

LIFE UNDER OCCUPATION

A DOCUMENTATION BOOK
FOR THE LARP **HALAT HISAR**

EDITED BY **JUHANA PETTERSSON**
POHJOISMAISEN ROOLIPELAAMISEN SEURA





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A documentation book for the larp *Halat hisar*

Edited by Juhana Pettersson

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The last scene of the game is a protest against the visit of the Jordanian Minister known for his pro-Uralian statements. Photo: Tuomas Puikkonen



Occupied central Helsinki. Illustration by Joel Sammallahhti

A STATE OF SIEGE, A LONG BLEED

Fatima AbdulKarim

After writing four drafts of this foreword, I realized I was still experiencing a degree of bleed, months after the game *Halat hisar* was played in Finland in November 2013. Residues of different moments and different characters are still playing in my head like shadows on a backstage rehearsal.

Moments from the sign up process, the character workshops and the eve of the game are still vividly alive in my memory. Some more sharply than others, but all still exist, mostly as questions.

The idea we're examining was that of a fictional alternative history setting for one nation as the strongest means of contemplation of the situation in another nation, because touching on the issue of identity is critical and changing perception could be intense. The scenario went beyond reality for the Finnish players, but might still be true in some way. The contemplation of the alternative setting was also unrealistic for Palestinians as well, who found themselves taking in different roles, too.

The Mirror

We worked out the details of the game's setting very carefully and put a lot of thought into what should be the title of the game. Before I get into the name, let me start by stating why this game needed to be a real life experience.

Imagine this scenario: The year is 2007. The declaration of a new political party is published in a local newspaper in Palestine. The party's name is Forward. Its main principles regarding the Palestinian – Israeli peace process include a guaranteed acknowledgement by the State of Palestine of the establishment of an Israeli state as a state for all Israelis wherever they might be, without exceptions. This includes settlers. Based on these principles, settlers would not be allowed into Palestine.

Speaking the language of power and authority, the party's manifesto was an art project reversing the political manifesto of the Israeli party Kadima, born in 2007. In the art project - manifesto, the two Palestinian partners – an artist and a philosophy professor at Birzeit University – switched the word Palestine for

Israel, Israeli for Palestinian and settler for refugee.

As I read through the first lines, I burst out in laughter in what seemed an automated reaction from my brain, but the next moment I found myself caught within dozens of questions, to the point of fear. Again, that project stood in my memory as a point of vivid revelation to a reality I live under day in day out. The first reaction might have caught the sarcasm, but a few lines down, I was made uneasy. The text seemed to me fascist to a point where I couldn't stand it anymore; I was disgusted.

But that was the mere fascism of the occupying power and its ideology that hit me, not my own.

The Words

In 2002, the late poet Mahmoud Darwish wrote the poem *"State of Siege"*. He wrote in the heat of the second intifada, in the very years which collected lives of Palestinians – as well as Israelis to a certain extent – like it was time for harvest. Israel re-occupied the West Bank in the spring of 2002 and re-imposed a concrete state of siege.

In his poem, Darwish spells out his sixth sense transcending beyond his political context, which most Palestinians read as a political analogy; an analysis and a forecast. Then he comes back with his words to speak from within, and directly address his enemy with a negotiation over a tale, in which he and his own enemy are facing the same plight, that of humanity, and towards the end of the poem, he calls

*"You! At the thresholds of our houses,
vacate our mornings,
so we may be certain
we're as human as you are."*

While Darwish was asking for a truce, for reasons,

perhaps much stronger than his known love for coffee, the choice of the name of the game wasn't an example of our genius. Yet, it was a sensible choice, especially as political larp is flourishing in Palestine. Darwish, under siege in Ramallah, paradoxically offered his besiegers coffee,

*"You, standing at our thresholds, come in,
sip some Arab coffee with us!
You may feel you're as human as we are."*

In our version of *Halat hisar*, we offer you a paradoxical matrix of reality no more accepted than this. The situation hits on a sense of nationalism being interrogated and a question of an identity that stands without an urge to be reconsidered.

It seemed so right that *Halat hisar* offered a much needed shake to a paradigm of social and political identity, where, at its heart, lies a notion of discrimination nobody wants to face. A notion hidden behind baseless stability reflected in the competition for positive social identity manifested in our everyday life and seen in today's media streams.

In *Halat hisar*, there is nowhere to hide from the question of identity, or where you stand in such a situation.

What's in a Name?

The official name of the larp is *Halat hisar*. It's Arabic, written according to the Finnish transliteration. This transliteration was chosen because the larp was played in Finland. The first word is capitalized and the second is not, as per the rules of capitalization in Finnish.



*On Friday, the participants did workshops to get into the world of the larp and develop their shared history.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*

THE BASICS

Juhana Pettersson

Halat hisar was a larp created by a joint Finnish-Palestinian team of game designers. Set in an alternate history world, the game attempted to create an experience approximating that of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.

To do this, the Palestinian political situation was moved to Finland, so that Finnish and Nordic players would find it more relatable. Instead of occupied Palestine, we had occupied Finland.

In the world of the game, a made-up people called the Ugrics had made large parts of Finland into their “ancestral homeland” of Uralia. The Finns who had been living there were squeezed tighter and tighter in the grip of Uralian settlements and military occupation. Some Finns lived in Uralia and held Uralian citizenship, but most lived in the Occupied Finnish Territories.

The University

The game milieu was the University of Helsinki, a university located in the Occupied Territories. Its Finnish students and staff lived their daily lives under the oppression of the occupation. The characters of the participants were students, teachers and staff, foreign fighters lying low, exchange students from other countries, journalists and human rights workers. The most important supporting characters were the representatives of the occupation: soldiers, interrogators and officers from the Uralian Defense Force, the UDF.

The university setting was chosen because it allowed us to create an everyday environment. It was familiar to many of our players, and allowed our Palestinian co-designers to use their experiences from the Palestinian Bir Zeit University.

The Test and the Big Game

The first version of the game was a small test run at the roleplaying convention Ropecon in the summer of 2013. Experiences from this game were used to refine and develop the game for the main, big run, played in November 2013. The test lasted an afternoon, the main run a weekend.

In story terms the test game was not connected to the main game: it was a prototype, not a prequel. Many of its ideas got recycled. The test game and the main game had only limited overlap in terms of players.

Uralia

Our plan was to design the fictional world of Occupied Finland to follow real Palestinian history as closely as possible, but in a sensible Finnish context. Fortunately, this proved to be easier than expected because of some historical parallels. Palestine used to be a British colony, and Finland used to be a part of Russia.

We considered using the Russians or the Swedes as the occupiers since they are our neighboring countries, but ultimately decided against it. Palestine has not been occupied by a neighboring country, but instead mostly by European Jewish colonizers. Russia and to a lesser extent Sweden are also charged subjects in Finland, and we had no particular wish to contribute to those discussions.

Because of this, we invented the Uralian people, who's settlement and occupation in the area of what's in the real world known as Finland would parallel the history of Israelis in the area of historical Palestine.

The Uralian occupier would be represented in the larp by soldiers from the Uralian Defense Force, the UDF.

Technique

The main larp in November was played over three days. Friday was reserved for workshops. The game started on Saturday, and lasted until Sunday, through the night. After the game ended, we had a debrief on location followed by an afterparty in a bar in Helsinki.

Designing the game, we consciously wanted to make a larp using the Nordic Larp toolbox. The main larp influence of our Palestinian co-designers came from collaboration with the Norwegian NGO Fantasi-forbundet, so in this sense we were Nordic by the way of Palestine.

In the Finnish core team, we were all strongly influenced by Nordic games we had played. In my case, the most important one was Till Death Do Us Part, played in 2012 in Palestine. Another essential influence was a Swedish run of Mad About the Boy in 2013, played by a core member of our team, Kaisa Kangas. Some of the metatechniques and workshop ideas we had were straightforwardly lifted from these games.

Credits

The Test Game

Date: 27. 7. 2013

Location: Espoo, Finland (as part of the Ropecon convention)

Number of participants: 19

Countries: Finland, Palestine

Organizers: Fatima AbdulKarim, Kaisa Kangas, Juhana Pettersson, Maria Pettersson, Mohamad Rabah

Supporting players: Syksy Räsänen, Aarne Saarinen, Dare Talvitie

Estimated budget: 2500 €

The Main Run

Date: 15. - 17. 11. 2013

Location: Parkano, Finland

Number of participants: 70

Countries: Finland, Palestine, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany, U.K.

Estimated budget: 11 000 €

Core team:

Fatima AbdulKarim (concept, design, characters)

Faris Arouri (concept)

Kaisa Kangas (concept, setting, design, characters)

Riad Mustafa (concept, design, production in Palestine, characters)

Juhana Pettersson (concept, design, production in Finland, characters)

Maria Pettersson (concept, design, Media Wall)

Mohamad Rabah (concept, design, Black Box, characters)

Foreign guests: Johanna MacDonald

Food team: Emi Maeda, Eeva Järvi, Ville Uusivuori, Joanna Österman

Documentation: Tuomas Puikkonen, Katri Lassila

Logistics: Antti Savolainen

Additional design: Syksy Räsänen, Joel Sammal-lahti, Dare Talvitie, Mike Pohjola

Production assistance: Teemu Rantanen

Supporting players: Syksy Räsänen, Aarne Saarinen, Dare Talvitie & Johanna MacDonald

Soldiers: Koalitio



*Saturday morning. The game has just started, and a Uralian soldier is checking the ID of a character.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



*An ambulance was called after Marie Isola was shot, but the paramedics were delayed by Uralian soldiers.
Paramedic played by one of the organizers, Kaisa Kangas. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*

WHAT HAPPENED?

