

Shape of the US LARP Hobby

It's good to look at and study the hobby in different countries and presented by different people. What follows is an examination of the U.S. LARP hobby by US_LRPer (a.k.a. Amber E.) from my experiences and what I have seen where I live (Pacific Northwestern part of the U.S.A, consisting of Washington State, Oregon and Idaho, though some people also include Montana and British Columbia, Canada¹) and what I have been able to gather from people I have talked to and web sites and forums I have visited on the Internet. As for my personal experience, that comes from groups I have participated in, in Washington (not to be confused with Washington D.C.), my home state.

The Forms of the Hobby

Because of the different definitions terms may have depending on what part of the world you live in I felt it best to start with defining terms and building from there. Within the U.S. LARP scene I see two distinct forms with one of those forms having two sub-forms. These two distinct forms are Theatre style and Live-Combat style.

Theatre style (Freeform in the UK) LARPs don't use any kind of mock weapon (boffer or otherwise) and instead use an alternate resolution system for combat and conflict resolution such as rolling a die or drawing a card from a deck for the randomizer then adding that number into what ever skill or ability is used to determine success or failure or comparing skills or stats from character sheets. There is the commonly perceived thought that theatre style games focus more on plot and character development as there isn't a huge combat focus. But like any LARP there are theatre style LARPs that are weak in plot and character development. Most theater styles LARPS are not a if-you-can-do-it-you-can-do-it form of LARP as almost every aspect of the character (sneaking or lock picking for examples) is resolved via the resolution system and not on the ability of the player to actually pull off the act.

Live-Combat LARPs use mock weapons as a part of their conflict resolution. These LARPs are much more of a if-you-can-do-it-you-can-do-it form of game. If you can pick the lock you've picked the lock, if you can sneak by the orc, you've snuck by the orc, and etc. While theatre style LARPs tend to have simpler conflict resolution system (draw card, roll die, or etc., add to ability, compare result with combatant's result) live-combat tend to be more rules heavy. This is not to be confused with the creation of a complex, hard to understand resolution system, but more that the rules need to cover more than just how to handle resolution: There are safety checks in place to ensure the safety of the weapons used (criteria that must be met for them to qualify for use) and the participants (legal targets or illegal actions with weapons) during the event. The common perceived thought is that live-combat LARPs focus primarily on combat with less emphasis on plot and character development. To a degree this is true as it depends on what sub-group the game falls under: Role-play or battle game. Many people just roll these two sub-groups up and call them both live-combat LARPs.

Role-play oriented LARPs put the focus on plot and character development within a story and less on just combat. Role-play oriented groups try to keep the focus on the story and only involve combat when needed because the story warrants it. This doesn't mean that an entire event that happens to be combat heavy isn't a role-play oriented live-combat LARP, but that the combat is there because of story and plot, not because that's the extent of the event without other reasons.

Battle game oriented LARPs put the focus on the combat and don't have much plot and character development isn't based on story. Battle game groups tend to be capture the flag, but boffer style. This isn't to say that the combat doesn't have a goal in mind, but that the event as a whole is to engage in fighting with little to no role-play whatsoever.

It's important to note that even though most LARPs will tend to fall into one of these categories, there will always be a game or organization which doesn't quite fit any one category and instead may be a cross category hybrid. The most common hybrid is Adventure Style in which there is an in-game location where primarily theater style play may take place, but there are modules that allow for primarily live-combat style play.

A cousin to LARPs, especially live-combat LARPs, is the living history or historical reenactment groups like the Society for Creative Anachronism² commonly called the SCA. While they have their similarities: each person has a character or persona they play or portray, they do have rules in place for the safety of combat participants, and do provide a social venue. They also have their differences: Focus on living history with little to no room for non-historical interpretation and core fantasy elements are not commonly found at historical reenactment groups (I don't see people casting fireballs at each other or being a sneaky rogue trying to steal a chest of coins). Their events are dedicated to recreating an aspect of history and to live history. If reenactment groups were to be classified as a LARP, they would most likely be placed as a battle game group as their events rarely have little to no real plot or story and the battle or war at the event (beyond court being held and general socializing) tends to be the focus. It's important to remember that there are LARPer who participate in historical-reenactment groups and vice versa; just as much as there are those that don't cross participate.

