

Claus Raasted's tips on creating a kids larp campaign



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A LIST OF THINGS TO DO

This is a list of loose ideas that can be used exactly as they are. They're also here to show that creating activity ideas isn't that hard. They're very generic. Enjoy - and use as you will!

- Make a ritual somewhere in the forest
- Improve your fortifications
- Mark your territory with coloured strips of cloth
- Sing a song for another Team to impress/scare/provoke them
- Make a special War Dance and teach it to another Team
- Make a tournament internally in your Team
- Do combat training in your base
- Train your diplomats in their lying skills while the rest of the team watches
- Divide your Team into two parts, and let one part ambush the other as a training exercise
- Capture an enemy Team Leader and do something silly to punish him/her
- Train marching in your preferred marching order
- Hold a grand speech about how awesome your Team is
- Make a circle and let everyone suggest plans - then vote on the plans
- Hide in the forest and prepare an ambush for another Team
- Betray a Team you're currently allied with for some absurd reason
- Make peace with a Team you're currently fighting, and join them as allies instead
- Lie about another Team and what they're up to, to a third Team, and cause trouble
- Organize a diplomatic meeting of all the Teams - and if it's boring, then start fighting
- Make a competition for all Teams about something dumb like spitting, farting, etc
- Create a new song for your Team along with your kids
- Tell a story about your Team to your kids
- Create some kind of game that's special to your Team, like Orcball or Emperor Jumping
- Sneak past an NPC or another Team without being discovered
- Steal some soul-energy from dead enemies to create a powerful magical effect
- Challenge another Team to some duel that's not combat-related, like a dance-off, etc
- Find some interesting terrain feature and declare it holy/special/yours
- Get your Team to gather ingredients from the forest to make a special potion
- Make your Team symbol somewhere on the ground using sticks and branches

If it's not already obvious, there are a lot of these ideas that can be combined, twisted, customized and re-used in different forms. If something seems like fun and the kids like it, you can always make it into a tradition that your team has. As an example, when I was a Team Leader in Rude Skov, my Team of Orcs always started the day with duelling me.

Challenge the Chieftain: We always started out with all the Orcs being allowed to challenge me in single. The winner would rule the tribe for the rest of the day. Needless to say, I always won, except for the one day they cheated and swarmed me, and declared River Troll (a nice 14 year old kid) the winner. He got to be the boss until lunch, and was very happy afterwards when he didn't have to anymore. But it was fun!

YOU MAKE OR BREAK THE EXPERIENCE

As a Team Leader of a group of kids, you are the most important person in shaping their experience, and in ensuring that they have a good time. You are the one who leads them in combat, entertains them in peace, comforts them when they cry and calm them when they become angry. You're part coach, part team captain, part pedagogue and part role model. Most of all, you're part Gandalf, part Han Solo and part Peter Jackson.

TASK #1: KEEPING THE TEAM TOGETHER

An essential, but overlooked fact, is that as a Team Leader, your prime responsibility is making sure that your team actually functions and doesn't scatter like the wind. This can be hard to do, but is very central. Sending out scouts, diplomats and so on is fine, but it's important that you keep track of your kids. If you don't, they'll just wander the forest.

TASK #2: PROVIDING MEANING

You must also provide the kids with something to do! Whether it's base-building in the forest, finding the Dwarves to beat them in a dance-off or doing the Elven Ritual of Summer doesn't matter so matter. The important thing is that you give them things to do that are interesting and make sense to them. Keep it simple, action-packed and fun!

TASK #3: CREATING A GOOD ATMOSPHERE

It's your job to make sure the kids are comfortable with each other - and with kids from other teams. Be a good role model, and deal with conflicts in a reasonable way. Smile and talk to the kids. Be a cool adult they like. And make sure to constantly push your "We're all in this together, and the other kids aren't morons" agenda as discreetly as you can. Kids in sports clubs are often brought up to reinforce a culture of "Us vs Them". Don't do that. ;-)

TASK #4: COMBAT LEADERSHIP

When fighting occurs, you're there to make it fun. It's easy to lose perspective and just find a hole in the front line and fight whoever is closest to you. It's also easy to fall into the trap of just killing a lot of kids, since you're older, stronger, taller, more experienced and have better equipment! Instead, stay behind the lines if possible, get the ones hanging back to join the fights, and keep tactical overview. Controlling a battle force is hard - even if it's only 10-15 kids, so don't worry too much if things get chaotic!