Kaisa Kangas

The main plot of *Halat hisar* was seemingly built around the preparations for a conference, scheduled to start on Sunday afternoon. The Jordanian Minister of Culture had been invited. On one hand, the Minister had promised much needed funding for the faculty of humanities, but on the other he had also voiced support for Uralia, the occupying power.

Conflict was built between those who opposed the visit and urged for the cancellation of the whole conference, and those who thought the Minister's presence should be tolerated for the greater good of the faculty. The elections for the student council spokesperson were held on the same day as the conference, which brought many of the political issues to the fore.

Behind the scenes, we also had other things planned. After an election panel, there would be a big demonstration against the Uralian army that had invaded the campus. There, one of the election candidates would get shot. This would start the more intense part of the game, and after dusk, the soldiers would start arresting and interrogating people.

My role during the game was to represent the outside world. If someone wanted to call the police, the ambulance or their mom, they would call me. Thus, I got to see bits and pieces that would otherwise have been invisible. When things got tough, many of the characters called their parents or sent heartfelt text messages to their mothers.

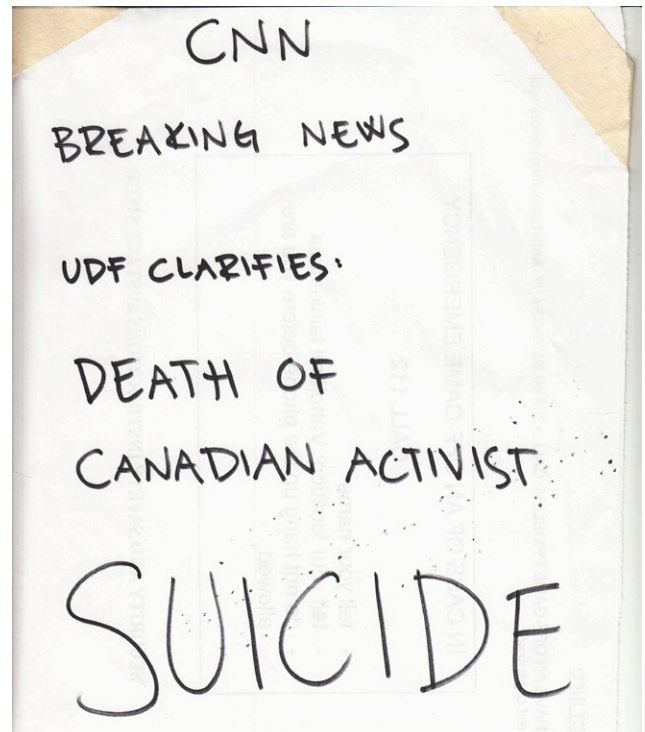
Checkpoint

We started around 10 on Saturday morning. The participants had to cross a checkpoint manned by Uralian soldiers to enter the campus. As they crossed the checkpoint, they went from off-game to in-game. During the crossing, Finnish characters had their ID cards replaced with new ones that contained information on their religion. In many of the new cards, names were misspelled or the person had been assigned to a wrong religious group. One professor was sent to the back of the line over and over again for protesting be-

ing classified as "Christian", as his atheist denomination was not accepted as a legitimate religion.

In addition to the checkpoint itself, the new ID cards were intended to be another entry point into the world of the game. Afterwards, some players said the scene highlighted the everyday nature of the occupation. Others commented that the new cards provided an easy topic on which to start in-game conversations.

Around 11:40, the Uralian soldiers took over the university sauna building and announced a curfew. The army had received information about suspicious peo-



Headlines from Finnish, Uralian and foreign media were posted on a wall as the game progressed.

ple from other Nordic countries seen at the campus. The university staff members who had been drinking sparkling wine at the sauna were thrown out. They brought the news to the main building, interrupting a lecture and a press conference.

The students immediately arranged a spontaneous demonstration. We were afraid that the game would turn into continuous protest and that there wouldn't be much energy left at 16:00 when our scripted demonstration scene was to happen. I sent a text message to Johanna, the supporting cast player whom we had recruited to help us create the drama and who knew her character would later get killed. She managed to convince others to take a break and organize a large demonstration after the elections panel. However, a long vigil was held at the barrier improvised on the road to the sauna by the Uralian soldiers.

The Demonstration

The big demonstration held at 16:00 became an impressive event. Marie Isola, the Socialist Resistance Front (SRF) candidate played by Johanna, was shot. The ambulance was delayed at the checkpoint by the soldiers, and she died in the hands of the paramedics. Many players said that after this, it was impossible to play the everyday plots written for their characters.

Since Marie had a Canadian passport, the media in Uralia as well as abroad could not ignore her death. The army spokesperson had to give a press conference in front of the university. He said Marie had tried to knife a soldier. Later, the story was changed into Marie shooting herself.

The newspaper headlines appearing on a "Media Wall" we provided for the game each had their own version of the events. The pen-and-paper Twitter posted on the same wall was filled with #marieisola hashtags and calls to protests in various cities around the world. A human rights organization decided to contact Marie's parents in Canada and offer them legal aid in case they wanted to start a lawsuit against the army.

When the soldiers first invaded the university building, there was panic. After the first arrests, a mode of resistance evolved. The characters formed a ring, linked arms and started humming. The soldiers had to physically wrest people away and carry them out of the building. The scene was very intense and moving, but it started repeating again and again. We were afraid that the players would get into a rut, so we decided there would be a break in interrogations until midnight. In the morning, the army would be forced to leave the premises because of international pressure.

At Night

Before going to bed, the players organized a night watch. We didn't want to make things too easy, so we opened the lock of a side door in a downstairs corridor, so the soldiers wouldn't need to use the main entrance to enter the building. Only after the game we found that the lock had already played an important role.

Earlier, a collaborator had been caught red-handed while unlocking it for the soldiers. The night raid was conducted around 01:00 at night. At the organizers' cabin, I was woken by a phone call. An international activist wanted to inform the Canadian embassy that his comrade had been arrested.

On Sunday morning, the soldiers marched away. A couple of hotheads tried to throw stones at them but were stopped by other students. The student council had decided to hold the elections despite the tragic events. The Social Democratic Liberation Party candidate Anna Heikkilä, who had taken an active role in organizing people to resist arrests, won. Students from the other parties, however, began organizing an armed uprising through social media. A list of approved targets was published in anonymous messages on Twitter and blogs. It included checkpoints, military vehicles, the separation wall, army bases, Uralian settlements, and taking UDF soldiers as hostages.

The game ended between 14:00 and 15:00 with the start of the conference. In the end, the Jordanian Minister was allowed on the campus, but virtually everybody participated in the protest against him. During the game, the players had invented a new mode of showing their disapproval. They turned their backs to the unwanted speaker, with protest signs and Marie Isola martyr posters attached to their backs. This was done also during the speech the Minister held.

Life

During the game, I saw the big events, and sometimes I got glimpses of smaller things. Yet, at some point on Saturday, I realized I no longer understood what the players were up to. They came to me to interact with the outside world but I had no clue about their reasons for it. The game had gotten its own life and started to fly. I hope that the player descriptions collected in this book will enlighten the reader on all the stories that happened in the framework of the game.



*Halat hisar organizer Mohamad Rabah gave a talk about larp in Palestine at Ropecon 2013.
Photo by Fatima AbdulKarim*



*Zeid Khalil in his role as an Al-Jazeera journalist reporting from the Occupied Finnish Territories.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*

Interview: Zeid Khalil, a Palestinian participant

How was it to play in the larp as a Palestinian? Did you have moments of bleed during the game?

For me the game was a mirror of what my life seemed like looking from far away. Sometimes when you're living in a unique situation, you stop perceiving things that are happening around you and to you as abnormal, you become part of a social blend that is neither natural nor normal. But when you step outside and watch your life as a third party, that is when you're shocked by the reality that you have been part of most of your life.

During the game I had flashbacks from 2002 when the Israeli Occupying Army invaded the city of Ramallah where I lived, and the number of sleepless nights I had because of the possibility of someone knocking on our door or even kicking it down. In certain moments I had "bleed-in", especially during the night while trying to sleep. I knew that soldiers will come at a certain point and the night won't pass peacefully, but I didn't know where, when or how and this kept me up most of the night.

How was it to play a journalist? What kind of experiences you used to make the character?

Personally I am very skeptical about the role of journalism in my region in general, and Palestine in particular. That is what I tried to reflect in my character. I played my part as a journalist who is good at his job, loved by his bosses, and would do anything to get a scoop. I felt that playing this kind of character would reflect the international media working in the Occupied Territories showing the biased views of

their governments and media networks rather than covering the real truth.

During the game I shifted my views due to the fact that for once I witnessed and felt how it feels to be under the hammer of occupation. This shift in position might have been a ray of hope within me to actually witness change in the international media towards showing pure truth rather than pre-set propaganda.

How do you feel about the way politics played out in the game?

During the game I felt like I was back in my university actually preparing for the student union elections. The discussions regarding political views and how each political party has its own proposal for reaching freedom... Some are more extreme than others but generally speaking they all had the one pure goal of freeing Finland.

What was for you the most interesting moment of the game?

Actually there were two moments that stood out from the game. The first was during the pre-game workshop scenes when I watched the soldiers evacuate a family from a house to prepare for demolishing it. The second was raising the flag of Finland while singing the national anthem. This moment of raising the flag has always been touching for me since I was a little boy. I guess it is because of my dream of proudly singing the national Palestinian anthem in an international event while the flag is being raised.



