaming, how you play your character and how much fun you have are far more important than who does better or worse than you.

6. Do I need experience? What if I don't know anyone there? What if I'm shy? Who are these people, anyway?

Don't worry. Many people who play these games have played tabletop roleplaying games, but many others have not. Lots of other real-life activities are excellent preparation for live roleplaying. If you've ever daydreamed about being someone else, or about being in a different world, you've got what you need.

Besides, most game designers set things up to give experienced players incentive to help new players along. You'll probably have knowledge or abilities that other people need. Other people will help you out, not just because they're nice, but because they need your help.

And they are nice, too. These aren't wild-eyed lunatics or immature geeks, they're ordinary people from all walks of life, who happen to like using their imaginations and sharing the experience with other people. All live roleplaying games are very social it's a great way to meet new friends.

7. Can I team with my friends?

Of course! Just let the organisers know ahead of time. Really big teams often get broken up into smaller ones, just to keep things balanced, but you'll practically always get to stay with at least a few of your friends. In some games, this will mean that you will be given characters who share goals and beliefs, and who would have reasons to work together. In others, notably LC fantasy style games, the whole ethos is on your character as part of a group of adventurers who rely upon each other to survive.



8. So how do they work? Who runs them? How do I get involved?

This is where things start getting really diverse, and we have to start differentiating between the two major styles. For the next section of this document, the answers will be labelled Theatre Style or Live Combat appropriately, but these are only the predominant answers for the style - some games which would be classed as LC in most respects might do some things similarly to the TS answers given herein, and vice versa. Here, nevertheless, is a brief explanation of the predominant features of the two styles:

8.1. Live Combat

The LC style is characterised by Live Mechanics. In these games everything (within reason) is done for real. The storyline is usually either an ongoing "campaign" with a rich background or a series of events loosely linked by occurring in a shared world. Rules vary in complexity from the very simple and abstract to highly detailed and complex mechanics. Campaign and plots are often highly detailed and complex with an immense amount of interaction between the players and the campaign world.

Games are usually run in the woods, using padded swords and other live systems for magic and thieving, all of which rely a fair bit on your own physical skills. You design your own character, and over the course of many games, build up experience and knowledge which increases your effectiveness. Almost all of the original worlds were "swords and sorcery," although organisations have now branched out into many different genres. Most of the time, you will play a "module," a series of planned encounters for a small group of characters, where GM-scripted non-player characters (NPC's) act as your adversaries as you carry out your quest.

8.2. Theatre Style

TS games are run under a very different paradigm. Rules are designed to be as simple as possible, and to require little or no real physical action on the part of the players. About the most violent thing you'll do is stick a sticker on someone; usually, you'll compare numbers on index cards. Games are usually run indoors, often in hotels. Previously many games were run in conjunction with science fiction or gaming conventions, though this is not quite as common today. Genres range all over the map, including high fantasy, science fiction, historical, espionage,

horror, cyberpunk, Saturday morning cartoons, and lots of others. Games are almost always single self-contained events, usually a weekend long, with the action building to a climax and resolving by the end of the game. The GMs write the characters ahead of time, designing plots and characters so each character has allies, enemies, objectives, and an interesting personality. Because the games are self-contained, there is no long-term building up of experience necessary to get a powerful character. Your adversaries are not the GMs or NPCs under GM control, but the other characters who have goals contrary to yours. The focus of these games is roleplaying, including negotiation, persuasion, trickery, and other dramatic interactions; as in real life, combat and such are effective, but often create new problems. Combat, thieving, magic, and other "unfriendly interactions" (that is, things that don't involve people just talking to each other) are not usually emphasized in a Theatre Style game. For this reason, the rules are kept very easy and quick to resolve, serving only as a framework for roleplaying. Each game has its own set of rules, rarely longer than a magazine article. Most GM groups use a constant set of rules to govern things like "don't touch people's real-life personal property," "don't run in the hallways," and "don't freak out people who aren't playing," and write rules for unfriendly interactions as appropriate for each particular game.

The thing that characterises all of the rulesets, however, is that your real physical skills play only a minimal part in the game. Whoever you are, you can play anyone at all, without having to spend time building up real-world skills.