TASK #5: JUDGING AND PUNISHING

Your final task is to keep your kids behaving. Sometimes you'll need to tell one of them to stop doing things that are problematic, and you may even have to give them time-outs or send them home if things get particularly nasty. It's part of being in charge - don't be afraid of conflicts, and don't lose your temper. Be fair, but be the boss. Kids respect leadership and authority, and need to know where you stand. Tough decisions are sometimes needed.

THE MORE IT DOES, THE MORE THERE'LL BE

If you get to make alchemy potions because you have a set of alchemy tools, there are more kids who'll get (or make) one. If you get extra Hit Points by having a cool costume or a set of armour, more kids will get their parents to invest. In general, if something DOES something (other than just look good), there's a bigger chance it'll be common at the larp.

RESIST TEMPTATION

It's tempting to start selling stuff that does ingame stuff. Magical rings of protection giving +1 HP that are sold for real money aren't much different than selling costumes that give +1 HP for being cool. Except there's a huge difference, in that most parents will be able to see why the costume is worth something, and very few will understand why the ring is.

In online games such as World of Warcraft, of course a \$1,000 axe represents value. It's like a \$1,000 diamond necklace (comparitively speaking of aesthetics) and it can even kill ingame orcs, which the necklace can't. But to most people, one is valuable, the other is not. This will slowly change, but for now - keep away from what may be seen as unfair sales.

THERE'S PLENTY OF COOL STUFF

The better the game looks, the easier it is to recruit new people. The better the props are, the more interesting things can be done with them. So there's good reason to reward kids for bringing cool costumes and cool props. Some of it you may even sell to them yourself. Just remember, that it's always better to say "Sure, you can use your own home-made thing" instead of saying "We only allow official trademarked Dwarf Axe-holders". Creativity is one of the most important things in larp, and it makes both kids and parents happy to make stuff.

FOCUS ON LARGE CENTERPIECES

When considering what to get for the campaign, its better to have some stuff that makes everyone go "Woooooooow!" than having a lot of less-cool stuff. Rather one super-awesome Shield of the Elements than five shields that look ok. If you're going for function, of course the five shields are better. If you're going for wow effect, go for fewer, but greater.

JARKWELT - A MAGICAL WORLD

For our children's campaigns, we use the world of Jarkwelt. It's a simple, roughly defined fantasy world, which has all the usual stuff - orcs, elves, an empire, etc. - but also has some explanations for other things that function quite well. Here are a few things to know about Jarkwelt.

(ALMOST) EVERYONE CAN BE EITHER FRIEND OR ENEMY

One of the central things in Jarkwelt is that there are no "eternal friendships" or "eternal enemies" (except for the Dark Elves, who hate the Light Elves). This means that there are no limits to who can be allies, and anyone can get into conflicts. This makes the larps very flexible and give tons of interaction possibilities.

THERE ARE 16 "CULTURES"

In Jarkwelt, there are 16 main "cultures". Some of these are entire races (e.g. The Wood Elves), and some are - mainly human - nations/groups (e.g. The Army of The Bandit King). Some are very evil in the classic sense (The Black Society) and some are very stereotypical (The Pirates of The Southern Sea). But for each of these, there is a colour, a little description, some ideas for names, war cries and life ideals, and some text on costumes and behaviour. Of course, it's easy to create more groups or sub-groups, but there are 16 to begin with.

THERE ARE 7 ELEMENTS

Another central thing in Jarkwelt is the 7 elements. These are the elemental forces that bind everything together, and also where magic comes from. The seven elements are the four "normal" ones (Air, Earth, Fire, Water), the two opposing elements of creation/destruction (Life, Death), and finally the seventh, mystical element that binds it all together (Magic). The elements are great to have because they can be re-used endlessly in various stories and plotlines, provide personality, goals and conflicts by being in constant opposition.

COLOUR IS CENTRAL

There's a strong focus on colour in the Jarkwelt world (Orcs wear brown, the Emperor's Legion wears red, etc) and the reason for this is that it makes for clear distinctions in the field. It's a LOT easier having clearly marked teams and groups than having to use half the time figuring out who's actually a bandit and who's a Knight of The Order of The Sun.

IT'S EASY TO BUILD ON

Jarkwelt isn't very sharply defined. There's a nice map, the descriptions of the various cultures and their ideas about life, but there are very few descriptions of people and places. This means that it's extremely simple to be creative and carve out a part of Jarkwelt that can be used for a children's campaign without interfering with the whole game world.

