

Mad about the boy



A laiv-action role playing game by
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Introduction

Mad about the Boy is a larp about survivors of a global disaster that killed more than half of humanity. An inexplicable disease killed all the men in mere minutes. The surviving women are facing not only the enormous task of rebuilding society, but also the possible extinction of humanity.

The world of the larp is inspired by the graphic novel *Y the Last Man* by Brian K. Vaughn and Pia Guerra. The larp does not use any characters or storylines from the graphic novel. Our story is about a group of women who have applied to an insemination program initiated three years after the disaster. As sperm has become a very precious resource, there are only a few women who will be given this privilege.

The first act of the larp centers around the selection of who will get to enter the program to become mothers, and what new family structures will be the best ones to raise these precious children. Act one of the larp ends with a man entering - the only one who has survived the catastrophe. How will each woman relate to this man? Before the end of the second and final act the women will have to decide what to do with him.

A larp about a world without men will of course have gender as one of its main themes. What happens when "mankind" has become "womankind"? What does a world where women have to fill all positions and roles in society look like?

The original larp was played twice in the summer of 2010. Each run lasted three days, divided into one day of workshops, one and a half day of playing and an evening of debriefing. The game was written and played in English to make it possible for non-Scandinavians to participate. We wanted to explore both an all-female game and a game where men could play female characters. #

About this manuscript

This manuscript was created after the larp to give other people the possibility to produce the larp. This document describes the story, setting and characters briefly and goes into a little more detail about the form of the larp and the workshop. The full characters, a description of the setting and suggested scenes to play out in the workshop is included as appendices. These documents can be downloaded from <http://madabouttheboy.laiv.org>.

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Design decisions

Our larp was divided into three parts; a workshop and two acts. The two acts are separated by the event of the man entering the scene. The first act is more strictly defined than act two. It is focused around the selection process for the maternity program. Act two is hardly scripted at all. It is left open whether the characters decide to continue the selection process, overthrow the committee or whatever else the players decide to do with the story. The only instruction we gave the players for act two is that it should be the choice of the women, either collectively or through some of them winning a power struggle, what the fate of the last man will be. He can try to influence what will happen through his interaction with them, but not completely override what is happening by for instance fleeing right before the last scene of the larp. The player playing Isak should be instructed to strike up different type of relationships hostile and friendly with the different female characters, so that he doesn't focus his play on one particular alliance or love story.

We chose to do all the preparations on site. In principle the only preparations the players needed to do were reading through their characters and bringing a suitable costume. We believe that you get more focused and coherent preparations when everything is done with all of the players present, immediately before the larp starts. By and large this worked very well. Some of the players chose to prepare more than this before the larp and this was possible as the characters were sent out in advance.

All characters were pre-written for two reasons. It enabled us to get a well balanced dynamic between the characters. The other reason was that we wanted the players to have very limited preparations before arriving at the larp. We developed a character template which was divided into sections like 'archtype' and 'suggested function for the character in the dramaturgy of the larp' to clearly communicate the playability of the character.

For this larp we were interested in exploring stories, inner lives and backgrounds of the women. We find that meta techniques is a way to bring important aspects of the game into actual play between characters, so that important dramatic elements don't just remain in character descriptions or individual players' heads. The meta techniques we used are presented in more detail later in this manuscript.

We also decided on a great deal of transparency concerning the story. We believe we gain better play by telling our players what to expect and what we need from them to make our story come true. The framework for the larp is open information for everyone, so that the true surprises come from what the players fill this with. Because of this, we told the players that a man would show up and when that would happen. We wanted the reactions of the characters, not the players. We also published all the characters so all the players could read all the other characters.

As all characters in this game except one are female, iwe recommend having a particular focus in the workshop on the role playing challenges of playing female characters. We did this through physical workshops on female body language.

The setting of the Game

Here is a short version of the setting. For the full text see Appendix 2.