8.3. Other Styles

Remember, however, that every game is individual. Each may resemble the answers given under one, neither, or both styles in the following. The fact that I have chosen combat resolution style as a label for the two major groups is incidental, all LRP groups are there to roleplay, with combat being stressed to a greater or lesser amount depending on the group. If the thing that attracts you to LRP is the opportunity to have a realistic fight, there's a group for you. If you want to play a detailed character with other skilled roleplayers, there's a group for you.

One notable style which is distinct from the two paradigms is that used by the many groups now using the Mind's Eye Theatre (MET) live versions of the various White Wolf World of Darkness (tm) tabletop games. They use combat resolution in the TS vein, but character creation and ongoing storylines more reminiscent of the LC style, with most campaigns occurring over years in various clubs and other public places, the players interacting with each other and the (fictitious)



underground secret societies of vampires, mages, werewolves, and faerie in their respective cities whilst keeping their "true nature" secret from the general public.

It may also be pertinent here to mention SFLRP. The paradigms used therein are generally similar to the LC style, the difference, of course, being that Laser Tag style guns are used in place of padded weaponry.

Now we've got those general stereotypes in place, we can address more specific questions...

9. Who runs these games?

(for specific lists of groups and events, see section 22)

9.1. Live Combat

There are a vast number of groups running games in Europe, the US, and beyond. Many groups are small organisations just running events in their local area. There are some larger groups which are quite widespread, with regional branches in various locations (F+H in the UK, NERO and IFGS in the US). They provide centralised authorities which help new writers design good games, standardise rules systems and reward levels, purchase insurance, and the like. Players who travel or move to a different area can usually keep playing their already-developed characters.

9.2. Theatre Style

This game structure had many early origins and influences. Two groups which exerted a strong early influence on the form are the Society for Interactive Literature and the MIT Assassins' Guild (the names of both are historical accidents). The overall goal of these games is to create a world where you can be someone else with a maximum of dramatic roleplaying and a minimum of rules-crunching. There are no centralised authorities who control how a particular group of GMs designs or runs a game, but some organisations (most notably the Interactive Literature Foundation) attempt to provide a central clearinghouse for information. Note that the ILF's definition of Interactive Literature (which predates the one given in this FAQ) includes all forms of LRP, including LC.

10. What do I do about costume and props?

10.1. Live Combat

Most systems require that you make at least a token effort at costuming, but don't have the "costume police" associated with some re-enactment societies.

Most groups leave costuming to your taste, but require certain makeup and prosthetics to be worn by those playing nonhumans, for instance "all players playing dark elves must wear black face paint and pointed ears." This allows others to identify your character's race at a glance.

Most groups have a strong emphasis on making everything in the game look and feel as real as possible, which allows a strong atmosphere to be created. You may be provided with props, or you may need to provide them yourself, depending on the situation.

An excellent costuming guide can be found at:

<URL:<http://www.personal.u-net.com/~evermore/ukcostum.htm>>

Another excellent costuming resource can be found at:

<URL:<http://milieux.com/costume/>>

10.2. Theatre Style

You are seldom required to costume, although it's always cheerfully encouraged. Your character is usually identified with a name badge. Props which are part of your costume are just part of your costume -- all items which could affect the game are created by the GMs, and are always clearly marked as game items. Most props are index cards with descriptions of the items, although most GMs like to include as many "real" props as they can afford. Because of the many different genres, and the frequency of "one shot" events, TS groups often do not maintain props, but print cards symbolizing items. Most groups that run the same event over and over try to accumulate real props, or at least realistic props.



11. How about weapons and armour?

11.1. Live Combat

Weapons are made from High Density Polyurethane Foam around a fibreglass core. These are coated in latex and can be made to look very realistic.

An excellent guide to making these swords can be found at:

<URL:<http://home.clara.net/arianrhod/Aldebaran/DoItYourself/home.htm>>

In the US, these weapons are considered too hard by groups who do not fight using "pulled" blows, and less realistic but more padded PVC piping surrounded with thicker padding and cloth tape are used. These weapons are sometimes termed "boffers". Other groups will not allow these, and use fibreglass cores. Some weapons are also made with bamboo core.

Many things can be used for armour. The best solution is real armour, and, contrary to popular belief, some forms of real armour aren't that expensive. Leathers can obviously be made and mail (chain mail is a term that was not used before the Victorian Era) can also be made and it isn't difficult (although it is very tedious and time consuming).