WORD OF MOUTH IS ALWAYS BEST

The best way of getting players for a kids campaign is by having them play, love it and then spread the word to their friends. The second best way is letting their parents get convinced that this is awesome and tell other parents. But since that's hard to plan for, here are ideas:

SOCIAL MEDIA

The easiest and simplest way to promote an event is via social media. It's free (unless boosted), can be done from the office and takes very little time. The problem is that unless you have a lot of people in your social media circles who either are kids or have them, it's not that effective. Once you've built up a parent FB network, though, it becomes effective.

POSTERS AND FLYERS

The old way of doing things works quite good. Flashy posters and flyers at schools, libraries, cultural institutions and other places where kids (or families) go. This requires permission and cooperation, but it's definitely doable and somewhat efficient.

THE HUMAN ADVERTISING SIGN

One of the simplest ways of getting attention is by sticking out. Put two people in awesome costumes (preferably one in a monster suit, if possible) and give them a bunch of flyers, and then place them in a place where a lot of people come by. It works, but requires good people.

FLASH MOBS

The bigger version of this is doing a costumed flash mob or other massive visual event. People will become interested, if ten people suddenly start sword-fighting or casting spells in a public area. Some of that interest can be translated into them taking flyers. However, it's quite costly in terms of manpower, so remember to document if you're doing it!

FREE PROMOTION EVENTS

Some places have kids (and/or parents), and might be willing to let you borrow them if you do something cool. Doing a free event at a school, an after-school institution or a youth club is not a bad idea. It's one of the most effective forms of recruiting out there, but takes a bit of planning and dialogue with the place you're going to visit.

MEDIA EXPOSURE

Getting stories in newspapers, online news outlets and magazines is an awesome way of promoting an event. It's not always easy, though, but if done right, this really does wonders. So if you have any possibility of getting media exposure, GO FOR IT!

A: NEED TO HAVE

When looking for a location for a children's campaign, there are some very important things to look for. These don't always need to be in order, but there more the better!

Varied terrain: A big, open field is usable, but not really cool. The optimal is some kind of forest area, with paths, a few open spaces for big fights, some hills and maybe even a river. The area doesn't need to be very big (500 m x 500 m is more than enough!), but the more varied the terrain is the better.

Accessible: You need to be able to get there. The closer it is to major roads, the better. Having access to public transport nearby is nice, but in no way necessary. But no long drives via small, pot-holed roads. It needs to be easy to get to, and not too far from a big city.

Legal to use: This may seem like a given, but it isn't. Make sure you're actually allowed to use the area in question for larping, and that permissions are in order.

B: NICE TO HAVE

Apart from the necessary requirements, there are things that make a location better suited for a children's campaign, but are optional. These include:

Clearly defined area: If there are big paths, roads or streams of water leading through the forest, these are obvious boundaries to define where the play area ends. It's a lot easier saying "Don't cross the stream" instead of saying "Our game area ends 150 m that way."

Good parking: If it's possible to park nearby, there's a better chance that parents will do that, so they can stay during the event. This makes it possible to recruit their help.

Lots of pathways: People use pathways. Having one central pathway means that most interaction will happen there. Having lots of paths create more places for interaction. The optimal is having a "round" area with paths going everywhere, and also along the edges.

C: LUXURY TO HAVE

Permission to build things: Anyone can construct some improvised fortifications and "bases" in the forest - kids do it all the time. But being allowed to use rope (or nails, hammers, etc) makes it much easier to do cool constructions that can be used over and over again.

Access to toilets: It's perfectly possible to survive 5 hours in the forest without a toilet, but if there's a possibility of using one, it makes things easier.

Cool locations: A waterfall. A bridge. An awesome-looking hill. Cool locations are great for children's campaigns, because they become landmarks that can be used in the fiction and having a ritual on top of Skull Hill is just cooler than having it somewhere random!

AN AMAZING RESOURCE

No matter where they're from and what they do, parents have one thing in common - they're often quite efficient at doing stuff if well led. Being a parent (even a bad one) means you have to plan a lot of your life and actually get things done. Dinner needs to be made, after all, and not picking up the kids after school isn't really an option in the long run!

This means that parents are usually very good volunteer workers.

BUT THEY'RE ALSO ENERGY-CONSUMING

BUT... and there's a big "but" here. They also need clear direction, understandable goals, lots of dialogue and come with strong expectations that may not match reality. Some of them won't care about helping out, but some of them probably will. Nurture them, and you have strong supporters, awesome ambassadors and good workers. But realize that it takes time and energy, and that you should have one person who is responsible for them.

