

THE BOOK OF COLLEGE OF WIZARDRY 4-6

Documenting a larp about friendship, freedom and magic
Edited by: Charles Bo Nielsen, Claus Raasted & Erik Sonne

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Formalia

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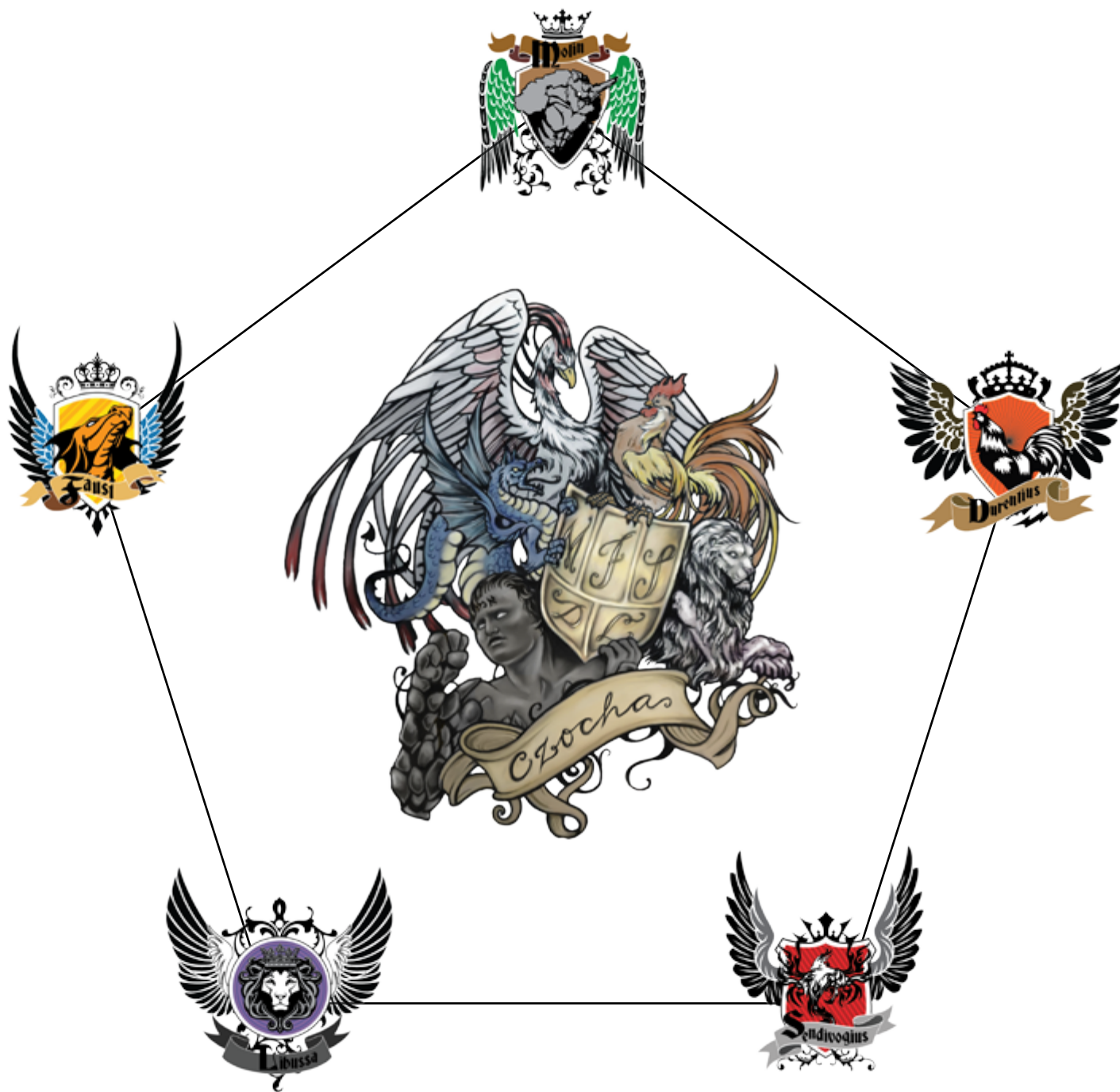


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Chapter 1: Introduction

The introductory chapter of the book presents some facts about College of Wizardry, the story behind the larp and tells why we have made this book - and the larp.

We recommend that you read this first!

Welcome to this book

The Editors

College of Wizardry

College of Wizardry (CoW) is a larp (live action role play) event that takes place at the Polish castle of Zamek Czocha, in south-western Poland. During the larp, the 140 participants dress up in costume and pretend to be witches and wizards for four days. Some play Professors, teaching classes in subjects such as Magical Theory, Alchemy and Magical Defence.

Others play students, who study, argue, love and live as university students in the real world - except that in this one, magic is real and you can meet ghosts in the secret passageways and Werewolves in the Dark Forest.

As of this writing, six CoW events have been held, two more - to be held in April 2016 - are already sold out, and more are on the way. It has been a little over a year since the first event ran on November 13-16, 2014, and when we started roughly 20 months ago, no one could have known we'd be here by now. What started out as a wild idea is now a community of its own. It's been an adventure, and it's one we want to share with you.

This book

This book is the sixth book in "The Book of ..." series by our publishing company, Rollespilsakademiet. It is also different from the other five, in that for once we are documenting a project we ourselves have created. Two of the editors of this book (Charles and Claus) have been part of the CoW project from the beginning, and Erik has joined in late 2015.

College of Wizardry started as one thing, and has since turned into another. You can read more about this in "The Story behind College of Wizardry". This is why this book only contains player experiences from CoW4-6. We want to show what it is. Not what it was in the beginning.

This book is divided into chapters.

The **Introduction** chapter is the one you're reading now. It gives a little background on the project, but is kept short on purpose.

The **Quotes** chapter is filled with short quotes from participants who were at CoW4-6. If you read the next text in the Introduction, chapter, it'll explain the lack of CoW1-3 quotes.

The **Stories** chapter contains texts that are a little longer (but still no more than a couple of pages) detailing personal experiences from players, helpers and organizers.

The **Czocha Pictures** chapter has pictures of the players from the three larps. House pictures and pictures of the Staff can be found here.

The book is written so that every story, every quote and every picture can stand alone. You can read the book from end to end, or flip through it and read things at random.

Both will give you an idea of what College of Wizardry is.

The book exists in both a digital and physical version. The digital version is available for free, and the physical version can be purchased via our web page cow-larp.com.

We hope you enjoy it, whatever form you read it in!

- Charles, Erik, Claus
December 2015





CZUCHA C.O.W.&W. ★ STUDENT'S HANDBOOK



CZUCHA
COLLEGE OF WITCHCRAFT
AND WIZARDRY



STUDENT HANDBOOK

The story behind College of Wizardry

Claus Raasted (Organizer, College of Wizardry 4+5+6)

College of Wizardry came into being because of a drunken conversation at 4 am. The conversation took place in April 2014, at the Knutpunkt larp conference in Sweden, and was between me and our Creative Lead, Dracan Dembinski, who I had met earlier at the conference. It went more or less like this:

Dracan: "In Poland, we have amazing places you can use for larp."

Claus: "No way!"

Dracan: "Yes. And they're cheap as well. Almost German quality, at 1/4 of the price."

Claus: "No way!"

Dracan: "Yes. Look at this castle, for instance. It can be rented cheaply."

Claus: "No way!"

Dracan: "Yes."

Claus: "No way!"

Dracan: Yes."

Claus: If you're right about this, we should talk more when we're sober."

It turned out that Dracan was telling the truth. Afterwards, we stuck our heads together and talked about what we could do at this wonderful castle he'd shown me.

And that's when the magic happened.

It turned out that the Polish larp organization Liveform had been dreaming of making a *Harry Potter* larp at the castle. It had fallen through due to lack of finances and player base.

I, myself, had done some preliminary work on a *Harry Potter* larp together with Danish larp designer Nynne Søs Rasmussen, but we'd given up on the project due to lack of a suitable (and affordable!) location.

The madness begins

This seemed like a match made in heaven, so we went for it head-over-heels. I called in the Danish larp designer Charles Bo Nielsen, who I'd done projects with several times before, and Dracan started assembling a team.

We talked a little about overall structure and just six days later we launched the web page for the *Harry Potter* larp *College of Wizardry*. It was madness.

Charles and I had constructed a budget that was shaky to say the least. We still hadn't met anyone but Dracan. We hadn't even seen the location, but we had already booked it.

And we were afraid that we'd bit off more than we could bite, and the only reason we dared dream that we would get the 100 participants we aimed for was that it was 7 months away.

Two days later it was completely sold out even though we'd expanded to 138 player, and there was a solid waiting list. We'd done nothing to promote it except mention it on our personal facebook pages, and it had exploded from there. Apparently the combination of a well-known story world and an amazing-looking location hit people who had just returned from Knutpunkt *hard*.

Then our work began in earnest. We started doing design work, fleshing out the fictional college and its inhabitants. We had decided from the beginning that this wouldn't be a larp set at Hogwarts, so we needed to establish something else. We already had a basic structure in place from the discussions I'd had with Nynne earlier.

The Polish fiction team, led by Dracan, created the five now-familiar houses of Czocha - Libussa, Durentius, Faust, Molin and Senvogius.

We booked flight tickets to go see the location in June and started working on schedules, finding ways of getting robes for everyone and producing scenography.

In June 2014, Charles and I saw Czocha for the first time. It was incredible. It was without a doubt the most impressive larp location I'd ever worked with, and it seemed unbelievable that we were going to have it all to ourselves a short half year later.

Here we also met more of the Polish team, discussed larp culture clashes ("Write gender neutral characters? That sounds hard, but we'll give it a try!") and got a lot of things settled. I don't think I'll ever forget that trip, but even then I had no idea where this was heading.

None of us did.

It was still "just" a larp. Big, flashy and wilder than anything I'd been part of before, but still a volunteer one-shot project that could miserably crash and burn.



Phase Two

After that, things really got rolling. The awesome character writing team took the basic template we had put together, and turned it into over a hundred characters. Our Design Document (an idea we'd come up with earlier in the process) grew and grew. Art work appeared, and suddenly the Houses had great-looking symbols. Things were happening.

It wasn't just us, though. The players were pitching in at an unheard-of rate. The crest of the school, which is still in use, was created by Tia, one of our players.

Thomas, another player, created the ingame facebook platform CzochoaBook, which let players have facebook-like interactions as their characters.

One of the Professor players, Christopher, went completely overboard and rallied the other Staff players into creating a 200-page teaching book for use during the larp. It was insane.

I've been doing larp projects since '95, but this was wilder than anything I'd been part of before.

Then the larp came. Even though we, the organizers, didn't get to play, we still had an amazing time. Maybe the magic couldn't be felt, but the enthusiasm certainly could.

Yet we still had no idea if it would actually work. Would people have a good time?

It turns out that they did. When we ended the larp on Saturday night (at 01.00 am, because starting an afterparty at 01.30 am is obviously a smart move when 70% of the players have to be on a bus the next morning at 11.00!), we found out that it had worked.

It worked extremely well, in fact.

After the larp, a player - Markus - enlisted the help of his friend Jaakko, and put together a survey. 74% of the experienced larpers who answered said it was "their best larp ever".

70% of those who had larped for more than a decade felt this way as well.

Wow.

We were humbled, proud and very, very happy.

Going viral

But one thing is that the players who'd actually been there had had a good time. Important as that was, what really made CoW unique was the media attention it.

We'd had two brilliant photographers - John-Paul Bichard and Christina Molbech - there, and also our friends from the Cosmic Joke film crew.

After the larp, they put together a short 1:41 min long teaser video from the larp. People shared it like crazy on facebook. Then it got picked up by some niche media. Bigger niche media picked it up from there.

Then it hit lower-ranking mainstream media, and before too long we were on MTV.com. That article got more than 37.000 shares on facebook. And that's when it really went crazy.

People magazine. Die Welt. TIME. The Guardian. Fox News. Good Morning America.

Suddenly CoW was everywhere. It's the first time I've been involved in anything that went viral, and here I was at the very center.

Journalists from India would call me, and while I was talking to them I'd get a message from a newly-minted fan from Taiwan. Someone read about us in a printed newspaper and before long we had a solid fan base in Peru. It was surreal, to say the least.

And that's when we decided we'd better call J.K Rowling.

Because we'd gone from small fan operation that no one cared about to world wide sensation that might draw some interest from the Intellectual Property holders. We felt reasonably safe. After all, this was volunteer work done by two non-profit organizations, and it was even derivative.

No one played Harry or Snape - this was just borrowing the universe and filling out a blank spot in it. Still, this was completely uncharted territory, and we were worried we'd stepped over a line we'd never even come close to before.

Those days were nerve-wracking for me. Rowling's publishers sent her on to her lawyers. They sent us on to Warner Bros, who (apparently) has the IP rights to Harry Potter events.

We got a three-hour lecture from a lawyer who knew about international IP. We had talks with people we knew who knew anything about playing with the big players in the entertainment business. Some were positive, and thought it might open doors. Others were surprised we hadn't been sued to pieces yet.

So it was with a very nervous feeling that I finally got through to the Warner Bros legal team, and had a chat with a vice-president of something important-sounding there. It was casual and friendly enough - once she realized we were one small volunteer event with less than 200 people all total, she seemed to relax a lot.

Still, the agreement we made with WB meant that we could do two more larps (a sequel that we'd since announced, and a rerun - both in April 2015), but then we'd have to leave the HP universe behind and create one of our own making.



The original CoW team

The Polish Team

Szymon Boruta
Location & Practical

Dračan Dembinski
Creative Coordinator

Agnieszka Linka Hawryluk-Boruta
Costumes/SFX

Aleksandra Hedere Ososińska
Characters

Dorota Kalina Trojanowska
Characters

Ida Pawłowicz
Props & Logistics

Agata Świstak
Scenography & Logistics

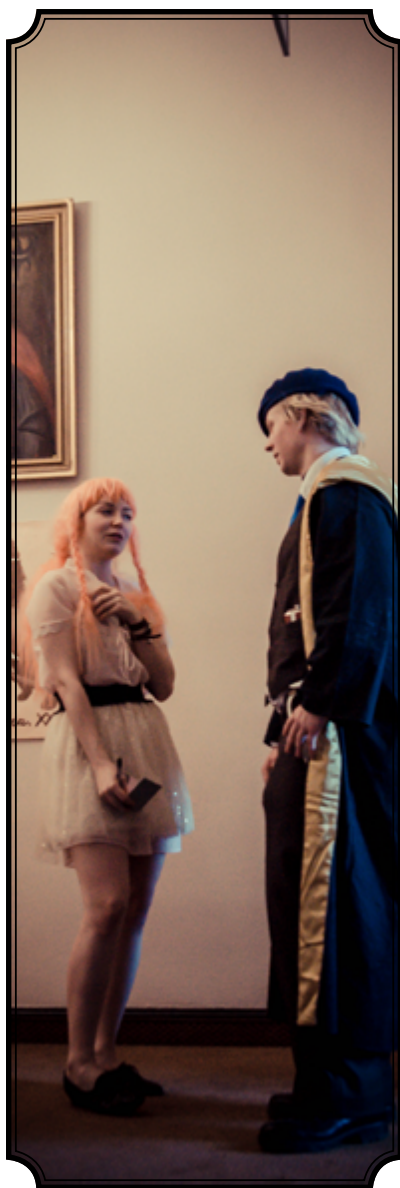
Mikolaj Wicher
Support

The Danish Team

Charles Bo Nielsen
Game Design

Freja Gyldenstrøm
Characters & Game Design

Claus Raasted
Project Coordinator



The larpers who tried to buy a castle

We were relieved, to say the least. Of course we'd also dreamt of getting official recognition and entering into a partnership with Warner Bros. How could we not? Our teaser video had then gotten around one million views on youtube, and a social media expert told us that CoW had gotten three million social media impressions, whatever that meant. It sounded like a lot. So of course we dreamed of going to the moon on the back of the flying cow (not rooster!).

In the end, we were happy with the deal WB offered us. We got to do two more larps in the *HP* universe, and interest in them was through the roof. We had around a hundred of the CoW1 players returning for CoW2, which was to be a sequel to the first game, and we had world wide interest in CoW3, which was to be a new event with its own timeline. When we opened the signup, tickets sold out in less than 90 seconds, and we broke the ticket servers. We had around 300 people who paid 5€ to be in the waiting pool. Around 50 of them ended up actually getting tickets.

So now it was late 2015, and we had two larps coming up in April. It was still a volunteer project, and we knew that if we left the *HP* universe behind, a lot of the interest would disappear. We'd gotten press coverage that was entirely unprecedented in larp history, but we weren't really allowed to do anything with it.

If we'd been able to, we'd have announced ten CoW larps, gotten people to quit their jobs and never looked back. But that wasn't to be. Or maybe it was? Because what if we could do *College of Wizardry* without *Harry Potter*? Was it interesting enough to stand on its own? Enter Hollywood Bob, who suggested crowdfunding.

None of us had ever done crowdfunding before, but helped by Bob Macauley (which is his somewhat less glamorous real name) we got a crowdfunding campaign lined up on the Indiegogo platform. Of course, just before the campaign was to go live - during the Knudepunkt 2015 conference, it turned out that WB had gotten into a scuffle with the Cosmic Joke people, which meant we couldn't link to the online documentary any more.

So just days before our launch, we had to scrap most of our campaign and shoot new video material. It didn't exactly improve things, but we launched on time and interest was there.

We got a ton of press again. Not only were journalists hungry to hear more about "the Harry Potter larp" (though we made a big deal of telling them this was NOT *Harry Potter*, few listened), we'd also done something that would both help us and haunt us.

Our goal was a seemingly modest \$50,000, which would allow us to run another CoW event, in November 2015. If we got more money we'd run two, and if we got even more we'd run three. And to have something to dream about, we decided that if we reached one million dollars - twenty times the goal - we'd buy a castle in Poland!

What did journalists hear? The *Harry Potter* larp wants to buy its own castle. Wonderful story. Not exactly how we tried to present it, but that's what spread. Suddenly we weren't raising money to see if there was interest in a non-HP *College of Wizardry*. We were trying to buy a castle.

For the two months the campaign lasted, everybody wanted to hear about the castle. How far were we? What castles were we looking at? Was it possible to be a partner somehow? Now we'd passed the \$50K mark, did we have the castle? The "buying-a-castle" narrative meant that we got a LOT of press coverage - even if it was a bit misleading.

A living community

In the end, we didn't get a million. We raised just over \$160,000 - or almost enough to do three events (\$175,000 was the goal for that). Being us, we decided to do three anyway, and opened up ticket sales for the third one (CoW6). CoW4 and CoW5 were sold out already, and though CoW6 tickets sold more slowly, in the end that got filled up as well.

We had now left Ron, Dumbledore and Gryffindor completely behind, and with them we'd left the 100%-volunteer status behind as well. Some people were now working on CoW as part of their job, and even though no one was making anything like a reasonable wage, there was now some money for salaries.

There were still plenty who worked on CoW on a volunteer basis, but there were also now some who provided the "stable core" of professionals.

And there was loads to do. Characters had to be re-written and be cleaned of *HP* references. New magic schools had to be created to replace Hogwarts, Beauxbatons and Durmstrang as places student characters could have come from. The Dark Arts were gone. A whole new world had to be created.

We decided that the coolest way to do this was to create a Student Handbook, combining teaching texts like in the previous CoW books with world texts that would show off the new CoW universe.

The plan was to do a 200-page softcover book in 14x21 cm format. In the end, the creative explosion that is the CoW community had blown that plan to pieces. Over 70 people contributed in one way or the other. We ended up with a book that's hard not to call a tome; 560 pages, leather-bound, hardcover, 17x24 cm. It weighs 1,2 kg and is hard to describe without using the word "massive".

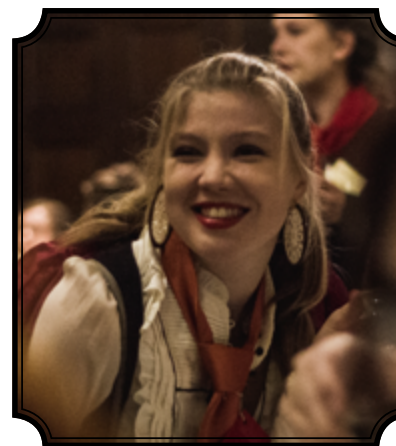
Ironically enough, we actually ran out of space in the book. The printing company couldn't handle more than 560 pages. So we also produced a 80-page soft-cover volume with descriptions of magical creatures!

In its craziness and scope, the Student Handbook is very typical of the CoW community. It was open, chaotic and fun, and everyone was welcome. Some American larp organizers asked us:

"So how do you control who's a member of the writing group?"

"We don't."

"..."



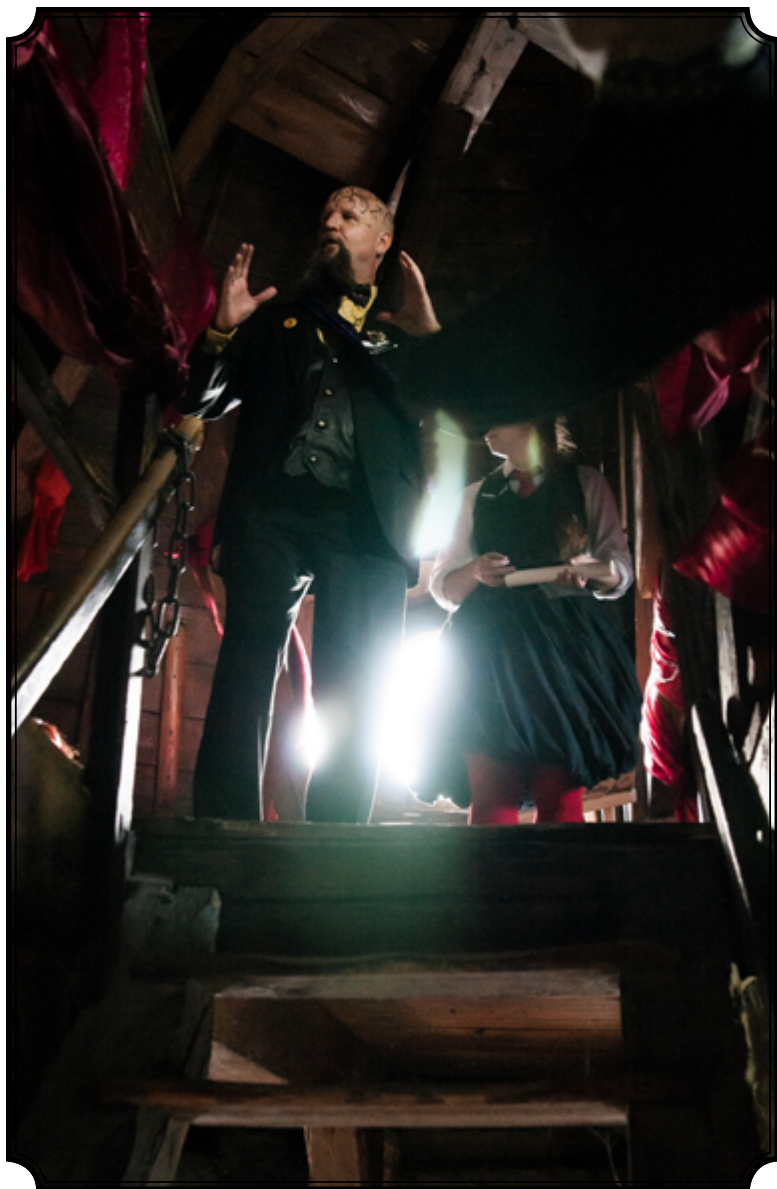
This meant that some texts needed heavy editing, while others were ready to go right off the bat. It also meant that some really weird stuff got into the book. My personal favorite is a short chapter on magical transport, which contains the following sentence:

"Using dragons during winter-time and in cold environments is impractical as it takes them longer to get warmed up. Finally, there is the obvious issue of dragons being extremely dangerous, which is why riding them is best left to badasses."