Failing real armour, an appropriate Physical Representation (Phys Rep) will do. Plate is probably one of the easiest armours to simulate. Plate armour can be simulated using high density polyurethane foam and latex. (One Phys Rep which is often frowned upon is the use of string vests painted silver and these are not permissible in many clubs).

11.2. Theatre Style

Armour and weapons are treated in the same way as other props and costuming - there to make things look better. If the organisers approve it and it's suitable to your character, there's nothing stopping you from taking a real sword - you won't be actually hitting anyone, just using an abstract system.

12. How do magic and the paranormal work?

12.1. Live Combat

There are about as many different ways of using magic as there are gaming groups.

Many systems use a "point and shout" system. The caster points at the target of the spell and says the relevant spell vocals. The last line is usually shouted and is fairly self descriptive (By the powers bestowed within me I cause thee to Trip/Sleep/Die/etc.)

Some systems use bean bags to determine whether or not your spell hits. As you toss the bean bag, you generally have to say a key phrase to indicate which spell you're using; some systems require longer verbal components (some use a whistle to stop time to allow spells to be cast); some require you to collect physical components from the game world in order to cast spells.

In other systems magic is much more ritualistic in nature taking a long time to cast spells and involving the drawing of circles and enchanting of pentagrams and the like. (When using ritual magic the use of pentagrams is often discouraged on public sites. The reason for this is that the public may get the wrong impression. (I will refrain from ranting on about how "pentagrams/the Star of David" have nothing to do with real world witchcraft/demonology.)

12.2. Theatre Style

If magic and the paranormal play a part in any given game, they will usually be resolved in a similar manner to other skills and abilities - if cards are being used, the magician will have a card saying, for instance, "You fall into a magical sleep. Nothing will wake you for the next five minutes," which he or she must show the intended victim. Many systems are fairly elaborate, and require specific rituals to be acted out. In fact, since these games often take place away from any people not involved in the game, these rituals can be extremely involved without the risk of creating the wrong impression.

13. How do thieving and other skills work?

13.1. Live Combat

Some systems teach you the fundamentals of real-life lock picking, and you have to really pick the locks you encounter. Some use more abstract representations, such as a twisting wire connected to a battery and a light. Your "pick" is a metal loop, which you must slip from one end of the wire to the other without touching it and completing the circuit (more experience allows you more errors or larger loops). One group uses only combination locks, and thieves are given sets of combinations which might work - if you have the combination to a lock, you can open it. In most systems, traps have a mechanical trigger which you must really disarm. In some cases, the actual disarming is as simple as flicking a switch, but it may be tough to get at that switch. Picking pockets and burgling rooms is also generally done for real - most systems have a convention along the lines of "real life personal items under the bed are off limits." One group simulates pick-pocketing either by genuinely committing the act or by having the "thief" tell a ref what they plan to do; the ref watches while they lurk near the pocket in pick-pocketing range for long enough to have made the steal, then the ref will make an OOC approach to claim the item(s), and they will roleplay discovering the theft an appropriate period of time later. Some systems use index cards which allow you to simply demand the items from the other player, along the lines of an Theatre Style system (see below). In general, you must have a character skill in order to have the right to make a thieving attempt.

Of course, if you pick someone's pocket and find yourself in possession of their car keys, real money, etc. these are expected to be returned immediately.

13.2. Theatre Style

It depends on the system being used, but most require only a token action before you can use the character's skills in an abstract way. If your character is an expert burglar, you'll have to get to the room you intend to burgle (something pretty reasonable to ask of anyone), but your character's skills will take over from there. Almost every Theatre Style system uses index cards describing your character's skills and proficiencies. To use an ability, all you have to do is show the card (of course, if circumstances demand, you can show it to a GM, so the other players don't know that you've done anything). If you're an expert swordsman, your combat card may have higher numbers, or a greater variety of moves, or whatever is appropriate to give you an advantage over a less-well-trained opponent.

14. What kind of characters are there? How do I create one? How do I improve my skills?

14.1. Live Combat

Some systems use character classes such as Mage, Rogue, Fighter, Cleric, and so forth; and character races such as Human, Elf, Half-Orc, and so forth - basically, familiar races and classes from tabletop roleplaying games. Each class and race has particular strengths and weaknesses.