PRODUCTION TASKS ARE BEST

Many parents are good at doing things. Building forts in the forest. Sewing costumes. Driving cars. Lifting stuff. Looking after kids who are hurt. Roasting sausages over a fire so that everyone can get a nice sausage (or a vegetarian equivalent!) for lunch. But they're often not as good at getting loose directions and making things happen. And very few of them are good Team Leaders (though they exist) or even NPCs. The reason for this is simple. Being a good Team Leader is not only hard, it's also extremely complicated and requires a ton of different skills. Making a good forest fort just requires that you are willing to work and there's a plan!

CUSTOMERS, FRIENDS, HELPERS?

There's nothing wrong with getting help from enthusiasts. But it's important that they understand that their help is something that's given voluntarily, and not something you're buying. You retain creative control. Their kids still pay to play. The don't own what they produce. If you start breaking these boundaries, do it for good reason. Some parents can turn into friends and people with "backstage access", but don't let them in too easily. Having parents try to run things their way can easily be demotivating, so think carefully.

NEVER BE ASHAMED THAT YOU MAKE MONEY

Treating what you do as valuable is important, even if it's also (hopefully) fun and different and cool. We've had almost no problems with parents who were told that we got paid for doing what we do, but we've had some problems when people started making excuses for actually taking money for good work done.

So stand tall, be proud and don't be ashamed of making money from larp.
(which may or may not be relevant to you, but it certainly was relevant in Denmark!)

YOU ARE THE PLAYMAKER OF PLAYMAKERS

As an NPC (Non-Player-Character) at a children's campaign, your job is both simple and complex. You are there to provide the children something meaningful to do, that also makes for a cool story. So while it's ok to be the NPC that asks the kids to build the base (as their Team Leader might do), it should be connected with a memorable event ("We had to build the base, to make the Minotaur happy, or it would eat us all!").

Basically, the function of the NPC is to take some of the load of the Team Leaders off their shoulders and make their lives easier. Here are some tips on how to do this.

BE MEMORABLE

Speak with a funny voice. Have outrageous catchphrases. Be super-stupid or super-smart. Make a show of things, and forget all about naturalistic acting! As an NPC your most important function is to be remembered. And there's no such thing as too over-the-top.

GIVE THEM THINGS TO DO, AND REWARD THEM

The teams will come to you to get quests, information and cool scenes. Give them missions, task and feed them with interesting stories and facts. Make them want to do things for you. If you're a good storyteller, reward them with a story. If you're not, give them a magic item, a little extra HP blessing or maybe some information instead. The important thing is to keep them wanting to do stuff for you - or if not that, then see you as an interesting enemy.

YOU CAN CHANGE IF THINGS DON'T WORK

One of the advantages of being an NPC is that you can always change, and say it was part of the plan all along. It's best to coordinate this (or at least the possibility of this) with the Team Leaders and other NPCs, but there's nothing wrong in having the Lady Hero Paladin suddenly turn out to be evil after lunch. In fact, this works very well, as long as it makes some kind of sense that the kids can understand. So if things don't work - change them!

PLAYING TWO NPCs IN ONE DAY WORKS FINE

It's extremely easy to play a Merchant Prince before lunch and a Skull Wizard after lunch. The half hour lunch break is a good time for changes in plotlines to be made and also for NPCs to switch costumes. A classic idea is having the NPC play some role before lunch, and then after lunch either be transformed into something else, or maybe have the first NPC character leave the forest, so the NPC player can come back and be summoned as a monster.

THE PRACTICAL STUFF JUST NEEDS TO WORK

One of the most destructive things for most Danish larp campaigns is when there's practical stuff that work less than optimally. This shouldn't be allowed to happen. Here are some tips on how to make the practical hurdles smaller.

RECOGNIZE THE OBVIOUS BOTTLENECKS

There are a few things that can easily turn into time-stealers that make everybody else wait.

Check-In: This is the normal #1 killer, and yet it's SO easy to fix. Having several Check-In stations is easy, and it's also very easy to change if it doesn't work out optimally. In general, try to keep the check-in process as fast as possible. Even if it only takes 15 seconds to check one kid in, that's still almost half an hour for 100 kids - and that's excluding complications.

Make-Up: The second big time-hogger. The easiest way to solve this one is by having several make-up stations AND by only doing very simple make-up on the kids.