Since no one will (probably!) ever ride a dragon during the larp, this is just a bit of supporting background info, but for me it captures just the right amount of whimsy.

And while the book is full of texts that have direct relevance to the larp experience (teaching texts, for example), it also has plenty of "fluff". Almost all of it created by our enthusiastic players.





Ending the tale

The book arrived at Czocha just a few days before the first players did for CoW4. And that brings me to Crazy November.

Right from the beginning, we've had a tendency to overdo things and have a blast while doing so. This had made us plan four larp's back-to-back in November, with only a few days of rest between each.

On November 5-8, 2015, we ran the 1914 larp *Fairweather Manor* (inspired by the TV series *Downton Abbey*) at the Zamek Moszna castle a few hundred km from Czocha.

Then we packed everything down and went to the *College of Wizardry* location, where we spent three weeks and ran three events for a total of more than 400 players.

November was an insane month, but it was also one of the most rewarding. Seeing the look on people's faces when they arrive at the castle, guiding them through the pre-game process and then letting them go, is something that gives me a high every time.

And coming out at the end of the larp after the Czocha Trophy has been awarded and listening to the Hymn of Czocha being sung for the final time – that hits me right in the feels. Every time.

Also, the after parties at Czocha are nothing less than magical. The sheer amount of positive energy there is incredible.

2015 is soon over, though, and we're looking at the future. We already have CoW7 and CoW8 sold out, CoW9 is about a quarter full, and we're busy with both CoW spin-offs (there's a Castle Goblin larp idea that came out of Swistak's head that is just waiting to happen, for example) and other larp projects.

We're now no longer a team of strangers, but a team of friends, and the thing we've created together with all the participants is something very special indeed.

One thing's for sure, and that's that I have gained a lot more respect for drunken conversations at 04:00 in the morning.

You never know what rabbit hole they might lead down.





The CoW agenda

Claus Raasted (Organizer, College of Wizardry 4+5+6)

When we started doing this, there was no overall vision except "Let's do a really cool Harry Potter larp for an international larp crowd".

Since that beginning, the whole project has evolved. We've realized that though we didn't aim to do so, we'd managed to create something more profound. Of course, some of this is due to decisions we made for completely different reasons, but their impact still stands.

From the beginning, we wanted CoW to be a place where people of all nationalities, ages, genders and walks of life could come and experience something magical in a safe and inclusive environment.

This is why we've had a strong emphasis on gender equality between all genders from the beginning. This is why the characters are all written gender-neutral.

This is why we've never asked about player age, and have had students in their 50's and teachers in their 20's. This is why we've promoted a "Yes means yes" culture - both in playing and in flirting. This is why we've never had locked rooms.

This is why we've given players the power to change their characters to fit the experience they wanted. This is why we've invited everyone in who wanted to help.

These weren't things we did because we had a mission statement or a written vision about connecting people. Nonetheless, our decisions have helped us do that, and that's some of the reasons people have powerful and meaningful experiences at CoW. They feel welcomed, included and safe, and that brings out their playful nature. We're immensely proud of that, and though we didn't start out with having a higher goal with doing CoW, we have one these days.

- We want CoW to be a place where you are welcome, no matter who you are.
- We want CoW to be a place where you may arrive alone, but you leave with friends.
- We want CoW to be a place where you can experiment and learn about yourself.
- We want CoW to be a place where you meet people from different cultures.
- We want CoW to be a place where you it doesn't matter if you're an old veteran or a first-time larper.

As we jokingly say in the of the intro video on the web page:

"Magic may not be real, but we can still do something magical together."





Chapter 2: Quotes

This chapter contains short quotes by participants at CoV4-6. Many of these are part of longer texts on facebook containing personal thanks to individuals. We have chosen to leave those thanks out.

Even so, we are deeply humbled by the quotes.



I was asked by a roomy:

'You're an experienced larper... Where do you rate this larp? '

My answer: 'This larp is unique! I've never experienced a larp like this one.' (After a few minutes of thinking) 'In all my 10 years of larping this is THE BEST one ever!'

- Alida Bruining (A. von Windbeutel, college of Wizardry 4)

CoW is our narcotic of choice. We crave it, become dependent on it and always need another hit.

- Ashley Northall (M. Tray, College of Wizardry 6)





I loved your fearlessness, your kindness, your whimsy, your devotion to building this amazing story together. The more of myself I poured into this larp, the more I felt you were all giving back. The more exhausted my body got, the more my brain was energised by all of you. What can I say; you all blew my mind.

- Aurelie De Cognac (M. Pelevin, College of Wizardry 6)

Thank you all for being a part of a blast of an adventure that I will never forget!! I am soo grateful to all of you, new and old friends, that I had the chance to play with you.

- Carina Enggård (Prof. Zontar, college of Wizardry 5)





The first time is impossible to forget... And I will never forget my first larp! Thanks to all of you for making the magic real!

- cássia carvalho (N. Rostov, college of Wizardry 6)

*I want to thank the guys we were playing with. You are so lovely!
Playing pranky twins wasn't too simple, but it was so cool to feel
your support. I wish we had done more pranks!*

- Catherine Ponomarenko (I. Deveny, College of Wizardry 4)





Not plagiarising anyone here but:

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!

- cécile Othon (F. McQuillen, college of Wizardry 5)

I may have returned to a mundane world, but that does not mean that I returned to it the same person I entered play as. I have learned so much from this that I don't think I can probably ever say I'll be the same person I was before.

- Cheyenne Procenko (K. Brennan, College of Wizardry 6)





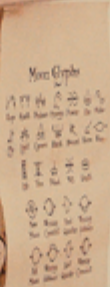
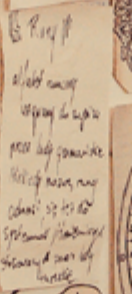
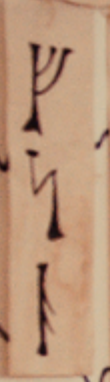
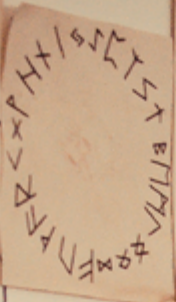
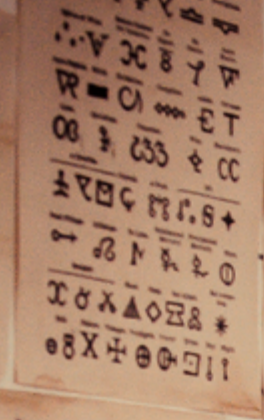
Thank you to all the organizers, volunteers and players for creating a memory of a lifetime. I'm coming out of this thing not only as a better larper but as a better human being. And words (at least my primitive English ones ;-P) can't come close to explaining how much I appreciate that.

- Connor Morgan (P. Sisinis, College of Wizardry 6)

It's been a honor to play with all of you. I'll remember fondly the philosophical discussions about teaching styles and protest strategies as well as the house points given for ridiculous reasons.

- Daniel Whalen (Prof. Jankowski, College of Wizardry 6)





CELLAR
XEX
XEX
MOVIE
R. 1. 2

Thank you for making my first larp one of the best experiences of my life.

- Davide Salvaggio (U. Köhler, college of Wizardry 4)

Thank you, the wonderful crowd of people who were there and made magic. Thank you organisers, NPCs, and staff of the castle, for without you we would just be mundane. Thank you for allowing me to play the brain of the classes, the girl with the homework done, the one with a thing for rules, she who knows and brags about the points, the push to perfection (and cup), the 'HEALER!'. The character that turned this way by accident, really.

- Dominika Cembala (S. Volkov, College of Wizardry 5)
(B. Gagnon, College of Wizardry 6)





Winnie the Pooh said, "One of the advantages of being disorganized is that one is always having surprising discoveries." While participating in the writing and editing for the CoW handbook, I realized what working in an organized chaos really was. By default the process has to be open and welcoming, because everyone is a volunteer doing what they can to make a project they believe in work. Not only is it an extremely creative process, but when you let go of the rules and structures you are used to working in -real magic happens.

- Elizabeth Chaipraditkul (R. Linhard, College of Wizardry 4)

I've had an amazing experience and got to meet new and awesome people and old friends I hadn't seen in a long time. You all make the magic happen!

- Emil Rud Bogø (C. Fawley, College of Wizardry 6)



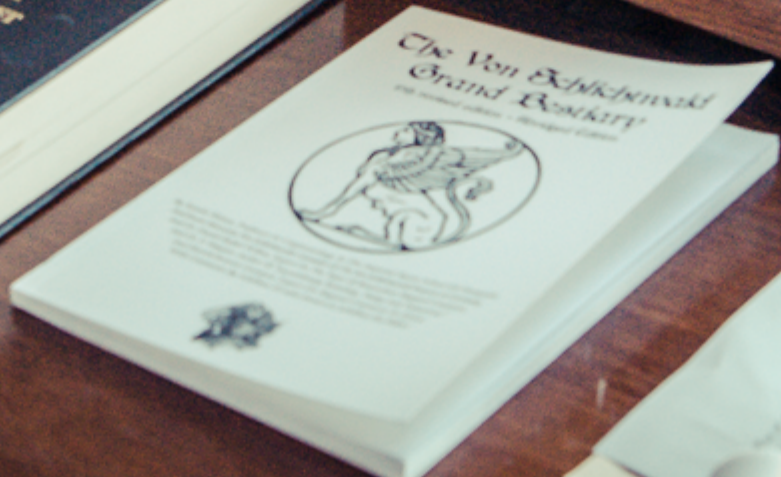


The way of the embedded workshops are the true genius of the College of Wizardry!

- Erlend Eidsem Hansen (Prof. Welsh, College of Wizardry 6)

college of Wizardry has done to larping what Knutepunkt was intended to do 20 years ago.

- Erlend Eidsem Hansen (Prof. Welsh, college of Wizardry 6)





Somewhere shrouded in mist, far far away from the normality of everyday life magic still breaths. We're just waiting for you to take that one step from the mundane to the magical.

- Evan Healy (Prof. Fritzon, College of Wizardry 6)

My days in the mundane world are as they used to be, but every night I come back to Czocha in my dreams. Nice to see you there again. At least for 6 hours a day I am myself.

- Ewa Wiszniewska (S. Ritter, College of Wizardry 4)





There was so much to do and so many ways to do it that I even sometimes got lost in this field of opportunities.

- Fabrice Wauthy (G. Trevelyan, college of Wizardry 6)

One of my favorite things about College of Wizardry are the friendships. You spend a weekend with someone, form a tight bond with a character, explore the castle or maybe just study together during the game. Then you get back home to the real world and talk with them on Facebook, and that is when you realize that you have known this person for a longer time as their character than as their real self. It was a very weird feeling that took me a week or two to shake off. In the end, I have made some new and amazing friendships with people from all over the world ~ which also makes me look up plane tickets much more often than I should.

- Frederik Nissen (M. Bezalel, College of Wizardry 5)





Magic is something from fairytales and books, but at The College of Witchcraft and Wizardry, magic, for a brief moment of your life, becomes real. You can sense it in the air, you can feel it on your body. It is all there for you to dive into head on, or to enjoy from a distance, whatever you wish. Suddenly you are part of the magic, and when you come back home you are left with a memory and a sensation that can only be described as 'magical'.

- Hans Christian Skaarup (B. Gregoire, College of Wizardry 4)

I had an amazing time! I have been a larper for around 8 years and have played in tons of different larps. This has been one of the most fun larps I have ever played in!

- Harrison Greene (Prof. Theodoric, College of Wizardry 6)





Something I especially appreciated was the strong and repeated rules of respect for diversity. Our little world worked in a way that puts the real one to shame in that respect.

- Jenna Welch (H. Torres, College of Wizardry 6)

Thank you so much for making all of this happen! You are truly bringing magic into the world.

- Johanna Strandberg (D. Urbaniak, college of Wizardry 5)





Having a student come out with something you taught them as an answer in another professor's class was a standout amazing moment in a weekend with more cool, amazing and emotional scenes to count. I've never been to a larp which left me so emotionally drained, yet so excited to do it all again.

- Jon Thurtell (Prof. Dubois, College of Wizardry 6)

Blood makes us related... larp makes us family!

- Joshua Alan Doetsch (E. Grimaldi, college of Wizardry 5)





You made this one of the most important experiences of my life. Thanks to you I could bring to life a character who was the embodiment of manipulation, obsessed with power and control, devilishly clever and cunning, but weak and pathetic when control was slipping out of her hands.

- Karolina Fido-Fairfax (Q. Wychwood, College of Wizardry 5)

Buying the ticket I wished to have a great time in Czocho, but I could never imagine all the things that actually happened and all the feelings I felt. Thank you.

- Katarzyna Wiszniewska (A. Kozlow college of Wizardry 6)





My only regret is that I wanted to play more with each and every one of you.

- Kjell Hedgard Hugaas (V.Volkov, College of Wizardry 5)

Vivat academia! Vivant professores! Our wonderful professors, you made this school real. You were wise. You were scary. You were intriguing, intimidating, inspiring, unattainable, approachable ~ and just extremely cool.

- Maria Shulga (L. McMorren, College of Wizardry 4)





It was my first international larp and my expectations were already pretty high (although I was nervous as hell about the whole prefect thing), but it was even more incredible than I thought it would be!

- Marina Gottardi (C. Sisini, College of Wizardry 4)

“I don’t do larps. I do a lot of crazy nerdy stuff, but not larps”.

Now I don’t know what I’m doing, but CoW made me seriously reconsider my life choices.

- Marta Szyndler (M. Rauffenberg, College of Wizardry 6)





Once again I return from a CoW larp feeling so immensely grateful that I went there.

- Martin Buhl (R. Jaeger, College of Wizardry 4)

You not only let people's dreams come true; in these difficult times, when so many things are going wrong in the world, you open a space for international friendship and love. This is far beyond game-creating. You guys are amazing. You should be nominated for the Nobel peace prize.

- Mim Ingalls (Prof. Fritzon, College of Wizardry 5)





Thanks all for such a fantastic time!! Loved every minute and everyone of you!! Can't wait to see you again!! Hugs & kisses!!

- Monica Gray (A. Morazov, College of Wizardry 6)

There are be so many people to mention that it cannot be put down in one post. I am taking home way more than a game experience; I am taking home friends. I learned and I grew and I was gifted with wonderful people entering my life.

- Monika Weissenfels (A. Zamos, College of Wizardry 5)





I wish there was a way to repay you all for this once-in-a-lifetime incredible experience, but there is nothing I can offer in comparison.

- Morgan O'Brien (E. Took, College of Wizardry 6)

Now fully back home, I have no idea whether or not I should bring my wand to lectures and work tomorrow.

- Mo Rusydi (R. Linhard, College of Wizardry 5)





This was just extraordinary! Thanks to everyone who made this experience unforgettable for us! I'm so glad to have met this magnificent group of lovely people.

- Nur Akinci (J. Gnarr, college of Wizardry 6)

Thank you, organizers and NPC crew, for ridiculously high quality work.

Thank you, staff players, for going above and beyond and creating intriguing classes for the rest of us to interact with.

Thank you, fellow student players, for unsavory amounts of emotion and adventure.

- Per Sikker Hansen (S. Koss, College of Wizardry 5)





*Thank you for the amazing adventure into the world of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which was so amazing because of all of you!
I have never in my life felt such painful post-LARP depression as I feel now. It only reflects how amazing and awesome the LARP was.*

- Rafal Poplawski (Prof. Zontar, College of Wizardry 6)

*Alright, you guys broke my brain, because I will be at both CoVW8
and New Word Magischola next year.*

- Robin Jendryaszek (V. Gillion, college of Wizardry 6)





Merlin's pants. This larp. Where do I even begin?

- Sagalinn Leo Tangen (R. MacKenna, College of Wizardry 6)

I'm home, I'm happy and tired and starting to miss you all, the friendships and the camaraderie and the fantasy we made come alive.

- Sarah Piyannah Cederstrand (E. Akerman, College of Wizardry 6)





This is my second CoV and I was so very excited to come back because it was such a remarkable experience last time. Thank you for working so hard to create an immersive magical world for us to experience and manipulate.

- Sarah Verbisky (A. Morazov, College of Wizardry 5)

I've been larping for a good long while now, and I knew going in that CoV was going to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I think I can now safely say I was wrong because if need be, I will sell a kidney to come again. Thank you all so much for making magic real!

- Sharre' Bakker (A. Zamos, College of Wizardry 4)





*A thanks to all those of you that bonded and related to me before and at the game. There were such strong moments in play, be it with my mentee, my arch enemy or my ex girlfriend, be it shouting at each other and casting curses to fellow students, or kissing and sobbing in the arms of lovers, ex-lovers and former enemies.
I really had a great play!*

- Stephanie Habicht (M. Renaut, College of Wizardry 6)

On CoV I finally could play larp as I intended to do when I began larping at 2007 - immersive, intense, emotional. Breaking the wall between reality and fiction while having a good time with friends, old and new.

- Stephanie Habicht (M. Renaut, College of Wizardry 6)



THE HOUSE
POINTS
GLASSES
CANNOT BE
HEXED OR
TAMPERED
WITH



Even though I had never done anything like this before, I had the most intense and amazing weekend of my life! It was great to meet you all!

- Tess Koopman (P. Tray, college of Wizardry 6)

*college of Wizardry Impressive ... Beautiful, brave, different,
cosy, heart-warming, heart-breaking, frantic, culture-clashing,
wild.*

- Thomas Christophel (M. Vasilescu, college of Wizardry 5)





This was my first (but probably not last) larp, and actually my first ever role-playing experience. It took me some time to figure out the “how to”, so I feel like I interacted with too few of you, which is too bad, since you all seem so wonderful.

- Tina Lindvig (Ass. Prof. Bolek, College of Wizardry 6)

With 35 years of roleplaying, but only a few brief encounters with larping behind me, I must say that I was blown away.

- Torben Vilken Ussing (Ass. Prof. Bolek, College of Wizardry 4)





When first first arriving I thought; What the hell have I gotten myself into? 2 hours later I realized I never wanted to leave. Besides it being "just a game" I felt extremely nervous when getting sorted, scared when busted by a teacher and angry by unjustified acts, most of the time it didn't feel like a game, it felt real, heck, it WAS real that is why it was so awesome to be here'

- Yleine Arts (H. O'Hara, college of Wizardry 6)

All in all, I think the 14 hours flight from Singapore has been completely worth it. A gigantic 'thank you' to everyone who made it so awesome that I'm already planning a trip next year.

- Yu Shan Hui (M. Almstedt, college of Wizardry 4)





Still processing the overwhelming emotional confusion of this larp. The lines can get quite blurry when you create a world for four days -- your character's house becomes your family, her professors teach you, you channel off-game burdens into your character's life.

- Zhyliana Garcia (T. Kaiser, College of Wizardry 6)



E. A. GONZALEZ

F. ZIELER

E. SUMMERS

F. MORAZOV

G. OSTROWSKI

F. RAFALKO

G. JORDAN

H. O'H...

Chapter 3: Stories

The texts in this chapter have been written by players, helpers and organizers. Some of them are very personal, and we are very grateful that people have been willing to share.

We hope you will find them as inspiring as we do.

Different perspective

Agata Swistak (Organizer, College of Wizardry 4+5 & A. Sinclair, College of Wizardry 6)

When I was offered a role at *College of Wizardry 6* by the rest of our organizing team, I felt a mixture of anxiety and excitement. This was a larp that I already knew better than most, and yet I was lacking the important factor of player experience. I, along with some other organizers, therefore agreed that we needed to try out our creation.

How was it, then? Most of all it felt weird. I couldn't shut up the small voice in the back of my head that was trying the spoil all the magic for me. I recognized locations, characters, plots and quest items, saw all the mistakes usually made by *College* first-timers, knew all the processes which keep the game together. At the same time, I really wanted to get carried away by the game.

Apparently, you don't have to look for plots or events when you are a Prefect; they will look for you.

I was playing the role of Prefect of House Libussa, home for the rebels without a cause, creative individuals and other very unique snowflakes.

Along with my co-Prefect, Philip, I was a walking, talking info point, confessor and leader for this lovely bunch.

Trying to get them in one place was similar to herding a litter of kittens - I think we managed to meet in one place maybe once for five minutes during the entire game!

Another layer of my play was interaction with other players sharing the burden of responsibility for the fun of larp - essentially other Prefects and Staff.

They managed to turn three hours of Junior sorting into an interesting experience.

With them I exchanged short glances of mutual understanding. When I was out of ideas, they'd inspire me by setting up more and more scenes.

Before the larp, I was anxious that I would miss out on so many things.

I did.

But all of that was OK, because even if I missed out on something, other events and people would find me.

Even though I had seen the story being played out so many times, knew the castle and all its surrounding by heart and secretly smiled to the rest of production crew, hidden behind brown robes, this (already!) timeless larp still managed to take me for an adventure.





A morning swim

Andra Kurlis (F. Zieler, College of Wizardry 4)

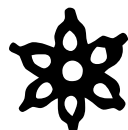
Sneaking down to the lake at dawn to go swimming, the golden leaf-strewn slope with mist rising from the icy water. Cold, cold, cold! The just-rising sun doing nothing to warm us as we dressed and hurried back to huddle in warm duvets.

Filing into the great hall and being steered to the table of the house I wanted straight away! What a relief - there's always that fear lurking, that maybe you'd be left standing at the side.

You'd think getting sorted into houses would narrow your allegiance, but the connections made on the bus to Czocha and with other Juniors pre-sorting seem to trump this. Lots of information and hints are exchanged cross-houses, with everyone benefiting. The House of Juniors wins!

It felt very immersive being in the larp - everywhere you went, some story was playing out into which you'd be drawn. If you sat down to study or look over the book, someone would join you. Lack of social confidence, larp inexperience or language seemed to be no barrier to participation or enjoyment.

I participated in a sequence of events which connected very deeply to some grieving I hadn't completed. The support I found from people and characters I had been interacting with, and ones I hadn't yet been involved with, was healing and wonderful.





How CoW helps me deal with my depression

Andreas Okkels Nielsen (G. Trevelyan, College of Wizardry 5)

College of Wizardry 5 proved to be more of an emotional roller-coaster than I had anticipated. Having participated in CoW3 I was prepared for quite a lot of emotional drama, but I ended up having quite a lot more than I was expecting. The time leading up to the larp was filled with the usual prepping and costume making, alongside a fulltime job and basically living the life of the character online.

At the time I didn't see it as a problem and that was probably why I didn't complain when my boss announced to a customer that I would be working fulltime on three different projects at once. All of a sudden I was under immense pressure and I didn't realize it myself until I was rushed to the psych ward, three weeks before the larp started. The doctors quickly diagnosed me with severe depression combined with anxiety attacks and told me that I would have to be admitted for quite some time – not really what I had hoped for.

I had decided that I wanted to go to CoW again, but suddenly it was all hanging by a thread!

Through the veil of depression I had CoW as the only thing to look forward to and despite the crippling effects of the illness, it enabled me to function to at least some degree. For those of you who don't know what depression feels like, it is kind of the way the dementors of Harry Potter are described.

Imagine giving a dementor a piggyback ride for every hour of every day. It sucks! I was admitted to the hospital having my own brain working on overdrive, telling me that I might as well kill myself as I would never succeed at anything anyway. As you can probably imagine that is a very dark place to be in, and lying in the hospital for weeks didn't exactly make it better.

I found out that prepping for the larp gave at least some relief from the depression, so even though I was unable to do simple tasks like shopping for groceries, I could still live the life of my character, Gabriel Trevelyan, online. Preparing for *College of Wizardry* became what kept me going and you can say that it even became what kept me alive, since I had gotten so ill that I no longer ate food on my own accord.