Friday night was dedicated to workshops in preparation of the larp. The participants played out scenes of ordinary life under occupation. Here, a Finn is collecting some of his belongings when his home is about to be demolished. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

FINNISH HISTORY

Kaisa Kangas

Most important changes to real life history:

- Since antiquity, a shamanistic religion called Ug-ricism has been practiced in Europe. Its followers saw themselves as descendants of the various Ug-ric tribes who inhabited the area between the river Ural and the Gulf of Finland thousands of years ago. From the Middle Ages till the end of the Second World War, Ugrics have been persecuted.
- As a part of the rise of nationalism in 1800's century the idea that the Ugrics constitute a nation and should have their own state was born. As a result, Ug-ric migration to the Grand Duchy of Finland, then a part of Russia, began.
- In 1917, during the Russian revolution, Estonia became independent. No armed conflict was involved. The country has been independent ever since. The relations between Estonia and Soviet Union were quite similar to those between Finland and Soviet Union in real life history.

- After Lenin, Trotsky became the head of the Soviet Union instead of Stalin. As a result, Soviet Union was somewhat more humane as a state than in real life history. For instance, the massive purges and pogroms conducted by Stalin did not happen. Also, Soviet policy during the Second World War was less expansionistic than in real life history.

High-Resolution World

To make sure the players had everything they needed to play and improvise during the larp, we included plenty of material about the alternate history of Occupied Finland, it's geography, politics and other details.

Our hope was that by including this material, the players would be able to explore the nuances of a realistic, long-term occupation.

- In 1950 the Ugrik state of Uralia was founded on the area of the former grand duchy of Finland. It contained all the land area of what now is Finland, except for the Åland Island which became a part of Sweden and the Eastern part of Southern Finland (including half of Helsinki), known as the South Coast, which became a part of Estonia.
- In 1970 Uralia occupied the Åland Islands and the South Coast. At the moment Uralia controls the whole area of Finland.
- 1995 began the Cairo Peace Process aiming to ending the occupation and establishing an independent Finnish state on the land area of Åland Islands and South Coast before the year 2000. However, the occupation still continues in 2013.

A History of Finland

Since ancient times, a shamanistic religion known as Ugricism has been practised in various European countries. Its followers are called Ugrics. During the Middle Ages, many Ugrics were burnt as witches for their shamanistic rituals. Many of them had to hide their religion and practise in secret, and some converted to Christianity. The discrimination continued for a long time. During some time periods and in some countries, the Ugrik people lived in their own segregated areas, and they were widely considered to be intrinsically different from normal Christian people.

Towards the end of the 1800's, when nationalist ideology was flourishing in Europe, the idea was born that Ugrics were not just a religious group but a people. A Ugrik nationalist movement called Uralism was born. This movement saw certain parts of Russia, especially the area of Grand Duchy of Finland, as their historical homeland. The Uralist movement started a mass migration to Finland, with the objective to eventually found a Ugrik state there. Ugrics coming from various countries spoke different languages, but as a part of the project, the Proto-Uralic language (*kantaurali* in Finnish) was revived to be a common language for the envisioned state. For a long time, the Proto-Uralic language had been used only in Ugrik religious rituals. The aims and actions of the Uralian movement caused conflict both with the Russian officials controlling the area and with the indigenous Finnish population.

The migration increased considerably before and during the Second World War, when Ugrics were persecuted in Nazi Germany much the same way the Roma were. Many Ugrics fought in the war on the Russian side against Germany. But when the war ended, Ugrik fighters came into conflict with Russia, as they wanted the area of the former grand duchy of Finland for their independent homeland.

In the year 1949, the recently founded United Nations proposed dividing Finland into two independent states – a Ugrik state and a Finnish state. In the partition plan, 56% of the land was allocated for the

Ugrik state. At that point, about one third of the inhabitants of the area were Ugrik and they owned about 6% of the land. Moreover, a considerable number of Finns were living on the land area allocated for the Ugrik state.

Among the Finns, the partition plan was considered unfair. When negotiations between the different parties were held, the Finnish representatives decided to boycott them. The partition plan failed, and the Uralians took the reins of history in their own hands, using the Finnish reaction as a justification. Incidents of violence on both sides escalated into a full-scale civil war.

The fighting happened mainly between the Ugrics and the Finns. The goal of the Uralist movement was to establish an independent Ugrik state and the goal of the Finns was to prevent that. The Russian Red Army tried to stay away from the conflict and slowly retreated from Finland. As part of the establishment of a state with a Ugrik majority, the Uralist forces forcibly transferred Finns from the areas under their control and razed hundreds of villages and towns to the ground. Many Finnish historical monuments – such as the impressive Turku Castle – were destroyed.

In July 1950, the Soviet Union announced that its troops had officially withdrawn from the area of the Grand Duchy of Finland and would no longer take part in the conflict. The Uralist movement then declared the independence of the Ugrik state of Uralia in Turku. A right to citizenship for all people of Ugrik religion, from anywhere in the world, was established in the basic law of the newly founded state.

The surrounding countries – Sweden, Norway and Estonia – declared war on the newly founded state, which was still in the process of implementing ethnic cleansing of Finns. An armistice agreement was reached next year. According to it, Northern Finland and the Western part of Southern Finland were left to the Uralians, whereas the Åland Islands came under Swedish control and the Eastern part of South Finland, known as the South Coast, fell under Estonian control. As a result of the fighting and the ethnic cleansing, large numbers of Finnish refugees had flooded into both areas. Helsinki was a special case: the armistice line ran through the center of Helsinki, with the eastern part of the city coming under Estonian rule and the western under Uralian rule.

In the beginning, Uralia maintained good relations with the Soviet Union, but soon the United States and Great Britain started to support the newly founded state wishing to build it into a fortress against Communism. Despite its small population, Uralia managed to build a very strong army and became one of the most significant powers in Northern Europe.

Those Finns who had managed to stay in Northern Finland and Western South Finland despite the fighting and the ethnic cleansing found themselves under Uralian military law. Eventually they managed to get

Uralian citizenship and the right to vote, though the military rule lasted until the end of the 1960's. They are still treated as second-class citizens and don't have all the same rights as Ugriic Uralians.

In 1970 Uralia attacked Estonia and Sweden and occupied the Åland Islands and the South Coast (including East Helsinki), thus gaining control of the whole territory of the former Grand Duchy of Finland. Since then, Finns living in these two territories have been under Uralian military rule. The Occupied Territories have been gradually integrated more and more tightly into Uralia. This has been achieved through constant building of settlements on the territories. These are civilian housing areas strictly restricted for Ugriics only. When they are built, Finnish homes are demolished to give way. Uralia controls all the natural resources in the area and makes use of them. Helsinki has become the capital of Uralia, with the western parts inhabited mostly by Ugriics and the eastern parts mostly by Finns. East Helsinki receives much inferior services than the western part, and Ugriics rarely venture there except when serving in the military or in the police.

In the 1980's a Finnish uprising, *kapina*, challenged the Uralian military rule. It mostly consisted of mass demonstrations, labour strikes and big groups of people throwing stones at the occupation army. Uralia tried to militarily suppress the movement, and killed about one thousand Finns. However, the *kapina* continued into the 90's. In 1992, partly as a result of the *kapina* and partly due to the power shift in Northern Europe caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, negotiations known as the Cairo Peace Process began.

As a result, an agreement known as Cairo Accords was signed in Egypt in 1995. It was agreed that the fate of the Occupied Territories would be settled before the year 2000. The goal of the peace process was to found an independent Finnish state on the occupied territories of the Åland Islands and the South Coast. Questions concerning the details, including the precise borders, were left to further negotiations. An organ called the Finnish Authority (FA) was founded to take care of local administration in the Finnish territories. A basic law was agreed upon, determining the powers and responsibilities of the Finnish Authority. The law stated that the FA should be ruled by a democratically elected parliament. The highest office would be that of a President. General elections within the Finnish territories would be conducted every four years.

The signing of the accords and the hope of an independent state caused great joy in the Occupied Finnish Territories. However, settlement building doubled as the peace negotiations went on and on. The agreement between the Finns and the Uralians was never reached, and military rule by Uralia continued. The Occupied Territories became more and more isolated from the rest of Finland. As years went by, Finns be-

came largely disappointed with the Finnish Authority. It seemed to many that it didn't do much more than help the occupiers with bureaucratic tasks.

In the year 2003, the disappointed Finns started a second *kapina*. Again Uralia tried to suppress it by violence. This time the Finns resorted to large-scale violence targeting civilians. The numbers of casualties on both sides got closer to equal (about 3000 Finns and 1000 Uralians were killed, whereas in the previous uprising the number of Finnish casualties was almost tenfold compared to Uralians).

The second *kapina* is considered to have ended in 2006. During that year, Uralia started building a wall in the South Coast to separate the Uralian Ugriics and the Finns living in South Coast from each other. The line of the wall did not follow the border of the Occupied Territories, but in effect annexed large parts of South Coast into Uralia. Many South Coast Finns were left on the Uralian side, and the wall cuts some Finnish villages into half. It greatly hinders the movement of the Finns. To get to the other side, you have to pass a checkpoint and may have to queue for hours or even a day at worst. Being harassed and humiliated by Uralian soldiers who run the checkpoint is common. Uralia tries to justify the wall using security reasons but the International Court of Justice has deemed the wall illegal and given a verdict that it should be torn down. The official point of view of the UN and the international community at large is that the military occupation maintained by Uralia should be ended and that the settlements built on the occupied Finnish territories are illegal. There is, however, currently no international pressure against Uralia, and the state enjoys many special treaties with the European Union.