One-Station-To-Rule-Them-All: Some larp campaigns have everything happen at once. Check-In, weapons testing (or borrowing), team choosing, make-up - all at the same place. This is a BAD idea. Make several stations in a row, so the kids pass through a series of checkpoints, each taking care of one thing. It's better in all ways. That simple.

Slow Team Leaders: The last classic mistake is in waiting for Team Leaders. If the person responsible for shutting down Check-In and putting chairs and tables in the van also needs to get make-up on and is the one doing the Opening Speech, then there's a problem. Make sure that the only people who can risk "lagging behind" are your NPCs. They're less critical.

MINIMIZE SETUP TIME

A good tip is that while it seems like no trouble at all to use an hour before a game to setup cool stuff, it quickly becomes VERY annoying to have to do that once every two weeks. Plan for minimalism - or if you want to have a lot of setup, make sure there are people who are ONLY in charge of that during the Check-In hour from 11.00 - 12.00.

PARENTS ARE A GREAT RESOURCE

It's awesome having an orc camp with skulls, banners and a smoke machine. It's great to have a fort for the Order of the Sun, that's taken ten people an afternoon to bulid. But it's even better if this work has been done by volunteers who want to help out. Some parents will want to help out and be part of the adventure - or at least help making it possible. They are a great resource, but they require leadership and clear plans. So if you want to do cool stuff with parents (or other volunteers!) make sure there's a clear plan and clear leadership.

Then guide them in building that awesome scenography stuff.

KISS - KEEP IT SIMPLE, STUPID

However, it's a schedule that's worked for our children's campaigns for 10 years, so it's at least tried and tested! Morning times may need to be adjusted due to transport times, but this is based on having a transport time to location of 30 min. If location transport time is longer, remember to factor this into the plan - either starting earlier in the morning, or moving game start from 11.00 to later.

SAFETY RULES, GAME RULES & INGAME RULES

It's very important to explain to the kids that there are three types of rules.

- Safety rules should not be broken, or things can get dangerous (don't hit hard, etc)
- Game rules should not be broken, because it's more fun (don't cheat with HP, etc)
- Ingame rules can be broken, but there may be consequences (breaking a peace treaty, etc)

EXPERIENCE POINTS ARE TEMPTING

When designing a rules system, it's always tempting to have an XP system. It's an easy way to keep players coming back, and it's tempting to use a lot of time making a "fair" system. They're almost never good. Instead, do something different.

Instead of the classic "You get 1 XP for each time you show up" (or something like that), IF you're going to use XP - which require a lot of administration work - make sure it rewards the style of play you actually want. Getting XP for killing big monsters means the kids will want to do that. Getting XP for solving quests makes the kids do that.

ALTERNATIVES TO EXPERIENCE POINTS

Another option is simply NOT having XP. Instead, you can have all sorts of interesting things. Maybe each kid gets a necklace with runes on it, and each game day has its own rune. Maybe they get a small token of some sort for participating, or a special cool collectible card. Maybe they get a discount on a sword if they've been there all year. The important thing is to make sure rewards don't disturb too much, and still seem cool. The "necklace of tokens" is one of the best ideas I've come across, but it takes some energy to do it.

IDEAS FOR ACTUAL RULES

- Team Leaders have 10 Hit Points, and are immune to spells.
- All kids have 2 Hit Points, and lose one when they're struck by a weapon.
- Magicians get only 1 HP, but also get access to a few simple spells.
- Spells include "Stand Still", "Defence" and "Magic Ball". Maybe more can be learned.
- Only Team Leaders can heal and raise the dead. All that happens AFTER battles.
- A cool costume can give you up to 3 extra HP (judged by Team Leader).
- Telling another kid "You're dead" or "You're cheating" means you die yourself instead.

THIS IS NOT THE ONLY WAY TO DO THIS

However, it's a schedule that's worked for our children's campaigns for 10 years, so it's at least tried and tested! Morning times may need to be adjusted due to transport times, but this is based on having a transport time to location of 30 min. If location transport time is longer, remember to factor this into the plan - either starting earlier in the morning, or moving game start from 11.00 to later.