¹ See <http://www.gonorthwest.com/Visitor/about/map.htm> for a map of the Pacific Northwestern part of the U.S.

² The SCA's web site can be found at <http://www.sca.org/>

Events and Gatherings

United States LARP group events tend to either last part of a day or last for several days, the latter being held over a weekend. Theater and live-combat oriented LARP events commonly last part of a day, or at least the better part of the day. The exception to this is when there is a convention or special (multi-day) event (such as a battle weekend gathering) then the event lasts for the better part of the convention or the duration of the special event.

Multi-day events tend to be held over weekends as most people have these free without conflicting with work or school. Role-play oriented LARPs primarily run over a weekend with the event starting Friday evening and ending on Sunday with Saturday being the primary event day. Friday is often seen as the day that you get there and get set up, with the event starting late afternoon or during the evening and Sunday as seen as the clean-up and check out day with the event ending late morning or early afternoon. This leaves Saturday as the primary event day. Those theater style and battle game groups that hold a convention or special (multi-day) event tend to follow a similar event structure as a role-play oriented LARP's multi-day event: the first day is opening ceremonies, set up, arrival and unpacking; last day is clean up, departure, and closing ceremonies; the days between the first and the last are dedicated to the event.

United States LARP events commonly run once a month, though there are groups that run a couple of times a month or even weekly. Those groups that run a couple of times a month or weekly tend to be theater or battle game oriented live-combat LARPs as it's easy to find a site and do site preparation for a single day. Conventions and multi-day events for them are the exception to the rule and these are specially organized and thus require pre-registration whereas their usual single-day events you can just show up and play.

Role-play oriented live-combat LARPs typically run just once a month because of the preparation involved and the need to secure an appropriate site. Common sites for weekend long role-play oriented LARPs are campgrounds with cabins and a main lodge that are rented out. The cabins usually have heaters and electric lights plus bunks with mattresses (just bring your own sleeping bag or bedding), there are flush toilets and running water and the kitchen at the lodge is full service (dishes, flatware, stove(s) and oven(s), cooking utensils and pots and pans, plus storage space for refrigerated and non-refrigerated food).

There is always the exception to the rule: I, myself, play in a theatre style game, but the game only runs once a month because of how role-play and plot intensive it is. I've also been to a weekend role-play oriented live-combat LARP event where we camped out in tents for the weekend and cooked our food over the campfire.

The costs associated with attending an event differ with the type of event a person is attending and how long the event is to run. Below is an average cost comparison breakdown for attending a single day theater or battle game oriented LARP and a weekend long role-play oriented LARP. This does not take into consideration any expenses regarding to costuming/garb/kit including any weapons or armor a person's character may use or wear, any membership fees that may be required or costs associated with any convention /special event.

Single Day Event

Site/Registration fee: Free to \$5

Travel expenses: \$10 to \$30

Food (snacks and/or a meal): \$10

Supplies (make-up or non-renewable equipment such as glow sticks): none to \$5

TOTAL: \$20 to \$45 (about £12 or €17 to about £26 or €38)³

YEARLY TOTAL IF ATTENDING EIGHT EVENTS⁴: \$160 to \$360 (about £91 or €134 to about £205 or €302)⁵

Weekend Long Event

Site/Registration fee: \$20 to \$55

Travel expenses: \$30 to \$60

Food (food for a weekend): \$10 to \$20

Supplies (make-up or non-renewable equipment such as glow sticks): none to \$15

TOTAL: \$60 to \$150 (about £34 or €50 to about £86 or €126)⁶

YEARLY TOTAL IF ATTENDING EIGHT EVENTS⁷: \$480 to \$1200 (about £274 or €403 to about £685 or €1006)⁸

³ The cost in British Pounds or Euros is based on currency conversion done on Feb. 23, 2006.