The death of men happened very quickly and without warning. It is still not known what caused their deaths. Sperm is stored in sperm banks many places in the world, but governments have been reluctant to make use of it since tests indicate that only girl children could be born.

The Nordic governments have recently decided to use some of the sperm in a pilot programme, the one the characters of the larp have applied to. A committee has been appointed by the government to make the final selection of who will be accepted into the programme.

The leader of the committee, Maria the politician, is the ideological brain behind the programme. As the death of men is also the death of the nuclear family, Maria has decided that the recommended family unit for the insemination programme should be three women. According to Maria this is a more robust constellation than the old one. Most of the other characters then arrive in groups of three, but the ties that bind the women together are different from trio to trio. When the larp begins they are all gathered at a secluded place where the final selection will take place.

Characters

Below is a short presentation of the characters divided into groups. The full characters can be found in Appendix 1. There are 29 written characters. With fewer players, one or more of the trios can be removed from the game. In some of the trios it is decided who is the intended birth mother, in others this might be open for discussion and conflict.

The Committee has been selected to choose the women who will get to raise a child in this first part of the new Nordic insemination program. In the first act they will organize a selection process, including interviews and tests of the applicants.

The Survivalists are a group of women belonging to a community which strives to be as self sufficient as possible. They are skeptical to the ability of the state to manage things in these present circumstances, but go along with the programme to secure a child for their community.

The Artists are three women who are used to either taking the spotlight, or making sure they have a say in who is in it. Their plan is to document the conception, birth and childhood of a human being born into this world. It will be beautiful. Truly a work of art.

The Lovers is a polyamorous group of three and a fixture of the scene in the city offering art and entertainment in these hard times. Even though they can be a close knit unit they are three women who are not shy to occasionally let their personalities and temperaments clash in public.

The Wealthy Women. The heiress of a fishery empire, the entrepreneur and the housewife. Together they are a resourceful family unit wealthy enough to

provide for all the needs of a child.

The Professionals. Who can be more qualified to raise a child than a psychiatrist, a teacher and a social worker? These three women are not a family and more acquaintances than friends really.

The Nuclear Family. This is the family that in the strongest sense resembles a family like they used to be: a mother, a father and a grandmother, only the prospective father is a drag king. The young woman in this group has a history of being treated badly by men in her life before they all died.

The Muslim Sisterhood. A common faith bind these otherwise very different women together. Compared to many secular women their faith might help them make sense of life after the disaster. The downside is that if they lose the belief that there is a meaning to the suffering, the existential crisis might become ever so much deeper.

Three Generations. The women left in this family is the dominating grandmother, her haunted daughter in law and the teenage granddaughter. Theirs is not a harmonious relationship, but they already have a family structure, and know each others faults and fortes.

Linn is not part of a trio and is a wild card in the selection process. She is a survivor, a person who is honest with herself, a no-nonsense, practical woman. Formerly a page 3 girl, she's now an undertaker, a scavenger and somewhat of an action girl.

Isak is the last man on Earth. Feeling like a lone sailor caught in a storm at sea. He has been hiding in the forest alone during the three years which has passed since the disaster, he was recently captured by a gang of women planning to profit from him. He managed to escape and has run naked through the forest for hours when he comes crashing into the game at the end of act one.

The larp, the methods and the pregame workshop

Act 1

The larp begins three years after the disaster to the day. The Song 'Mad about the Boy' plays while the participants have gathered in a circle with their eyes closed. When the song ends the larp begins. The committee and all of the applicants are gathered in a circle for a ceremony of remembrance. They are each holding a candle. One by one they tell where they were and what happened around them when the disaster struck. When one is finished speaking she blows out her candle. When everyone has spoken and blown out their candle the ceremony is over. Maria then holds a welcome speech, talking about the insemination programme.