The situation in the Occupied Finnish Territories is desperate. It is particularly bad on the Åland Islands, under maritime siege since 2006. According to a report recently published by the UN, the island will become uninhabitable before 2020 unless measures are taken to change the situation.



A Finnish player wearing the pirttanauha ribbon loosely around his neck. The pirttanauha, a traditional Finnish decoration, held political significance in the game. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

FINNISH CULTURE UNDER OCCUPATION

Kaisa Kangas

The rule of thumb for the game is that Finnish culture on the Occupied Finnish Territory of the South Coast is pretty much the same as it is in reality. Although a fundamentalist Christian regime controls the Åland Islands under the rule of the Party of Christ, people on the South Coast are generally fairly secular. Most of them belong to the Lutheran church but that doesn't necessarily mean that they practice religion in their daily lives. There are some Christian fundamentalists, but mostly they tend to keep to their own social groups.

It is acceptable for unmarried couples to live together and have children. Although homosexuality is loudly condemned by fundamentalist Christian groups, openly gay people are not unheard of. However, there are no openly gay politicians. The general attitude towards homosexuality is a bit like in the real

world 1980's Finland. Gender equality is on the same level as in the real world. There are many prominent female politicians, and women are even allowed into armed resistance groups.

A Captive Economy

Some things, however, are different. The Finnish territories are a captive economy. Uralia controls all movement of resources, people and goods. As a result, the Finnish market is very unattractive to investors and the economic situation is bad. In big population centres like the Helsinki area the greatest employers are the Finnish Authority government and various NGOs. Unemployment figures are high – 20% of the work force on South Coast and 47% on the Åland Islands. Of youth under 30 years, 43% are unemployed.

However, the South Coast numbers include some Finns who are illegally employed in Uralia (i.e. they have no work permits from the Uralian officials but work there nevertheless). On the South Coast, 38% of the inhabitants live under the poverty line, and on the Åland Islands the number is as high as 73%. Everybody has friends and relatives who are unemployed. Alcohol consumption is high, and alcoholism is a major problem in the Occupied Territories.

Finnish business success stories well known to us either never happened or didn't make it big. Nokia is still selling rubber boots. It is doing poorly as Uralian made boots cost less, even on the South Coast. Fazer was taken over by Uralians in 1950, and its products are now known around the world as delicious Uralian chocolate. The Arabia tableware factory exists but they are constantly struggling. Marimekko was never founded. There is no Rovio; Angry Birds was invented by a small company in Jordan. The South Coast forests are controlled by Uralia and closed for Finnish industrial use, so there is no Finnish paper industry. On the other hand, Uralian paper industry is thriving.

The economic situation has also affected universities. Although the University of Helsinki historically had abundant resources, most of these were lost to the Ugrics in the catastrophe of 1950. Many of the original university buildings were destroyed. As teachers and researchers fled, all activity at the university ceased. Later, the university was founded anew, but it is not the wealthy and thriving institution that we know. It is constantly short of money and its funding depends largely on development aid and foreign donors.

A Society of Prisoners

About 20% of the Finnish population has spent at least a week in prison at some point in their lives. Shorter arrests are also common. Everyone has friends and relatives who have either been to prison or are currently in prison. In prison, torture is routine. In the Occupied Finnish Territories it is well known that people who serve prison terms sometimes become collaborators. Thus, former inmates at times face suspicion from their fellow Finns after returning to society. This is something of a taboo subject in Finland, and such things are rarely said out loud about prisoners. Prisoners are seen as suffering for the whole of the Finnish people, and in public they are often respected and idealized.

Symbols of Resistance

Some cultural symbols also have a different meaning from the one we are used to. Uralians have tried to uproot Finnish culture and to replace it by their own. They have appropriated many things and branded them as genuinely Uralian. According to them, sauna is a traditional Uralian custom, salmiakki is Uralian candy and mämmi is a traditional Uralian food eaten at the Rites of Spring (note that most Uralians have lived on the area less than 50 years).

Many Uralians say that there is no such people as the "Finns". To them, Finnish language is just a strange dialect of Estonian, and they refer to the Finns just as Nordics. Thus, clinging to one's roots and one's cultural history has become very politicized, an act of resistance. For instance, traditional Finnish folk dance is a very cool and popular (and political) hobby among university students.

Inkle bands (pirtanauhut) (see [here](#) and [here](#)) have also become a symbol of nationalism and resistance, and they are often worn also by foreigners who wish to show their support and solidarity for the Finns.

Even some things outside the Finnish cultural sphere have a different significance than in the real world. For instance, the late British author J.R.R. Tolkien was a great admirer of Finnish culture and a vocal supporter of the Finnish cause. As a result, Tolkien is a controversial figure in Uralia and carries a specific nationalistic significance for the Finns. At the University of Helsinki, there is a department of Tolkien Studies at the faculty of humanities.

Literature, Film and Music

Since the game history is different from the real one, much of Finnish literature is also completely different. Väinö Linna never wrote *Tuntematon sotilas* (*The Unknown Soldier*). Hannu Salama is known for his realistic prose depicting life under occupation. He served in a Uralian prison and later used his experiences as material for fiction, after emigrating to Italy. Some of the more fantastic works are the same, however. For instance, Mika Waltari's historical novels and most novels by Leena Krohn exist in the game world. Tove Jansson emigrated to Sweden and wrote her famous Moomin books there. Some scholars read them as expressions of nostalgia for the lost homeland. If you wish to bring Finnish books to read in character during the game, use your own judgment.

The same thing holds for film, too. Aki Kaurismäki is known for his depictions of life under occupation and for his peculiar style, including dark and absurd humour. Pirjo Honkasalo has directed moving documentaries on settler violence and on suppression of nonviolent protests by the Uralian army.

Finnish popular music is pretty much as it is. Heavy metal is a big thing (but not the only thing by any means). Most metal bands have nationalist songs and resistance songs on their albums. Finland does not participate in the Eurovision song contest since it is not an independent country and not a member of EBU (Uralia is, however, and the contest is very popular among Uralians). The 2006 Eurovision victory of the Estonian band Lordi was a big thing for the Finns, since the lead singer has roots in Finland – his parents are refugees. If you wish to bring Finnish music to listen to in character during the game, use your own judgment.



GEOGRAPHY OF THE OCCUPIED FINNISH TERRITORIES

Kaisa Kangas

The Occupied Finnish Territories consist of two separate geographical entities (see the map), the South Coast and the Åland Islands. Due to restrictions of movement, Finns from the South Coast cannot go to Åland or vice versa. At the moment the areas are administrated separately. South Coast is ruled by the Social Democratic Liberation Party (SDLP) and Åland Islands by the Party of Christ. Helsinki (Helsingfors) serves as the administrative centre for the South Coast and Maarianhamina (Mariehamn) for Åland Islands.

The Uralian currency of oran is used as a means of exchange thorough the entire area of the Occupied Territories. One oran equals one euro.

Seat of administration: **Helsinki**

Currency: oran

Languages: Finnish, Swedish

Religion: various forms of Christianity are practiced, but majority of the people are fairly secular (particularly on the South Coast)

The South Coast

Helsinki serves as the administrative capital for the Occupied Finnish Territories. The FA government of-fices are located there as well as the delegates of various foreign countries. It also hosts UN premises and offices for various NGOs, both local and international. The University of Helsinki is the most well-known and respected university in the Occupied Territories.

The South Coast is divided into three areas, labeled A, B and C. Area C is under full Uralian control, and takes up about 65% of the South Coast. Area A is supposed to be under full Finnish Authority control (which doesn't stop Uralian officials and troops from coming in and constantly meddling with affairs), and Area B is supposed to be under joint Uralian and Finnish control. Most of Helsinki is in Area A.

The separation wall, checkpoints and closed military zones fragment the South Coast into small pieces. There are about 500 checkpoints in the South Coast, mostly in urban areas. The separation wall runs inside the South Coast, de facto annexing large areas into Uralia and sometimes cutting Finnish towns and villages into half.

Some of these half-cut villages have become famous for their nonviolent demonstrations against the wall. Such is the case of Iittala, where the wall prevents villagers from tending their crops and where weekly protests have been going on for ten years. The protests have become famous and many international activists take part in them. The Finnish director Pirjo Honkasalo has made a well-received documentary about the Iittala protests.

A journey from home to university that would take about 20 minutes without the wall and checkpoints now takes 2 hours, or longer if there is extra hassle. The Uralian settlers move much faster, since there are roads built exclusively for them. Finnish vehicles are not allowed on these roads.

On the Russian border, there is a wide buffer zone controlled completely by Uralia. Large areas on the South Coast with forests and lakes have been closed from the Finns. Officially, they are designated as military training grounds or natural reserves. The thriving Uralian paper industry uses the natural resources of the forests not kept as natural reserves. The South Coast is dotted by Uralian settlements. Most of these are areas where cheap housing is offered for Ugric Uralians. The lakesides are often filled by Uralian summer cottages – it is much cheaper to get one on South Coast than inside Uralia, say, in the Turku archipelago. Finns are not allowed to live in these areas, but they are often used as cheap labour for various industries that operate in the settlements. The settlements provide Uralian entrepreneurs with a means to avoid adhering to the strict Uralian labour laws, as they don't hold in the Occupied Territories. In addition to these economical settlers, there are ideological settlers who are usually religious fanatics. They think they have a sacred right to the land and that their duty is to move into areas where Finns live and drive them out to reclaim the land for Ugrics.