My days in the hospital became so focused on preparing for the larp that everything else was pushed into the background and I ended up realizing that my thought pattern was slowly being replaced with that of my character.

Even though my character had numerous mental flaws from the very beginning, his issues were easier to deal with than my own, so I dived very deep into his life and somehow managed a very basic level of function.

I ended up having fabric, a sewing machine and needles brought to the hospital so I could continue working on my costumes there, and eventually time started flying past as I spent day after day working on my costumes.

I was discharged in time for CoW and luckily my lovely traveling companions took charge of all planning of the journey to Poland so I could relax and try to recover at least some energy for the larp. At this point I was already running on empty, but I didn't want to admit it to myself and least of all to everyone else.

I thought I would be considered weak if I admitted that I wasn't feeling well, so I did what I knew best: I started acting. I acted like nothing was wrong and hid all signs of the depression from everyone around me. I don't think any of my companions noticed anything as I have acted the same way before with a prior depression, but going all the way to Poland from Denmark with mental baggage weighing you down every step of the way is really tough. And I ended up having to pay the price when I arrived.

When the bus arrived at Czocha, everything erupted into chaos. People needed to find their rooms, robes, ties, nametags, books and then hurry and be ready for the workshop; preferably two minutes ago.

The mood in the air was hectic to say the least and I was probably more sensitive to it than most other players, due to the stress induced depression I was suffering from. I managed to keep it together for the first couple of workshops but just as the second to last was about to start, I could feel an anxiety attack building rapidly.



How CoW helps me deal with my depression (continued)

Andreas Okkels Nielsen (G. Trevelyan, College of Wizardry 5)



Luckily I had heard about a “safe haven” in the organizers’ room meant for exactly what I was experiencing at that very moment, so I made my way there... Only to find the designated room taken up by a film crew, who hadn’t been briefed on this yet.

With no shielded place to go, I grabbed the nearest chair and collapsed there. An organizer was with me within seconds to try to help out, and together we got the panic attack under control I informed her about my condition and asked for help in getting my medication.

Half an hour later I felt well enough to go join the other players running around the castle, but I was now a lot more cautious, and for the rest of the larp I never went anywhere without having my medication within reach.

Furthermore, I informed some of my fellow players about what I was going through and they agreed to keep a watchful eye. *College of Wizardry 5* was underway, but, for me at least, it was a very rough start.

As the game started I felt good for the first time in a long while. I

no longer had to deal with my own problems since at the larp I didn't exist. Suddenly, the only thing that mattered was the problems of my character and those I had designed myself and had already worked with mentally for weeks, so I knew they were solvable.

And if they proved to be too hard to solve, I was now a wizard! What could touch me? A wave of the wand and some mumbo-jumbo latin and all problems could be solved. That is truly the power of larp. If there is something you are unhappy about - change it! I held the power to shape the larp to fit my wishes perfectly without having to think twice about the depression looming over me.

Of course that is not entirely accurate as I could not control when a panic attack would hit me, but that I had medication for as well as the option to relax in the organizers' room should the need arise.

It did a few times, but having taken the step back from the real me gave me the opportunity to see things in a bigger perspective, so I saw the warning signs well in advance and managed to avert the looming crisis.

All too soon, the larp ended. Time flies when you are having fun, but even more so when you are fleeing from yourself.

Despite the illness, I enjoyed participating in the larp and many times afterwards have I caught myself thinking that even though my character was a right shit, dealing with demons preventing him from sleeping and the like, his life was much to be preferred to living with a depression.

At the party following the larp, the price of having to suppress the depression had to be paid. Everyone was assembling in the great hall and I realized too late that a panic attack was imminent, so I hurried to my room to get my medication.

Sadly, the attack could not be prevented so while everyone else were partying and thanking each other for a great larp, I was confined to my quarters, paralyzed by anxiety.

I had hoped to end the larp on a happier note, but since the alternative was not going at all, I am happy to have been a part of CoW5.

Upon returning home, I quickly realized that I was still not well, so I contacted the hospital and got myself admitted once more - this time for electroshock therapy.

This text is being written while I am still admitted and I know there is still a long way to go before I am completely cured. However, being able to switch to being my larp character enables me to function on at least some basic level.

I may not be able to go back to work anytime soon, but the more I think about it, the more I realize that larp can be used to overcome some of the obstacles that would otherwise be impossible to overcome.

I know it sounds strange and I even have problems grasping the concept myself, but it may be impossible for Andreas to go shopping for groceries or wash his clothes due to the depression, but my character Gabriel doesn't suffer from depression, so even though it sounds like the most boring larp ever, I keep functioning due to playing personal mini-larps like "Gabriel cleans the kitchen" and "Gabriel washes clothes".

For someone who hasn't felt the effects of depression on their own body, this must seem silly beyond measure, but with an illness as crippling as depression, one has to find out how to keep on living, and I found that it is possible through larping. I plan to return to the world of *College of Wizardry* at least twice in 2016, at CoW7 and CoW8.

Hopefully by then, the depression will be undergoing treatment so I can use more of my energy enjoying the larp and having a blast with the awesome COWmunity.



What shall I do with my character?

Andreas von Knobloch (K. Sudek, College of Wizardry 5)

When I got my character for CoW5, I was very excited. The expectation of playing a person that I can identify myself with or totally despise was making me happy. Going over the lines of my character sheet made me think though. It was not at all what I anticipated.

The character given to me was supposed to be a slacker, in my eyes a very boring thing to play. Nothing that I could really grasp and have fun with. At that point I did not realize that you could just contact the organizers and they would help you with concerns like that.

This made me not look forward to the larp really. Finally about a month before CoW5 was starting, a friend gave me the idea that a loafer is the perfect base to cause trouble and just have fun. This was great, I embraced it. Something I would be working with.

As the larp was only a few days away one thing came to another and we also had our own little animal rights activist group together.

This and being a troublemaker weren't things I expected when I first got my character, but it worked out pretty fine and fit in with the character I was originally given to represent.

It even gave me the opportunity to do dangerous, stupid things like releasing a minotaur from the dungeons, because this character really believed he was doing the right thing.

Also being a bit careless and by that vulnerable to manipulation, gave me the opportunity to just go with the flow, have other people use me in their plots.

Out of something that I did not like, a very playable and interesting character rose. Thanks to my friends, who gave me new angles, new viewpoints on this person. It was another time enjoying not being myself, but someone else.

By understanding my character and his world, making me understand myself and my world a bit better.





Embracing the dark side

Anna Katharina Lingen (N. Asar, College of Wizardry 4)

So here I was.

It was around 8pm on a Thursday night, it was dark, it was cold, I was standing in front of the bridge to this old, beautiful castle somewhere in Poland. I was wearing a blue dress and a cloak. A wand in my hand.

As a first time larper, up to this very moment I had my doubts. Doubts that I wouldn't feel a little ridiculous. Doubts that I would be able to take this whole thing seriously. Doubts that the wand in my hand would feel like anything more than a piece of wood. And then we started walking towards the castle, the prefect of my house (Faust) started yelling "KNOWLEDGE" and we all replied, yelling "POWER".

And it was in this very moment I fell in love with larping.

Everything else is history.

The doubts were gone almost immediately. However, the struggle was just about to begin. Playing a rich, aristocratic, full-on racist hexblood – and there is no other word for it – bitch was probably one of the most difficult things I've done in my life.

Over the weekend I had my ups and downs. There were moments where I found myself strangely enjoying being rude to the Castle Goblins, raising my brows and rolling my eyes when some students were telling about them being mundaneborn. And then there were moments where I hated it.

Up to a point where on Friday I went into the Organizers' Room and had a full blown meltdown, crying about how I couldn't deal with being rude to people anymore. And no one thought it was weird. I got a glass of Coca Cola, a huge piece of chocolate, a long hug and the advice to do whatever would make me feel better, either change my character if I wanted to, or embrace it.

And this for me has become the essence of larping: You can do whatever the fuck you want with your character. You want to change into being good in about two hours after being the evil bitch for a whole day? Done.

I cannot put into words how empowering and freeing this felt. So what happened?

I decided to embrace it.

The next day: Sophomore Beastology class, somewhere in a creepy, dark dungeon. Apparently Tooth Fairies are pretty much evil little things. The professor asked if one of us students wants to kill it. Kill a Tooth Fairy!?

My moment to shine! I raised my hand, and a moment later I had a hammer and some nails in my it. In front of me was this amazing, realistic-looking creature on a wooden board.

"Nail the wings, hands and feet to the board, Miss Asar".

And I did. With a psychopathic aggression I didn't know I had in me.

"Now take this knife and cut it open, all the way down. We have to take its guts out".

And I did. Blood started to squeeze out of the wound, all over the board, all over my hands. I stuck my fingers into the slippery mess and pulled out some bits and pieces.

"Well done, put the guts into this cauldron. But look, what's so shiny in there?!"

Apparently the Tooth Fairy bit off someone's finger, with a golden ring on it. My price for torturing and killing a Tooth Fairy, a golden ring. Freaking awesome! I started to look around, although the shock and disgust on the faces of the other students looking at me was acted, I believed every single one of them. And then I remembered that I promised myself to embrace it. So I looked at my bloody fingers and asked the Professor:

"So, does Tooth Fairy blood taste as good as human blood?"

"Better!"

So I started licking my fingers. Right there, with the other students looking at me as if I was a heartless crazy bitch, I found the essence of 'embrace it'.

While I'm writing these lines I realize that every 'normal' person who would read this would think that this whole thing is in fact crazy. But larpers will understand, without a single doubt. Nothing crazy about gutting a Tooth Fairy. Heartless? Maybe. But let's not talk about this mushy nonsense that you shouldn't kill evil magical creatures, for Faust's sake!

If you had told me a year ago, before I learned that larping even existed, that I would be channelling my inner psychopath while killing a Tooth Fairy in the dungeon of a Polish castle, I would've have told you you were crazy. Now it doesn't seem absurd. At all.

Because for me, that's what larping is all about. Everything is possible. You can be whoever the fuck you want. Embrace your weirdness. And I loved it. All of it. The crying about being mean as much as the wacko Tooth Fairy torture.

It's a month later now, and I'm still wearing the gold ring I found tangled in the guts.

And every day I can't wait for someone in the real world to ask me "That's pretty. Where did you get it from?", so I can tell my story once again.





Am I a larper?

Ashley Northall (M. Tray, College of Wizardry 6)

...Yes I wore a robe... Yes I had a wand... Yes I did spells ... No, it was bloody AWESOME!

Am I a larper? Probably not.

To say that I had any idea of what to expect when I arrived at the castle, on my first larp, would be an understatement. Naturally, I had my reservations. It's not as if I am going to be able to be part of what my imagination will conjure when reading my favourite novels. Magic isn't reality.

Going on adventures in a mystical castle and getting into mischief with loyal friends is even further from reality. However, something magical did happen to me on those few short days at Czocho College of Witchcraft and Wizardry... It became reality.

Now, I could continue and explain in great detail about how amazing my experience was. How fantastic it felt. How, in such a short time, such a powerful emotional response was created but you only have to turn a few pages in this journal to understand the impact that CoW has on people. So, I'm going to try something else.

I'm going to tell you how I met some amazing people, discovered something new and what I took home afterwards.

Naturally, being a cocky sod, I had no reservations about telling my friends. If I want to do something I genuinely do. I got the expected responses such as 'You're going to be Harry Potter?'

Every five seconds an 'Alacazam' or 'It's wingardium levio-saa' was shouted. I even was awarded various house points from my friends as '5 points to Gryffindor' was one of the more popular chants (ironic as I don't think my character ever won a single point).

Whilst there was NO malice in their jest, it was relentless. I am a wakeboarder. We wakeboard, sit in the sun and pretend we are cool. We do not larp.

When I arrived, I was surprised at how confident, genuine and outgoing the other players were. Perhaps I was being ignorant, but my knowledge of larping consisted of a few Hollywood movies. The expectation of the stereotypical introvert was shattered in minutes.

Many of these people had travelled the world, many alone, to take part in this experience. To travel alone from America, as my now close friend did, to somewhere which is unlikely to live up to any mental expectation is extraordinary. I have always thought of myself as an outgoing and confident person. I'm not shy and I can confidently do things alone but as I boarded the plane to Berlin, the truth was that I was shitting myself - and I was only coming from the UK, let alone from across the Atlantic!

Now, at the larp, I had no idea what to expect. Not a clue. Would I feel awkward? Would I be able to join in? Would people even like me? I had a million and one concerns. But it was very simple... I didn't get a chance to feel awkward as everything surrounding me felt so real.

The smallest of details were taken into consideration, from the potion bottles to the themed beer labels! Fitting in was easy. It took about ten minutes to feel as if I was actually in the college, a student there ready for the new year, and eight of those minutes were spent walking into the castle.

The best part was that I wasn't playing myself, so the other people didn't have a chance to dislike me.

When the world opens, you lose yourself and you don't want to be found. The more Tray (my character) did, the more fun he had, rules he broke and trouble he got into, the more release Ash (I) found. I started to discover new priorities in my life.

Business, money and worries all became less important. This castle in Poland had become almost therapeutic, opening my eyes to more in life than these stresses. It wasn't just in the castle that I felt like this, as I also took this home with me. My life is better now. I don't take it so seriously for a start. Yes, I work just as much, the stress is still there but I have learnt to relax and I have new priorities. CoW gave me that and that is what I take from it.

If CoW can have the same effect on one person in a hundred, it should become mandatory for everyone.

Am I a larper? Probably not... but do I want to be and am I going to be? Definitely!

Some advice from a larp virgin

Astrid Juul-Larsen (X. Foxglove, College of Wizardry 6)

Larp virgin

So having never larped before, I was super excited and nervous before my first CoW. I didn't know what to expect. I spend 24 hours reading the Design Document cover-to-cover, making pros and cons for what house I would like to go to, and what classes were important to me. I thought the easiest role to play would be that of a Junior. Had I know the stress of wanting to get into 'the right house', I would have picked Sophomore or Senior!

As a first time larper I highly recommend going to Czocha a day early - not only to get the layout of the land, but to meet people before they 'put on' their characters. It helped me immensely to know that some of these people had met me as ME and not as Foxglove.

Planning

So I hadn't really planned much more than outfits before arriving at Czocha. I wish I had used the 'Looking for relations' FB group, because asking someone (you don't know IRL) to break character mid-larp is really hard and somewhat scary.

It is really funny to look at my pre-CoW notes - the two houses I absolutely DID NOT want to join were Faust and Molin. Their descriptions sounded so boring and far from what I wanted out of my experience. I wanted "Partyvogijs" or "Liberal-artsy-bus-sa".

But when the larp started, my preferences changed, and I ended up in Faust, which I was ecstatic about. Astrid might not fit in either Molin or Faust, but Foxglove does!

Bleed

The setting is this; Foxglove has fallen madly in love with the Faustian prefect Charles. I played a lot into this story, which became very similar to some parts of my own life as a teenager - and when he coldly refused to go to the ball with me, I experienced what is referred to as 'bleed'.

The emotions of the character spilled over and became the emotions of the player.

I had expected to be overwhelmed by the scenery and finally live out parts of my favourite books.

I hadn't expected to feel the way I did, though, and have such a strong flashback to painful memories.

Luckily I had made some amazing friends before the larp started and we took a small offgame chat, which helped. My point is, having someone there, who knows you a little IRL, is really helpful if you experience bleed and need to be "picked up".

That being said, this experience is not something I'd run from, and I am not afraid of another bleed experience. I recommend people to lean into experiences like this, and learn from them. For me, this was part of why my *College of Wizardry* experience was so immersive. It was not only good experiences but a fair mix of every emotion in the book.

Debriefing

All in all, the whole story around Foxglove and Charles is really funny in retrospect - but living it was hard. When the larp stopped, I found it very rewarding to go over and say to Charles;

"So hi! My name is Astrid, and I am actually not like this at all."

Turns out "Charles", is a seasoned larper, and he had done everything in his power to make our ingame interactions as awkward as possible. He succeeded!

For me talking to the other students afterwards was really important. It was also very beneficial to have a four-hour drive with my friends, where we basically discussed everything.

The 'post-larp depression' is a very real and raw feeling - and being able to connect and geek out on Facebook with the CoW community has been amazing. I cannot wait to go back - and here follows a list of some of the things I have learned, as a first time larper at *College of Wizardry*.

What I have learned

Dropping in and out of character is normal and totally okay. You might not be sure what to do - but just do something.

Don't be afraid of the Professors. Interact with them. They are actually regular people like you, and they love to interact. Most of them are seasoned larpers who can take a story and RUN with it.

Think very carefully about what you want out of this larp – why are you (not your character) going to CoW?

Take nothing said ‘ingame’ personally – and if you do, remember to debrief with the person afterwards.

If you are completely new to larp, having rules, or at least a clique to belong to is crucial – it helps you focus on your character’s interactions.

Don’t be afraid of ‘bleed’. Lean into it, learn from it. It is a unique way to learn more about yourself (said the life coach).

And most importantly DO SOME OFFGAME PLANNING BEFOREHAND!



Practical advice

PRINT OUT your schedule, the overview of the teachers, and the description of the houses and carry them with you at all times. You’ll need them.

BRING REPAIR STUFF; you are going to need safety pins. The NPC room might have plenty of this, but if you sleep on third floor, the ground floor is far away.

Wear comfortable shoes.

If you are wearing a skirt, wear something that covers your bum – because you might have to wrestle a demon, and you don’t want to worry about wardrobe while doing so.

Pick an easy (normal) first name.

Make a proper belt with a sturdy, long wand-holder and compartments for things.

Leave your phone in your room.

Make up catchphrases and stupid songs. People hate it, but also love it. And years from now, whenever someone hears ‘the safety dance’ they’ll think of CoW6. At least I will...



Thoughts and memories

Barbara Schack (T. Bellmer, College of Wizardry 4)

Strangers no longer

When I arrived on the bus in Berlin which was taking us to the castle, I thought they all knew each other: everyone was chatting, reminiscing and plotting excitedly. I asked one of them how long he'd known the others for. He pointed to the people closest to him and said: 20, 15, and 35 minutes. :)

The power of belief

Everyone asks me why I went, alone, to a larp unlike anything I'd ever played before. It's hard to explain how a leap of faith like that can happen. I think we underestimate how much we are willing to believe that magic can be almost real if "you do, you do believe in fairies!".

The stories are what matter

You cannot understand the feeling you have when running down stairs with your cape billowing behind you and shouting "I can't l've got to save the Ambassador of Atlantis" until you've lived it and then lived on to tell your colleagues at work on Monday.

Double up on everything

My character was beyond my control very quickly. It took about an hour, just enough time to make a friend and start our castle exploration adventures. But from time to time my real self surfaced to make side comments. It was strongest when my player and my character's feelings were in synch. Because it was like feeling it twice. Imagine a crush, twice. Elation, twice. Fear, twice. Your heart sometimes feels like it's going to explode with the rawness of it. Yes it's pretend, but we humans are capable of pretending for real.



It's real when we make it so

Mind magic is real. During the closing ceremony, as the house ranks were announced, we cheered. The Beastology teacher kept casting silencing spells to shut us up, they worked, every time. Then the larp organizers arrived and officially closed the larp. We cheered. The man who was no longer our teacher cast the silencing spell again. It failed. Mind magic is real.

Sadly, not just a story in the larp

I live in Paris. I was in Czocha during the terrorist attacks. I was told by the organizers discreetly and tactfully. I then told my in-game best friends briefly then moved on, deciding to deal with the emotions when the larp was over. Two days later we realised they thought that "there was an attack on Paris" was a story linked to the larp. If only it were true! Werewolves and vampires climbing the Eiffel Tower?

What I learned?

What did I learn at Czocha? - To play the harmonica - It is actually quite fun to face a complicated negotiation if you distance yourself as a person from the character you are playing - It's been great help at work! - I can actually run 25 km a day if you give me a cape, a quest and secret passages, towers and winding staircases as an obstacle course!





Sometimes all you need is a hat

Carita Bræstrup Løsnes Morlandstø (M. Kurowska, College of Wizardry 5)

I went to a magical larp and got home with a magical hat. I put it on, and both confidence and guts increased by several levels. At CoW5 I played a character that was somewhat different from myself.

She was more cynical and less caring of other people's feelings. She had more backbone. Even though my character was being bossed around during the larp, I feel that the true nature of my character is someone who would not easily be picked at.

On the flight home from CoW I encountered a group of middle-aged men who were harassing the women that went past them.

Normally I would just have ignored them, but with the character still in my blood and her hat on my head I instead looked at the man nearest to me and said "Hva er det du glør på!" (What are you looking at!)

And it shut him up.

It took me by surprise that I actually did that, but it felt good. Normally I would not do such a thing because I usually feel that I don't have it in me. I like that larp can help you expand the way you see yourself and help you explore some abilities you did not know you had.

I hope I will manage to keep this newly discovered side of myself, and that it will not fade away with the character. Maybe the purple hat will be a reminder for me of what I am actually capable of.



A great, awesome and wonderful experience

Casper Skyum Høgh (C.B. Maliver, College of Wizardry 6)

CoW6, if I was to describe it briefly: A great, awesome and wonderful experience! On one hand, I was stressed and nervous, on the other I was growing as a person.

I think back to the day that I got a call from one of my friends. He told me that he had a ticket to this larp that there was all this hype about in the Danish larp community and that it was in Poland... And it was only four weeks! I wasn't quite sure what to expect, but knowing the organisers and what they could create, I was sold.

So the adventure to Poland started with a sprint. I had no idea what was up and what was down. When I got the message that I was to play as Prefect for house Faust, the most serious and dedicated house at the college, I was terrified. This was going to be my first international Larp and with this responsibility, waves of insecurity washed over me. Am I prepared? Is my English good enough? Where do I get a wand? What about a costume? Could I lead a house full of larpers all older than me, being only 21? I am used to leading people in my daily life, but I could not help doubting myself.

You can't really say that I am new to larp. I have over five years of experience under the belt, having attended the world's only roleplaying boarding school (Østerskov Efterskole). However, I could not help feeling 'late for the party'.

When we finally arrived at the grand castle, after a long ride, I was baffled to say the least. A sense of adventure and lust to explore it all, mixed with a sense of dread for what was going to happen, flowed through me as I stood, stunned, in front of the main bridge leading to the castle.

We were early, so we went on a mad dash to explore the ins and outs of this great castle that was going to be our playground for the next couple of days. It was exhilarating to tear through each and every room looking for secret panels, hallways and passages. Damn, there were a lot!

Some of them better hidden than others. While running around, I tried to get my bearings on what was going to happen. Luckily, we met some of the other players who had been there before and they helped us.

They explained what to look out for when the game started and they gave me some great tips on how to handle being a prefect and what to expect. If it had not been for them, I feel I would have been lost and overwhelmed with the task ahead of me.

Now here is the thing that is absolutely essential to creating the elaborate work of art that is CoW: Workshops! Ensuring that all players know all the essentials, the basics on how to play and what to expect is damn important!

When the other players started to arrive, chaos ensued! The exciting, "who is who" and "what is what" ingame were discussed frantically. Relations and last minute planning were on! The workshops were undertaken and confidence was growing.

And there we stood...about to begin... Was I ready? Nope. Not at all. With some things though, you just have to take the plunge. However, regardless of my insecurities, I looked ready.

I was going to lead and it didn't matter how much fear and apprehension I had inside me.

Simply knowing that each and every one of my students were sharing these fears - and all of them looking up to my co-prefect and I for guidance - meant that I had to look the part.

I wanted to make sure that no matter what happened, when the game started, they could look to me and be helped, comforted and inspired. I was going to be there for them no matter if it was in- or offgame.

I would like to share with you all, a little concept called 'Yes'. It sounds simple, right? Well trust me, when you are working with multiple planes of reality, it becomes a lot harder because what is smart ingame and what is smart offgame might not always be the same.



