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larp design cards

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The Larp Design Cards are a tool for LARP game creation. The goal is to aid the designer in visualising various elements of the game and the connections between these elements. Inspired by *The Art of Game Design. A Book of Lenses*, the Cards are meant to assist teams of creators in preparing a game together. Other influences include „The Mixing Desk of Larp" and „The Elements of Larp Design" but, contrary to those, Larp Design Cards are a practical tool and not a descriptive system. The formula given here is the first version, and I encourage you to experiment with it.

TYPES OF CARDS
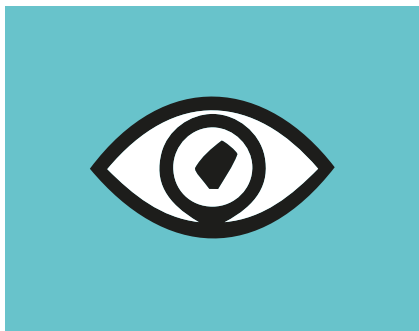
The Engine (Vision) – These four cards pose the base question: What do I want to do? Though they do not enlighten you much in themselves, they will strongly influence other elements of the game.

The Interface (Manipulation) – These cards pose the question: How do I want to achieve that? I call them Manipulation cards because the solutions chosen here are what makes the players do what you want them to (Vision), while retaining an illusion of free will.

The Packaging (Communication) – These cards tell you how to sell your game – how are you going to speak to your players, and what are you going to tell them.

LARP DESIGN CARDS – MANUAL

I'M IN

1. Make a photocopy of the cards attached to this publication. Cut them into individual cards.
2. Fill in what you can. Be brief.
3. You don't have to fill in all the cards. You can make your own cards.
4. Set the filled cards on a table:
   - the Engine cards in the center,
   - the Interface cards around the Engine – if you can see a strong connection between the two elements, put them close together;
   - the Packaging cards as the third, outer ring.

> The player will experience your game in the reverse order. Entering your game, they will not know where are you proposing to take them. The important part is for you to know that, though. Do not start designing your game by designing the Packaging.

I CALL

1. Start on the inside. Do all the Engine cards fit together?
2. Continue outwards. Look at the answers you filled in on every Interface card, and check whether it's conform to the Vision (Engine). Is anything missing? Are there discrepancies? Make corrections.
3. Pass on to the Packaging. It shouldn't contain too many cards, because people don't like being flooded with information. Don't write long pages about the game, put down the elements important for the design. Is this circle conform to your Vision? Did the Interface define something that you need to specifically communicate to the players?

> If you can't fit an answer on one card, you've probably found an especially important element. It probably deserves its own card, so create it (e.g, when you find out that character sheets will be especially important in your game, create a special card for them) and write down what is the purpose of that element in your game

I RAISE

1. You've gone over all the circles for the first time. Make corrections, check if all the cards form a coherent whole, add cards if you find that necessary.
2. Remove some of the cards. Yes, you do have some cards in there that can be removed. Wonderful ideas, perfect to use in a different game. Make sure you only have the cards important for this particular game on the table.
3. If you can see connections between the circles, mark them down. These are probably the pillars of your game.

YOU WIN

You now have a graphical model of your idea before you. Using it, you can:

- easily present your idea to somebody else,
- build your game on a strong foundation,
- make sure you don't deviate from your vision, or that you deviate from it on purpose,
- run the game and see if the elements function as planned,
- if they don't, analyse and correct the design easily,
- check which connections did the players discover,
- experiment and have fun.

Literature

- „The Mixing Desk of Larp" – Martin Nielsen i Martin E. Andresen, article published in *Crossing Theoretical Borders* Knutepunkt 2013 conference publication.
- „Elements of Larp Design" – Erik Fatland, presentation given at the Knutpunkt 2014 conference (available at: http://larpwright.efatland.com/?p=524).
- *The Art of Game Design. A Book of Lenses* – Jesse Schell.

THE MESSAGE

What's the game about?
What story does it tell?
What questions does it pose?

THE AESTHETICS

What does the game look like?
What senses does it engage?
Which element will the players
remember and why?

THE TIME

Does it take place at a specific
time of day? How is it timed, if at all
(and how do players experience that)?
Are there any pre-planned events?

PLAYERS' EXPERIENCE

What emotions and states
do the players experience during
the game? What relations do they form?
What is left in them after the game,
what do they remember?

PLAYERS' ACTIONS

What is the most important
for them during the game?
What physical actions do they perform?
What character interactions can happen
(rivalry or cooperation)?

THE PLACE

Where is the game located?
How does the space delimit
the game, if at all? Do you need
special space (like blackboxes)
and how will you use it?

SCENOGRAPHY

Realistic or symbolic?
What are the key elements? How can
you use the scenography to play (what
actions can the players perform with it)?
What ideas does the scenography convey?

GAME CHARACTERS

Do the players create them,
or you? If you – how? (Written
sheets, other means?) How will they
communicate the desirable interactions?

EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS PLAYERS

How do they prepare
for the game? What attitudes
and behaviours do you expect before
the game, what behaviour during and
afterwards?

OFF-GAME ELEMENTS

Where will the players sleep,
how will they eat? How does that
influence the game experience?
Can you do it differently?

THE GAME PROCESS

Do you moderate the game?
How much? Which elements
are known to the players, which
should be secret?

THE GAME RULES

What game mechanics
help lead the players to the Vision,
if any? What are the rules of engagement
and safety rules? Which rule could you
forgo if you had to? Why?

THE GAME UNIVERSE (DIEGESIS)

Which elements are crucial for the players? Which elements lead them to the Vision?

Why is this element important? What do you want to achieve through it?

Why is this element important? What do you want to achieve through it?

COMMUNICATION WITH PLAYERS

What communication channels do you use? What is the ratio of in-game information to technical descriptions? Do the players communicate before the game, and how do you influence that?

Why is this element important? What do you want to achieve through it?

Why is this element important? What do you want to achieve through it?