Some systems have a class-free skill-based system. Most allow you to learn skills not normally associated with your class or race, depending on the development of your character.

The group will send you instructions on character creation when you join. In some groups, you write a background history for your character and state what starting items and skills you think you should have. You then talk with one of the referees who will make sure you're being reasonable, and will attempt to work you into the ongoing plot of the world. In others, the background is done less formally, and you only need to choose the class, race, skills, or whatever that you think are appropriate - these being limited so all characters start with roughly equal power. The character's abilities then develop with the character. In yet others, the skills are done by acquiring actual physical skills, so you start with the abilities you physically have, although the character's background is still up to you.

Some systems use experience points. Some groups simply give you experience for surviving a certain number of hours, rather than rewarding you for specific actions. You work your way up over time. Some groups have very slow advancement, others tend to rush you up the first several levels (in level based systems).

14.2. Theatre Style

Every character in a Theatre Style game is a unique individual, not restricted to a particular class. Your character is described to you in a 3-10 page short story describing your skills, desires, background, allies, knowledge, personality, and objectives. Each character is created by the GMs to be deeply woven into the interconnecting plots.

When you sign up for a game, you fill out a casting questionnaire, which gives you an opportunity to tell the GMs about yourself and about what you're looking for in a character. They rarely have exactly what you describe, but there's so much variety among the characters, they probably have something you'll enjoy for the same reasons. Once you get your character, if there are elements of your background or personality you haven't been told about, you're free to make them up, of course. Some brave (stupid?) people allow you to create a character which they then work into the plot of the game.

Depending on the game, it may or may not be possible to improve your skills during the weekend. However, because the games are self-contained, rather than a continuing campaign, you don't have to start with a character comparable to other starting characters - you enter the game with a fully developed and advanced character, prepared for action.

15. Can I play a monster / bad guy?

15.1. Live Combat

In these games, monsters are all non-player characters (NPC's) under the control of the GMs. What you give up in autonomy, you get back in discounted or free admission. In most groups, people play monsters occasionally so that everyone else has someone to fight against. The term 'monster' is used rather generically, it includes thieves, bandits, and other normal enemies, as well as often being used as a shorthand for any character not belonging to a player, so the nice old man who heals the adventurers is also sometimes referred to as a 'monster.' Monstering (LRP invented this new verb!) is a great way for less experienced players to learn the ropes of the system without risking the lives of their characters.

You are also quite free to make your character less moral than you are, though this often leads to a dangerous existence as an outlaw.

15.2. Theatre Style

Of course you can play a bad guy, or a good guy, or someone to whom those labels wouldn't apply at all. Each player is part of the world for the others, and if everyone were nice, there wouldn't be much need for conflict, so the game would be pretty dull. But don't worry: people who play these games are grownup enough to realise that just because you're their enemy in the game, doesn't mean you're a

bad person in real life. Of course, the definition of 'bad' is very subjective, some of the best characters to play are those who are good people who believe strongly that what they are doing is for the general good - even if it's trying to keep slavery legal.

16. What happens if I get killed?

16.1. Live Combat

Some systems have provision for limited resurrections, others don't. If not, you'll probably have to make up a new character at the first opportunity and spend the meantime with the monster crew. Many LC systems allow you to have more than one character alive at a time, in fact it is common to have several. If you die during a linear adventure, there is usually no provision for starting a new character or coming in as another of your characters, you're with the monsters until the end of the adventure unless your character is raised on the spot. If, however, you die off an adventure during more freeform roleplaying in a tavern or town environment, you can pop back to your bunk and change costume to play a different character.

16.2. Theatre Style

It depends on the game. In a fantasy world, you might simply become your own ghost, or you might get resurrected. In a cyberpunk world, you might be cloned and backed up on tape. If the GMs have extra characters, you might be given a new character. Some GMs write bit parts, such as police officers, for players who get killed. Or, you can just hang around and ask everyone what's **really** going on, as long as you don't tell what you learn. In many longer TS type games, killing is forbidden early in the game (often on Friday night or until noon on Saturday on weekend games) in order to prevent people from getting killed off early and being put into bit parts for the remainder of the game.