I have an experience from CoW6 which demonstrates this: It's about a boy called Tray. Tray was a troublemaker and a great troublemaker to say the least. He created a lot of nuisance for his house and lost a ton of points. It had gotten so bad that the teachers had decided to expel him from the school. While that might be the logical decision ingame, offgame, it might not have been.

The Headmistress and the Janitor came up with a plan - and a risky one at that. They had decided that they were going to move Tray from House Molin to House Faust and as some of you might know, there are some great tensions between these two houses. To add fuel to the fire, they weren't going to inform him or his house who, was all about family and loyalty. However, the one person they did tell was me.

As a Prefect of House Faust, I now stood before a major decision. The headmistress needed the acceptance of myself and fellow Prefect, but also the aggrecance of the Faust student. Without this, the plan would go nowhere and to top it off, they were going to announce it in 15 minutes, leaving me a quarter of an hour...

So as a player and a person, I had to contemplate:

1) Say YES and accept Tray into House Faust.

Pros: A student does not get expelled.

Cons: Tray might bring a lot of negative points to the house; It might cause an "explosive" reaction from Molin; It could create internal problems within house Faust; It may lose house Faust the house cup; finally, a troubled student, who may not be loyal to his new house, would gain complete access to the common room and house secrets.

2) Say NO and let a student get expelled .

Pros: No problems for the house, Faust continues as normal.

Cons: Letting a student, who had caused Faust much trouble in the past, stealing and pranking, get expelled.

As one can see, the cons of saying yes, far outweigh the Pros... but that's the thing. It's easy to say no, but does it create play? Not really. Does it create a story? Well, kinda, but is it great? Not really. Will we win by saying yes?

Nope, not at all.

And that is the thing: One should not play towards winning. One should play towards creating great play and an interesting story. Saying yes might be bad from an ingame perspective but from an off-game perspective, each and every one of those cons become a plot point that creates play and that creates conflict - and that conflict is the stepping-stone for great play.

With that being said, with all the cons, especially the one about losing the house cup which for some was the main objective of the game, meant that even though that I was the co-leader of the house aside my co-prefect, meant I could not take this decision without some kind of consent from our house. Ingame, yes, one could take it, no sweat. But offgame - heck no! Being a leader ingame never means that one should trample over others without their consent and being in a game like this, where there is a clear gameistic element, some players might strive for it. It becomes important that one makes sure that their motivation isn't affected due to some crazy guy's lust for more drama.



Working professionally with leadership and learning how one can become a great leader is fun. A larp like this can demonstrate why people do what they do when faced with conflict as well as why they're looked up to. Some may say that roleplaying is nerdy and a waste of time. These people don't know how much you can get from a four days Rour de Force of Leadership 101 like this was. Surrounded by a safe and risk-free environment where you can try out different strategies that you can take with you home.

At CoW and other larps, you often get a more open discussion about how and why people act. That open reflection and safe environment for constructive criticism might be a valuable lesson and one that I have taken home with me. It might just be the thing that I will think about for a long time to come .

My second home at Czocha

Cécile Othon (F. McQuillen, College of Wizardry 5)

The location, Zamek Czocha, conveys the whole 'magical college' experience just by its appearance. The castle in itself, with its secret passageways, wooden stairs, isolated tower and dark dungeons, single-handedly creates this feeling of being in another world.

Add to this magnificent surroundings in the form of a dark forest, a lake and an extremely scenic bridge to access the castle and you get the whole experience.

Czocha for me is about many things: Being in a demonology class and fearing for my life before summoning a demon; having a drink in the tavern with other players, talking about the current wizardry situation and the clash between mundanes (people without any magical powers) and wizards, being involved in a runic magic class in the forest where we tried to defend ourselves against malevolent magical creatures.

Two main scenes/memories come to mind:

An amazing scene for me as a player and as a character was when I matched up two of my character's closest relations (foster father and childhood friend) by arranging a meeting for the two of them in the tower.

While I felt the love and friendship that my character had for her friend, seeing her disappearing in the tower with the man my character loved like a father felt awful.

With each step taken by them, I felt my player's and character's hearts crushed with despair, love, and the overwhelming feeling that from now on, there would be no turning back.

Another memory comes to mind:

It's at the Grand Opening Party, when the headmistress starts announcing the points gathered by the houses and who the winner will be.

Being with my fellow players/colleagues and feeling ever so moved, seeing faces going from happiness to disappointment, from content to despair, and the glimpse of a tear from some players when they realized their house won - followed by us all cheering and shouting, was, and will remain, an unequaled experience.

As a player, *College of Wizardry* is a place where I can experiment with many types of interactions and feelings, from romance to conflict, from sadness to joy. The intensity of those emotions enables a thorough and complete immersion as well as an unforgettable player's experience.

I just cannot wait to go back to Czocha or, as a few players call it: 'home'.







Driving the co-creative spirit

Charles Bo Nielsen (Organizer, College of Wizardry 4+6)

For me, *College of Wizardry* is very much about people coming together. From all over the world, people of all ages and backgrounds come together to do something magical. Some put a lot of lifeblood into their participation, while others just show up.

It is highly motivating as an organizer to see how people keep adding to the mythos and general enjoyability of the event, whether it is by writing their own song for their version of the choir at Czocha or by writing an article about the understanding of the foundation of magic for the student handbook.

At CoW you shape your experience yourself. You choose it by picking which classes you go to and what you end up doing in your free time. Some try to wake up an ancient spirit of the castle in order to see memories from the past. Others enjoy their time by throwing a small tea party in their common room.

Still others go to the potions cellar to make a love potion in secret or investigate where the secret passages lead.

Trying to drive this wonderful atmosphere of everything-is-possible and shared ownership is made possible by always being supportive when someone comes up with an idea, and by trying to fit it in with the rest.

Another key factor is to remind participants to trust in the intentions of others, since we are people from many different cultures; both in terms of larping culture and also just as people.

Boundaries of what is accepted and what is odd or weird differ a lot. Making sure that people feel welcome, and are prepared for a culture shock, is vital in order for participants to feel confident enough to open up and pitch in.

For some, just being in a foreign country and sometimes even an unfamiliar continent is a huge hurdle to overcome. But when they arrive and sense the friendly atmosphere at Czocha Castle, most of them get carried away and focus on the experience instead of on their fears. When the larp really starts rolling there is no stopping until it is over. And for most of the newcomers, they'll never be the same again.

Instead of being a bystander watching a movie, they are part of the action, part of the storytelling, part of the creation.

Failure is just one way to success. Being open for the sometimes odd and weird ideas of players has been important for us; trying to always keep in mind that we don't always know best. Especially not when it comes to what the players want to experience.

Sometimes events go wrong or mistakes are made, but it is okay. Embracing mistakes as being unavoidable and acceptable creates a much more relaxed atmosphere in which participants do not fear ridicule or getting stressed out about the risk of doing something wrong. And not just players. This goes for organizers and helpers as well.

As a larp designer it can be incredibly hard to tell whether or not people are having a great experience, since you cannot tell what is going through their mind.

And, unlike other types of events, asking people about their experience can be very disruptive.

Players sometimes come by the organizers' room in order to take a break from the game and to tell us about their experience and how it's going, but there's no way for us to get the complete picture.

We thus have to stay confident behind the scenes, sticking to our plan with our fingers crossed as the show goes on. So far, each of the six *College of Wizardry* events has afterwards received a lot of very positive feedback.

And yet, every time, we don't know for sure before the afterparty, where we get to hear the players' war stories and learn that some of the hick-ups worked perfectly for someone as a fun twist or that they maybe didn't notice it at all.

Because the truth is, that for most players, they're too busy being absolutely blown away by the whole experience of turning an actual castle into a school of magic for three days, together with around 140 other players.

And that's what drives me. The co-creative spirit of Czocha.

The challenge of freedom

Daria Romanova (I. Sauvage, College of Wizardry 6)

To be a participant of *College of Wizardry* was both a big pleasure and a big challenge for me, even though I have experience in larp-ing.

You could ask me: Why?

Because it was my first international project and the first meeting with the specific approach of Nordic larp in the games' organization. A few words about how I was feeling during the pre-larp preparation and what I'm thinking about all of it now.

The first strange things began to happen from the very beginning: "Good! Great! Awesome!" Claus from the organizing team was telling me, no matter what I was asking. At one point I even started to suspect that he didn't read my mails.

It doesn't mean I was offering something extremely weird or hardly feasible, but in Russian games, it's different. You should always be ready to accept that your ideas can be banned by organizers because there is some kind of a main plot in the way. Here the organizers almost always agree with you and don't mind helping you make things happen.

To tell the truth, at first it really irritated me. "How can they run the larp without a strict system of restrictions? Players may do whatever they want. It will definitely destroy the main plot line!"

It probably sounds weird, but let me assure you, dear reader, that this is an absolutely typical approach to larp-making in Russia. In Russian games, organizers (we call them "masters") not only provide a detailed system of rules, but also keep watch on its compliance.

So you can imagine how amazed I was when the response to my question "Where and when can I get a detailed description of rituals and demonology?", was simple: "It's all up to you".

Incredible! Impossible! But during the pre-larp months I almost made peace with the idea of variability in our magic world.

At that time only one thing was still frustrating me – the spell system (or, better to say "un-system"). Let's again go back to frosty Russia, where *Harry Potter* fans amongst larp players have created an accurately organized spellcasting system.

It was created on the basis of elements from dance and fencing: every spell has its own gesture or combination of gestures + a spell (word) in itself. Of course, it takes some time to learn all gestures and what every spell means, but it's really useful to know what goes on when somebody suddenly attacks you.

It helps to stay in character, because you don't need to ask or explain the effect. But at the same time, it takes a lot of time to practice. You have to remember many movements and do it fast and right if you want to win. I was really worried about how the free way of casting would work at CoW due to the fact that all depends, actually, on your opponent -- would he or she like to play it or not. I was pretty sure that I would be confused by this unpredictable style of spellcasting.

To pretend that my character liked duels was a really brave (and a little bit crazy) decision, but I promised myself that I'd at least try. When the time of the Annual Grand Duel came I was totally frustrated – what should I say? How should I move? There were numerous questions and no time to find answers for them.

I just did my best – remembered what my teachers (in Russian games) told me and what I figured out during the workshop, which was performed by an absolutely incredible "spellcaster" and organizer – Dracan. And you know what? I really liked this totally improvising style to casting spells. I think, the "Four I-principles" are fair not only for of Ritual Magic, but for all types of magic in the CoW project – above all, this is a game about imagination and improvisation as the most powerful tool of creation. And, by the way, I not only won that duel, but became the best duelist of the college amongst all students...

I do not want to judge different approaches to larp organizing. I just want to say that to let the game flow by itself sometimes is a much more natural decision than to try coercing it. I've understood that only after *College of Wizardry*. As well as remembering that an "unsystematic" system can be more structured than even the most strict and authoritarian control of organizers. CoW is a game about freedom, both for characters and for players. And I believe everyone has something to learn from this project.



Casting the plot

Dracan Dembinski (Organizer, College of Wizardry 4+5+6)

I've been asked to write down my personal experience with College of Wizardry 4-6 as NPC coordinator and plot boss. While this text is mainly focused on my very personal experiences, it has to be noted that my work is part of the work of a huge team of fantastic organizers and players, without whom none of this would happen.

The magic is real. After years of waiting, you can finally be a student or teacher at a real magical college – and it is just like in your dreams. Magical creatures make the forest an eerie place, ghosts roam slowly through the corridors and powerful rituals summon the voices of the founders.

Some friend of yours tries out weird spells from some old schoolbook, full of handwritten comments – the moment the instruction is read the books in the library start to fly out of the shelves. The air is full of parchments with a shining silver rune. The piano plays unnatural sounds.

During the sorting all Juniors wait in the Knight's Hall, where the Duelling Club hosts its tournament.

While waiting to be presented to the Prefects, the Juniors watch how two famous Guardians wield spells in a showfight. Time slows down and accelerates.

An unfortunate Castle Goblin is hit by a spell, one of the Guardians dodged. Laughter and classical music fill the halls while the Goblin sings and dances, struck by a “karaokeo” charm.

The Czocha College of Wizardry is more than just the Staff with their lessons and the students with their high school drama.

Every game is full of NPCs, events, special effects and a big underlying plotline that changes with each edition of CoW.

My job is to make the living world in and around Czocha a little bit more real.

Directing a larp

I like to call my job “Larp Director”. I have nothing to do with the financial and practical side of the larp, rather the plot and everything the NPCs do. Most of the events the players ask for and all the prewritten riddles and histories hidden at school go through me and my crew. Being a “Larp Director” doesn't mean I get to direct people; it means I get to give the story some direction.

On the basic level it's both a pleasant and simple task. People come into the NPC Headquarters and ask for an event. We ask when, where and who is needed, then I or my second in command brief the required number of helpers, they change clothes and go ingame. About 1/3 of the events are requested via mail before the game, which makes my life even easier.

Most often players ask for magical beings to arrive in the tavern, forest or the magical circle they just prepared for some shady reason. Sometimes they want to learn something more about their family's past or find some hidden objects.

An immense number of NPCs is requested for lessons. While already ingame it's the NPCs job to keep the illusion up.

With the small amount of information they got during the briefing, these wonderful people (already changed into wonderful beasts, goblins, ghosts, demons or bodiless voices) continue making up the plot.

Often small suggestions, mistakes or ideas change into huge stories, driven by a common goal.

Players rarely have a clear vision of what they really want when initially entering our room. Within minutes, our team changes vague ideas into living dreams.

And this is when we make our magic happen!



Enhancing a larp

This entire series of requests; all the ideas players send to us, all the theories written down in the book and all the small histories hidden in the history of Czocho at some point merge into one story.

And that's when the plot is written. My personal philosophy is to look for some underlying meanings of the stories sent to me; for some possibilities to connect even the most distant events. Very often I add plot twists, small stories and hidden meanings to the things that will happen at Czocho.

Directing a larp like *College of Wizardry* is about making unrelated stories part of a bigger and deeper world - a changing and living one.

This way, every *College of Wizardry* has a different plot happening in the background. A plot you can choose to ignore or follow. A plot you can freely use for your character's story or entirely change with your character's choices. And very often, the way the plot unravels is the work of your characters.

Crafting a larp

This *plotcrafting* begins around 2 days before the game starts and lasts until the last minutes of the game. Most players send their requests in just a few days before the game, so even if most of the work is finished long before, some parts of the game are made last minutes.

Before, between and during CoW 4-6, we created enormous riddles, several books from former school years full of hidden stories, and more handwritings of the founders - all this to react to last minute requests.

Of course, this could all have been done weeks before, but I personally believe that exactly this makes the world of Czocho really come alive. If a player finds some non-standard way of resolving a plot - it will not only work - it will be spectacular!

Some of the most memorable moments while directing CoW 4-6 happened very much last minute - like crafting the school book of one student's dead mother, full of hints that she was a werewolf and died while finding a working cure against lycanthropy.



There was also the moment we sat together in a group of four helpers and created dozens of notes, letters and writings on book margins, to simulate them being made by students years before. It might be a small accent for a player searching through the library, but I'm sure that being able to track the story of Septimus and Boris, full of funny fights, made the school a bit more vivid.

Crafting a larp is about creating both plausible and playable stories, that are all connected through a huge web. It is about making every game unique and every encounter with a NPC meaningful.

It's all about creating magic, and the only tool we really have is our minds.

Three weeks of madness

Edin Jankovic Sumar (Prof. Beyersdorf, College of Wizardry 4+5+6)

Hello, I'm Edin Jankovic Sumar.

I did something incredibly stupid this November.

I played the teacher of Arithmancy for *College of Wizardry*.

That's only part of the truth, what I actually did was that I played the teacher of Arithmancy for *College of Wizardry* three times.

In three consecutive weeks.

CoW4, CoW5, and CoW6. That was incredibly stupid, and I regretted it so much at the end of CoW6. In fact, I started regretting it in the middle of CoW5. That's because blockbuster larps like *College of Wizardry* take a lot from you. It takes blood, sweat, and tears in the form of emotional investment and intellectual labor.

On the other hand, I felt pretty good about the whole thing only a while after, and I was ready to go for 3 more larps. Hell, why not 10? Why not 20? There's this sort of mild psychosis that goes through the head of those who just went through something that stressful, but also that rewarding. It's a sort of adrenaline after-the-fact.

I had been portraying a student at CoW2 and I was incredibly excited about being able to portray a teacher this time. I don't remember exactly how it went down, but I'm pretty sure I asked Charles (one of the organizers) if I could play the Arithmancy teacher.

The joke here, of course, was that I was going to play the teacher of what sounded superficially like the most boring subject of them all, but I wanted to make my character absolutely infatuated by the subject. No dry lectures or boring snore fests for classes.

I wanted to make a character who well and truly loved Arithmancy, who lived and breathed Number Magic, and wanted to share his enthusiasm with his students.

It seemed to have worked well because I've gotten good feedback about that. It seems everything can be made interesting if you're just enthusiastic enough about it.

I'd put a lot of work into College of Wizardry in the months leading up to it. I was very active on CzochoBook, especially for a teacher.



I wrote long quasi-academic (magicademical) essays about Number Magic, Mathematical Geometry, and other subjects like that. I think I ended up producing at least 20 pages of content on the platform, just because I was so excited.

Then the Arithmancy professor for CoW5 had to cancel, so Charles asked me if I wanted to go instead. I knew it was a bad decision, but I ended up going anyway, forsaking whatever other stuff I had planned for that week (not much, as it turns out). Then the absurdity really began when they found out they also needed an Arithmancy Professor for CoW6.

Teaching is hard, but rewarding.

Real teaching that is. I was undergoing education to become a teacher at one point. Teaching Magical Mathematics at a larping event in Poland is not quite the same thing as the real deal, but it's still very hard, and very rewarding. You really get invested in "your" students.

You're silently rooting for them because each of them is the main character in their own little story. And from your high perch on the balcony, looking down on everyone, you have a truly unique perspective on the unfolding grand narrative which emerges quite organically. It's 140 (or for me, 420!) small stories, but they all come together to form a single one. I'm sure I could write a bullshit Arithmancy essay about that.





Confessions of a CoW addict

Emilie Tia Hall (A. Winding, College of Wizardry 4 & F. de Tremble, College of Wizardry 5)

My name is Emilie Tia Hall. Some call me a CoW-veteran; others call me an addict.

I've been a Nordic larper since 2009 and have partaken in many different scenarios and campaigns and played in many different genres.

I've partaken in the adventures of CoW 1,2,4 and 5, and I have tickets for CoW7 and CoW8.

Until now I've played 3 characters, 3 paths and in 2 houses.

I have chosen to describe my experience regarding CoW4.

At CoW4, I played one of the darkest characters in the game, if not THE darkest. This meant having to be on top of my mental game every second spent at the castle; I couldn't let down the facade for even a moment.

I had to work immensely hard leading up to the scenario and spent a serious amount of money on costumes, jewelry, regular hair/makeup and SFX makeup in order to portray a high-born witch, who commanded a small army of both witchards and demons.

It was a mentally exhausting character, but the reactions I got from my play and the scenes I participated in made it my grandest achievement and experience as a larper. The confidence I gained when people cowered in my presence, were afraid to even talk to me or finally took the courage to stand up to me - it was worth all the blood, sweat and tears.

From getting the character months before the scenario, to designing the looks and costumes with my tailor and stylist, to the extensive amount of text-RP with several different players from different countries, to finally standing with House Faust at game start and then playing the scenario - it was a rollercoaster ride like none other.

Upon receiving the character, I had a vision as to where she would go and what she would do.

Quickly I realized that this was not going to be possible due to extensive amounts of text based pre-larp, that all added emotional depth and vulnerability to the character.

The Darkest of Shadows went from a young Voldemort in the making to a credible, struggling woman, who tries to balance good and evil in her life; however, evil has a tendency to tip the scales.

In my opinion CoW, despite being a veritable melting pot of playing styles, is primarily a Nordic larp - this allowed me to play out controversial, deep and emotional scenes with my fellow players.

These scenes ranged from crowning a regent of a dark order in the inner courtyard in the pouring rain, while the new regent was almost naked and possessed by a demon, to crying my eyes out and going through bleeding emotional pain, while trying to win back the trust of my lost love and having my twin brother telling me the daunting truth about our parents.

I live for Nordic larp, because it allows for these intense scenes and deep relations; CoW has given me the opportunity, and an amazing platform, to do exactly that.





My first College of Wizardry: everything I ever dreamed

Erica Breig (H. O'Hara, College of Wizardry 5)

As a child, my love for living in my own world through pretend games was my favorite thing to do. This was the very reason I decided to pursue acting as a teen. At this point in my life, it is my dream to be able to create my own stories through writing and filmmaking - though most of my training and experience lies solely in acting.

So it felt as the as the only natural thing to do; quit my job as a bartender to make room for a month-long trip across the little pond known as the Atlantic, for a chance to live life as another soul, in the magical world of Czocha.

As a player, it's as though I get to be a writer, actor and audience member simultaneously, in what feels like my own personal movie - while also contributing to the overall production of other player's experiences.

It is a great way to exercise my creativity, improvisational skills, and acting. Not only is it beneficial and fulfilling to me as a creative person, it has also been the most fun experience in my life.

The Castle and all it has to offer: its grounds, secret passageways/ hidden rooms, along with Ghosts and House Goblin NPCs, ensure that there is never a dull moment. (And If I have a dull moment, it's because I'm tired from so much excitement!)

But what really defines the experience, are the character relations I establish with other players - both planned and unplanned.

As with most larps, creating the world together - listening and reacting to other players - is exhilarating, and requires a certain level of vulnerability and trust between players. Especially at Czocha, where attention and trust are necessary to play on the existence of magic, to keep that illusion real.

My most memorable moments include two scenes I shared with my character's love interest. One was at the Czocha bridge and gazebo, where a professor was getting re-acquainted with a student (my character) he once knew as a daughter-figure, who was now a beautiful young woman.

The two reminiscing, and slowly falling in love under the stars was romantic and endearing. The other scene was in the Czocha tower stairway, when both characters shyly admitted their love for each other - and discussed what to do about it.

Seeing this notoriously harsh professor show his vulnerable side to this young student was incredibly moving as a character and as a player. I was completely blown away by my counterpart's ability to portray this complex character and his emotions. (It is the kind of chemistry between characters that I strive to portray in films that I write or act in.)

I greatly admire and respect the players I shared in-game moments with, because we had to push past our own egos to let our characters come to life - to let the story take over. While the characters and their plots are make-believe, the thought and creativity that goes into relations between players is completely real and special.

It's like exchanging gifts with a good friend - you put a lot of thought and consideration into it, and so do they.

I instantly felt love for those my character interacted with - friends, foes, lovers - because we exchanged unique experiences and emotions that required thoughtfulness and consideration.

Thanks to the wonderful players at CoW, I got to re-experience the clumsiness of falling in love for the first time, and I even shivered in the fear of death threats that resulted from it. I got to develop notoriety for losing so many House points, and even received a screamer from a rule-loving prefect! I made new friends, reunited with old ones, and found new family in the house I was sorted into.

The real magic is in the talented individuals who bring *College of Wizardry* to life - the staff, NPCs, and the players - who have so much to give.

Was it worth quitting my job to go to Czocha? You bet your Hex-blood arse, it was!

The love and inspiration that has resulted from my first CoW is invaluable, and all I can think about is saving up money to go back and create more magic.

Words from the Headmistress (No, it's spelled exactly right!)

Florian de Ville Pugius (Headmistress Ostenstern, College of Wizardry 4 & R. Frost, College of Wizardry 6)

Why did I join COW?

It all started one rainy afternoon... Welcome to the Internet! The wonderful place of so many things! Mostly "whatever", but then I found the CoW youtube clip:

I was intrigued. I had done LARPs for more than 10 years, but this looked so professional! And somewhere in the nomansland-wilderness of poland?!?

Crazy!