SCHEDULE EXAMPLE

- 08.30** Campaign Boss starts getting ready for breakfast.
- 09.00** Campaign Team meets at Base, and eats breakfast together.
- 09.30** Breakfast is over. Briefing about the day. Questions and ideas about plotlines.
- 09.45** Packing begins. Everything gets put into cars, and costumes are put on.
- 10.15** Campaign Team leaves Base.
- 10.45** Campaign Team arrives on location. Setup of Check-In, Make-Up, etc.
- 11.00** Check-In opens for kids. It doesn't open earlier, even if there's good time.
- 11.30** Check-In closes down (late kids are of course ok, but deal with them 1-on-1). Everybody gets ready. Make-up, battle exercises, hanging out.
- 12.00** Briefing. Rules are explained. Story of the day explained. A few questions.
- 12.10** Game starts. All teams go with their Team Leaders to their team bases.
- 13.30** Lunch break. Everyone takes 30 min break to eat lunch.
- 14.00** Game resumes. All teams go with their Team Leaders to their team bases.
- 15.00** Game stops for the day, usually just after a big battle. All kids are gathered.
- 15.10** Debriefing. "What happened with the main story?". Kids vs Adults battles.
- 15.30** Pickup by parents happens during the next half hour. Packing down stuff.
- 16.00** Campaign Team leaves the location, when all kids have been picked up.
- 16.30** Campaign Team arrives at Base. Everything is unpacked and put in storage.
- 17.30** The work day is over. Everything is in its proper place. Time for chillin'.

WHAT CAN WE SELL ONCE WE'RE IN CONTACT?

One of the side effects of having a children's larp campaign is that the participants become a market of their own - and they might be interested in more than just the larp campaign. Here are a few ideas to what else might be useful to think about in terms of selling.

OTHER LARPS FOR KIDS

The most obvious thing kids will be interested in is more larps for kids! If there are 100-150 kids playing regularly in the fantasy campaign, some of them might be interested in playing a different sort of larp. So that's not to be forgotten, especially as the campaign grows.

WEAPONS, COSTUMES & EQUIPMENT

Fantasy campaigns have a large portion of latex weapons, and they need to come from somewhere. You might as well sell them weapons at reasonable prices instead of that profit going to someone else. Having someone responsible for a small shop during the Check-In (that can take orders between games) is a great idea if there's no local larp shop.

The same goes for costumes and equipment, though these are less specialized, and therefore easier to find elsewhere. But offering to sell costumes and equipment in the mini-shop is a good idea, and may give some extra income for very little effort.

SELLING TO PARENTS: THE DIRECT SALES

There are also the parents, and there are some things they may want to buy. A children's larp birthday is an obvious idea. Organizing a movie night watching a fantasy movie at the Base or something similar is also a possibility. Or a LEGO day! Basically any kind of event that might make their kids happy and give them some free time.

SELLING TO PARENTS: THE INDIRECT SALES

The other kind of sales to parents is a bit more subtle. Some of them will have jobs, where larp might be relevant, and if they know you can do things for them, some of them might come and ask you for help at some point. After all, if you see your kid is happy doing something, you might think "Hey, we can use this for teambuilding at my company!"

THE "WHAT CAN WE DO" FLYER IS A MUST

To make them jump to that conclusion, it's important to have some words and examples of that in the flyer that parents should get. Because one thing is them connecting the dots on their own - another thing is them getting helped to make those connections.

And who knows? One of them might just own Czocho Hotel! ;-)

TEAMS SHOULD BE EASY TO RELATE TO

Culture differs from country to country, so there may be some variations in which cultural references kids have. In Denmark Vikings are popular, but that may not be the case elsewhere. No matter what, make sure that the teams are easily understandable by the kids and that they are more or less self-explanatory.

JARKWELT HAS THE FOLLOWING TEAMS

1. The Bandit King's Army
2. The Black Society
3. The City States (not as good as the others, since it's not self-explanatory)
4. The Dark Elves
5. The Desert Folk
6. The Empire's Legion
7. The Kingdom of Alasia
8. The Light Elves
9. The Mountain Tribes
10. The Orcs
11. The Order of the Sun
12. The Pirate of The South Sea
13. The Stormfist Dwarves
14. The Wood Elves
15. The Vikings

There's also the weird 16th "culture" called The Land of Dreams, which is a weird place where dreams become reality and all manner of crazy stuff happens. In Jarkwelt, all monsters and weird stuff come from The Land of Dreams. It's not a playable team, but an explanation for why strange beasts exist in the world.