⁴ Eight events is given as opposed to 12 to account for those events which may be missed due to illness, schedule conflicts, or other causes.

⁵ The cost in British Pounds or Euros is based on currency conversion done on Feb. 23, 2006.

⁶ The cost in British Pounds or Euros is based on currency conversion done on Feb. 23, 2006.

⁷ Eight events is given as opposed to 12 to account for those events which may be missed due to illness, schedule conflicts, or other causes.

⁸ The cost in British Pounds or Euros is based on currency conversion done on Feb. 23, 2006.

The Big Players

Like any hobby, there are the key players; those that have created a game that's grown to where it's become a recognizable creature in the hobby. Each group of the hobby – theater, battle game oriented live-combat LARP, and role-play oriented live-combat LARP – has its key organization(s) or game(s) that are widely recognized by others who participate within that group as well as those who don't participate in events held by that group. This doesn't include any games that are popular in any given region, just games which are well known and popular across the U.S. as a whole. Any given region will almost always have an independent game or two that is popular in that area.

For theater groups, White Wolf/Minds Eye Theater or MET⁹ games (Vampire, Werewolf, Changeling, or Mage) are recognized as the primary players, with Vampire being the top one. This includes those games that are Camarilla¹⁰ and non-Camarilla based as well as those that espouse tightly to the MET rules and the World of Darkness as outlined by the White Wolf books and those that deviate with their own house rules from the MET rules and those that have created their own alternate World of Darkness. The Camarilla is White Wolf's official fan club that is responsible for the organized play of several groups/games in a global chronicle. The Camarilla has existed since 1992 in a couple of different incarnations and was taken over by White Wolf in 2003.

For the battle game oriented live-combatLARPs there are two key players: Amtgard¹¹ and Dagohir¹². Amtgard has existed since the early 1980's and now boasts many chapters across the U.S. with the majority in the southwest and western parts of the country. Dagohir has existed since the late 1970's, they now have chapters across the U.S. with the majority in the eastern and central parts of the country. Both have solid memberships and each have built up several chapters (50-75) across the country.

For the role-play oriented live-combatLARPs there are also two key players: NERO (both NERO International¹³ and the NERO Alliance¹⁴) and the International Fantasy Gaming Society or IFGS¹⁵. Both NERO International and the NERO Alliance were a part of one organization before 1998 when the NERO split apart into these two groups. NERO started in the late 1980's. The years surrounding the split were full of heated "debates" and "discussions" between the two NERO factions as evident in old Usenet posts¹⁶. This has been renewed to a degree with the recent lawsuit against NERO International's president Joseph Valenti by NERO Alliance's¹⁷ president Mike Ventrella. NERO International hasn't been very forthcoming with information regarding this lawsuit to their members, but they have posted a page with links to their official statements¹⁸ even though many International members have visited the Alliance boards¹⁹ as there is more open discussion there. The NERO Alliance has a page up on their web site²⁰ that goes into more detail as to why there are two NEROs. NERO International refuses to acknowledge the existence of the NERO Alliance, nor do they provide to the public any explanation from their perspective as to why the two NEROs exist.

IFGS has had a much quieter existence since it's inception in the early 1980's. It is named after the fictional group in the Dream Park series by Larry Niven and Stephen Barnes. Unlike many of the other LARP groups, IFGS has had a much slower growth rate and only has about a dozen chapters in existence at this time.

The State of the U.S. LARP hobby

Part of understanding the state of the U.S. LARP hobby includes understanding the history of the hobby. Wikipedia's article on LARPing, located at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larp>, includes a good, albeit brief, history of the U.S. LARP hobby:

American LARPs have no single point of origin, although many of the groups still in operation can claim a lengthy history.