'Be the Headmaster': Wuhuu! More craziness! Shortly after this I had a Skype conference with Claus (the figurehead of CoW). I talked for a few minutes and explained my character idea, and he was like: "Go for it! You can't go over the top!". And I tried :-)

I played Simon/e Ostenstern; and that's how the wonderful-mystical-magical-sparkling-morbid-genderfluid-headmistress was created!

Look at the pictures, look at all the posters we had hanging around, even the fanmade calendar, and ask yourself: "Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?"

What do I intend to achieve with this character?

First and foremost to help people get out of the normal world and realize that Czocha is a magical, mystical place with its own rules. And to show that with great power comes madness!

But keeping the madness in such a way that it encourages players instead of demotivating them. And finally to have fun (for myself!) and be something nice/interesting to look at (for you!).

Random Ostenstern Quotes

"Stop worrying and be awesome instead!"

"Embrace creativity! You can only loose the chains of ignorance"

"With great power comes great power"

"Dead people can be fascinating too"

"What is life without change?"

"Death is nature's way of telling you to slow down"

"Create something beautiful today!"

"A beautiful mind resides in a beautiful body"

"Traditions are like roads, but true places lie in between"

"Excel and shine!"

How did I feel as the Headmistress of the game?

The short answer is:

Good but it was very exhausting!

The longer answer:

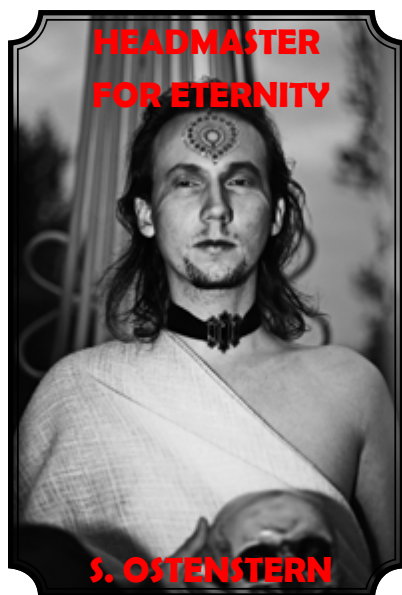
It doesn't matter so much how I did feel! Its about how the other players did feel!

Did I manage to inspire them to "excel and shine"? Did I lift up the spirit? Did they have some symbol, like a star, to look up and try to become/archive?

Do people need stars, role models, examples? To look up to in a glorified way, to help them focus and become as awesome?

I think so.







Two very different and amazing experiences

Frederik Nissen (M. Bezalel, College of Wizardry 5 & Helper, College of Wizardry 4+6)

Goblin

Being a castle goblin is one of the funniest experiences I have had as an NPC. The role in itself is filled with practical stuff like putting up posters and making sure every room has enough toilet paper, but it could easily be made into something funny and memorable for the players.

For example, if I knew that a certain character hated castle goblins, I would provoke them in front of others until I got a reaction.

Chances were that nearby players witnessing it would sympathize with me, and all of a sudden you have this minor conflict between the players about how to treat goblins.

For me the castle goblins play a very important role at *College of Wizardry*: Keeping the castle alive.

And it was amazing doing this for the players; whether it was by making sure players had enough toilet paper or by providing comic relief for a bored player.

Prefect

At the fifth run of *College of Wizardry*, I played the role of prefect for House Molin. I was in Molin for CoW3 as well, so I felt ready and experienced enough for the upcoming challenge.

Never had I spent this much time preparing for a game. I had prepared my character, all my character relations were ready, and I had spent a lot of time with my fellow prefect discussing how we were going to run the house. It is, in my opinion, impossible to completely immerse yourself and constantly be in character as a prefect. Throughout the whole game, your brain is working in two lanes; one lane is your character and their thoughts and feelings. The other lane is yourself trying to make everything run as smoothly as possible.

All this is happening while you are doing your best to make sure your house runs properly. You do your best to make sure that the players in your house are having fun and when you finally think you have time to sit down and breathe, a player runs into the common room and requests your immediate help and attention.

The only moments of peace I had during the game was when I forced myself out of character and relaxed in the Organizer Room – something I found myself doing a few times a day. Occasionally I just wanted to sit down and cry because of the constant pressure on me.

If you think this sounds extremely exhausting and demanding, you are right. It is. Yet I would never trade it for anything. You invest so much of your time and your heart into this house and the people in it, and seeing it all work out in the end is something I will never forget.

Many times throughout the game I doubted if we, as prefects, did a proper job of running the house. I was afraid our housemates were not having fun or that we disappointed them in one way or another. However, as I was standing on the balcony with my fellow prefect Linn, waiting for the announcement of this year's winner of the House Cup, I knew we had done a good job. Looking down on our housemates and seeing them huddle together made me realize that everything was fine, and that was a great emotional moment for me.



Afterwards, at the off-game party, I stated many times that I would never want to be a prefect again. I lied. I would love to be a prefect again. It is a stressful rollercoaster of emotions, responsibilities and logistics, but it will be one of the best rides of your life. You learn to lead, but more importantly you learn to love your housemates, because no matter how we decided to run the house, it was our housemates who got us to the top.

If there is one thing I have learned from being a prefect at *College of Wizardry* it is that getting sick in the middle of the game is a bad idea.



Family

Frederik Sylvest (A. Sokolov, College of Wizardry 5)

This was my first ever *College of Wizardry*, the expectations were sky high and my hype was beyond measurement. Just to put it into perspective: I have been a larper since I was a kid, making up stories and characters is what I love about my hobby, but never ever in my career as a larper have I encountered such an opportunity and environment where I could create a character so rich and... well, alive, as *College of Wizardry*.

So as I'm writing this I'm listening to a very special song. This song is not just a reminder for the character that I played... But also the main reason why I'm writing this. The song is called "Strawberry Swing" by Frank Ocean.

When I came back from CoW I felt something that I have never felt at a larp before: Grief, anguish, sorrow. But also a sense of unity, friendship and most important of all...

A feeling of being a part of a family.

There were many players that I had never seen before, never interacted with... Never played with.

But in only three days all these players... All these people became a part of me, an undying memory of one of the most spectacular experiences of my life.

I heard someone tell me this when I got back to Denmark: "post bleed is like breaking your heart" and the more I thought about it, the more sense it actually made.

For about five months I had invested time, energy, some tears and a bunch of laughter and good times in preparing my character for the larp. It was like building a relationship with someone, learning what made them tick and what made them happy, learning how much you, in the end, would miss that person.

Those months I had relations with other characters online... AS my character! So yes, you can imagine that my head was pretty messy at times, but goddamn, it was worth a ticket in itself!

The last thing I will point out about my trip is that not only did I play and had a blast for three days, but I was also in therapy at the same time.

Being a part of this has taught me more about myself as a person. It has taught me that I hate conflict, although I wanted it for the challenge. It has taught me that I need to also be able to sit back a bit and not always plan ahead. Sometimes I need to NOT know how I'm gonna do things.

But the most important thing CoW taught me was that I as a human being have the tools and the potential to change to the better.

It is as a fellow player said: if you ever have problems in your life, be it fears or doubts about yourself, the remedy is simple...

Larp it away.

So, my fellow CoW family members, thank you for the opportunity and the love! And just as Frank Ocean sings in the song:

"I've loved, I've loved the good times here"



A journey for immersion

Halfdan Keller Justesen (N. Stava, College of Wizardry 5)

I originally bought my ticket for CoW to get the experience of "true immersion". Despite me having played all sorts of role-playing games for quite some years, this was something I had yet to try.

For me, *College of Wizardry* started way before I set foot at Czocha. I used hours and hours on relation building and story writing to help me get a hold of my character. This experience alone was amazing, it was a fun and entertaining journey to explore my character.

A constant opportunity to escape from the grey mundane world and dive into the CoW universe to help define it. The expectations for the game became colossal and then, suddenly months of preparation were reduced to a backpack and a suitcase.

I had been advised to stay a night in Berlin beforehand, a piece of advice I am happy I followed since the next 3 days proved to be some of the most exhausting and exciting of my life. So, Thursday morning, I woke up and went to the Berlin airport, where I met the other players.

Arriving at the meeting point was when I first felt him, Nikolaj Stava, down under my skin, stirring to live. All of these people gathered, representing all these characters that I had grown to love and hate, awoke him. Three hours in a bus and then I was there, standing on the Czocha bridge, taking it all in.

During the course of the next three days, I became the character that I had played in the pre-game (Czochabook, storywriting, etc) for so long, his feelings became my own, I reacted with his instincts and his goals, however unreachable, they became mine.

When he laughed, I laughed (this did not happen often), when he felt anger I showed the world his wrath and when his world fell apart, I cried his tears.

Czocha College of Witchcraft and Wizardry brought the feeling from being in a position of power to instantly becoming helpless. I lived a romance in the darkest of ways, I walked into the world of dreams, I threatened the innocent and left in my wake the tears of the man who stood in my way.

After returning from CoW I do not only feel I have grown as a player but also as a person.

I have found a new way to process emotions and gained one of the most wonderful experiences of my life, and I can't wait till I go back.





The fantastic teachings of Professor Theodoric

Hanne Jakobsen (U. Köhler, College of Wizardry 5)

In the first class of the second school day we had Mind Magic with Professor Theodoric.

It was kind of a dull class, because we didn't get to practice on each other. Instead, we had to face the wall and windows and do magic on those.

At the end of the class, Professor Theodoric called for the attention of all the students in the classroom. He then lifted his wand and said "Contente Maxima!"

And every student lit up, cheered, gave applause and on their way out of class told everybody else about their fantastic class with Professor Theodoric...





An old dog learns some new tricks

Jason Morningstar (Janitor Stanislav, College of Wizardry 6)

This was my first semi-immersive multi-day game, and I approached it with the critical eye of a game designer. I wanted to have fun, but I was also desperately curious about how everything was going to, you know, work.

I think it could have been immersive, particularly for students, but I had a lot of metagame responsibilities and I don't really roll that way anyway. I was always on the lookout for fun stuff to do to make other people awesome.

I brought a bunch of parchment pages with ye olde scripte on them, and if I saw someone who looked bored or confused about what to do I'd approach them and say "Hey, I found this spell but I have no idea what it does. Can you do me a favor and find out? I think it has to do with ghosts."

40% of the players were brand new larpers, so I quickly learned to bookend that conversation with a quick out of character "... and it's just gibberish, not a puzzle - the spell can be anything you want, be creative, get your friends involved and have fun."

Soon enough people were bringing me back spells they had figured out. It was pretty cool. One girl came back and said "This spell can tell you where the Goblin King's gold is!" and I got all serious and said "OK, get two friends - never go after goblin treasure with less than three - and remember I get 25%"

It was interesting to experience conflicts in play style. Beyond brand new larpers, some came from Nordic traditions and others came from more performative traditions. There were some aggressive, shouty professors.

There were a couple of Professor players whose style was totally opposite from mine - they were basically playing bullies, were mean to their students, and very much into the points game (out of game they seem like nice guys).

From my point of view their play was selfish, and offered few openings for others - they stole focus wherever they went. I love a villain (I usually play a villain) and they are necessary in this sort of larp, but I feel like they need to offer fun openings to empower others to be awesome.



The fact that many players really enjoyed them and their cruelty speaks to the clash of cultures - mine was just one preference among many.

I avoided these guys, but I worry that new larpers may not really grasp the 'make your own fun' ethos or understand the illusory nature of the power dynamics we all "consented" to.

Regardless, the game's very flimsy connecting tissue is also very flexible, so it all hangs together nicely. With 140 people, you can always walk away from interactions that upset or disinterest you, assuming you know you have "permission".

The dichotomy between in-game and out-of-game became problematic. My spell-letter example above, for example - there was no metatechnique that explicitly indicated "I am informing you of something out of character".

This is trivial when you are explaining a piece of paper, but when someone is broken down in tears it becomes more important.

When I saw this I always asked - "are you OK?" and then "Out of character, are you OK?" which was important because several times people were 100% not OK.

But once a player was weeping like her mom died and when I asked she said "Thanks for ruining my moment, jerk."

One thing I learned from such a long game was that it gets very emotional and bloody. The combination of intense social interaction and high social stakes with close-but-not-quite slice of life/high school drama, with a big dollop of exhaustion, meant that people were breaking down.

The organizers had wisely set up a chillout area with chocolate, tea and pillows (and, often, live cats) in the out-of-game room, and some players used this a lot.

I never crashed, but I did find myself "popping in" just to have a real conversation every so often. I really needed it. I got emotional.

My arc was all about love, trust and loyalty and that's some heavy stuff.

I thought about my own relationship, the depth of my love for my wife, and the people for whom I'd go to the wall like Stanislav went to the wall for his Headmistress.

I cried, the tears flowed, over and over. In a larp about witches and wizards, for fuck's sake!

It was pretty cool. It felt good. I'm crying again right now. This is how cults work.

So that was surprising and awesome. The experience puts short form, where I butter my bread as a game designer, in sharp perspective.

I have a lot more to think about but I really want to play and make more, longer games now, because there's a secret sauce once you really get into it.



My first larp

Joe Fanelli (T. Hallund College of Wizardry 5)

Here is my perspective as a forty-something husband and father of 3 boys from Chicago, who has never larped before, but who hopes to again!

One day earlier this year I was browsing Indiegogo. I saw a picture of a castle with the title "College of Wizardry". It looked interesting, so I clicked it; and I have never been the same since.

I saw the video that began with Claus (one of the organizers -ed.) saying, "Have you ever dreamed of being a witch or a wizard...?" and I was hooked. Over the next few weeks, I must have watched that video 30 times, along with any other video I could find about *College of Wizardry*, larping, or Nordic larp.

I had heard about larp, but never participated. I have played many tabletop role-playing games, such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, and I missed getting together with friends and being transported to another world for the day. This seemed similar, yet different...better.

No stats, no classes, no complex rules... I was intrigued.

It became something of an obsession for me, as I could not believe that people... adults... did this larping thing that looked so fun! I watched as the first event sold out, then, as tickets for the second event dwindled, I did not know whether I could go or not.

My thought was that I would just buy a ticket so I wouldn't lose a place, and if I couldn't go, the worst thing that would happen is that I donated to this cool project.

Then the Facebook groups started. "Have you ever played before?". "How do you play?". "When do we get our characters?". "I was at the first one!".

Constant messages and updates. Such great energy! Then the excitement of getting a character and making it playable for me. "I like this about him, but I don't like that."

So I changed him and made him my own Thomas Hallund. Within the first days of getting a character, I had requests for making relations between characters. These turned out to be, for me, very important for making my character come to life.

Then Czochabook started, and there was so much in-character interaction that I didn't think I could keep up. But it was glorious! And again, it helped me develop who my character was.

With the game approaching, I hastily put together some "school-wear" and a ball costume (thanks ebay!), packed, and flew from Chicago to Berlin alone. It would have been scarier, had it not been for a group of players who had planned a hostel to stay at and a get-together dinner the night before the bus would take us to the LARP.

It was amazing to be around a group of such excited, energetic people and I couldn't wait to get to the castle.

The next day, as we boarded the bus (the Czocha Express!), I was relieved to find there were many other first time larpers there, just like me! The 3 hour ride seemed short because of all the new people to meet and talk to. There was an agreement made between all to just use character names because we would not be able to remember real names AND character names before the larp.

It was just like college again, with "What is your path (major)?... Curse Breaker?...Cool! Me too!" and "Where are you from?...You went to Stenøya too?...So did I!"

Then we arrived at the castle, and it was breathtaking! We got off the bus with our luggage and walked from the parking lot, over a bridge, and right through the front doors of a medieval castle. I was surprised by memories and emotions of my first day at college flooding back.

"Pick up robes here! Room assignments over there!" Then I went up a winding castle staircase to find my room and meet my roommates. The workshops were great fun and then we got dressed and prepared to get into character for the next 3 days.

I felt totally immersed in the game during the days with trying to be on time for classes, talking with friends, planning adventures, and trying to finish homework. Since I have never larped before, for me, *College of Wizardry* was about drinking in the experience. Sure, I wished I had planned more things to do. Of course I felt confused or didn't know what to do sometimes.



But I also had so many great interactions with the other characters, both students and teachers, and a few wonderful surprises, that it made a great experience. My favorite surprise was a special "Adventure Club" late at night in the forest, where we transformed into animals!

Two other surprises were regarding the Sorting and the House Cup. I had no idea what House I wanted to be in (neither did my character) so I was drifting back and forth with different Houses in the game.

When I was sorted into House Molin along with a couple of the other characters that my character knew well, I was relieved. The Prefects, my Sophomore mentor and my other housemates did such a great job welcoming me that I really felt like I belonged.

It was a wonderful feeling!

My character was never really interested in House Points or winning the House Cup either, but after he was sorted, the close family feeling that Molin had, made him want to do his best for his House. He did not want to let them down.

Now, he did not get many points. He even lost one or two, but it was a great feeling to be part of a team - a family. I also thought that House Faust always won the House Cup as part of the design of the larp. So when we won the Cup by just a few points, I was genuinely surprised! The feelings of happiness and pride were real!

I am glad that I was able to come and meet and play with all of the brilliant, intelligent, thoughtful, lovely people at *College of Wizardry*. I have made new friends and they have enriched my life more than I would have thought.

Thanks to all of you!

And a special thanks to the organizers for working so hard to make *College of Wizardry* such a beautiful experience!



An eye-opener for an old veteran

Jon Thurtell (Prof. Dubois, College of Wizardry 6)

I am what is generally known in UK circles as a veteran or 'Beardy' larper. That is, a person who has been playing for so long and in so many systems they seem to be on first-name terms with everyone who is anyone in the hobby and seem to speak in some sort of arcane, alternate language of abbreviations and shorthand that only members of the inner circle are privy to.

I can tell you tales of the year they built a great pyramid in the marketplace at 'The G', why 'Labby' is the most unique system in the world and why you should stay away from the trees at the final event of 'Strom'.

What this means is that I have been larping in all its guises in the UK for about 15 years and started playing tabletop RPG's ten years before that.

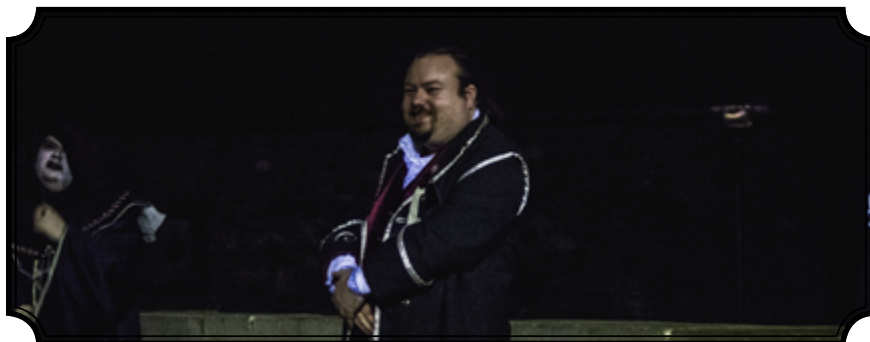
This breeds a certain 'Seen it all' attitude in people like me that is, honestly, not very healthy and it took a trip to Czocho castle to make me see it.

College of Wizardry was hands down the greatest, most immersive, most intensive, most emotionally harrowing experience I have ever had at larp event.

With no artificial layer of game rules and character statistics to get between you and your character, it is much easier to get immersed into the world of the game.

For four days 140 people from 26 different countries built a fictional magic college in a real Polish castle inside their own hearts and minds, and it was one of the best experiences of my life.

I can't wait to do it all again!





onion | photo



The transformation from Harry Potter to CoW

Jost L. Hansen (J. Karasek, College of Wizardry 5)

For the second time I returned to Czocha to be a wizard and cast spells and experience the late teenage drama that we all love and know so well.

I took part in CoW1 as a NPC, playing a former student and in CoW2 where I had upgraded my NPC character to a player character who had to do the last year as a senior again.

My third visit at Czocha at CoW5 was again as a player, but this time as a Junior.

One of the reasons for why I signed up for CoW1 was my love of the *Harry Potter* universe.

But from CoW4 and forward it was no longer to be *Harry Potter*, so why sign up again?

Since CoW1 and CoW2 took place almost 20 years after the books, we really did not play Harry Potter. We had of course a common reference language when speaking of known things from the *HP* lore.

But the game itself was really about the life of young people at college, just set in a magical world.

So for me it did not make much of a difference whether we played in the *HP* universe or in the CoW universe.

It's the magical college life that's appealing and of course running around in a castle with secret passageways. Even though I hardly used them the third time. The biggest challenge in playing in the new CoW universe was not to switch to speaking *HP* lore.

It happened rarely and people were really good at keeping playing and either ignoring the *HP* reference or sliding it back in the CoW universe.

The CoW universe is of course only half a year old and J.K Rowling spent 10+ years developing hers. But with all the contributors around the world, the CoW universe will soon be independent and not seen as being heavily inspired by the *HP* Universe.

I had three very different experiences, and as I wrote above it's the magical college life that is the center.

So it's all about the angle you approach the game with.

I would definitely have a different experience if I went back as a sophomore or with another character from the junior or senior years.

Would I go back again? Even though I would have a different experience the fourth time, I have been there three times within a year. That does not mean I would not go again, but next time I will probably be a teacher.

And I still have a dungeon to do...



The Five Stages of Life Post-CoW as seen by a first time larper

Jovita Tang (J. Rochester, College of Wizardry 4)

Denial

The inability to accept that your character's brief life is over, that magic isn't real and that you're really just a mundane. You cling on to your last moments at Czocha, hoping somehow that you will wake up and realise you're actually a witchard larping as a mundane character.

Anger

When reality starts to set in and you return to your mundane life, you become frustrated and wonder why magic can't be real, or why the weekend could not last longer, or why you did not buy a ticket to all of the other previous CoWs.

Bargaining

You talk to your fellow CoW players and go on Czochabook, hoping to linger in that magic a little longer. You relive those wonderful moments in your head again. Sometimes, because your character is also clinging on to life, his/her thoughts and emotions bleed out into your life. And you kind of like that, because it feels like going back in time to CoW.

Depression

Nothing in your life can compare to the awesomeness you experienced at CoW. You wonder if anything will ever beat that, or life will ever be back to how it was pre-CoW.



Acceptance

You embrace the inevitable truth that your magical weekend is well and truly over. Because time magic doesn't exist and you can't just go back in time, you accept that the only way forward is to buy a ticket and attend the next CoW.

Or CoWs.



Sunglasses After Dark

Juhana Pettersson (Prof. Dubois, College of Wizardry 4)

My character was a vampire, so I figured I'd do the classic sunglasses thing. I didn't want to make things too subtle, and sometimes cliché is good. I played the Professor teaching Magical Defense. The first time I walked into the Teacher's Lounge in the beginning of the game, the three people in the room were all wearing sunglasses.

After a while, I got tired of not seeing anything, so I decided I'd only wear them when lots of people were looking at me. One of the more dramatic moments of the game was a ritual in which the college's Headmistress talked with Death. I experienced it more from the perspective of sound, since I felt I had to keep up appearances and put the shades on.

I got to do a few things that I'd always wanted to do in a LARP, but had never had the chance to do. I've played a lot of Vampire: the Masquerade LARP, but I've never had the scene where I turn someone into a vampire. I finally got to do it now, and twice no less. The first time involved a nice moment with sunglasses.

My Magical Defense class involved an exercise where the students would run a gauntlet of monsters in pairs. They started from the gazebo in front of the castle and ended in the Dark Forest.

Before they started, I told them that if one of them happened to die during this exercise, I had an experimental spell ready. After all, the purpose of the class was to teach the students not to die, as I kept repeating. Of course, the reason I said that was to give one of the student players a chance to play on this if they wanted. They could make the choice of getting killed with the knowledge that this would lead to something interesting.

The last enemy in the gauntlet had a normal, mundane gun and shot the students with it. One player decided that his character was badly hit, but then the other students managed to heal him.