Tampere (Tammerfors) is the only Finnish city that has Uralian settlers living inside it. They are religious extremists who claim that ancient hiisi, Ugric holy groves, have been located in the Tampere area. As a result, there is a strong military presence in Tampere to

protect the settlers. The city is separated into two administrative areas, T1 and T2. Area T1 is fully controlled by the Uralian army. Area T2 is technically controlled by the Finnish Authority, but the Uralian army constantly operates there nonetheless. The movement of Finns is very restricted on area T1, and they are not allowed to walk on the Hämeenkatu Street (including the central market square) or on the banks of the Tammerkoski River running through the city.

Because of the strong settler and military presence, human rights violations happen constantly in Tampere. The settlers sometimes occupy Finnish homes and they frequently throw stones and rubbish on Finnish courtyards. It is not uncommon for them to attack people. When the situation gets tense, Tampere often sees massive riots by Finnish youngsters. The army quells these by shooting tear gas, rubber coated steel bullets and sometimes live bullets. Because of all this, there is a constant presence of international human rights activists from various organizations in Tampere. The activists mainly give protective presence (such as walking young children to school) and report human rights violations.

Åland Islands

Since the 2006 clashes, the islands have been under a tight maritime siege by Uralia, and they are now practically an open-air prison. Few people are let out, and even humanitarian aid workers have difficulty getting in. In the war of 1950, large numbers of Finnish refugees poured to the islands. As a result, the Åland Islands that used to be mostly Swedish speaking now have a population of mostly Finnish speaking Finns (especially as many Swedish speakers left for Sweden in the aftermath of the 1970 war).

There are about 1,5 million Finns living on the Åland Islands, and the conditions are crowded and unsanitary. There are shortages of food and clean drinking water, and blackouts are an ongoing problem. Many homes have no proper heating, and this leads to deaths every winter. The Uralian military often conducts short raids of a few hours into the Åland Islands, and every now and then there are more sustained attacks, with bombardment from the air and sea. Finnish fishing boats are routinely attacked by the Uralian navy.

POLITICAL FACTIONS

Kaisa Kangas

Social Democratic Liberation Party (SDLP, Sosialidemokraattinen vapauspuolue)

Of all the Finnish political parties, SDLP has the longest history. It is currently the largest political party in the Occupied Finnish Territories and rules the South Coast. The party was originally founded in the Grand Duchy of Finland under Russian rule, in 1899, and it has roots in socialist ideology. It was first named Finnish Labour Party (Suomen työväenpuolue) but the name was changed into Finnish Social Democratic Party (Suomen sosialidemokraattinen puolue) in 1903.

Its original agenda included 8-hour working day, minimum wage, compulsory education and prohibition of alcohol. During the 1950 war that led to founding of the state of Uralia and the expulsion of Finns in 1950, the existing Finnish political factions, including the Social Democratic Party, were driven into upheaval. However, some of the exiled party members living in Estonia re-founded the party in 1960 under the name Social Democratic Liberation Party. Leftist ideologies were still central to the party but it now set the liberation of the whole of Finland as its main goal.

When Uralia occupied the Åland Islands and the South Coast in 1970, SDLP assumed a central role in the resistance movement, taking part in armed resistance and planning guerilla attacks against the occupation forces. In the “Western” world SDLP was largely seen as a terrorist organization. The Soviet Union supported the party by providing both economic support and arms.

After the first Finnish kapina, the popular uprising in the 1980s, SDLP took part in the peace negotiations with Uralia. The party agreed to denounce violence and to recognize the state of Uralia. In 1995 the SDLP leaders signed the Cairo Accords together with Uralian leaders. The period of hope of an independent Finnish state began and SDLP's popularity reached a high point.



However, settlement building increased during the Cairo Accords period. We are living in the year 2013 and the occupation still continues. It seems that the peace process has failed. The Finnish Authority controlling the South Coast is led by the SDLP, but general elections have not been held since 2006. It is clear that at the moment Uralia wants SDLP to remain in control. Many of the current SDLP officials have been involved in corruption scandals.

The critics of SDLP say the party has betrayed both its socialist roots and its goal of liberating Finland. Many of the party officials seem to be more interested in power and money than the wellbeing of the poor. Some even say the SDLP has become complicit in the occupation, fulfilling whatever requests the Uralian officials make. However, its supporters see it as the only strong alternative to its main rival, the fundamentalist religious Party of Christ.

The Party of Christ (Kristuksen puolue)

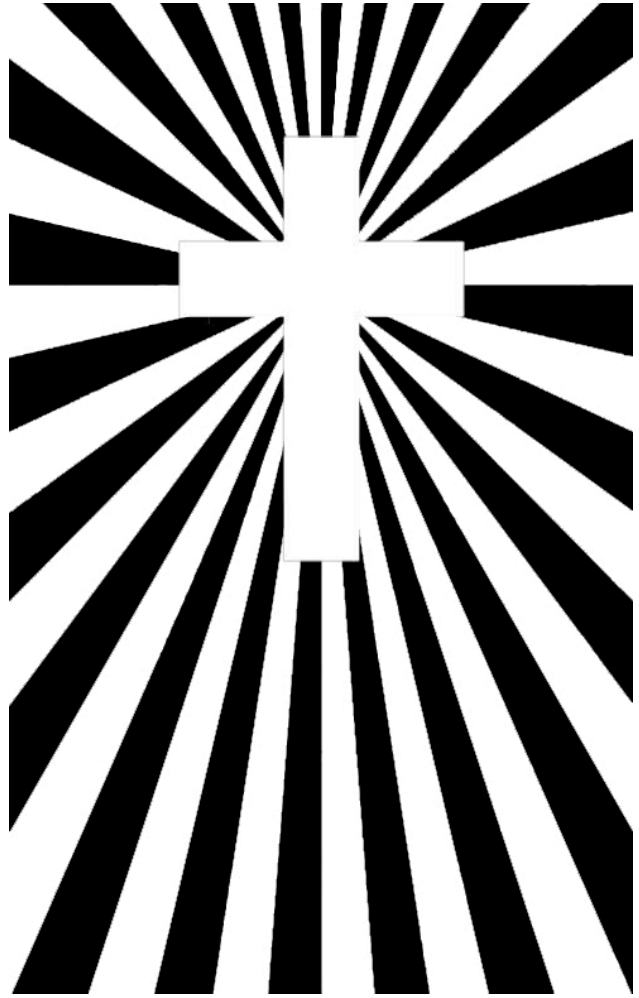
The Party of Christ is the second largest party in the Occupied Finnish territories and the main rival of SDLP. It controls the Occupied Finnish Territory of Åland Islands. In the near past, the militant wings of the two parties have been in armed conflict.

Since the 1800's, fundamentalist Christian religious sects such as Laestadianism (lestadiolaisuus) or Pentecostalism (helluntailaisuus) have had a strong presence in Finland. Originally the members of these sects preferred to lead a peaceful life in their own communities in the countryside, away from more secular (and from the sects' point of view – sinful) Finns. In the 1970s, however, Uralia and the US started supporting these religious groups both economically and militarily, in the hope that the conservative Christians would provide a counterforce for the radical, socialist SDLP funded by the Soviet Union. The plan backfired, and by the popular uprising of the 1980s, a new militant resistance faction called the Party of Christ had been born.

At the start the party assumed the position that the whole of Finland – not just the Åland Islands and the South Coast should be liberated. In its view the area belonged to the Finns and the state of Uralia should be destroyed. The party holds conservative political views – for instance it condemns homosexuality and premarital sex and is strongly opposed to abortion. Some of the most extremist members see watching television and the use of birth control as sinful acts that should be forbidden, but the general line of the party is more tolerant. The Party of Christ envisions a future state of Finland based on Christian values.

In the 2000s, when the Uralian army tried to suppress the second Finnish popular uprising with extreme violence, the Party of Christ decided to answer violence with violence and started a campaign of suicide bombings in Uralia aimed at civilian targets such as buses, restaurants and shopping malls. During that period settlement building slowed down. However, the attacks gave Uralia the justification to start building the separation wall and made it easier to picture Uralian violence on the Finns as war on terrorism. They also made it possible for the Uralians to see themselves – and be portrayed in the international media – as victims and the Finns as nothing but terrorists.

In 2006, The Party of Christ won the general elections as the Finnish people were tired of SDLP's corruption and inability to change the reality of the occupation. As a result, SDLP attempted a military takeover



with Uralian support. The clashes ended with SDLP victory in the South Coast and Party of Christ victory on the Åland Islands. After this, there have been no general elections on either territory. Municipal elections have been held on the South Coast but The Party of Christ has systematically boycotted them, which has led to SDLP victories. The voting rates have been extremely low.

Currently, the Party of Christ does not have much power on the SDLP dominated South Coast. Actions of the Party of Christ officials are carefully monitored by the SDLP, and active membership in the Party of Christ can lead into imprisonment by the Finnish Authority police controlled by the SDLP. However, the Party of Christ rules the Åland Islands and has started to establish a conservative Christian society there.