⁹ The White Wolf web site can be found at <http://www.white-wolf.com/> and the MET part of the web site can be found at <http://www.white-wolf.com/met/index.php>

¹⁰ The Camarilla web site can be found at <http://camarilla.white-wolf.com/>

¹¹ The main Amtgard web site can be found at <http://amtgard.com:8080/>

¹² The main Dagohir web site can be found at <http://www.dagohir.org/>

¹³ The main NERO International web site can be found at <http://www.nerolarp.com/>

¹⁴ The main NERO Alliance web site can be found at <http://nerohq.com/>

¹⁵ The main IFGS web site can be found at <http://www.ifgs.org/>

¹⁶ Old Usenet posts can be viewed at Google Groups by searching Google Groups using this search term: [NERO group:rec.games.frp.live-action](http://groups.google.com/group/rec.games.frp.live-action)

¹⁷ Ventrella's announcement regarding the lawsuit can be found in the start of this forum thread: http://nerohq.com/bb/forum/forum_posts.asp?TID=4788&PN=1

¹⁸ NERO International's statements can be found off this page: <http://www.helpnero.org/>

¹⁹ As of Feb. 24, 2006, these forum threads comprise the entire discussion regarding the lawsuit against NERO International:

http://nerohq.com/bb/forum/forum_posts.asp?TID=4788&PN=1 and http://nerohq.com/bb/forum/forum_posts.asp?TID=4808&PN=1

²⁰ The NERO Alliance's write-up as to why there are two NEROs: <http://nerohq.com/break.htm>

Among the live-combat groups, Dagorhir Outdoor Improvisational Battle Games (Dagorhir) was founded by Bryan Weise in the Washington, DC area in 1977. The International Fantasy Gaming Society (IFGS), also live-combat but with a complex rules system more clearly influenced by Dungeons and Dragons, was started in 1981 in Boulder, Colorado. (IFGS took its name from a fictional group in the novel Dream Park by Larry Niven and Steven Barnes, which described highly realistic, futuristic LARPs.) At about the same time (but before 1981), the Assassins' Guild was created at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to pursue "killer" or "assassin"-style live-combat games with toy guns, but also to encourage creative design in LARPs. While NERO is currently one of the more widespread live-combat groups, with over 50 chapters in the US and Canada, it was founded only in 1988.

Theatre Style LARP began in America at around the same time. In 1981, the Society for Interactive Literature (SIL) was founded by Walter Freitag, Mike Massamilla and Rick Dutton at Harvard University. The club's first public event was in February 1983, at the Boskone science fiction convention. A substantial part of the SIL membership broke off from that organization in 1991 and formed the Interactive Literature Foundation (ILF), which in 2000 changed its name to the Live Action Role-Players Association LARPA²¹. The mid-Atlantic and northeastern US has been a center for Theatre Style events, especially the Intercon LARP conventions.

The northeast US plays host to many, smaller, fantasy-based LARPs, such as Lione Rampant, Quest Interactive Productions and Mythical Journeys, all formed in the early 1990's by fantasy enthusiasts with a love for character roleplay and adventure, but without large player bases or complex rule systems. Some of these LARPs were formed as splinter groups of larger, more franchised LARPs, such as NERO. Such LARP groups tend to run in the spring and autumn, utilizing summer camp facilities (such as 4H and group campgrounds) in their off-seasons.

The northeastern LARP scene, founding place of SIL, NERO, and the MIT Assassin's Guild, continues to have an active LARP scene, due to the large number of college campuses present. Other universities along the East Coast have been strong "incubation" sites for northeastern LARPs. Early (pre-internet) campus-based LARPs formed in isolation, developing their own style of games with little crossover with other styles or regions. The existence of larger regional organizations, of published LARPs, and of the internet has helped to create a field of "LARP theory" and deliberate experimentation with LARP forms.

Since 1999, the mid-Atlantic US has been a center for a number of crossover Theatre Style/Adventure Style events or "campaigns," which fall outside the medieval fantasy genre which tends to characterize a majority of Live Combat LARPs. An initial impetus for this was the attempt of various fantasy groups to adapt the Call of Cthulhu as a LARP genre, however the genre has expanded to substantially wider horizons. The progenitor LARP in this genre was Mike Young's Dark Summonings Campaign, followed by transitional LARPs including the Mersienne Medieval Fantasy Campaign (medieval fantasy), Outpost Chi (science fiction), 1948: Signals, 1936: Horror, as well as the heavily Call of Cthulhu based Altered Realities Campaign and the Victorian "steampunk" Brassy's Men Campaign. Together this network of current and previous events make up a substantial and innovative body of work which characterizes a vibrant mid-Atlantic US LARP Community. The rise of many campaigns all drawing from the same community has tended to preempt growth of non-campaign games, though, and to some degree push out the 'less dedicated' gamers due to the higher commitment needed.