17. Where do you play? How often? What's the schedule like?

17.1. Live Combat

Most groups play in wooded sites although a few have indoor sites. Some sites have cabins with beds, some require you to bring tents for weekend long games.

Many run events all year including weekend-long events once a month, but this depends on the area, group, and climate. Groups in the UK tend to run all year round, some US groups in less temperate areas tend to take a winter break (due to snow), though this is less common in temperate parts of the US. Some places only have a few events per year.

Most groups run single-day adventures as well as entire weekends of continuous play. There are usually no formal rest or meal breaks, but you are encouraged to remember to eat and sleep. Some groups run a banquet style meal "in character", either as part of a major event or as events in their own right. Most groups prefer that you remain on site and active the entire event. Depending on the group, you might be "in character" for the entire event or only for periods of a few hours at a time (during set "adventures" for instance).

17.2. Theatre Style

There are several different lengths of event:

"Campus Events" tend to run for days or even weeks, usually on a college campus. An event of shorter than four days (a holiday weekend) is almost unknown. In these long events, student players may go out of character to do homework and go to class, or the game may be active only at night. Some vampire groups which run "serial events" have so much in character activity between games that the game might as well be considered ongoing. Vampire style games often take place in nightclubs and the like, part of the game is not having "mortals" notice you're a vampire.

"Full Length Events" were once the undisputed most common form. Usually occurring at a hotel, often in conjunction with a science fiction or fantasy convention, full length games run from Friday to Sunday around noon. Often Friday night is declared a "safe" time during which no combat can take place as players arrive and get up to speed on what their characters should already know. Sometimes combat or other activities are not allowed for a specific period - meal breaks, or a sleeping period. It has been less common for events to occur in parallel with a science fiction convention, though there certainly are plenty of such events. Full length games are likely to remain a standard, but are no longer the only, or even primary, type of event.

"Intermediate and Mini-Games." The term "intermediate" is seldom really used, but the term "mini-game" has come to be so heavily identified with a four-hour event that it is useful to coin a term for games lasting 6-12 hours. Shorter games

have become very common in many areas. Less planning and logistical support is required, and more complex plots are being introduced as the length has expanded slightly. Mini-games tend to be, understandably, more narrow in subject matter, often focusing on characters in a specific situation. Mini-Games are becoming the most common form of Theatre Style event for obvious reasons.

As a vague generality, full length games tend to represent a general situation - a peace conference, a critical few days in history, and often have many sites or take place in a large setting - an entire city for example. Mini-games tend to focus on a specific event - a historical decision, or a specific meeting of some diplomats. The site is usually identified as a narrower area as well.

Because of the vast amount of writing involved in producing a single game (2-4 person-years), most individual writing groups only write one or two games per year, but in some areas (particularly the US Eastern Seaboard) there are so many groups writing that you can play every few weeks, all year 'round.

A concept important to describing locations sometimes used in LC style games, but more frequently in the TS paradigm, is that of "virtual locations". Games are sometimes very grandiose in scope, involving subjects like the rise and fall of empires, or great political movements, and are often not limited to a specific physical location or time period. Because determining who is in a position to attack whom is not as critical, these games often use "virtual" locations - a hotel lobby may represent an entire city, with a few rooms picked out as a palace, court, etc. Some games also use a virtual time-frame, in which events "outside the game" take place either between periods of play, or at an accelerated rate. Of course not all games use these devices. Some games set strict "real time - real space" rules. This is something that varies widely from event to event.

18. How many people play?

18.1. Live Combat

The number is variable. The number on a particular adventure is usually in the range of 4 to 12, the number at a weekend event may be between 50 and 200 with the largest (The Gathering in the UK) now attracting 3000+ people.

18.2. Theatre Style

While some Theatre Style games are written for as few as eight people or as many as two hundred, most are written for thirty to ninety players. Rather than forming a small adventuring party, you spend the weekend interacting with anyone you come across in order to advance your goals, so you really do play with all those other people, and it's to your advantage to deal with everyone else in the game - most of them have some knowledge or abilities you can benefit from, if you can convince them to help you. Most games are organised into factions of 3-8 people (rarely is a faction more than 10% of a game), so you have allies, but traitors and multiple loyalties are common.

19. How much does it cost?

19.1. Live Combat

The cost is very variable and what follows is a very crude and approximate guide.