OTHER TEAMS WE'VE USED IN JARKWELT

16. The Demons
17. The Hobbits
18. The Alliance of Light
19. The Mercenaries

Some of these teams have been a great success. Others - not as much. Sometimes, some of our 15 main teams have been out for a season or two, returning later. These classic teams have almost always been there, though:

- The Orcs
- The Wood Elves
- The Black Society
- The Order of the Sun
- The Empire's Legion

A COLLECTION OF RANDOM GOOD IDEAS

- Smile and be happy. Don't lose your temper. But don't let them boss you around.
- Always be up for talking with the kids about stuff. Also offgame stuff.
- Get them to keep their weapons in their belts while talking, if possible.
- Let them fight! Lots of fights make lots of kids happy.
- Some kids don't want to fight. Create functions for them if you can.
- Don't let them get into conflict with each other, if you can stop it.
- Take the kids seriously. But also know when to ignore their complaining.
- All kids think the other kids cheat. Most of the kids cheat themselves, without knowing it.
- If parents are being problematic, tell them to leave (in a nice way, if possible).
- Train latex weapon fighting. The easiest way to get respect is to be a good fighter.
- Be over-the-top instead of believable. Silly, outrageous and weird is better than "realistic".
- Remember to tell them about other kinds of larping.
- Don't be afraid to have a secret agenda about gender equality, democracy, tolerance, etc.
- When the entire Team is dead, let them become ghosts (saying "oooo" while the walk).
- Make up as many functions as you can on your Team. Shamans, spies, scouts, etc.
- Don't worry too much about good roleplay. Focus on a good experience.
- Just because it doesn't make sense in your head doesn't mean it doesn't for the kids.
- Kids will bring reference points from everything they know into the game.
- Use the (ingame) names of the kids as often as possible. It's easier to learn them that way.
- Don't cheat. The kids love winning over adults, but adults who cheat are uncool.
- Let them try out stupid things, as long as they're not hurting anyone.
- When they're offgame, tell them stories of cool stuff you do and play.
- Make it clear to them when you're playing and when you're not.
- Delegate as much as possible. Let your kids do the talking, fighting, etc. when you can.
- Don't call out kids who cheat in fights with you. Just hit them more times, until they die.
- Remember that kids have ears and listen to what you chat about in the lunch break.
- Be prepared for a lot of weird questions - especially from parents.
- Use a lot of rhetorical questions when motivating your Team. "Are we ready to fight!?"
- Don't be too concerned about playing your character. You're mainly a function.
- Some kids are stupid. Some aren't. Get good at spotting the difference and be flexible.
- Some kids will keep on pushing the boundaries. Shut them down fast.
- It's ok not have some things be part of the game (like ingame rape, for instance).
- Building a base is fun for some kids, and it's cool to have a base.
- It's ok to make mistakes. It's a good way to learn things.
- There's no shame in being skilled at different things. Learn to spot each others' kid skills.
- Nothing can substitute field experience. Even when it sucks, you learn stuff.
- Let the parents participate in the "Kids vs Adults" fights at the end. It's a good start.

THE BEST COSTUME EVER

Lars Andersen, who is not only a skilled archer, but also a larp pedagogue, at one point said “The latex sword is the best costume ever.”

He’s right. When someone holds a latex sword, it’s obvious to anyone that they’re playing. And if there’s any kind of larp culture based on latex weapons in the area, it’s also obvious that they’re going larping (or ARE larping). The sword functions as a costume, letting anyone be a knight, an elf, an orc, or whatever - just by holding it and acting differently.

THEY NEED TO BE CARED FOR

Latex weapons need care. More specifically, they need to be sprayed with silicone spray from time to time, and then have it rubbed by a cloth (any piece of cloth will do). This keeps them from sticking to each other, and to clothes and other stuff, and prolongs their lifespan.

They’re also much more vulnerable at the tip. A latex weapon should in most case NOT be used for stabbing, but just for hitting, and also only for hitting people and other weapons. Hitting trees, bushes, etc. is a bad idea, and an even worse one is putting the tip into the ground and leaning on it (or leaving it standing on its tip in a corner like a real sword).

The more the kids learn how to care for their weapons, the happier the parents are.

THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT TYPES

I recommend Palnatoke weapons, but there are many types. Several professional latex weapon companies exist, and most of them are quite ok. Calimacil, the Canadian company, makes them not out of latex and foam, but out of something else - which makes them more durable, but also much harder. I do not recommend allowing them.

Also, many weapons from the German market are very hard. The best brands (in my opinion) are Palnatoke, Epic Armoury (made by Ironfortress) and Forgotten Dreams. Other brands work as well, but are usually harder, more expensive, and less durable. Write something about weapons on the web site, and only sell stuff that’s allowed to be used!