During the rest of the day the committee will organize interviews and tests of all the applicants. Theresa is in charge of the psychological tests, while Julie is in charge of physical tests. The tests can both be individual (of prospective birth mothers for instance) or group tests of each prospective family. When not involved in the test the applicants will get a chance to get to know the other women who are gathered here and maybe establish possible alliances or animosities.

Shortly before the organizers have decided to end act one the committee should gather everyone to present their preliminary recommendations for who will get access to sperm and who will not. It is up to the committee themselves how many they choose, but approximately half of the family groups can work well. The committee is also free to recommend a rearranging of the family groups and/or to make a separate list of the most suited birth mothers separate from the list of the best suited family groups.

When the committee has concluded the presentation the characters are given a brief moment for initial reactions. Then Isak, the last man, comes crashing in the door, fleeing into a house he thought was empty. Everyone freezes and 'Mad about the Boy' is played. During the song we chose to play a slideshow with pictures of men, boys and babies in different situations. When the song has ended one of the organizers ask each character (except Isak) one by one "[Name] What runs through your head?", and they answer with a brief monologue. When everyone has spoken 'Mad about the Boy' is played again. When the song ends act 2 begins.

In the original production of this larp, act one lasted from early afternoon to approximately midday the next day.

Act 2

Act 2 begins right where act one ended – with all the women gathered moments after Isak came crashing into the room. Some of the characters will most probably try to take charge of the situation, but what unfolds now is wholly up to the characters themselves. The players make the decisions as to whether the

selection process for the insemination programme should continue in parallel with the storyline of what to do with the last man.

Act 2 should last until sometime in the evening the same day. Some of the characters might decide to contact the outside world. This should be somewhat difficult and can be explained with phone lines and cellphone networks being down. If someone has a phone conversation with someone from the outside this can be played out in the black box, with one of the organizers playing the person on the other end.

The larp ends with a scene that in some way or other determines what happens to Isak. How this plays out should be up to the participants themselves. It could be a joint decision or some of the characters forcing through the outcome. Towards the end the organizers should be watching the drama unfold and be alert to what is to be the last scene of the larp. When they decide that this is it, they should play 'Mad about the Boy' one last time. Everyone gathers in a circle while the song is playing and removes an item belonging to the character putting it on the floor as a way of saying goodbye to the character and to the larp. When the song ends everyone is out of character and the game has ended. We had a portable mp3-player, so the larp could end anywhere on the premises.

Meta-techniques

This larp incorporates the use of some meta-techniques and some simulating game mechanics that can be employed by the participants. Meta-techniques are dramaturgical game mechanics that seek to enable play which isn't possible with a purely "realistic" playing style. The aim is thus to strengthen the drama of the larp, by pulling what is inside the characters head into real game situations. Here is an overview of the recommended techniques for this game.

Inner voice

With this technique an organizer approaches a character who is currently not in the company of others. The organizers start playing the character's inner voice which the character responds to. Typical input can be giving voice to the character's fears and doubts or encouraging the character to act on a personal motivation. When the organizer walks away from the character the inner voice session is over.

Several players reported that they had acted out things because of being exposed to this technique that they otherwise wouldn't have. A few people found it disturbing, but then the organizer should just back off.

Monologue Box

The monologue box is a technique where the inner thoughts of the character are spoken aloud. This is heard by the players, but not by the characters they play. What they hear in a monologue can be used in how they will play in relation to that character, but the characters should react in the situation according to not having heard what was said in the monologue. The start of a monologue is signaled by drawing a square box in the air with both hands in front of the face before speaking. When the monologue is finished the same sign is made and regular play resumes.

The monologue box is best used in scenes with few characters where everyone

can clearly see the monologue sign being made. We experienced some misunderstandings on the part of the players when this technique was used in crowded scenes. In the second run it was suddenly used for communicating off-larp issues, stop this if it happens as this will create confusion.