Once I got to the scene, my larp sense suggested that he was trying to maneuver his character to death so he could trigger the events I had hinted at in my speech earlier.

I talked with him and said that sometimes mundane weapons cause internal damage that seems to heal with magic, but actually doesn't. He took the cue and, as we walked back to the gazebo, played as if though he was slowly getting worse.

Once we rejoined the rest of the class he sat down and collapsed on the floor, surrounded by all of his fellow students.

I knelt by him, established that he was dying, and started to perform my experimental spell. It involved casting a spell that drained him of all of his blood and then giving him some of mine.

Since this was *College of Wizardry* and not *Vampire: the Masquerade*, I wanted to give the vampirification ritual a magical twist.

At this point one of the students said:

"Professor, did you just turn him into a vampire?"

"Silence in the peanut gallery! This is a delicate operation."

Once the new vampire was coming to, I gave a little speech telling him that he'd be okay except for an insatiable craving for human blood, and that sunlight would hurt his eyes. The idea was to give the player some idea of how this vampire thing was supposed to be played.

He scrambled to the corner of the gazebo and crouched there, protecting his eyes. I went to him and gave him my sunglasses. He put them on and joined the class. Another Professor was helping me with the class and took over once things had settled. I stood there squinting in the sunlight, when one of the other students gave her sunglasses to me. I put them on.

It was a surprisingly affecting gesture. For me it meant:

"You just made one of us into a vampire to save his life. We're okay with that."

Later during the party that ended the larp, the new vampire was terrorizing the student population, and I was called in to take care of it. I gave him a speech about consent; "Blood tastes best when it's willingly given!"



What I learned about larp from playing College of Wizardry

Laura Sirola (R. Mikos, College of Wizardry 5)

Besides being my first larp outside Finland, *College of Wizardry* was also unique to me in many other ways. Some things felt weird at first, even wrong, but simply because I wasn't used to them. Here are some of my observations about things I would really like to see more in Finnish games as well.

1. "Characters don't matter"

When I got my character profile I felt like it didn't have any content at all. I'm used to getting several pages with a detailed history, personal goals and predefined contacts, and if I don't, it feels like the organizers didn't put any thought into my character and I have no purpose in the game.

Here we could change anything we wanted, and more shockingly, we didn't even need to tell anyone about it. Whatever we did, it didn't matter in the grand scheme of things.

First I was confused, but I soon realized it made perfect sense. With a year, a house and a path, everyone had a place in the system, and everything else was up to us.

Trying to force plots on us in such a big, action-packed game would just probably make them fail. In the end it was awesome to have so much freedom: If you have come all the way to Poland to play, you really should be allowed to play things that work for you.

2. Scripted plots are fun

In Finland it's rare to plan scenes or actions beforehand. Somehow we think that everything should happen naturally as a part of the immersion. Here it was completely fine and many people planned pranks and adventures and even knew what kind of character development they would like during the game.

It felt almost like cheating. I ended up liking this a lot, though, since it usually made for better play. I was able to take a couple of my sophomores to see the forest and unexpectedly fight a couple of monsters there, and that certainly wouldn't have happened spontaneously. Many of my favorite moments included a bit of preplanning - it was a bit like becoming an NPC for just a little while in order to create more play for everyone else.

3. It's okay not to play with all your contacts

Usually, if you have a relationship with someone, you really should play it since it's probably important for both of your stories. In CoW, with so many things going on at the same time, it's totally possible that you just won't have a chance to see some of your friends at all. It's a school, it's natural.

Of course, this can result in you ending up alone when your most important contacts suddenly disappear to do something more important, and this did happen to a couple of my friends.

Luckily for me, just having several acquaintances around worked very well and often, just seeing them in the hallway, just knowing they were there, was enough. I barely talked to a couple of my most important contacts at all, but that just made the few moments I did have with them mean so much.

Catching my ex drawing a heart with his crush's name in his notebook, gently kicking him under the table and seeing him hide it, both happy and embarrassed...



The whole thing took a few seconds, but thinking about it still makes me smile every time. Such small things really made the world feel more alive.

4. NPCs and players with extra responsibilities

I'm used to NPCs being something "boring but necessary" such as guards or servants, or just lesser characters without a specific purpose in the game.

In CoW their variety and the possibility to borrow them for the players' own plans was amazing. Things like a ghost as a ball date or an escaped demon had a huge impact on both personal and bigger plots.

I also liked that the characters at the top of the food chain had NPC-like responsibilities.

While having more power than other players, teachers and prefects were supposed to create play for others. As a prefect I loved including my house in things and taking younger students with me whenever possible.

It's a great way to ensure that the ones with authority don't hog all the most interesting plots.



5. Preplay - it's not for everyone but it's awesome

Usually I have no need for preplay at all, but in CoW the wonderful Czochoabook and all the other things deepened the characters in a way I've never seen before. For example attending the Pandemonium Ball, roleplayed in a separate Facebook group, set up the romance my character would have and gave her more credibility as a powerful duellist. Not everyone did it, of course, and they most likely still had a great larp, but for me it made the experience so much better.

Many of these things are linked to each other and they wouldn't work in every game, but here they were exactly what was needed. On the whole I learned that it can be a good thing to be in charge of your own playing experience, and even though immersion is one of the things I love the most about larping, sometimes it's alright to give it up just for a bit in order to create a better story.

In a huge game like this, if many people put some effort into making more play for the others, everyone is more likely to have a better game.



On being a Prefect

Laura Sirola (R. Mikos, College of Wizardry 5)

Playing a Prefect actually wasn't my first choice. I had never played outside Finland before and when the casting was published, getting such a huge responsibility filled me with both immense excitement and slight panic.

Honestly, it felt like it was too much for my brain to handle. I started planning some of the things I wanted to say half a year beforehand, followed everything that happened on Czochoabook, made sure to know every character.

I like planning and using my ability to remember names, but that was a lot even for me. Besides, my character wasn't likeable at all. How would I ever make my house listen to and respect me? Was this really the right character for me? I had my doubts, but looking back I'm so glad the organizers knew better than me.

I had been told playing a Prefect would be chaotic. I prepared for it by trying to keep away from all extra plotlines. I had no demons to summon, no secret clubs, no great plans to change the world.

I had simply gathered a few important contacts, people that shared my interests and ideals, and that was a good choice: It really was busy.

I usually arrived at meals late or had to leave the table in the middle of eating to take care of something. I didn't sleep nearly enough because of the night patrolling. In the end I was responsible for everything my house did, both good and bad. Usually bad.

And it was all so wonderful.

The way my house worked together was amazing. Our Sendivogius was a house of changes and second chances, and it really felt like the troublemakers actually shaped up a bit and the ones I thought to be reliable caused the most trouble.

My housemates hid a lot of stuff from me, but they also came to me for advice when they really needed it. We had our differences and I feel like maybe we didn't do as much stuff together as the other houses, but we really pulled together when it was needed the most.

Our game as a house culminated on Saturday evening in a mission to save the life of one of our own, and when we gathered the house to explain what we needed to do and what kind of sacrifice they would have to make, not a single one hesitated. In the end we did succeed, and the pride I felt at that moment couldn't have been greater.

It's safe to say that the larp was the best I've ever been to. Nothing I have experienced previously can compare. An incredible castle, all the lessons, personal conflicts, adventures, lovely contacts - many of whom I didn't even play much with, but somehow even the smallest of glances meant so much here - and a bit of romance, my game had it all.

And delivering the losing speeches on the balcony in front of the whole school and hearing the roar when Molin won... My character was disappointed about losing of course, but as a player I could only think of what an honor it was to stand there. I was - and still am - grateful for the chance I was given. The chance to be a Prefect at Czochoa College of Wizardry.





The most engaging and entertaining experience of my life

Lauren Corrody (S. Fairfield, College of Wizardry 5)

College of Wizardry was my first ever larp, and I wasn't the most confident in my ability to essentially play pretend for three consecutive days. Fortunately, the pre-game workshops were helpful - it was made clear that there were no "wrong" ways of playing, and that the point was to have fun. If you weren't having fun, it would be completely within your right and power to change things - even if that meant turning your character completely around mid-game.

One of the best things I heard during the workshops was: "When you hear a secret, don't keep it to yourself. TELL EVERYONE. Whisper it loudly to people, BE overheard."

They encouraged everyone to be inclusive on everything, from rumors to adventures. "If you think you're about to get into something awesome, get at least one other person in on it."

They encouraged you to break school rules and annoy the professors, noting that just because a character is being serious or irritable doesn't mean that the player is.

This made the experience feel so much more welcoming - I could see that everyone else was just as willing to meet people and join activities as I was.

(Maybe this should have gone without saying, but it's hard to remember things like this when you're trying something out of your comfort zone.)

And then the game began. As a first time player, I basically ended up just playing myself at wizard college - which was a BLAST, and it built up my confidence to actually play a character next time.

I can't even begin to wrap my head around the number of plots and events that must have been taking place at every given moment.

As much as I tried to keep on top of every school rumor and activity (I even wrote notes like a dork), I undoubtedly missed at least half of the developments because I was already so incredibly busy.

Any concern of being bored or not having enough to do dissipated FAST.

On my first night as a reckless junior, I explored three secret passageways before getting caught trying to access the "room of mirrors," which was inconveniently located right next to the staff room.

I lost my future house quite a number of points with that stunt. I also managed to obtain an entire bottle of champagne during dinner by being friendly with the goblins, and joined the O.R.G.A.S.M. club for some awkward fun.

During class hours on the second day, I was the victim of an irritability hex (which made for a fun two minutes of slamming things and snapping at people), heard terrifying rumors about the Demonology professor (and spread them religiously), and helped distribute stolen answers to a Magical Defense exam.

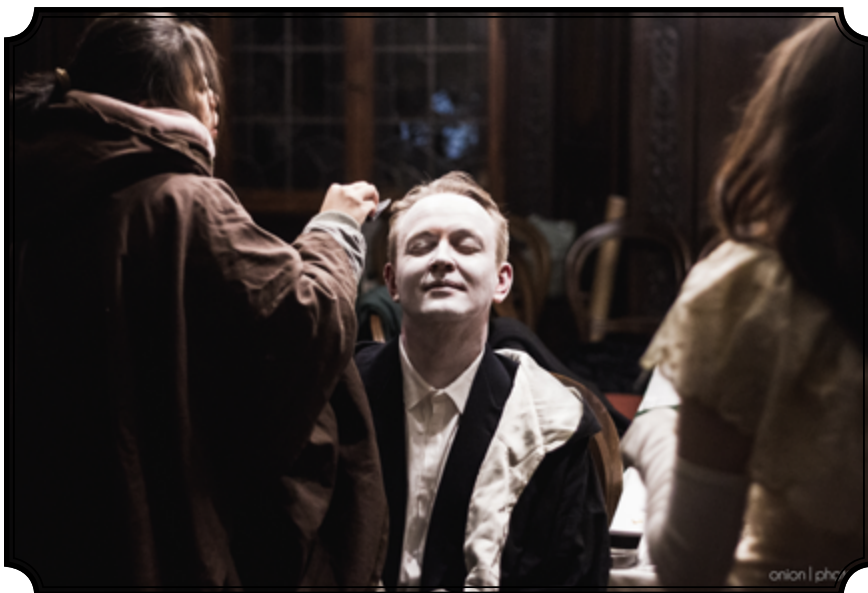




After classes, I witnessed a werewolf get his heart ripped out, came across a mysterious group of strangers attempting to access the castle in order to obtain the Alchemist's Stone, helped rummage through the alchemy lab after hours in search of glacier water melted during a full moon (I wasn't entirely certain on how to distinguish this from plain water, but it was fun trying), and bribed a goblin with candy for information (note to self: bring more candy next time).

I was successfully sorted into my goal house (Libussa - as the troublemaking house, I'm fairly certain that they didn't mind that I came with some negative house points) and partook in the Libussa initiation ritual, which entailed a rambunctious trek through the castle's secret passages while yelling our house chant.

At midnight that same night, I found myself clutching a bottle of wine in a secret meeting in the dungeon with the school janitor and five other students while two of my friends stood by, invisible, discussing some of the secrets of the castle, its families, and its professors.



On the third day, I earned house points for hexing a teacher (very Libussa of me, I thought), summoned a shadow imp to bottle his evil thoughts, successfully maneuvered past a minotaur, was bitten by a vampire (which led to a solid ten minutes of out-of-game panic wondering if I needed to find makeup and figure out how to manage being a new vampire at the ball), learned how to polka, and witnessed what was explained to me as an incredibly bloody attempt at curing a student of her werewolf condition (seriously - blood everywhere. I'm not even sure how that was arranged).

During the ball, I made sure not to give out my name due to a rumor that demons were possessing students, assisted in summoning the spirit of house founder Abraham Molin, and cheered along with everyone else when house Faust did not win the house cup.

Those three days were the most engaging and entertaining experience I've ever had in my life. I'm still surprised at how many real-life friends you can make when none of you are using your real names!

Being a Czocha Prefect

Liselle Awwal (Prof. Welsh, CoW4 & R. Took, CoW 5 & Helper, CoW6)

So as it turns out, being a Prefect at *College of Wizardry* equates to playing the game in hardcore mode. It is infinitely rewarding to lead your house to victory - or epic defeat - in the House Cup competition, to be immediately recognized as a representative of your House, to be included in shenanigans by staff and students alike, and to start off the roaring house chants echoing between the old stone walls of the castle - but it is also exhausting.

The many duties of a Prefect include (but are not limited to):

- Sorting the Juniors into Houses at the start of the term.
- Organizing the Initiation rituals to welcome the new House members.
- Upholding (and inventing) House traditions.
- Carrying information between the Faculty and student body.
- Patrolling the school and grounds after curfew, to see if any students without hall passes are out and about.
- Ensuring your Housemates have dates for the Grand Opening Ball.
- Giving a Winning or a Losing Speech at the Ball.

In addition, Prefects are also Senior students with a full schedule of lessons. Making it to class on time in the morning is not always a given, for when you also live in the Common Room of your House, sleep does not necessarily come easy.

At CoW5, I was Prefect of House Durentius, eternal underdog in the House Cup competition, notorious for their annoyingly catchy "Rooster! Rooster! To the Moon and back again!" House chant, their orange House colour, their Common Room, their penchant for pranks and adventures...

And their many, many cock jokes.

I very quickly discovered that herding roosters was going to take up every waking moment of the weekend. We ended up coming last in the final House Cup lineup, as we found ourselves too busy exorcising demons, chasing magical creatures on the loose, being werewolves, and sending our Juniors on scavenger hunts across the castle, to make much of ourselves academically.

I would not have had it any other way.





A few scattered thoughts

Liyana Fauzi (B. Aleksandrova, College of Wizardry 5)

CoW5 was my first larp, and given the amount of prep that I had done beforehand I thought I had a pretty good handle on what I was getting myself into.

And I did, but I failed to really consider the emotional intensity that would come with experiencing CoW as a first-time larper.

I graduated with a B.A. in Theatre & Film which made me naively assume that the larp experience would be like any other production that I had been involved in as an actor. I was wrong, of course.

This isn't to say that the emotional intensity was a bad experience for me – I suppose I just shocked myself with the amount of affecting moments that bled through from my character to myself.

The entire experience at the Castle was so immersive for those four days and three nights, and the amount of prep that I had done before CoW also contributed to my immersion.

At some points, the reactions that my character had to particular events/situations felt therapeutic/cathartic for myself.

One of the things that really stood out for me as a player was the politics surrounding CoW and how they aligned with my own. Before the larp began, the organizers made sure to explain that there was no room for 'heteronormativity' in the CoW universe.

It was perfectly fine for queer couples to attend the Grand Opening Ball. I was relieved to hear the organizers use a term that I would usually only read about in academic literature, or hear from my friends who are into queer theory.

During the workshops, the organizers also made sure to explain that consent was key for any play that included intimacy between characters – as long as two (or more!) adults have agreed on the specifics, playing intimate scenes at CoW wasn't a problem given that it is a larp for people who are at least 18 years old.

When the larp ended and it was time for the organizers to give their final messages before the after-party, they made sure to remind the players that everyone present was from diverse cultures.

This meant that what might be considered flirting in one culture could be interpreted contradictorily by another person from a different culture. The organizers also announced that there was a space set aside exclusively for those who were staying sober during the after-party; they could escape to the Library should they feel any discomfort around those of us who were partaking in alcoholic libations.

As a queer person of colour, I felt safe throughout CoW and I knew that I could go to the organizers for just about anything.

A lot of the 'real' magic that I experienced at CoW concerned the timing and outcome of events specific to my character, her plots and relations with other characters.

My favourite example of this is how my character, a Sophomore student in House Libussa, would come about acquiring her mentee, who would be a Junior newly sorted into Libussa. I had created a relation with the player months before CoW – our characters had known each other briefly as children, but then lost contact until their reunion at Czocha.

The plan was to reveal our relation in a big way at the larp during a scheduled event that took place on the first night of CoW (we didn't play on our relation at all before CoW because we wanted a fresh reunion at Czocha).

Of course, my character missed the event and I found myself rather distressed by the thought of not being able to play out this relation at all.

As luck (or CoW magic) would have it, his character was sorted into Libussa on the second night and my character's mentor introduced them to each other, which made for an even better reunion for our characters at Czocha.

It suffices to say that it only felt natural for my character to take on his character as her mentee.

As a player, I felt that the outcomes of the developments of my plots far exceeded my expectations just from being in the right place at the right time (even when, on occasion, it felt 'wrong' in the moment).



I'm not sure if this is something that regularly happens at larps, or 'should' happen at larps given the compressed/heightened sense of realities that are played upon. In any case, the payoffs felt sweeter to me because of my perceived sense of things happening perfectly for my character.

I see myself going back to many subsequent runs, just so that I can experience all the other different aspects of CoW magic.

I don't think one run (or even two runs) would be enough to fully experience all the things that CoW has to offer.

The community makes it even easier to return, and to want to return. It would be hard to say goodbye to something like this.



An attempt at a somewhat structured report from magic school

Marion Bræstrup Løsnes (R. Farkas, *College of Wizardry* 5)

Pregame

The pre-larp preparations have always been an important part of my larp experience, but *College of Wizardry* beat everything I have ever seen. A group of enthusiastic players, many of them already hyped from CoW3, together with Czochabook and countless of Google Hangouts made everything go crazy.

The preparations were both fun and frustrating. It was amazing to interact with an international larp-crowd but the differences sometimes got quite big. Both in the way people built their characters and relations, and also in the way people interpreted 'play to lose' differently.

The intensity of the preparation helped me find my character and build interesting relations, but it could also be alienating when the differences were not understood and resulted in heated discussions. The good thing about CoW is that the larp and the venue is big enough for people to larp in different ways, so I knew that in the end, there would be room for the different approaches to the game.

Necromancy

Some months before *College of Wizardry* someone wrote on Facebook that you automatically get immersed in the game if you play in a castle. For me that was not true. The castle was great, but immersion didn't come until the classes.

I went to great lengths to show up to all my classes to get the college experience, even if it meant that I ran late for class because I got lost in the castle. The subject that left the deepest impression on me was Necromancy.

Both my character and I found it morally disgusting. In the first class students volunteered to enter their inner hell to learn something about themselves. To get that experience, other students would use magic to hurt them. In the second class we learned about lobotomy, and how to magically lobotomize someone to gain control over their body. I don't even remember if there was any logical reason for us to learn it and to try it on each other. I just remember feeling appalled and sick to my stomach both in- and offgame.

To hurt people, and to take control of them for the sake of learning is not OK. And with me bleeding into my character and my character bleeding into me, the experience got even more extreme.

People have asked why I chose to stay in the class when it was easy to opt out. I larp for the emotions, not only the nice or sad ones, but also for the stomach-wrenching feelings from watching something you find so utterly immoral. Necromancy was the class that made me reflect.

No blues and bad bleed.

In my experience, the post-larp blues steals your focus from real life for some time after a larp. After CoW on the other hand, I came home to a real life struggle and it stole my post-larp blues. What it did not steal was the heavy bleed I had for my in-game brother.

I didn't realise it before I logged onto Czochabook and saw the announcement of the character's engagement. It felt like someone hit me in my stomach, and I just had to log off at once.

I always play for the emotional experience and normally welcome bleed. What caught me off guard this time was not the bleed of sisterly love I felt for the player and the character, but the deep grief of knowing that my character would eventually lose him to his own ambitions.

This intense bleed made me feel offgame resentment for the people I knew he would choose over me, and the thought of going to another game, where I would stand idly by and watch him drift away from me, was so painful that I felt I could not play these characters again.

Luckily, bleed does not keep its hold on you forever. The resentment has disappeared and the pain is almost gone. Left is the aspiring friendship and sisterly love for the player. I still struggle to see the pictures of his character though. Love and sadness flows through me every time.



Family and larping

Going to *College of Wizardry* was not mainly about the game for me. It was a chance to larp in a castle, larp with international players and to share the experience of such a big production with my three sisters and two brothers-in-law with whom I travelled to Poland.

We have rehearsed songs, done character development and visited players in Denmark. We have enjoyed the fun and the frustration together. And one of my highlights from the trip was to be able to dance away my nervous character at the after party with my three sisters.

While writing the end of this I am sitting in yet another CoW Hang-out in the middle of the night with new friends that have come to mean so much to me.

I can say that the game has given me much more than an experience. It has given me friends with whom I can share both the best and the worst parts of life.





Needs Hi-Res

The pre-bleed is real

Martine Svanevik (K. Volkov, College of Wizardry 5)

Before CoW5 I spent a lot of time building my character, her history with and relations to other characters at the larp. It was great, but it got very intense.

The first moment I realized I was experiencing emotional spillover from my character was when I met the player who was going to play my ex at Czocha at another larp event in Copenhagen, three months before CoW5.

Our eyes met and it felt like I was seeing an ex I wasn't over yet, not like I was meeting a fellow larper who was playing a different character at this game. I had this intense urge to hug this man I'd only met once before, just to acknowledge that we were sharing something amazing.

At the same time I felt like crying. I quickly realized that he was feeling the same way, since I tried to hug him and he said he couldn't talk to me right now because he had to focus on his character for this larp, and he couldn't do that if I was there.

I left him alone until after the game was over and then we spent the rest of the night on the kitchen floor, holding hands, drinking and talking about this new, weird sensation that we dubbed pre-bleed.

I realized that things were about to get weird. What I should have realized was that things had already gotten weird, and were about to get weirder.

For the next couple of months we delved into the relationship between these two characters who had already broken up, telling the story of how they got together, their experiences together, how they functioned, and what went wrong.

At the same time, we were detailing and building relationships and experiences with other characters and players at the LARP through shared stories and an online forum dubbed 'Czocha-book', which functioned as a social hub for the characters.

This meant that for all intents and purposes, I was playing my character continuously for several months leading up to the game.

For the next few months I existed in a space where I was myself, I was my character in the past, while she was happy with the love of her life, and my character in the present trying to get over him. Holding these separate strands of time and personalities in my head at once was both exhilarating, challenging and powerful. I'm not sure I'll ever be the same again.

While I did this, I also talked off-game on Facebook and in Google Hangouts with other players. The sum of this created an intense feeling of community and love for several players as well as characters, which made the LARP a profound experience for me.

I did not just know the characters from the page or from a few shared words, I had fought next to them, saved them, loved them, hugged them. I knew them completely even before CoW5 started. This made the experience of the game world more immersive than any other larp I've been to. And I've been to a lot!





Cheers

Melinda C. Balchan (D. Bayron, College of Wizardry 4)

This was my first larp experience, and I was quite overwhelmed while preparing. It seemed like so many other people knew what they were doing and had these complex characters with epic backstories and intricate relations planned for the game.

I had re-written my character several times but still didn't feel that attached to her. In the days leading up to *College of Wizardry*, I was more worried about how simply getting into and staying in character would go.