West coast wise the LARP hobby really began in the late 1980s to early 1990s, depending on what part of the West coast area one looks at, as the LARP movement made it's way westward from the East coast and really took off after Dragon Magazine published an article on NERO and the LARP hobby. Looking at the LARPing hobby in a broader view and from an economic standpoint the history could be summed up in the following paragraphs:

²¹ LARPA's web site can be found at: <http://www.larpaweb.net/>. LARPA is a "player" organization. It is not a business organization like GAMA, or GPA. Its members are largely players or fans of LARPing. It has no real funding; it has no real charter to do anything except vaguely promote LARPing. Its BoD isn't really comprised of business-focused people looking to not only expand their own games, but LARPing as a whole.

LARPA's mission statement is as follows:

The Live Action Roleplayers Association (LARPA) is a non-profit organization that exists exclusively to promote live roleplaying (LARP) around the world. LARPA does not run games, and does not promote any one system, group, or type of event. LARPA supports and promotes all live roleplaying, and LARPA members come from many different groups, backgrounds, and types of event. LARPA promotes live roleplaying by providing schedule information to make it easier to find an event or group to participate in, and works to educate the general public.

LARPA also works to build the live roleplaying community, providing a place for everyone involved in running, organizing, promoting, or just participating in live roleplaying events to network, discuss and learn from each other. One of the principal activities of LARPA is licensure of the INTERCON name for LARP Conventions.

More information as to what LARPA does can be found in their Wiki entry at <http://www.larpaweb.net/wiki/index.php?title=LARPA>
Much of the conversation on LARPA still happens at their old Yahoo! Group: <http://games.groups.yahoo.com/group/larpa-gen/>

LARPing as a whole began in the late 1970's to early 1980's depending where in the country you lived. Throughout the 1980's LARPing was primarily focused in the battle game oriented live-combat LARP with Amtgard and Dagohir leading the way and if you were lucky enough to find a theater style group, a bit of theater style LARPing. The hobby really took off in the late 1980's and early 1990's when the battle game oriented live-combat LARPs had finally solidified themselves organizationally and developed a solid player base and role-playing oriented live-combat LARPs began to appear, created by those who either 1) wanted more immersion than they could get in a table-top game or 2) those who wanted more plot and storyline to the game than what is present in a battle game oriented LARP. It was at this time that NERO (pre-split) made its appearance and IFGS began to see more growth (not that it hadn't before).

Throughout the 1990's LARPing as a hobby grew, fueled by an economy that provided people with enough discretionary income to attend events or start their own. Many independent games sprung up during the 1990s and LARPs already in existence saw significant growth. The Internet also had a large impact with the ability to disseminate information regarding the hobby, events, and information from various groups to a wide audience with ease. It was at this time that the Camarilla started up and the White Wolf/MET games began to grow in popularity. Throughout the 1990s the Camarilla saw vast amount of growth and the number of non-Camarilla games grew just as fast.

When the dot-com bust happened in the later 1990s and the economy slowed, penny-pinching tightened on already existing shoestring budgets and there were groups that closed down because of lack of funds and/or rising costs. Members also began to penny-pinch due to rising travel costs (gasoline a.k.a. petrol), registration fees, and other event expenses. This penny-pinching only got worse with the recession in the early 2000s. Rising costs of housing, fuel, and inflation in general along with the growing unemployment rate caused many people to severely tighten their budget. Money that was once looked at as being discretionary now had to be used to pay the bills. LARP groups suffered as they fought to stay afloat and in operation. Members had a hard time attending events, as budgets were often very tight. By the around 2004 the economy began to change, the unemployment rate drop, and more people were able to secure a bit more discretionary income and the hobby stabilized and slow growth resumed.

