

Chapter 04

About LARP

Afterwork by Ana de Almeida is a Live Action Role Play (LARP), a participatory form of role-playing in which participants physically and performatively embody characters within a collectively constructed narrative framework.

Emerging at the intersection of gaming, theatre, and improvisation, LARP requires players to enact fictional scenarios through embodied performance and social interaction, typically without a passive audience. Unlike tabletop role-playing games, where events are mediated through descriptive narration and rule systems, LARP relies on direct interpersonal engagement, blurring the distinction between theatrical performance and lived experience (Bowman 2010, 23–45).

In Afterwork Ana de Almeida, who is the LARP facilitator, plays the character of the chatbot ELIZZA 2.0. The other players, also referred to as “participants”, can play either one or more characters.

While LARP initially developed within recreational and fantasy contexts, particularly in Europe and North America, the form has undergone significant diversification. A central strand of this development is the Nordic LARP tradition, which arose during the 1990s and early 2000s. Nordic LARP is characterized by a commitment to emotional immersion, critical reflection, and narrative depth, often privileging collaborative storytelling over competition or predefined outcomes (Stenros and Montola 2010, 12–18). Rather than relying on elaborate mechanics, NordicLARPs often employ minimalist rules and a shared social contract, allowing participants to co-create complex worlds and affective experiences through improvisation (Fatland and Wingård 2004). These practices have led scholars to describe Nordic LARP not merely as a subgenre of gaming but as a cultural form with its own artistic and social ambitions (Montola and Stenros 2008).

Within this broader field, writingLARPs have emerged as a distinct methodological and creative practice. In this context, “writing LARP” refers not to preparatory scenario design but to games in which the act of writing occurs *during* play as a central mechanic. Furthermore, practices of diegetic writing (writing as one's character) facilitate a deeper connection between the player and her character (Sandquist 2021). This form is often used in artistic, educational, and speculative settings, where the combination of embodied improvisation and textual creation allows for rich collaborative world-building (Bowman and Torner 2016). Participants collectively produce textual artifacts from within their characters' perspectives, effectively shaping the narrative world through both performance and writing.

In Afterwork, character building through writing plays as much an important role as writing in character, being that for this LARP, players can decide to start chatting with ELIZZA 2.0 or already sign up for the game in character. Further on, during the writing process guided and prompted by the chatbot, players can either further work on building their character or create new ones. For those who did not start in character, creating one happens at the second chat session. Scenario and story writing are done from a first person perspective, being that the players can either embody their characters throughout the whole process or switch in and off character guided by the chatbot. At the

end of the Afterwork LARP, participants end up with a speculative fiction draft that they are welcome to develop further on.

A further methodological variation involves facilitators performing in character, a technique that is especially prevalent in Nordic and writing-centered formats. Rather than acting as external game masters who control the flow of the scenario from outside, facilitators may adopt fictional personas and interact directly with participants from within the diegetic frame. This strategy serves multiple purposes: it maintains narrative coherence, models desired forms of interaction, and deepens the immersive quality of the experience (Waern 2018).

In Afterwork the facilitator's character functions as a narrative catalyst, prompting participants to articulate perspectives, develop characters, or generate textual material that enriches the collective fiction. This in-character facilitation blurs the conventional distinction between player and organizer, reinforcing the collaborative and performative dimensions of LARP.

Future-oriented or speculative scenarioLARPs use roleplay as a tool for collective imagining. These games invite participants to inhabit speculative worlds, such as transformed political systems or altered ecological conditions, and to explore their implications through embodied interaction and collaborative world-building (Stenros and Montola 2010). Rather than predicting the future, suchLARPs function as laboratories for social imagination, enabling participants to test ideas, rehearse new forms of social organization, and reflect critically on contemporary structures. These games are often used in artistic, academic, and activist contexts to generate situated knowledge and collective narratives that address complex global challenges in ways that conventional analytical methods cannot.

References

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