BOWS AND ARROWS

Bows are cool. They’re fun, they’re ok safe (with the right arrows) and they’re epic. There are problems with them, though. Arrows are expensive and get lost, making parents mad. Arrows hit other kids - and the adults - in the face, making them much more unhappy than if they’re hit by a latex sword. And from a tactical point of view, archers are a pain in the ass, as people’s real-world fear of getting hit in the face makes them over-powerful.

So my advice is - don’t allow bows and arrows. And throwing knives, throwing axes, etc. should also be considered a no-go due to them also easily getting lost.

MAKE SURE IT'S EASY TO UNDERSTAND

One of the things that's keeping larp in the underground is the total failure of most larpers to make their hobby understandable, cool and accessible. Web pages for larps are usually quite horrible at communicating to an audience that isn't already completely aware of what's going on. When aiming for non-larper kids and their even more non-larper parents, this is something you need to take seriously. Get outsiders to look things over, and change things until they're easy to understand. Explain, explain, and explain again.

PICTURES SELL IDEAS BETTER THAN WORDS

Make sure there are awesome pictures on the web site. Pictures of happy kids, happy adults, happy smiles and great scenes everywhere. Ally yourself with good photographers and get them to capture some of the magic on pictures. It'll be worth it in the long run!

VIDEOS ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN PICTURES

A properly edited and high production value video can do wonders. Professional quality video can make anything look and seem awesome, and with epic music, good voiceover and a few persuasive sound bites ("I've never had so much fun!", "My daughter just loves this!") you're in excellent shape. It's also easy to share on social media, and if you're extremely lucky, it can be picked up by bigger media and spread.

A NEWSLETTER IS A MUST

Enough said. ;-)

A LINK TO "OTHER STUFF WE DO" IS ALSO GOOD

Many parents and kids won't automatically think "They're doing this - perhaps they can do THAT too!", so they need to be guided. Linking to a page that explains all the other cool stuff you can do is a good idea. Just like a link to a weapons/costume/equipment shop is good.

BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY, CONTACT INFORMATION!

The most important thing on the web page is a place where you can be reached. The amount of parents and kids who simply don't understand things and need to talk to someone (either via mail or phone) is staggering. The amount of parents I've talked to over the years who asked questions that were clearly and elegantly answered on the web page already... A LOT!

So no matter what, make it easy for them to get into contact with you. Very easy.

THERE ARE MANY TYPES OF PLOTLINES

When writing plotlines for a children's campaign, there are many good ways to do it. Here, the focus isn't on HOW you do the actual writing, but more on WHAT kinds of plotlines.

TEAM GOALS

All groups have some goals that they do their best to pursue. All groups have ideals (preach the faith of the Sun, fight for recognition of Orcs as more intelligent than humans), and most of these ideals lead to actions (conduct religious rituals, collect magical artefacts). However, when writing plotlines for the campaign, it's good to throw in some short-term missions:

Terrain-based missions (hold the bridge, take control of the crossroads)

Object-based missions (find the Icesword, gather all parts of the Crystal of Eight Parts)

Person-based missions (escort the Duke to the Light Elves, catch the Troll Hunter)

Action-based missions (make peace with the Black Society, construct a new fort)

STORY PLOTS

There are also plotlines that are independent (though sometimes linked to) the Team Leaders. Here are a couple of examples of these:

World Events are events that have happened "since last time" (the dragon has woken)

Main Plots effect everyone (the forest has been enchanted and the water is poisoned)

Team Plots are team-specific (the Dark Elves are sick and have -1 HP all day)

Personal Plots are for individuals (the Orc Shaman is cursed and can't cast spells)

Object Plots deal with those who have the object (the Silver Helmet makes you mute)

Location Plots deal with those who are there (the Blue Tree cures poisons)

Physical Plots require tasks to be done (find eight different flowers for the Gryphon Master)

Reflection Plots require thinking to be made (understand the Saga of Dreams)

Information Plots give out new knowledge, which can be fake (Orcs have Elven souls)

WHY WRITE PLOTLINES AT ALL?

How you choose to write your plotlines (if you choose to write any at all!) is up to you. For the first year, the our Rude Skov children's campaign didn't have any written plotlines at all, and it worked great. But the advantage of having written material is that it's good backup.

A FEW PLOT WRITING TIPS

- Don't plan for things that HAVE to happen. They probably won't.
- Make several teams included in each plotline, if possible.
- It doesn't need to be complicated and long. Just some short notes do wonders.
- Basically giving your Team Leaders alibi and inspiration. Remember that.
- Think in actions. It's better to write what the Dwarves have to try to do, than write why.