In the UK many clubs charge an annual membership fee of UKP5-10 which entitles you to a discount on adventures (and sometimes with suppliers of LRP equipment as well) although it is not necessary to be a member to play.

Adventures range in cost from Nothing to around the UKP15 mark for a 4 hour adventure.

Weekend long events can range from UKP20 to UKP60. Some of the more expensive events are fully catered.

Festivals (which are often camping events) tend to be about UKP25 for a weekend.

In the US, those clubs that charge annual membership have a rate of around \$20 - 30, though some charge more.

Adventures cost \$10 - 20 for a four hour adventure.

Weekend events cost \$35 - 70, again, the more expensive ones tend to be catered to some extent.

Additionally, you are generally required to provide your own equipment (weapons, armour, etc.), although most groups have equipment to lend or rent to new players. In most groups, your character cannot have a piece of equipment for which you cannot provide a physical representation. You're also on your own for food; some groups have taverns where you can buy hot food and some of the more expensive weekends are catered.

19.2. Theatre Style

Few of the game-running organisations charge membership fees, and none require membership in any organisation to play in their games. Some publish quarterly newsletters, which cost \$10-20/year, and some groups offer discounts on their games to subscribers.

Most games cost somewhere between \$15-40 for a whole weekend, although games run apart from an existing convention can cost \$45-125, or even more.

If the game is run at a convention, players are usually required to join the convention, at a cost of \$15-40. Sometimes, the GMs are able to arrange discounted convention memberships for game players.

You are on your own for food and sleeping arrangements in most games, although many GMs provide free munchies (as do many conventions) and will help players co-ordinate crash space. Occasionally, a game will be offered as a package deal, but prices are highly variable.

You do not need to bring or buy any other costuming, equipment, or supplies - everything you need to play the games is included in your registration fee.

20. Can children play? What about people with disabilities?

20.1. Live Combat

Children under 18 usually need parental permission. Many groups have a minimum age, usually 14-18 which is often for insurance requirements. People with disabilities are welcome although there are few provisions for playing a character who does not share your disability.

20.2. Theatre Style

Children are welcome at some games, depending on the GMs. As long as they can talk to adults and understand the game materials, they'll do fine. Realise, however, that games often have plots that might be rated PG-13 (drugs, crime, violence, occasionally sex) - although the representations of these things are always totally G-rated, you might want to talk to the GMs ahead of time if you're concerned. Other games have stronger plots which are unsuitable for children. Again, the best advice is ask the organisers beforehand.

People with disabilities are welcome in Theatre Style, and GMs will make every effort to help you be able to play freely. Your character will not share your disability. It's best to discuss your particular needs with the GMs ahead of time, so they can make whatever arrangements are necessary.

21. Boy, Live Roleplaying sounds like a great party!

It is. But no group which runs any sort of live roleplaying game permits drugs in its games.

Some events provide a bar service or ask people to bring their own alcohol if they want it. Check with the event organisers before taking alcohol though, occasionally the sites which are used are "dry" (e.g. scout camps). Also, drinking is only ever permitted when it is safe to do so - always check before drinking, especially at an LC style game, since being uncoordinated whilst trying to fight is VERY dangerous.

LRP is also a very good way to make friends. Most regular gaming groups are also social circles.

22. How do I find out what events are coming up? How do I get my event listed?

One of the longest running lists of LRP events on the 'net is Shade's LARP list, available on

<URL:<http://members.stratos.net/zargonis/shade.htm>>

You can add your group to the list by emailing Joe Santocildes at (zargonis@coil.com).

The ILF's calendar listings are available at(<http://www.ilfinfo.org/calendar/>).

You can add your event to the calendar by e-mailing Stephanie Olmstead-Dean (calendar@ilfinfo.org). There is also a mailing list for Interactive Literature announcements and discussions, ilf@rpg.net. To be added to the list, send a message saying "join ilf" (without the quotes) to list-request@rpg.net. The ILF also has a web page at <http://www.ilfinfo.org/>

Also out there is Mark Baker's Convention Diary, which is posted regularly and is available on the WWW at

<[URL:http://www.io.com/~lange/conctrl/conventions.htm](http://www.io.com/~lange/conctrl/conventions.htm)> [Editor's Note: This URL appears to be incorrect. - B.D.P.]