The Party of Christ still strongly resorts to violent resistance. There are constant clashes between its militant wing and the Uralian army. When the Åland Islands is bombed from air or Ålandese fishermen are shot from Uralian gunboats, the Party often responds with indiscriminate rocket attacks at Uralia. The “Western” world sees it as a terrorist organization, and in international media the image of the party is often used to portray all Finns as fundamentalist terrorists. However, the Party of Christ has expressed willingness to start peace negotiations with Uralia and suggested that it would be willing to give up its original vision of the liberation of the whole of Fin-

land and negotiate a two-state solution.

The considerable support for the Party of Christ in the Occupied Finnish Territories is often portrayed as a sign of religious extremism in the international media. However, many secular Finns also support the party, because they see its commitment to armed resistance as more effective than SDLP’s cooperation with the Uralian occupation forces, which they consider only further entrenches the occupation. And it is true that the actions of the militant wing of the party have been effective in the sense that the Uralian control of the Åland Islands has weakened.

Socialist Resistance Front (SRF, Sosialistinen vastarintaliike)

The Socialist Resistance Front is a small leftist party born during the first Finnish kapina when it became clear that the SDLP sought to engage in negotiations with Uralia. Some factions inside the party were strongly opposed to this decision, as they thought any negotiations would only benefit Uralia and legitimize everything the state had done so far. When the majority of the SDLP leadership turned out to support the negotiations, the others left SDLP and formed their own party – SRF.

In the beginning, SRF gained popular support, but when the Cairo Accords were signed and it seemed that the SDLP had succeeded and an independent Finnish state was only a matter of time, its support dropped. It has never managed to regain the popularity it enjoyed at its beginning, even though at some point it started to seem that the SRF leaders had been right about the peace process all along.

At the moment the SRF is a small party supported by leftists who are disappointed with the SDLP. It draws its base of support from left-wing intellectuals such as students and academics on the one hand and from Finnish working class people and trade union members on the other. The party emphasizes the socialist ideology that has been largely forgotten by its mother movement, SDLP.

SRF has activity both on the South Coast and in Åland, and it includes a militant wing. During the second kapina, SRF took part in armed resistance, including conducting attacks against civilians. At the moment there is a big moral dispute inside the party whether attacks like this are justified. Some of the party members think the situation is becoming so



desperate that the Finns should start a new uprising, including a campaign of terrorist attacks. Others only accept violence when it is targeted at the military, and there is also a faction that questions the effectiveness of armed resistance altogether and sees non-violent protests as the only way to go. Many younger members participate actively in the non-violent resistance movement.

The SRF is seen as a terrorist organization by Uralia and the US but many European left-wing parties work together with it.

Pan-Nordic Liberation Front (PNLF, Yhteispohjoismainen vapausrintama)

The Pan-Nordic Liberation Front (PNLF) is a relatively new political party that draws its ideology from Pan-Nordic nationalism rather than Finnish nationalism. Its view is that the Finnish question is only a part of the larger problem of American and Uralian colonialism and imperialism in North Europe and must be addressed as such. It cannot be solved unless all Nordic peoples unite and all Nordic countries are liberated, including the withdrawal of all US bases. Uralia has one of the strongest armies in the world, but if all the Nordic countries were to ally against it, this could change the power balance. The PNLF sees military help from the Nordic countries as only means to liberate Finland.

The support for the party is constantly growing, and it has many rising sister organizations in other Nordic countries. It also has a strengthening militant wing supported by the other Nordic countries. No wonder that Uralia sees the PNLF as a very dangerous movement and party activities have to be conducted largely in secret.



The Non-Violent Resistance Movement

This is a movement that is not tied to any political party. It organizes various events in which everybody is welcome. These include weekly demonstrations against the occupation and the separation wall, as well as various nonviolent (and often very creative) acts of resistance such as building tent villages, cafes or even art exhibitions at planned Uralian settlement sites.

The main idea behind the movement is that only international pressure and boycotts on Uralia can end the occupation. Therefore, one of its main goals is to get international attention. Many of the events include international activists and even Uralian dissidents who struggle to end the occupation. The protests often go unnoticed by international mainstream media, but in the internet age more and more people search for alternative sources for information. The event organizers are adept at using social media

and it seems that even the “Western” mainstream media cannot always ignore their blog posts and video clips. The revolution may not be televised but it will be tweeted.

Everybody is welcome at the protests, and members from all the different political factions have been seen participating in the activities of the movement. However, attendance of SRF and PNLF members is more common than that of SDLP or Party of Christ members. The SDLP sees the new movement as a potential challenge to its dominant position, and some of its officials fear that the movement might lead to the founding of a new political party. Some supporters of the Party of Christ feel uneasy about the liberal views of members of the nonviolent movement, and they are also suspicious of any movement that includes Uralians.

Logos by Dare Talvitie



A Palestinian player participating in the pre-game workshops, in the role of an occupation soldier.

Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

THE POLITICAL SITUATION

Kaisa Kangas

Since 1995, when the Cairo Accords were signed, a never-ending peace process has been going on between Uralia and the Finnish Authority. Sometimes negotiations are held, sometimes they are put on hold. The stated goal of the peace process is the so called two-state solution, where an independent Finnish state would be established on the Occupied Territories of South Coast and the Åland Islands. In the beginning, people were generally hopeful about the peace process, but now most Finns see it as futile exercise, if not downright harmful.

The process seems to be going nowhere and as long as it has lasted, Uralia has continued to take land by building new settlements. Future state borders have been discussed over and over again, and it seems that whatever concessions the Finnish Authority makes,

the Uralian negotiators are never satisfied with them. For instance, Uralia insists on keeping all the major settlement blocks and an area on the Russian border that would serve as a military buffer zone.

One of the issues in the negotiations has been the right to return for the Finnish refugees. In the ethnic cleansings of 1950, about 700,000 – 800,000 Finns where expelled from their homes on the area that now is Uralia. Some of them ended up living in the South Coast or the Åland Islands, others went abroad. At the moment, there are about 3-5 million Finns living as refugees abroad. According to the UN declaration of human rights, refugees have the right to return to their original homes, and the FA has been officially insisting on this right. However, as returning would mean returning to areas that are now inside the offi-

cial state borders of Uralia, it seems impossible for the Uralian negotiators to agree to this, since they want to keep an Ugrik majority in their state. A couple of years ago, WikiLeaks released secret documents indicating that the FA was actually willing to give up the refugees' right to return in exchange of the establishment of an independent state. This plummeted the support for the FA government on the South Coast.

When the peace process began, jointly coordinated coexistence and peace groups where Finns and Uralians could meet each other became popular. Many Finns trusted that the Uralians participating in these groups genuinely wanted to end the occupation. However, it turned out to be a big disappointment as most of these people still served in the army reserves and other institutions maintaining the occupation. It seems that in the end, the ongoing occupation was a normal situation for them and that eventually they just wanted the status quo to continue but everybody to be happy about it.

At the moment participating in such meetings or cooperating with Uralians who don't genuinely strive to end occupation is largely seen as normalization by even the Finns who believe in nonviolent activism. It is widely thought that such cooperation only makes the Uralians think of the occupation as something normal that can go on forever. An increasing number Finns go so far that they refuse to cooperate even with those few Uralian activists who genuinely work against the occupation. Many see any cooperation with Uralians, regardless of their political views, as normalization. Some even deny the existence of the State of Uralia. They simply don't recognize it, refuse to use the name "Uralia" and they refer to the whole land area as Finland.

In the Cairo Accords, a two-state solution was suggested, and it is supported by the UN, Arab League (AL), EU and most of the international community. The idea also has wide support among the Finns. However, while many Uralians would support an entity called the Finnish state, few would agree to withdraw from all of the settlements, and most would like Uralia to remain in control of the lives of the Finns. In proposals of the Uralian government, large parts of the South Coast would remain under Uralian control, including many of the settlements and all of the borders, coastlines, sea routes and airspace. The Uralians would be willing to grant Finns autonomy to manage their own affairs in a demilitarized entity, whereas Finns want full independence.

There are also many Finns who refuse to recognize the State of Uralia and who wish to see Finland as the whole area of the historical Grand Duchy of Finland. Many families originate from areas that are now inside Uralia. People who came from places like Turku or Oulu (or whose parents or grandparents came from there) see these cities as their homes and insist on their right to go back. Uralia is a colonial project,

and there are many who think that in the colonial situation, the only solution is for the colonizers to leave, as the French left Algeria. This idea is, however, often criticized as unrealistic.

Some say that the two-state solution has been long gone. Uralian settlement building has fragmented the South Coast into small pieces, and there is not much left of what was supposed to become the Finnish state. The whole area is controlled by Uralia, and there are people who say it is in effect a one state, an apartheid state. There are some voices for a single democratic state with equal rights for Finns and Uralians alike, with one person, one vote. This kind of solution would resemble ending the apartheid in South Africa, and a way towards it could be a struggle for civil rights for the Finns from Occupied Territories joining together with those Finns who have Uralian citizenship. However, many Finns don't like the idea of living in the same state with Uralians, and this kind of solution would mean the death for any hopes of an independent state. It would be a strong blow for the nationalistic feelings of the Finns. Many people, both Finns and Uralians, also feel that even if a one-state solution would be desirable in principle, it will never be realized and that aiming for it would jeopardize achieving realistic goals, like the two-state solution.

At the moment, discussions on solutions seem very theoretical to most people. An end for the occupation seems to be far away, and many have lost hope. The peace process seems to lead nowhere. Armed resistance is largely futile, since Uralia is one of the strongest military powers in the world. Nonviolent resistance rarely gets covered by international media. The surrounding Nordic countries have often stated their solidarity but have rarely done anything to help. All the Nordic leaders do is talk. The UN is helpless as the US supports Uralia and vetoes all Security Council resolutions against the Ugrik State.