At the pre-game orientation, when Claus (one of the organizers) mentioned that we could change aspect(s) of our character if something about them wasn't working well during the game (young adults are flighty after all),

I felt a huge sense of relief. Instead of being serious, my character evolved into this mischievous, gossipy goofball who was mainly interested in socializing, helping her friends, and in the basement beer brigade. I had a blast! Next time I larp I think it might be fun to try stretching myself and playing a more serious character.

For my first larp experience, however, playing a lighthearted character was fantastic and stress-free, and I now have a much better understanding of how a game works.

In the end, the hardest part wasn't playing my character, it was meeting so many fun, like-minded people and then only getting a few hours to get to know them off-game before we all headed off to opposite sides of the world.

I never expected I would get so attached to Czocha and the witching world after just a few days of play!





How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love The Simulation

Mikolaj Wicher (Organizer, College of Wizardry 4+5 & A. Inkblot, College of Wizardry 6)

I consider myself a player who enjoys action in larps. This usually makes me more involved in plots, and this is how I achieve immersion into the game, which again creates a basis for building emotional drama and strong relations with other characters.

I've played larps that focus on simulation a few times before and although I've enjoyed them very much, I've generally considered them boring as well.

You could probably say that this is a bit funny, considering that I have been a part of the organizing team of CoW since the first run as a support for Swistak, our scenography boss.

Every time I've seen how the players cheered at the end of the event, I've always wondered: "Would I be satisfied if I played it?"

A chance to learn suddenly arose when I was asked by the team to play one of the prefects during CoW6.

Yet I was full of fear before playing CoW.

"Will I fit in? Is it a larp for me?"

During the game I played Ambrose Inkblot, Durentius Prefect. I learned from conversations with former prefects that this would be a role with a lot of responsibility, and I would not really have time to get myself involved in the plot and events that were to happen during the game.

The sixth *College* was unusual because of the many inexperienced players. For the majority of them, CoW was the first larp they played. Ever. I knew that I should be there to support them, and my personal goal was to make the game experience the best one possible for them. This way my ingame and offgame motivation got really well mixed together.

When the game started, I instantly got really busy. I was the last person to go to bed every night and still had to attend breakfast at 7:30 every morning. My schedule was filled with things to do, like making sure that SOME Durentius students attended classes, solving the problems that Roosters generated through their pranks, making sure people had dates for the ball, Junior sorting, etc.

And then I got attacked by the plot. As a prefect I was the first choice for most students who encountered unexpected events.

They would report to me what was happening and then ask what to do about it. Things like "A secret demonology ritual is taking place in the dungeon! Should we find the ancient ring and bring it to them or rather keep it away from the dungeon in order for them to fail?"

It sometimes got absurd. There were situations when we'd all gather in the common room, and there'd be three different groups talking about some action going on, each group wanting my opinion on the matter.

This was when I realized that this mixed motivation I mentioned before somehow became my character; I was much more involved in making things roll than actually participating in them. When I did allow myself to be involved, I felt spent and tired.

I took a break, gave it some thought and made the decision that I would be like a mirror; reflecting the plot and action back to the other players.

After that I was again able to immerse myself into the game. Being just a prefect was more than fine! It was a great experience that I'd love to repeat some day.

Thanks to this experience I discovered that simulationism, as well as gamism, can serve as a way for me to have a great experience.

I just needed to properly familiarize myself with the role I was playing.



Where the magic happens

Mim Ingalls (Prof. Fritzon, College of Wizardry 5)

Czocha - this is the place where the magic happens - both in-game and off-game. Before CoW, I had larped for almost 15 years. I knew many styles and settings. I had larped in lost places, on ships, in black boxes and castles. So I really had seen a lot of games and people.

But Czocha gave me something that I have never experienced to that extent before. The incredible synergy of letting a dream come true with 150 people from all over the world. I was a student in run 3 and played the Necromancy teacher in run 5.

Both runs were completely different experiences, but had that special magic in common: The magic of intense gaming, the magic of international friendship, the magic of deep emotions and exciting adventures.

When I first came to CoW I was shy, a little anxious and very nervous. How would it be to play with so many different people, all of them with various backgrounds, ideas, know-how, and preparations? So I just let myself go and surrendered to immersion. And the magic of CoW happened.

I found myself in a world that was so realistic that I completely forgot this other life. I even dreamt in character. I was a student at the College of Wizardry: I learned, I avoided, I feared, I loved, I cried and laughed.

And when the game was finished, it wasn't really over. Acquaintances and even friendships had started with people from all over the world who had shared this amazing game. I knew I wanted more.

So the sign-up for CoW5 was quickly done, and this time I played a Professor. This was also a great experience; completely different and very fascinating. I really enjoyed preparing and giving classes and challenging the students with discussions that blurred ethics and morals. We really tapped into the dark side of the topic.

Some of the students confronted the hidden parts of their soul where dark secrets hide. Others had the opportunity for supervised near-death-experience. Also, I really enjoyed helping the students with their worries and hardships after class.

And of course there was the great game between my colleagues and myself.

We spent a lot of time together in the teachers' lounge, and many of us had a lot of fun creating game for the students through the ideas we shared there.

The whole game between the teachers was mesmerising, very close and dynamic. Having this responsibility towards the pupils, but also being involved with our own personal stories and relations - that was a deep experience.

I really enjoyed both; playing a student and playing a teacher, and I am very happy about the magical time that I shared with fascinating, crazy, gorgeous people.

I hope to return to CoW, to Czocha, the place where real magic happens; the place that has become a part of my best larp memories.





What I learned from killing myself

Ola Kristian Læhren (A. J. Smith, College of Wizardry 5)

Smithy was a rather sad little guy. His family might have had all the money and power in the world, but they were about as empathic, understanding and loving as a hungry flock of seagulls. His primary school had been boring and lonely place, occasionally made exciting by sudden appearances of bullies.

(You think ordinary bullies are bad? Imagine them with wands and the creativity of a wizard)

Czocha was nice. And quiet, with no bullies. He didn't have many friends there either, but the ghosts were nice. After a while some of them even started replying to him. One ghost in particular - the ghost of a young female student long dead. Smithy fell in love with her and, in a fit of passion, promised to do the one thing no one had ever done - to take a ghost to the grand school ball.

Our young hero even had a plan. If only he could find the Atlantean Stone! The mighty artifact supposed to control life and death. With that he might - MIGHT - be able to bring the ghost back to life for a few hours - long enough for a dance, a drink, maybe even a kiss.

But the stone was hidden well, the clues were vague and schools of red herrings frustrated him at every turn.

Just hours before the ball, Smithy finally found the Stone. It was hidden where water met air met earth - in the old castle well, behind a rune of invisibility. The rune he unraveled with rune-breaker sigils, but not in time. A ritual of ghost binding would take hours; hours Smithy didn't have. Thus he had to improvise. If he couldn't bring her back to life, then he would have to die. It was far easier to resurrect him later than to bind the ghost, since he would just have been dead a few hours while the ghost had been dead for centuries.

So Smithy died by his own hands and returned as a ghost, by drinking a potion of hemlock and ectoplasm. His housemates even helped him; with advice and by making the potion for him (And by unceremoniously stuffing his not-yet-cold body into a closet in the house common room).

The ball was a dream come true. Smithy felt as if he floated on air, as if he had finally escaped the cage of his lonely existence.

The ghost girl sparkled, her smiles as diamonds and eyes like opals, her kiss like a discharge of lightning.

It ended so soon. The music faded, the ball came to an end and the ghost girl vanished with a smile, a wave and a kiss. Friends brought him back to life; resurrecting his still warm body with the power of the Atlantean Stone.

But as Smithy vomited up the remains of the poison, his destiny felt as bitter as the hemlock in his mouth. How could he go back to normal now, after this?

Deflated, he returned to the ball just in time for the house cup awards. His housemates smiled as they saw him alive again, congratulated him on a plan well executed, hugged him and smiled.

And if by magic, he suddenly didn't feel so lonely after all.





Summonings, banishments and the pandemonium that was CoW5

Piotr Duda-Dziewierz (Prof. Moretti, College of Wizardry 5)

CoW5 was all about the Demons. They were the new black so to speak. And I should really know, playing the esteemed Professor of Demonology, Trystan Moretti.

And as many other players, I had a quite personal and close relation to the subject, as dear Moretti was indeed himself possessed by a malevolent force - a Caribbean Water Loa. Oh, how inventive I felt, coming up with the back story for my character, and deciding he should be possessed! Little did I know that everybody, their uncles and pet hamsters would somehow be demonically involved...

I had a lot of fun teaching my Demonology classes in the great Tower classroom. Both the theoretical parts about creating summoning circles, and especially the actual practical part of summoning lesser demons and letting them possess dolls or students.

The latter was reserved for the older students, experienced enough to handle themselves. They needed to be physically restrained, for their own safety.

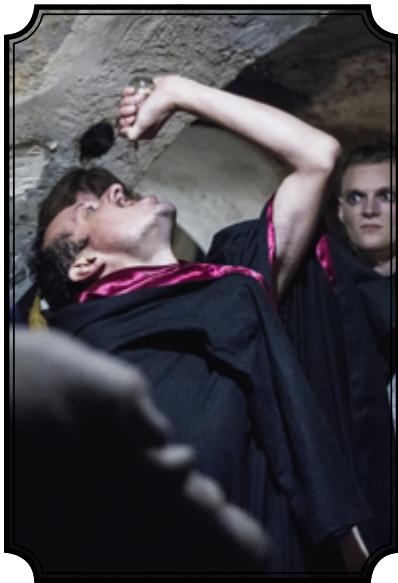
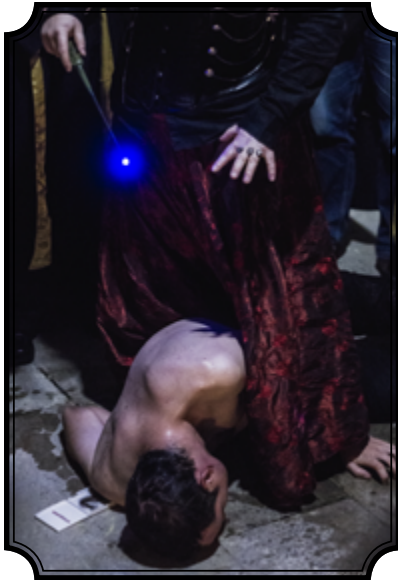
How satisfying it was though, to casually check the collection of chains and ropes and assure the Juniors - "Oh, don't mind that - that's for the seniors"...

However, my best personal experience in terms of play at CoW5 wasn't in the classroom - it was an "extracurricular activity" - the driving out of my demon. I had written my background story together with Mila (playing Professor Laveau) who taught Necromancy.

Basically we had attempted a summoning ritual back when we were students ourselves. Unfortunately it had gone wrong, and Moretti was possessed by the Loa, unable to get rid of it himself. But Friday night, it was exactly 20 years since that fateful night, and the stars were right - time to set things straight!.

I had talked at length with Mila about how to do the ritual. We quickly agreed that a symbolic drowning and resurrection would be a great way to drive out a water demon. In a moment of cockiness and bravado, I suggested that we should do it in the lake.





That was still during summer. Once we got to Czocha in November, the prospect of being submerged in the freezing lake wasn't so appealing anymore. As it had to be done late in the evening, it would be very dark outside, and as it was also rocky and slippery by the lakeside, the plan was abandoned once we got there.

Instead we chose the cellar, and a large tub of (also freezing) water. Professor Laveau had announced to her favourite students (and a lot of others, it seems) that they could help out being present, and contributing their magical energies. Late Friday evening we met in the cellar, and it was showtime!

Professor Laveau explained briefly what was about to happen, while Professor Moretti stood nervous and a bit disdainful of the whole spectacle the exorcism had turned into. He took of his shirt. "Let's do this. It has to be now". Professor Laveau instructed the students what to do, and started her part.

First she produced a cow's heart much to Moretti's (and especially my!) surprise.

As she rubbed it against Moretti's chest, he let out some very convincing coughs and gasps. That was actually me having a nausea attack, feeling slightly grossed out by being smeared with a very real and ripe smelling heart.

Then came the drowning. We had planned that Mila would hold my hand, and by pressing it, I would signal her that I was all right, and when I wanted to get up. That part went absolutely fine. Moretti knelt before the large tin tub, and while chanting and invoking the powers beyond, Laveau took his head and pressed it under the water. For some reason (it would look cool, I think was the one), the organizer who provided the tub for us, had put some gelatinous goo in the water. Yum. Well, that was actually better than the heart smears, it washed away.

I held my breath for as long as I could, and pressed Mila's hand when I was ready. She took my head up quickly, and I drew breath. As we had agreed, she put my head back in, and this was repeated three times. After the last time, I sank lifelessly to the stone floor. I was turned over, so I was laying flat on my back.

The ritual went into the resurrection phase, and when I felt the moment was just right, hearing the chanting vaning off, I sat up gasping for air. And got back down right away. Here was the only glitch in our planning. As I couldn't see, because my eyes were closed throughout, Mila was still standing over me, with her wand pointing at my face. As my head rushed upwards, the tip hit me sharply just ½ cm under my left eye (phew). It left quite a bruise for over a week...

But no harm was done. Moretti was back to the land of the living, wet, half-naked, freezing... and free at last. I was having a blast though. The ambience of the ritual had been perfect, and it had been a very intense and physical ordeal - just as I like it. As Moretti was being offered potions and flasks from the students (to get the body heat up), the two Alchemy Professors Schneider and Zontar, came rushing in - far too late, as they were expected for the ritual with a relaxing potion. Seeing Moretti in a shook up state, they offered to do an after-care examination. Which proved just as interesting as the ritual itself. But that is a story for another time!

I Spent Three Days Crying in a Medieval Castle and Loved Every Minute

Rhonda Coleman (K. Jensen, College of Wizardry 6)

I was a first time larper who travelled across the Atlantic in search of the sort of adventure I'd only read about in novels and seen on film.

I had prepared hastily and arrived at Czocha armed only with a homemade wand (crafted last-minute from items found in my kitchen) and a character description I had just completed editing the day before. I felt thoroughly disorganized and nervous for what was to come in the journey ahead.

But I needn't have been. From the moment I set foot in the castle as my character, the atmosphere of the college coming to life around me distracted from any sense of worry I had previously felt. As the evening wore on I found myself slipping further and further into the mind of another person.

The adventures I had longed for followed shortly behind, and before the night was over I had participated in stopping a werewolf attack, slipped out after hours and avoided detention with the help of the Janitor and his Basement Beer Brigade, and fallen in with a band of leprechaun hunters.

The first time I cried in-game was the next morning, during a necromancy lesson. Forced to recall a significant memory, I began to tell a tragic story from my character's past and before long something took over.

I had become completely absorbed in the moment and from that point on I purposely sought out the most immersive scenes I could find, attempting to recreate that moment.

While I had expected and hoped for such drama and adventure, what ended up taking me by surprise was the impact my character's personal life would have on my game.

The devastation I would come to feel at the apparent disinterest of friends and housemates felt almost real. For the majority of the game, I constructed a plotline based around these feelings and fully intended to play to lose.

That is, until these feelings became a little too much. My new-found talent for crying on cue had backfired and I eventually reached a point where I simply couldn't stop.

It was then that I enlisted the help of the event organizers. I had been hesitant to approach them at first, being a naïve first-time larper intent on getting in every minute of in-game time that I could, but this could very well have been one of the best decisions I made that weekend.

The support team was endlessly understanding and succeeded not only in calming me down but also in helping me to tie up loose ends before the game's finale. An event was organized which, through a little magic, wound up giving me key answers about my character's past as well as the strength to confront her wayward allies.

She would be redeemed. She would admit to her faults. And the last moments of the game were spent receiving a warmer welcome back into her house than she ever thought possible. Apologies were made on all sides, drinks were bought, and friends caught each other up on the events of the past few days. New adventures for the next semester were planned. Yes, I would be back. *College of Wizardry* had won me over completely.

The last time I cried was not out of sadness, but out of joy.

At the game's closing, I held my house's banner aloft as the Hymn of Czocha, with lyrics echoing the experience I had just lived through, was sung aloud:

Enter your house with a heart full of pride

Be loyal and true to the friend by your side.

Hearts will be broken and hearts be restored

But Czocha will stay with you forevermore.





Who knew I was allergic to Werewolf fur?

Sabrina Dallas (T. Ludwig, College of Wizardry 5 & Prof. von Hoff, College of Wizardry 6)

Finally came the end of November, and this would be my third time at CoW. Both previous times were unique, but this one would be more challenging because I would play a teacher role.

I have played many larps before in many different countries, including Brazil and New Zealand, but one thing that really makes me want to come back to Czocho again and again is the fact that we all live inside the story for 3 days.

It is usually a bit hard to get into character for the first few hours, but the following two days always go so smoothly that I have a big crisis when it is time to go back home.

I was already at the castle a few days before the larps (between CoW5 and CoW6), so I had time to prepare my lessons and choose my beasts.

Even though I had a terrible fever for the next couple of days and could not do everything I had in mind, I absolutely loved to play a figure of authority and to study a lot about every subject.

The best part of playing a figure of authority was actually being bribed in honey beer by students in the tavern in exchange for House points. Too bad I only had this idea on the last day... (To all my students who are reading this now: It was all for a good cause and I swear I registered all those points!).

The interesting thing was that it all made a lot of sense in the end. When it was my first time at CoW2, I remember coming into the castle with my House and so deeply feeling the emotion of entering a new world of magic that was so familiar and so new at the same time.

This time it all fit together: Explaining rules to new students, knowing all (or most of) the secret passages, guiding them through the Dark Forest and giving/taking away points. I felt as if I really was an old student at Czocho that had become a teacher, and this was exactly the story I gave to my character.

A funny fact about my character was that I had originally chosen to have one of the lovely cats that linger around the castle as my personal pet.

The problem was that this plan did not even survive the first day; I am TERRIBLY allergic to cats. And apparently also to minotaur and werewolf fur, it turns out.

The irony of having a Beastology teacher who was allergic to her own beasts...

Another comic moment was on Saturday morning (when my fever was peaking). I was so weak I rolled out of bed with my onesie and a terrible sick face, and went to have some breakfast downstairs. The reaction of the students when they saw me was to ask "Professor, are you alright? You look like you did not sleep at all." The only answer that I could think of was "Most of my creatures are night-active. Still want to be a Cryptozoologist?"

For me, the best thing about larping is that you are not only able to play someone completely different from who you are, but you also really experience feelings and reactions to many situations.

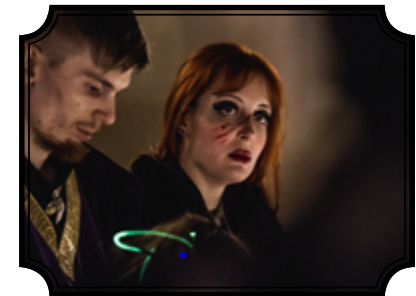
Nobody knows their true potential until they try larping at least once - you'd be surprised how many stories you can make up and how long you can keep up with them.

On the last day of CoW6, the worst part is unfortunately one of my strongest memories: The part where I had to pack my books, wand, cauldron, and all of Prof. Von Hoff inside a suitcase and look at Czocho from the window of the bus.

This is the moment where the tears of happiness for those amazing last days and the tears of sadness for having to leave mix.

Coming back to real life is really hard... but I try not to let go of the magic boost I receive every time I walk through those doors.

Today, as I am writing this text, I like to pretend that I am stuck in this mundane world for my holidays, soon ready to come back to another semester at Czocho College of Witchcraft and Wizardry.



Account of a first-time larper

Samantha Simpson (D. Bayron, College of Wizardry 6)



The world of larp was completely new to me, and it was such an outstanding experience that I came back down to reality with a bang! I didn't have any expectations and had so much fun with it. I suppose, looking back now, that if I were to do it over again, I would have made more relations during the workshops.

Being a first-time larper I suppose I didn't understand the importance of this, and I'm now pleased I did make some relations. I would have made more knowing what I know now, just so I could cause even more mischief with my character. I had a great experience and changed my character throughout the larp in order to get the most out of it.

I played a rebel, which was very enjoyable. I had an arch enemy who then became my friend the night of the ball, as well as a couple of other players with whom I had previously agreed that our characters were close friends,

We had a lot of laughs getting into trouble with teachers, finding secret passageways and causing mayhem.

My character (and !!) loved sneaking off to the enchanted forest and the tavern, where Dhartri - my character - had fun talking to the Leprechaun hunters and arranging a hunt with them.

This was so far removed from reality and I only wish it could have gone on longer... But I suppose I have to pay the bills! This was my first, but will certainly not be my last, larp. And who knows? Dhartri may return again next year to cause mayhem in the castle.







CoW made me a larper again

Simon Brind (T. Wychwood, College of Wizardry 5)

I'd carved out a niche for myself behind the scenes of UK festival larp 'conducting' plot as though the various storylines were a musical score. I had a chair, a computer, a two-way radio, and a steady supply of coffee. I'd been 'clean' for a decade.

CoW made me a larper again. I came to it deciding to treat the experience as a one off.

A chance to hack about with my emotions in a giant magical sandbox for a few days; I had no preconceived ideas and no expectations; it was a rush.

"I wanted the full Nordic larp experience, so I played a character who was effectively unplayable and doomed from the start" I explained; "So I spent Saturday afternoon crying uncontrollably, covered in my own blood."

We were at the after-party, the bar had just run out of beer so we were drinking shots of whisky out of coffee mugs.

"Congratulations and welcome, you are one of us now."

Everyone looks for that moment when the wave breaks; but they usually look backwards as it slides away from the beach; all I could see behind me were the broken bodies of wizards I had tried to persuade to form a human pyramid to Destiny's Child. They should have known the wise saying: "Never let an old goth get drunk, alone, two thousand years from home".

How often does a chance like this come around? To rend reality, to mess with the here and now so hard that you get lost. Writing this, what? a week later?, I'm starting to doubt what I saw, and what I felt.

I needed to do normal things; plant tomatoes, go to the supermarket... Otherwise I could not go through with this. For some reason it feels like writing it down will 'trap' it somehow, steal the soul of the memories.

Things blur here. The whole experience was weirdly psychedelic, but that only became apparent later - at the airport - when I kept seeing wizards where there were no wizards to see; like the peak of a phenethylamine trip; everything at plus three.

It was an amazing experience. Being that close to a tragedy; Close enough to taste the tears and feel the sobs. My character cried, and he cried hard. I felt like someone had cooked up a batch of catharsis and offered me a fat line on a first folio edition of *Hamlet*; a mixture of jubilation and despair.

Sure I've cried in larps before, but this felt different. Somewhere along the way I'd bitten his thumb, enough to make it bleed. He'd got blood all over his face; smeared it down the side of his cheek.

Back home I used to notice that most gamers steered clear of emotional intensity. So many times I've seen an epic and emotional scene destroyed by a 'comedy character' delivering an amusing one-liner.

In other cases I certainly 'checked back' with players to make sure they are okay. But here people fed off it, ran with it and pushed it as hard as they could. Here is a place where you can leave someone in floods of tears, and after the game they come and thank you for it.

'There is no honest way to explain the edge because the only people who really know where it is are the ones who have gone over.'

I had strange memories of these nervous nights in Poland when I wrote this. It was six days later? Seven? It seemed like a lifetime—I feared it was the kind of peak that would never come again. But I was resolved to try.

Received wisdom tells us you should never chase your highs. Some things are never as good the second time around; but CoW was. A different character, a different story, a different path through the labyrinth.

Most of all it has been about the people: Glorious, passionate, creative, beautiful, mad bastards one and all. We got lost together twice, and now I can't imagine wanting to be lost without them around me.

No explanation, no mix of words or music or memories can touch that sense of knowing that you were there and alive in that corner of time and that world.

Whatever it meant...