Also, most groups have a calendar of events which they publish in their newsletters or online.

This covers very broad areas of roleplaying all over the world. To be included, email Mark (markb@lange.demon.co.uk). The list is intended for special events rather than regular club meets, so only events running less frequently than once a month can be included.

For the UK there is an Events Guide on The Net.

<[URL:http://home.clara.net/arianrhod/Aldebaran/Eventguide.htm](http://home.clara.net/arianrhod/Aldebaran/Eventguide.htm)> [Editor's Note: This URL appears to be incorrect. - B.D.P.]

This list only covers the UK. If you would like your event listed please mail the information to M.D.Horrill@bath.ac.uk

Also in the UK, there's a discussion and announcements list. To join, email (majordomo@lists.io.com) with a blank subject line and message body:

subscribe uk-larp [your email address] END

The official White Wolf MET club, the Camarilla, runs a mailing list, (camarilla-1@wizards.com).



23. I'd really like to run one of these! How do I get started? Is there a publicly-available ruleset I can use?

Your best bet is to play in a game or three first, and then find a group of experienced writers and work with them before going out on your own. There's only so much that can be learned from reading someone else's set of rules, especially in Theatre Style systems. It takes experience to learn what sort of plots work and how to weave things together to make things fun for your players. However, plenty of successful events have been run by people with no GM experience.

If there isn't anything in your area, don't worry. If you're reading this FAQ, you've got access to some of the best people in LRP who are more than happy to give advice to newcomers. There are plenty of links in this document and in many other posts which can be followed to the rich LRP resources on the WWW.

Many groups have starter games which they will sell or give away to people - if you plan to make a profit, expect to have to share that profit pretty generously with the people who put all the time and effort into writing. Contact a group in whose work you are interested and see what they say.

Because of the large amount of time and effort most groups put into their game design, and because of the near-impossibility of enforcing one's copyright over something that's been freely and widely distributed, they are generally reluctant to make their work accessible to the general public (by anonymous ftp and the like). However, most game designers are eager to help out people who are just getting started, and will give you ideas or samples or even more in-depth help on an individual basis. There are, however, some resources which are freely available. One of the best is the (Interactive Literature Exchange (aka ILF Gamebank) <URL:<http://www.ilfinfo.org/gamebank/home.htm>>. There is also an archive of all sorts of LRP scenarios maintained by Prof. Brian David Phillips (director@interactivedramas.info), including some work by *English as a Foreign Language* students, at <URL:<http://www.interactivedramas.info/home.htm>>

There is now an Amazon Associate book list at <http://www.interactivedramas.info/bookstore.htm> - the purpose of which is to list all currently available professional publications related to live roleplaying with click-thru links to the Amazon page for the book.

There are some rulesets available on the WWW, including:



Bodycount 2 ('cyberpunk' LRP)

<URL:<http://www.angel.co.uk/interwired/>> [Editor's Note: I am uncertain whether this URL is correct or not as I cannot connect to the host. - B.D.P.]

The Dream Game <URL:<http://www.demon.co.uk/bat/lrp/home.htm>>

LASH (Live Action Super Heroes)

<URL:<http://home.mho.net/jwalker/lash.htm>>

Simple One Page Live Action Role Play (basic resolution system)

<URL:<http://www.interactivedramas.info/scenario/soplarp.htm>>

There are some others listed from

<URL:<http://www.interactivedramas.info/larplinks.htm>>

If you have a system available over the Internet which isn't listed here or on the netlrp listings, mail me or Tony (tony@tony@blews.net).

Some American LC Clubs will "branch" or "franchise" their rules. Be warned, there is usually a hefty fee for this! On the other hand, you can expect support from that group and may be able to transfer player characters between clubs.

You should never use another club's rules or setting without their express permission. They have put a lot of time and work into their game and it is the ethical equivalent of software piracy to use their rules without their permission. And if that doesn't stop you, think about this: because LRP organizations already need attorneys for other purposes (incorporation, etc.), clubs often have counsel and will readily sue to protect their intellectual property.

The most popular (probably) commercial rulesets are the MET versions of White Wolf's World of Darkness (tm) games, notably Vampire: the Masquerade (tm). These are designed to be used "off the shelf", but it is still a good idea to talk to someone who has experience of running them. A good collection of links for web resources for MET gamers is Dr Jamez's pages

<URL:<http://home.maine.rr.com/drjamez/larp.htm>>

Also available in the "off the shelf" LRP market are R. Talsorian's Cyberpunk game, West End Games' Star Wars game, and Flight Games' Cthulhu Live.