Despite this tumultuous past, Amtgard, Dagohir, NERO, and the White Wolf/MET games still saw growth; even if it was slow, it was still faster growth than the rest of the hobby. As of now (early 2006) the hobby has recovered pretty well from the economic illness it suffered.

Who Makes up the Hobby Membership

Just as the table-top RPG hobby was primarily male dominated early in its existence, so was LARPing, but that LARPing saw a lot of growth (especially in the 1990s) in regard to female membership and it quickly became a very mixed gender hobby. The hobby has also seen a growth in the age range of its members.

Early in the hobby's existence many of the members were in their late teens and early to mid 20s. It was very much a young adult's hobby and was (and still is) a very popular hobby among college age adults (18-23), but the age range of its player is growing as more and more hobby members are now in their late 20s and early to mid 30s.

It's important to note that many battle game oriented live-combat LARPs tend to have a low minimum age requirement (12 or 13 years old), most role-play oriented live-combat groups tend to have their minimum age requirements in the mid to late teen years (14-17), and most theater style groups (Camarilla and non-Camarilla games are included in this) are adult focused groups (18 plus years old). Because of this there are games and groups with a strong contingency of young members and there are games and groups with a strong contingency of adult members and this doesn't mean that a game or organization that tends to have younger members won't have older members and vice versa.

Along with the increase in the age range of the hobby members come the changes that come with age: education level, marital status, and financial status. Just like any other hobby there will always be those that don't go on to post secondary education (college/university study), but there are a large number of LARPer who do and do earn degrees. As a matter of fact it's quite common to find a club at a college or university campus, especially larger schools, dedicated to the LARPing hobby, even if that club espouses a particular rules set or organization. With a post secondary education under their belts the LARPing hobby is seeing more and more professionals within its ranks. Often with an increase in education a person also increase their earning potential and a much better chance at securing a good job with decent pay. This translates to a larger pool of discretionary income available.

Age also plays into the growth of the number of LARPer in relationships: married or unmarried, though the number of married LARPer and LARPer with children is growing. This change is also starting to shape some of the dynamics of the hobby as well. You would think that with a rise in education level and earning potential (and thus, hopefully, a well paying job) a LARPer would be able to devote more financial resources to the hobby, in particular to their kit, but with a recent rocky economy and more and more

LARPer needing to devote more finances to non-discretionary needs (family and/or children), this isn't always possible²². Also, there are older LARPer (in their mid to later 30s and even some in their later 20s) who are deciding to retire from the hobby. Age related health issues, children, and life in general aren't making participation within the hobby a reality any more.

Looking at the breakdown from the standpoint of the style of game – theater, battle game oriented live-combat LARP, and role-play oriented live-combat LARP – battle-game oriented LARPs tend to have the youngest members. Since their events are usually single day events, rules systems tend to be simpler, and events rarely have underlying plot (especially plot that deals with mature topics), and parents may look at battle game oriented live-combat LARPs as more of a boffer sport the youngest members of the hobby, young teenagers around 12 and 13 years old, will cut their teeth on a battle game oriented live-combat LARP as their first LARP. Older teenagers who have been LARPing for a while and young adults who may be LARPing in a live-combat group for the first time will move up into role-play oriented live-combat LARPs because of deeper story, longer running events, and in many cases better immersion into the game setting. Theater style games tend to focus on more adult oriented storylines, or storylines that the younger member of the hobby may have a hard time grasping because of their subtle nature, or because of organizational rules²³. Because of this, theater style games tend to be frequented by the adult crowd because the game length makes attending an event do-able when a player has a demanding job or a family. This is because theater style games tend to be a single day game, running for 4-6 hours, much like battle game oriented live-combat LARPs.

Just because a battle oriented live-combat game tends to be popular among the youngest players doesn't mean that adults don't play it, that all theater style LARPs are adult only, or role-play oriented live-combat LARPs only members are the young adult, college age crowd. There will always be groups that defy the stereotype and people that stick with a particular form because they prefer that style, no matter their age.