Arab League diplomats and bureaucrats generally recognize the occupation as illegal, but the AL still continues special trade and cooperation agreements with Uralia. It tries to balance the situation by also maintaining diplomatic ties with the FA government and pouring development aid into the Occupied Finnish Territories. However, critical voices say that the development money has not helped to create a viable economy, but a situation of dependency. Some of the money goes into redundant infrastructure, as the AL is unwilling to politically challenge Uralian rule over the Occupied Territories. For example, if movement to a school or a hospital is restricted by the separation wall or checkpoints, the aid money may be used to build a new school or hospital on the other side, instead of helping to end these restrictions to movement. According to critics, the development aid money thus only helps to maintain the occupation. Moreover, even AL-funded development projects are often destroyed and hindered by the Uralian army.



A human rights activist confronts soldiers at the pre-game workshops. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Kaisa Kangas

The UN and various NGOs have reported on the following human rights violations and breaches of international law in the Occupied Territories.

Settler Violence

Most of the Uralian settlers are in the occupied territories for cheap housing (and they don't necessarily even know they are on occupied territory – to them it's Uralia). In addition to these economical settlers, there are, however, ideological settlers who are usually religious fanatics. They think they have a sacred right to the land and their duty is to move into areas where Finns live and drive them out to reclaim the land for Ugrics.

For example, the ideological settlers beat up preg-

nant women to cause miscarriage or speed up when they see Finnish schoolchildren cross the road in order to drive over them. They sometimes throw rubbish and sewage on market places and on people's yards, and they teach their kids to attack Finnish children. Sometimes they come and occupy Finnish homes, doing everything to drive the original inhabitants away.

The Uralian army is technically responsible for keeping the order in the territories. However, the army is there to protect the settlers, and there is not much the soldiers can do to restrain the settlers, even if they would like to. While offences by Finns are handled in military courts according to military regulations, settlers are convicted in civil courts in ac-

cordance with Uralian civil law. Many of the soldiers serving in the territories are in good terms with the settlers. A Finn complaining to the soldiers about settler behavior will usually not achieve anything, and in the worst case will be beaten up and arrested. The settlers seldom suffer any legal consequences for their actions.

According to international law, an occupying power may not move its civilian population into territories under occupation. Hence, the settlements are illegal under international law.

Home Demolitions

During the year 2012, about 500 residential buildings were demolished by the Uralian army in area C of the South Coast. Often the army comes in the middle of the night, gives the family no more than 15 minutes to leave the house and then bulldozes it, often with some or all of the family's belongings still inside. If the family resists, they are beaten up or arrested. Often the family ends up living with relatives or in tents provided by the UN or NGOs. A home demolition is a very traumatic experience, especially for children.

The reason for the house demolitions are administrative. On area C, building permits are very rarely given to Finns (yet Ugrics easily get building permits), and houses without building permits get a demolition order. Most Finnish houses on area C have a demolition order, and you never know whether the army comes next year or after the next sunset. They might never come to some of the houses, but the Finns in area C live in constant fear and anxiety.

The political motive behind home demolitions is to drive Finns away from the area C, to make space for new settlements and thus to make the Finnish residential areas in area C smaller and smaller. The policy is even officially called Ugricization by the Uralian authorities.

Under international law, it is illegal for an occupying power to destroy civilian structures on the area occupied unless there is a military necessity.

Imprisonment

Finns are often arrested and imprisoned by the army with no reason at all or on dubious evidence, which may be obtained by torture. Sometimes people are detained for months before pressing charges – and sometimes they are released with no charges after those months. Finnish prisoners are often taken to prison in Uralia. It is against international law for an occupied power to keep civilians from the area occupied in prisons within its own state borders.

In the occupied territories, there are two justice systems in use. Finns are under military rule, while the Uralian settlers are under normal Uralian law. The military law allows keeping people detained for long periods without trial, and it allows arresting and sentencing children as young as 12 years.

About 500-700 Finnish children are arrested every year, and arresting children is often used as a means to pressure parents into collaboration. The children are usually arrested between midnight and 5 AM from their homes. They are usually tortured or threatened to press a confession (the confession rate at military courts is 99,7%). The children are then taken to Uralian prisons, where the parents don't usually have a chance to visit them. Technically, it is possible for the parents to get a permit to enter Uralia in order to visit a child in prison, but often the bureaucratic process to get the permit lasts longer than the prison term.

The most usual reason for children to be detained or sentenced is throwing stones. According to the military law, a child might get a maximum sentence of 10 years for throwing stones at the separation wall, or 20 years for throwing stones at moving vehicles. In practice, the sentences are shorter, usually from 2 to 10 months.

Torture

According to Finnish human rights organizations, more than 90% of the Finnish prisoners are at some point tortured in Uralian prisons or elsewhere. According to Uralian human rights organizations, the number is a little bit lower, 85%. Technically, the Uralian military court has outlawed torture but it is permitted in special cases. The rules allow "moderate torture" in order to get confessions from Finns. Often psychological torture, such as prolonged periods of isolation, is used instead of physical torture but its mental consequences are usually more severe than in the case of physical torture.

Random Harassment and Violence by Soldiers

Harassment of the Finns by Uralian soldiers happens at checkpoints and during home searches and arrests. For instance, soldiers searching Finnish homes sometimes humiliate the parents in front of the children. Random beatings are also common. Technically, all of this is against army regulations, but soldiers rarely get consequences for their actions, and being a bit "crazy" with the Nordics is sometimes even encouraged by the officers.

The soldiers serving in the occupied territories are usually very young (18-21 years) and under strong peer pressure. A particularly strong pressure to "prove themselves" is laid on female soldiers and members of ethnic minorities. The testimonies of former soldiers indicate that an important reason for the harassment is boredom. There is not much to do while on duty in the territories, so you end up having a bit of fun by tormenting the Finns living there.

Obstacles to Movement

There are about 500 checkpoints inside urban areas in the South Coast. The separation wall runs inside South Coast, de facto annexing large areas into Uralia and sometimes cutting Finnish towns and villages into half. A journey from home to university that would take about 20 minutes without the wall and checkpoints now takes 2 hours, and longer if there is extra hassle. The Uralian settlers move much faster, since there are roads built exclusively for them. Finnish vehicles are not allowed on these roads.

Large areas on the South Coast containing forests have been closed from the Finns. Officially, they are designated as military training grounds or natural reserves. However, only a small percentage of the military areas are actually used for training, and if the settlements need to expand into the nature reserves, they will be re-zoned as habitable areas, for use of the settlements. The thriving Uralian paper industry uses the natural resources of the forests not designated as natural reserves – and here again, creative re-zoning to fit the needs of industry is not unheard of.

The wall, the checkpoints and closed military zones fragment the Occupied Finnish Territories into small pieces. Many children have to cross a checkpoint on their way to school (and are sometimes subjected to humiliating searches or violence there). For many Finns it is impossible to get to a hospital without crossing a checkpoint, and people have died because they didn't get to medical care quick enough when an ambulance was delayed and searched at a checkpoint. Sometimes pregnant women end up giving birth at the checkpoint while waiting to get through. In some cases this has led to the death of both mother and infant.

Restrictions on Freedom of Speech

Demonstrations in the Occupied Finnish Territories are not allowed, and even peaceful demonstrations are routinely suppressed. The Uralian army frequently arrests demonstrators and uses teargas, sound bombs and skunk water (a foul-smelling liquid) to disperse demonstrations. Rubber coated steel bullets are often shot at demonstrators, and sometimes live ammunition is used as well. Many demonstrators have been permanently injured or killed. Even those leaders only involved in non-violent resistance are sometimes imprisoned for long periods. In some cases, even notable Finnish cultural personae have been imprisoned for writings or artworks that challenge the occupation. For instance, the famous Finnish author Hannu Salama, who wrote some keen depictions of life under occupation, served a prison term in Uralia before emigrating to Italy.

It is not only the Uralian army that restricts the

freedom of opinion in the occupied territories. On the South Coast, the Finnish Authority police has been responsible for beating and sometimes imprisoning people who demonstrate against the FA. In the religious regime established by Party of Christ on Åland Islands criticism of the rulers is not tolerated either. And people who collaborate with the occupation can face ugly and violent deaths.

Human Rights Activism on the South Coast

In addition to many Finnish and some Uralian NGOs working on human rights, many international activists come to the South Coast. The activists go to checkpoints, areas with aggressive settlers and to demonstrations to observe and document what is going on. Then, they report what they have witnessed and post their videos, pictures and stories on the internet.

In most cases, the mere presence of internationals makes the army and the settlers to behave in a somewhat more civilized manner. Thus, one of the most important things the activists do is to give protective presence. Sometimes they live together with Finns who are under threat of settler attacks. There are various different international organizations that send activists to the occupied territories. Some of them require them not to participate in activities such as demonstrations, only document and report. Other organizations coordinate together with Finns, and their activists take part in non-violent resistance activities such as demonstrations and rebuilding demolished houses.

Uralia tries not to let international activists in, so they have to pose as tourists on the border. Security checks on Turku International Airport are meticulous and sometimes people are interrogated for hours before entering the country, or when leaving. Those who are found to be activists are detained, sent back home on the next plane and often banned from entering Uralia (and thus the Occupied Finnish Territories) again. Sometimes activists are arrested on the Occupied Territories and then deported. However, internationals are treated on different standards than the Finns, so they rarely experience violence from Uralian officers.