Once you have a system, you will need the four Ps: PLACE: Find somewhere to play - this can be public land, a convention suite, someone's home, a nightclub, a

scout camp - it all depends on what is appropriate for the game. It is very important to make sure it is legal for you to play at the site, if it is not your property (a nightclub, Students' Union, or whatever) then make sure the owners or managers are aware of what you'll be doing and are happy for you to play on their premises. If you're going to be playing on public land, especially in a city, make sure you have no props that look like real weapons (it doesn't matter that they're not real, it's still an offense if people think they are and get frightened) and let the police know what's going on. PLAYERS: Make sure you have a group who wants to play, and that they're available on the date of the game - games have been killed by GMs assuming 20 people expressing a vague interest when they mentioned the idea of the game meant 20 people would turn up on the day. PROPS: You can't expect players to provide all necessary props for your first game. This especially applies to LC games, you have to make sure there will be enough weapons for everybody. PLOT: Make sure your players will have something to do. This is built into most TS one shot games, but not into any general rules system you intend to use; you generally can't just turn up and hope to think of a plot on the spot. This FAQ is way too long without going into advice on plots, you'll just have to ask people about those. There's a list of helpful contacts in section 25.

There are more tips for setting up a game at:

<http://www.highprogrammer.com/larp/running.htm>,

<http://www.rpg.net/via/essays/home.htm>, and

<http://www.interactivedramas.info/how-to.htm>

24. Which kind of game is best? Which group runs the best games?

Whichever one you think is most fun. Ask some more questions, or just come give them a try. Many people play several different styles, while some can't figure out why anyone would want to be so stupid as to play a particular system they don't play themselves. It's easy to get into flame wars over whose games are better, and they're really pointless arguments. This newsgroup is a forum for game players and designers who wish to trade ideas and learn from each other; please keep the language calm and as nonjudgemental as possible.



25. What if I have other questions?

If you think they're of public interest, post them on rec.games.frp.live-action. Otherwise, there are people you can ask privately.

The following people have volunteered to answer general queries about LRP, each is listed with the style of LRP they play most often. If you have a fairly broad experience of one or more styles of LRP and wish to be added to this list (i.e. if you're willing to talk objectively about clubs other than your own), then mail Stephanie Olmstead-Dean (sjoilf@yahoo.com).

Live Combat Fantasy LRP:

(UK) Marcus Hill (marcus@ma.man.ac.uk) Mike Horrill (M.D.Horrill@bath.ac.uk)
Roz Horton (roz@evermore.u-net.com) Ian Murphy (indigomage@geocities.com)
The Nomad (nomad@easynet.co.uk) Dave Phelan (dphelan@pavilion.co.uk)
Caroline (caroline@here-be-dragons.demon.co.uk) Simon White
(S.A.White.20@bham.ac.uk)

(US) Dennis Halnon (mendelin@esslink.com) Dennis Waltman
(waltman@bellsouth.net)

Joseph Valenti (neroint@aol.com)

Mind's Eye Theatre (Vampire et. al.)

Carol Arko (ladybug@alum.mit.edu) The Nomad (nomad@easynet.co.uk)

The Interactive Literature Foundation:

Stephanie Olmstead-Dean (outreach@ilfinfo.org)

Ongoing theatre style:

Geoff Wingard (GWGRUNT@VM.SC.EDU)

SFLRP Dave Phelan (dphelan@pavilion.co.uk) James Bloodworth
(james@runabout.demon.co.uk)

Horror/Modern Day Dave Phelan (dphelan@pavilion.co.uk) Caroline
(caroline@here-be-dragons.demon.co.uk)



[...End of FAQ...]

If you have any comments or suggestions about this FAQ, send mail to [Stephanie Olmstead-Dean](mailto:Stephanie.Olmstead-Dean@interactivedramas.info). Your comments are always welcome. Comments on format for this pdf document should go to [Brian David Phillips, PhD](mailto:Brian.David.Phillips@interactivedramas.info). This document was last rebuilt Thursday, 25 February 1999