They actually let me bring my cat

Sphinx Birch (Ass. Prof. Grimgor, College of Wizardry 4)

As I was thinking of pledging for one of the last tickets for CoW4, I said to one of my friends that I would only go if I could bring my cat. It was mostly due to me being a bit short on money and needed an excuse not to go.

But when I asked the organizers if I could bring my cat, I truly did not expect them to say "Yes, that would be amazing!"

However, they did, and suddenly I had tons of logistical and practical problems to solve before I could get us to Poland and Czocha.

With the organizers promising to find a suitable place for us to stay, the first problem I faced was how I would carry her around and still be able to play out my role. Even though I know she behaves well in crowds, the second thing to consider was how she'd react to any demon, monster or pyro we would face during the larp.

The third problem was how to get her to Poland. The fourth problem turned out to be how to keep her dry and warm in November. Fifth, but not least, I needed to find her a suitable role.

The first and the fourth problems turned out to have the same solution. I decided to construct a heated shoulder platform with a weatherproofed hood.

As I beta tested her platform, I attended another larp closer to home, pushing her boundaries with rituals, smoke, demons and some climbing.

It went really well and I decided to get the logistics settled. Fortunately, it is not very complicated to travel with animals within the EU.

We got the right vaccinations in time, a passport and a certified cage for flying. We were now ready. I put a lot of work into the in game bestiary, which gave me a perfect way to incorporate the familiar bond I had planned for us and help explain her usual presence on my shoulders.

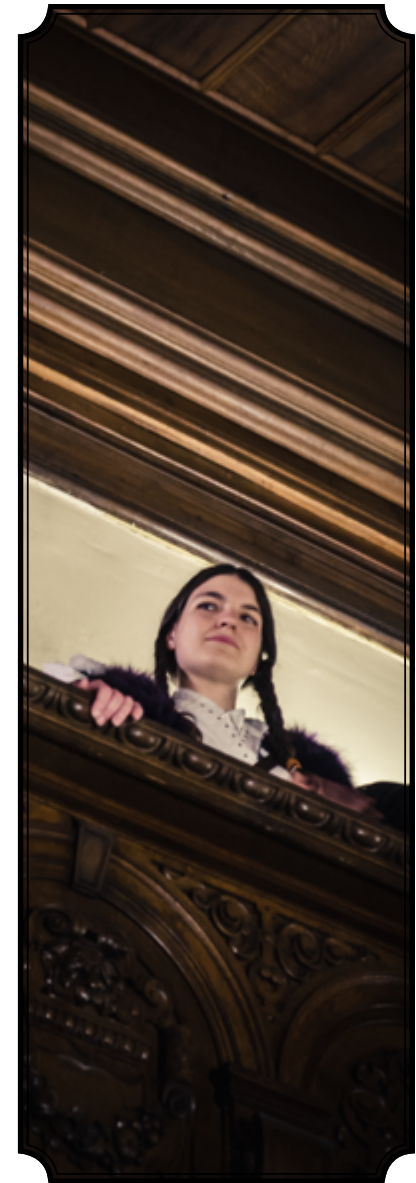
All this may sound like small things now, but it was a long six months of planning and discussing details with the organizers. Details such as the airline, double and triple checking rules for traveling with cats and developing my platform were arranged.

College of Wizardry, however, is a place where anything is possible and it was with such a satisfaction and joy that we, assistant professor and familiar, stood at the bridge with the other staff welcoming all the students to another year at Czocha.

Hearing surprised exclamations; "It's a cat!", "Look! A cat!" and seeing the sparkle in the other players' eyes when they noticed her was a truly remarkable way to begin our adventure.

During the run I could not bring her inside the castle due to allergies but since many lessons were outside, I did not think it would be such a problem. However, it did take a lot of momentum from my play to get back to my room and leave her every time I went for a meal, a meeting or lesson within the castle.

But we are coming back! This time, I am hoping for a better suited room closer to my classes and more time to build both of us into other players' game before we even get to Czocha. Now that all the practical things are sorted, the world truly can be magical and we can roam the castle grounds together.







A place which sucks you in completely

Stephanie Habicht (M. Renaut, College of Wizardry 6)

At CoW, I could finally play LARP as I intended to do when I began larping in 2007 - immersive, intense and emotional; breaking the wall between reality and fiction while having a good time with friends, old and new.

First of all, I have to state that I've played larps since 2007 and RPGs (online, via forums and on the persistent worlds of Neverwinter Nights) since 2002.

Ever since, my greatest wish was to create a memorable story for all the players and play immersively and emotionally. I always tended towards the more fantastic and performant roles, so it was no coincidence that I played a lot of wizards and clerics over time.

Playing *College of Wizardry* was no exception, and my experience, from fantasy larps and other fantasy RPGs, in playing a wizard based on display and performance, came in handy. I was not lost. I knew how to act and react, so I had a solid ground at the beginning of play.

But that solid ground did not last long. I was sucked into play for better and for worse.

Again, I have to explain that in Switzerland, larp seldom gets immersive and intense. The most played out emotions are anger and hate, often leading to death (if against an NPC), humiliation or the expulsion of a character. After this, most players feel personally hurt or have had a bad playing experience.

As a player at CoW, I had many occasions to be on the safe and wanted side, while totally freaking out and being shunned in-game, as well as playing on sex and love without feeling awkward and kept at a distance. In the end, I was so sucked into the world, into the play, while having mind- and heartbreaking experiences as my character Michele Renaut, that I had a breakdown on Saturday evening when I did not find a suitable date and had been turned down by fine men and beautiful women.

I did not even have a backup date, as my closest real life friend acted solely on the game and would not break character. He was sorry, but he wouldn't change his opinion. It was ok because I knew that the situation had nothing to do with me, but rather with my character and her pride.

She didn't just want to settle with what was left (that was maybe me?). I didn't really know or care at this moment. I was sobbing and crying. But it was ok, because I knew that after the game everyone would tend to me and take care of me. That was a very intense feeling and one that I had had maybe once or twice since I started to play larp. It was scary, even for me. But on the other hand, it was much more welcome bleed than I've previously experienced. I also recovered quickly and had a wonderful ending.

I don't think that the breakdown was a bad experience, although I prefer to handle feelings like love, sadness, hate, anger, fear, etc. as a solely ingame feeling, immersive enough to create a spark, a "something", but never a breakdown or a real change of heart for me as a player. Nevertheless, I am ready to have this experience again, where the larp is based on feelings.

After the game, I suffered extreme bleed, but in a good way. I felt empowered. Maybe a little bit too much to make my next CoW a "real sequel", but I am willing to work hard for it.

I did not really have post-larp depression, because I knew that I would see many of the players again at the sequel or at some other larp.

Also, as I took a flight from Zürich to Berlin and from there a bus to Poland, as well as having traveled a lot in the last two years and planning on travelling again the next year, I'm used to travelling. This means it's just a question of time and money until I will see all those excellent people again.

Until then, Facebook is and will be my strongest connection to the player base. At home I made a lot of advertising and also had some theoretical talking about my experience and the playing style. This has resulted in at least one more player from Switzerland joining us for CoW8, and a few more players that want to go for CoW9.

Because the Swiss larp community is rather small, this counts as real progress in bringing the concept of Nordic larping to Switzerland. I'm looking forward to future Nordic larp events and to future CoWs. And I know now that attending a CoW makes you being obsessed with it - in a good way.

The magic was real for me

Tereza Kulovaná (E. Schattenberger, College of Wizardry 4)

College of Wizardry wasn't my first larp. Or at least that's what I thought before the game; after the larp I felt differently. I've been to several games before and I used to play pen and paper roleplaying games, but this was the first time I and my character were actually one.

The surroundings and other participants played a major role in this. It was essentially the adult version of my childhood dream, and just being there was the most amazing experience ever. I even cried a little as a child because I was too old to get my letter from Hogwarts, so when I got the opportunity to experience life on a college of magic I went for it. It was my first international larp ever, I didn't know a single person, but I was a part of it.

When I went through the castle gates it took me several hours to stop grinning like crazy. The school had everything: Secret passages, an alchemy cellar, a tower and a Dark Forest with a lake in it. Great mirrors and old paintings everywhere. Some places could be reached by only one special staircase, other places had several passages and shortcuts leading to them.

The castle wasn't too big for you to easily pretend that you were familiar with it, but still so large that there were always details that you hadn't discovered before. Just taking a stroll around the location was great fun.

Here are some moments from the game which really got stuck in my head:

We were sneaking around in the basement and accidentally walked through a secret passage. We met an older student, and I forced her to guide us around the castle: "You're sophomore, will show us the castle?"

She had, in reality, only been there for a couple of hours and had no clue where anything is, but she didn't hesitate for a moment: "Of course! But I must warn you: I experimented with memory potions over the summer, and I am afraid I'm still suffering from some side effects." It was hilarious.

The castle is a great place for hiding. When sneaking around corridors, I tried to avoid larger groups of people. I spent all afternoon running away, using shortcuts and different staircases.

There were so many ways to get to most places. I'm normally easily spooked and can only watch horror movies at daytime, with a blanket to hide behind and a good friend by my side. But in here, for the first time ever, I've learned that feeling scared can be fun; maybe it was because I knew I was safe.

If it all became too much, I could go and hide in the organizer's room. I didn't use it for this purpose during the game, but I came there for advice a few times when I was lost, and they always helped me find a solution. My heartbeat was so loud sometimes I thought people ten meters away could hear it... And it felt so great!

I loved playing a student. I miss it so much. I was still studying up until a short while ago, but... This was really the part of the game where my dreams came true. Lessons felt very real, teachers were creative during the lessons and some of them even gave us funny homework.

"Attack someone. If you get in trouble, just tell them it's homework. And there will be bonus points for sneak attacks!"

Doing homework after classes really made me feel like I was attending an actual magic school.

Crazy rituals in our House. Really, getting crazy powers from eating sweets?!? I mean, the Memory Stones, everyone pretending to faint, falling down... The most hilarious way to eat sweets! And the whole thing with dragon's blood marks on the forehead!

Going around and saying: "Don't worry; it's not my blood."

The look on people's faces was priceless.

Getting jinxed by a singing curse... It spread like a forest fire among the Juniors.

The choir... The singing is always emotional. It required some preparation before the game and only a few of us stayed until the end. It took lot of time in-game and it took a lot of effort for me with my sick throat. But standing up in the gallery in the final moments of the game, getting the crowd to join in with us and, in the last few seconds of the song, we all held up our wands and sang like one body, one mind.

Magic was in the air, and with this, the most powerful moment of the game, the whole larp ended.

The thing I missed the most during the game was time... Time to do everything. I wanted to know each character's story, to be part of it. I had so many plans and achieved so little. And I love people's stories afterwards. I bet it was a different game for every single character involved.

The hardest part was letting my character go. How could I speak about her as if though she wasn't me anymore? It was so weird. She was so real. All her fears and joys were mine too. It made the end of the larp harder that I couldn't really force myself to play more risky.

How could I put her in danger when she and I were one? Even after the larp it was hard to switch off, to let go.

And the best part was making friends... Off-game and in-game. Right after the game I ran and hugged my best in-game friend.

I'd never met her before the game.

We didn't start making up our relation until an hour before the game started.

Really made you think...

Sometimes, all you need to do in order to make a new friend is just to shake their hand and make it so, even if you were complete strangers a minute ago. The first thing I said to her after the game was: "Please... I know it wasn't real, but can we still be friends?"

I know it was all fake and it all just happened in my head... But it felt real. I did it and I was there. The magic was real for me.





A prank visit to remember

Thomas Mertz (Helper, College of Wizardry 4)

I am a veteran of the original CoW and its sequel, CoW2. I actually thought that was the extent to which I was going to experience *College of Wizardry*. I had, believe it or not, had my fill.

But... I am an asshole. Not the malicious kind. Just the kind that will go to somewhat extreme lengths to pull a fast one on my friends.

So when I heard that Martin and Lars (also known as Richard and Ulrich Jaeger of CoW4) had started referring to me as their characters' evil older brother as a joke, I thought "Aw, hell no!"

Two days later I had received an 'All clear' from Charles from the organizer team. Plane tickets to Berlin had been bought and a rental car had been booked.

They wanted me as their evil big brother. Well, they got it. In spades.

For two months I gleaned what I could, to learn about their characters. How to best stab them where it'd hurt the most, which flaws and weaknesses to pounce on.

I had my friend Liv (playing the House Faust student Selena Bagali) spy on them and report to me what they had going on, both before the game and during.

Creating an impression that Dietrich always knew what was going on with his brothers.

It was a fun little treat to give to two very good friends, and judging from the look on people's faces around the castle when they realized who was walking down the corridors, it seems like it was a nice surprise for many other returning players as well.

10 out of 10.

Would prank visit again.







A helper's perspective

Yoru Kamiko (Helper, College of Wizardry 5+6)

I was a NPC/helper during CoW5 and CoW6. Before I came to Czo-cha I didn't know much about CoW itself, and I only knew a few people who were going there. Right now I am working on some articles for the student's book and I have a LOT of new friends who are absolutely amazing people.

What I find most important about the whole experience is basically two phenomena.

The first one is the mindset of people at Czochoa. Everyone knows that it will be a multicultural and international event, and thus they are prepared for the unusual.

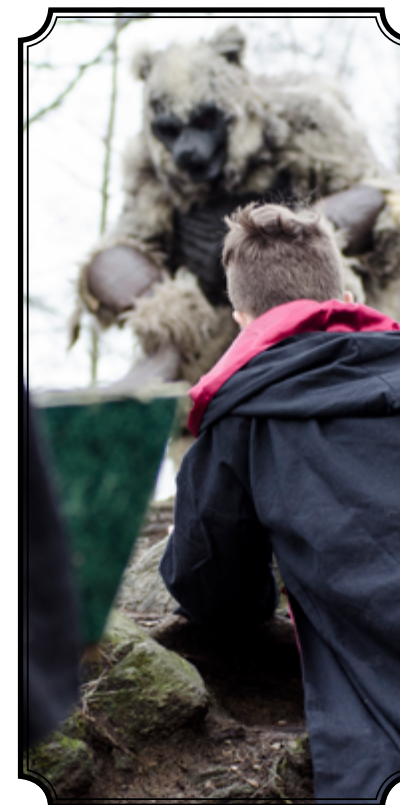
They don't judge. They see the best in others and they are open. That creates a very comfortable, safe environment in which to reveal your true self.

Some people found out that what they imagined would be unacceptable behaviour was really not shocking at all and made others compliment them rather than criticize them.

It gave a lot of people courage and confidence. I, myself, found both and brought them home from Czochoa.

The second thing is how much Czochoa inspires people. It's been two weeks and I feel like the river of content generated by the CoW community is not only unending, it's just gaining more and more power, taking in all those who are still uncertain if they want to join.

People are inspired, feel appreciated and it makes them creative.





Chapter 4: Czocha Pictures

This chapter is dedicated to the players who made CoW4-6 come alive. For each CoW, we took pictures of the Houses and the Staff. These pictures can be found here.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

House Libussa

College of Wizardry 4+5+6

Attributes: Daring & Creativity

Symbol: Silver Lion (The heraldic symbol of Bohemia)

Colors: Purple & White

Founder: Libuše (One of the three founding mothers of Bohemia and a famous seer)

Culture: Based on Czech culture





House Durentius

College of Wizardry 4+5+6

Attributes: Diligence & Valor

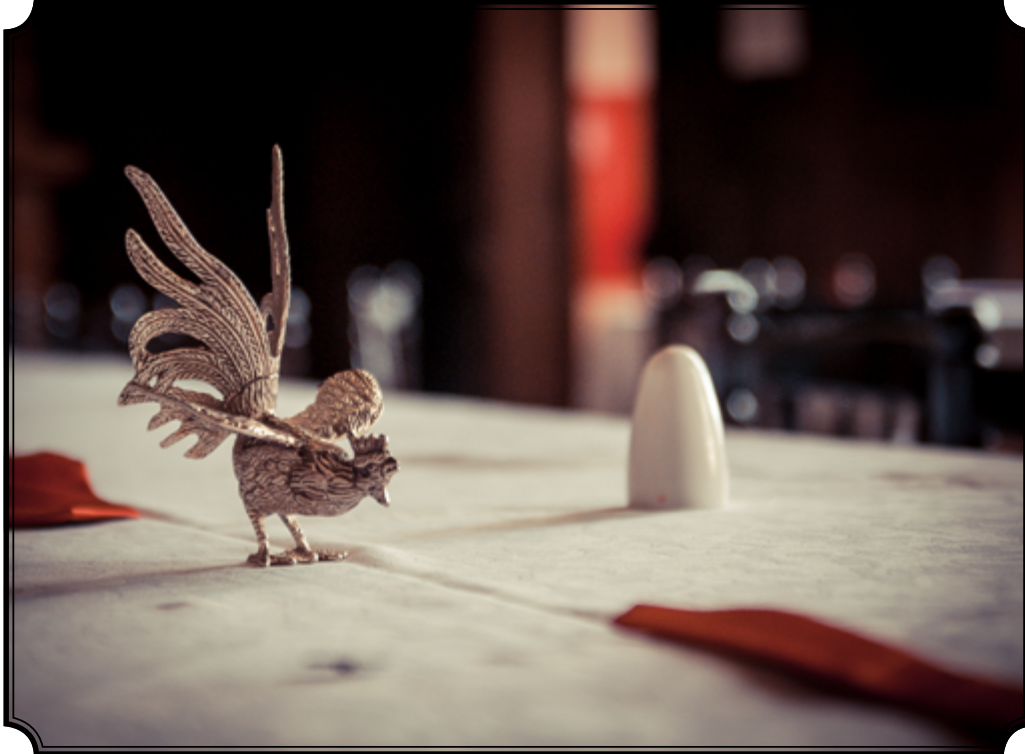
Symbol: Rooster (often other houses make fun of the Durentius because of that, while they are proud of their symbol. It's a rooster because of the legend, that Durentius went to the moon and back on the back of a rooster)

Colors: Orange & Brown

Founder: Laurentius Dhur (Master of dark arts on the Jagellonian University, originally from western Silesia. Known in Polish legends as Pan Twardowski)

Culture: Based on Silesian culture





House Faust

College of Wizardry 4+5+6

Attributes: Knowledge & Power

Symbol: Dragon (the symbol of Mephistopheles)

Colors: Blue & Gold

Founder: Johann Georg von Faust (Famous german wizard. He lived according to the proverb "Wisdom is might")

Culture: Based on German culture





House Molin

College of Wizardry 4+5+6

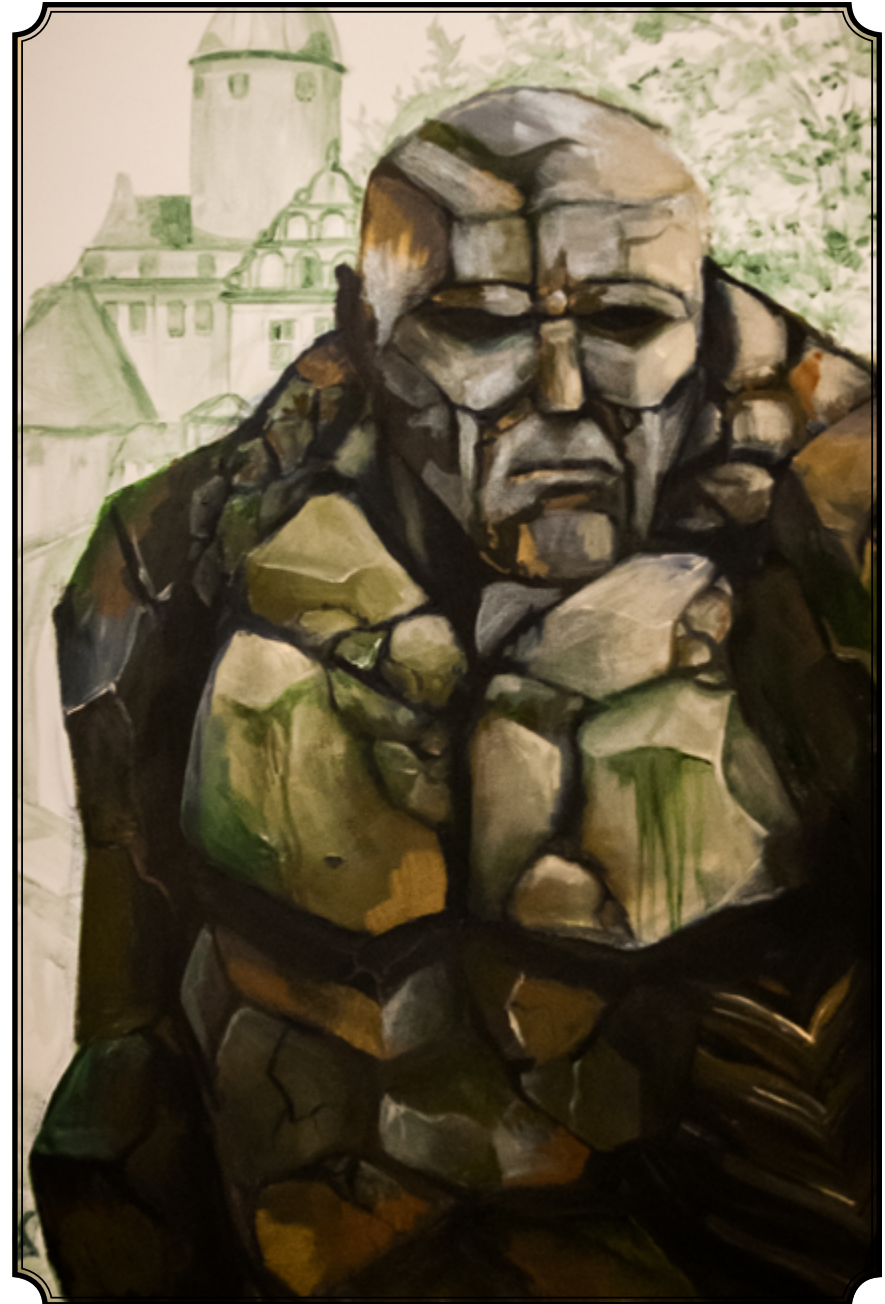
Attributes: Loyalty & Cunning

Symbol: Golem (symbol of the Jewish kabalists)

Colors: Green & Bronze

Founder: Jakob Abraham Molin (Legendary Jewish wizard and kabalist)

Culture: Based on Jewish culture





House Sendivogius

College of Wizardry 4+5+6

Attributes: Courage, Honor & Diplomacy

Symbol: White Phoenix (The traditional symbol of immortality, and similar to the heraldic symbol of Poland - the white eagle)

Colors: Red & Silver

Founder: Michał Sędziwój (Sendivogius Polonus. Famous Polish alchemist)

Culture: Based on Polish culture





Czocha Staff

College of Wizardry 4+5+6

Attributes: Awesomeness & Dedication

Symbol: The Great Book of Points

Colors: All over the rainbow - but lots of black

Founder: Lost in the mists of time

Culture: A drinking club with a teaching problem





*Thank you for reading.
Thank you for caring.*



*Czochoa College, witchcraft and wizardry
Staff and students living and dead.
Listen to the tide of the centuries
Raise your wand to what lies ahead.*

*Learn from your elders and learn from your peers
Find comfort and strength in the laughter and tears
Magic will flow through your hands and your heart
Discover yourself and embrace who you are*

(at)

*Czochoa College, witchcraft and wizardry
Staff and students living and dead.
Listen to the tide of the centuries
Raise your wand to what lies ahead.*

*Enter your house with a heart full of pride
Be loyal and true to the friend by your side.
Hearts will be broken and hearts be restored
But Czochoa will stay with you forevermore.*

(we're)

*Czochoa College, witchcraft and wizardry
Staff and students living and dead.
Listen to the tide of the centuries
Raise your wand to what lies ahead.*

- Hymn of Czochoa, by Rikke Munchkin Sørensen

Rollespils Akademiet