Black Box

A room at the game site can be designated as a black box. The black box can be used to play scenes from the past, imaginary scenes and possible futures. An organizer can be present in the black box and give input and suggestions as a director to the scenes that the participants want to experience. The black box is also well suited to play scenes of contact with the outside world (if the Committee contacts the government for instance). It can also be used by participants who want to have an off-game discussion about where the story about their characters is heading and agree on scenes they want to play out during the game.

The black box can contain light and sound equipment to be used to enhance scenes, but this is not essential. The "black box" can be any designated room or area on the game location where the participants can play out scenes without being disturbed by things happening outside while they are in the black box.

Ars amandi

Ars amandi is a technique developed by Emma Wieslander to simulate sexual scenes in larps. When employing *ars amandi* a sexual encounter is played out by touching each others hands, arms and shoulders while keeping eye contact with the other person(s) in the scene. No other parts of the body is touched. We found this method well suited for any sexual scenes that might happen in this game.

We recommend that *ars amandi* is demonstrated in a pre-game workshop to ensure that the participants who might play sexual scenes become comfortable with it and everyone at the larp get the same understanding of how it is to be played out.

Simulated violence

This is not a game with a lot of expected scenes of violence, but some of the characters have been given guns to make violence into a clear and present threat. The main reason we added guns to the game was that they represent the explicit possibility of not resolving conflicts in a peaceful manner. In particular we wanted that aspect included in a game with a majority of or only female players to see if and how the guns were used.

The players should be instructed that firing a gun should not be done before towards the end of the game. The character shot at decides whether she dies or is just wounded. Physical confrontations without guns involved, such as punching someone should be played out safely. We chose to do this in a slow motion mode, but this did not really work well in high adrenaline situations. Situations were played out safely, but the slow-mo part was just forgotten.

Pre-game workshop – some suggestions

We wanted the pre-game workshop to be an integrated part of the entire experience of playing Mad about the Boy. Building the flow of the workshop, we wanted to work with the players starting with focusing on themselves and their reasons for joining the game, to reflecting on the game world and finally to become the character they would play through workshops on body language and playing out scenes as the character. Here is a sketch of the main points covered by the workshop:

DAY 1

- Organizers present themselves, the structure of the workshop and the two acts of the game.
- Players introduce themselves and their motivation for wanting to play this larp.
- The players are introduced to the in-game world through a guided meditation asking the players to imagine what their own reality would be like if all men suddenly died.
- A physical workshop with focus on female body language. How are women's body language different from men's? How are "masculine" and "feminine" women's body language different from each other; and women of different status.
- The players present the characters they will play. The players then fill in application forms for the insemination programme as their characters.
- Joint world building through discussing what the world after the disaster looks like in areas like: art & culture, media, education, sexuality & romance and religion & ideological movements.

DAY 2

- Hot seat is a theatre impro technique where one player at a time is interviewed in character by a couple of other participants. They ask questions about the past and present life of the character and all answers are improvised on the spot. This enables a player to deepen the knowledge of the character she will play before the game itself starts
- A physical workshop with focus on finding the individual character's body language. This was particularly important in the game which included male participants, but can be a relevant exercise for almost any larp - finding how the character moves in a different way from the person's regular body language.
- An introduction on how to use the *ars amandi* technique in the game. Everyone who have characters who are in an intimate relationship with each other can be encouraged to play out a situation using *ars amandi*
- Explanation and demonstration of the other meta techniques previously described
- Split into groups and act out scenes from the past of the characters. This can be scenes between characters who are in the game as well as scenes with other characters, for instance men who are now dead. Suggestions for scenes can be found in appendix 3.

Concluding remarks

This larp was made as a collaborative project between three organizers. We jointly created the setting and the characters and did a lot of our writing together to ensure consistency and to motivate each other and avoid the feeling of "homework". Thanks to our players for making our vision come true, and we hope other larp-organizers will find some inspiration in this manuscript.

- Appendix 1: Characters
- Appendix 2: The Setting of the game
- Appendix 3: Suggested scenes for the workshop