The LARPing “Community”

The U.S. LARPing community is rather fragmented with very little sense of community other than, “Oh, you're a LARPer too” as an identifier that at least a person understand the hobby to some degree as well. Some of this fragmentation is caused by existing rivalries and the elitist viewpoints of some groups toward others. The rivalries can be caused by splinter groups breaking away from an existing LARP due to rules and/or organizational disagreements and the bad feelings that ensue between the owners/GMs of the parent group and the splinter group as well as heated competition for the support of a small player base in a region. The opinionated and at times elitist viewpoints often drive groups farther apart, especially in where close-mindedness is an issue. There are plenty of people who feel their opinion is the correct opinion and won't even try to look at the other side of the fence to attempt to see and understand the views of the people they've been debating with.

Another reason for the fragmentation is the nature of how the different styles operate. Theater style events typically run 4-6 hours in length and the best way to get the room needed to run these is to join up with other theater style groups and run events at conventions. Compare this to live-combat style LARPs that commonly run for a much longer period of time and require more space and separate space from other live-combat style LARPs to prevent confusion from unwanted rules system “cross contamination²⁴.” Of course, this doesn't mean that a theater style group can't run an even by their own or that a group of live-combat oriented LARPs couldn't benefit from working together.

Of course, not all groups are hostile toward each other, but that there aren't an overwhelming number of groups who are actively trying to promote a greater sense of community within the U.S. LARP hobby. There are partnerships here and there among groups where they will try to assist each other be it increasing or stabilizing the player base, working to secure site arrangements that don't conflict or encourage a site to rent to a different group, and in general better the sense of community within the hobby. There are also regions where the players will play in several games and “cross-pollinate” these games with other ideas and concepts, but this is not a national thing.

This isn't to say that there isn't any community within the U.S. LARP hobby scene; it's just a very loose “community.” The U.S. LARP community, as a whole, nationwide consists primarily of Shade's LARP List²⁵ and the LARPA site and forums. Other than these forums the community doesn't have a nationwide newsletter or magazine, though Joseph Valenti is trying to rectify this with LARPMag²⁶, or a company that has secured an insurance policy that all nationwide LARPs can buy into.

²² This is by no means an excuse for a poorly put together kit where mundane aspects are still blatantly seen (shoes, jeans, watches, etc.) and not well hidden or replaced during events with something more appropriate for a fantasy-medieval LARP for example.

²³ The Camarilla, White Wolf's organized play organization requires all members to be at least 18 years of age.

²⁴ Cross contamination in this instance doesn't mean the unwanted influence of one LARP system upon another, but rather the resolution mechanics (verbal calls, specific gestures or hand signals, or color coded items for examples) that cause confusion among others who are not familiar with the rules systems in use.

²⁵ Shade's LARP List can be found at <http://www.larplist.com>. Shade's LARP List has a strong contingency of international members as opposed to LARPA, which doesn't.

²⁶ LARP Magazine's site is located at <http://www.larpmag.com>. If this isn't the address then you can do a Google search for LARP Magazine and you should be able to get the correct web address.

There's starting to be some effort made to try to rectify this fragmentation and very loose community problem as more and more groups are slowly realizing that the fragmentation of the hobby has had a negative, and in some cases very detrimental effect on the hobby as a whole, and that with the growth of the hobby that having a stronger nationwide community will create a stronger support network for new and existing LARPs. Perhaps the recent economic struggles have helped different LARP groups understand that in order to survive they need to get along and play nice with others, particularly if several LARPs in a region share a common player base.

Closing Statement

What has been presented above is the opinion and views of one member of the U.S. LARP hobby, taken from my personal experiences and what I have read online and discussed with others. My views and opinions are not the views and opinions of every member of the hobby, and I'm hoping that those who have read this (U.S. LARPers in particular) will understand that their view and opinion of the hobby is just as important as my views and opinions of the hobby are. This was written to help the international community gain a better perspective of the nature of the U.S. LARP hobby through the eyes of one member of the U.S. LARP hobby.