In addition to the international activists, there is also a tiny but loud Uralian radical left that is opposed to the occupation on principle. Many of them either refuse military service despite the prison sentence it means or manage to avoid it using medical reasons and such. They often come to the Occupied Territories to take part in demonstrations. These principled activists are generally seen as fools and traitors in Uralian society. Uralian activists do not face the same risks as the Finns – if arrested, they are typically re-



An interrogation at the airport border control, played in the pre-game workshops. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

leased within a day or two, and they are rarely beaten by the soldiers, though it is not unheard of. Uralian activists also often face suspicion from the Finns.

In addition to the radical left, there are various different human rights and peace and coexistence groups in Uralia, many of them quite mainstream. Most of them operate on the principle that there is a conflict with two equal sides – the Uralians and the Finns, and if the people only learned to know each other on a personal level, somehow a solution would be found. The groups organize gatherings where Finns and Uralians can meet each other. Some

of these initiatives are supported by foreign governments. As the term “occupation” is controversial in Uralia and rarely used, most of these groups avoid using it (or ban discussing politics at all). Many of their members still serve in the army reserves. As many years of these meetings have failed to produce any result, many Finns in the occupied territories think that attending such only serves to make Uralians and foreign governments feel good about the situation, while failing to challenge the occupation.



A Finn attempts to negotiate with Uralian soldiers in a workshop scene. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

THE SITUATION IN NORTHERN EUROPE

Kaisa Kangas

Northern Europe is an unstable area with constant conflict and unrest. The human rights situation and level of democracy is bad in almost all countries. Since the Cold War, the area has been a political playground for the United States and Russia, with many of the local dictators supported by either country.

As a result of the conflicts on the area of Finland and the policies of Uralia, there are hundreds of thousands of Finnish refugees living in the surrounding countries, in particular Sweden. Some of them have become integrated into society, whereas others have been living in refugee camps for two or three generations. There are also Finnish refugees in many other countries in the world, and some Finns are internal refugees within the Occupied Finnish Territories or

within Uralia itself, with their families prevented from returning to their original homes.

The Northern European states are not members in the European Union, which consists of the stable and democratic countries of Central and Southern Europe. The Middle East is a calm and peaceful area known for its involvement in human rights, with welfare states and a good level of social security.

Sweden

Sweden hosts a big population of Finnish refugees from 1950, 1970 and later. It is sometimes estimated that almost half of the population has its roots in Finland. Indeed, there are many wholly Finnish speaking suburbia around Stockholm, the capital city of Sweden. The Åland Islands were controlled by Sweden between 1950 and 1970, but the country has denounced any claims to the territory in an agreement stating that the islands belong to the Finns.

Sweden is a monarchy ruled by the autocratic Bernadotte Dynasty. The current King Karl Erik has close ties with the United States, and Sweden has a peace agreement with Uralia. However, the sentiment of Swedish people is by and large anti-Uralian and pro-Finnish. The dynasty has previously ruled the people with an iron fist, but the current king Karl Erik is widely seen as a fool and often made fun of by the general public. Lately, there have been demonstrations against the regime in Sweden, and a pro-democracy movement is growing.

Estonia

Estonia has been an independent state since the Russian revolution in 1917, and it has never been occupied by the Soviet Union. However, a large part of Estonia was occupied by Uralia from the 1980's to the early 2000s. The country is still technically at war with Uralia. An armistice agreement has been in force since 2007, but hostilities could escalate at any time. Estonian citizens are not allowed to travel to Uralia, and Uralian citizens are not allowed into Estonia. Russia supports some of the anti-Uralian militant factions in Estonia with arms and money. Estonia is technically a democracy, yet the system has many flaws. Estonia has officially denounced any claims to the territory of South Coast that it controlled in the time period between 1950 and 1970. The Estonian position is that the territory belongs to the Finns.

Norway

Norway is a wealthy country, thanks to its oil reserves. However, the wealth is very unevenly distributed and many Norwegians live under the poverty line. Norway co-operates militarily with the United States and there are US military bases on Norwegian soil. Norway has a peace agreement with Uralia.

The population, however, sympathizes at large more with the Finns than with Americans and Uralians. The Norwegian president is an autocratic ruler backed by the United States. Recently there have been large scale demonstrations against him, demanding democracy. The protests have been violently suppressed by the Norwegian army.

Denmark

Denmark is a Russian backed dictatorship. The country is technically at war with Uralia, but an armistice agreement is currently at force. Danish citizens are not allowed to travel to Uralia, and Uralian citizens are not allowed into Denmark.

There is a growing movement for democracy inside Denmark, yet with the iron rule of King Christian, the struggle will be hard.

Russia

Russia is currently ruled by the duma and President Anatoly Salnikov. The country has been more humane and democratic than in the real world, both during Soviet and post-Soviet times. Finnish resistance movements originally had a Socialist ideology and were partially funded by the Soviet Union. As a result, Russians are usually seen as friends in Finland. However, Russia has always avoided direct war with Uralia although it supports some of the countries in the area opposed to the United States and Uralia. Russia has normal diplomatic ties with Uralia although the relations are sometimes tense. The Finns have realized long ago that no real help is to be expected from the neighboring superpower.

Instruction for play: In in-game conversations on politics and the North European power balance, it might be best to leave Russia out of the discussion.



*The workshops scenes used minimal scenography. The raised stage represented the inside of a house.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



Palestinian participants played journalists, human rights workers and other visitors from the affluent and democratic Arab countries. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

THE ARAB WORLD

Kaisa Kangas

In the game world, Northern Europe is in turmoil, but Southern and Central Europe and Great Britain are pretty much as they are in the real world. These countries form the European Union (North European countries are not members) have special trade agreements with Uralia. United States is the kind of big power player as it is in the real world and a strong supporter of Uralia. The US is constantly involved in military operations in Northern Europe and in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Arab League

What is different from the real world, however, is the role of the Arab League. The Arab countries are wealthy and peaceful first-world countries that are seen as desirable places to live in even more so than the Central European countries. They are known for their high level of democracy and their commitment to human rights. In the game world, the Arab League (AL) is quite similar to the real world EU. It has its directives that are to be applied in each member state and a parliament consisting of representatives from the different countries.

The Arab League often juxtaposes itself with the US in the moral discourse. It sees itself as a beacon of

human rights and diplomacy that might eventually have potential to counter the imperialist US policies. The AL directives and guidelines emphasize the importance of human rights and state that they should be taken into consideration when making decisions on foreign policy and trade.

Despite the rosy rhetoric, these guidelines are not usually put into practice when the alternative is economic gain. One example is the case of Uralia. The occupation is officially condemned by the AL, and the AL official policy is that the Occupied Territories are not a part of Uralia. However, the AL holds special trade agreements with Uralia. All sorts of special co-operation programs exist in the fields of science, technology and academics in general.

Some of the AL countries also engage in arms trade with Uralia. The recent case of Jordan is very illustrative of this. Jordan recently made an agreement to buy Uralian drones. This caused a strong reaction in Jordanian civil society. The legal experts working for NGOs concentrating on arms trade said that any agreement with Uralia would be against the AL official instructions.

When asked for a comment for the national press, the foreign minister of Jordan, known for her background in human rights work, said that while selling arms to Uralia would be against the AL instructions, the guidelines did not apply to purchasing. She also stated that decisions on the arms trade were not her responsibility, but made in the Ministry of Defence. The Minister of Defence, on the other hand, said that matters on arms trade are decided in the Foreign Ministry. The only one ready with a comment was the Minister of Culture, Shafeeq Ahmad Al-Najati. He said that Uralia has an excellent track record in human rights and that activists should rather concentrate their attention on Denmark.

The Middle Eastern Model

In many respects, the Middle East countries in the game world are like Nordic countries in the real world. Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq are known for their high level of social welfare and high equality. Lebanon was one of the first countries in the world to give women the right to vote and pose themselves as candidates in parliamentary elections. Egypt has often been praised for its efforts in the fields of international law and human rights. The level of education is generally high, and Iraq is known around the world for the high quality of teaching in primary schools and top scores on the PISA tests. In all of these countries, the environment is respected – nature is clean and historical monuments are meticulously taken care of to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the area.

These countries are known for extensive welfare benefits, narrow income gaps, free education, free daycare for all children, and good public healthcare. This type of welfare system is often called the Mid-

dle-Eastern model. In Egypt, it is sometimes called the Egyptian model, but this is usually sneered at in other Middle Eastern countries. To sustain the welfare system, taxes are quite high. Those on the political right say this stagnates the economy, yet there seems to be plenty of business innovations coming from the Middle East. Jordan is known for information and communications technology, and the very popular digital game Angry Birds was invented by a small Jordanian company.

The Arab countries are fairly secular. Although most of their inhabitants are technically Muslims, the religion does not affect their daily lives much. In recent years, there are more and more people who see themselves as mainly secular and not adhering to any religion. The Conservatives sometimes attribute the success of the Middle Eastern, and more generally, Arab countries to Islam. They claim that as a religion, Islam is concentrated on peace and justice and allows for moderate readings of the scriptures more easily than, say, Christianity.

These same people often blame Christianity as the cause for the turmoil in Northern Europe. Political Christianity is widely discussed in the media and featured much more than the more moderate variants of the religion. In the mainstream media view, Christianity is often connected to fundamentalism and radical movements. Those on the political right sometimes go as far as saying things like “All Christians might not be terrorists, but all terrorists seem to be Christians.” This is seen as blatant racism in more liberal circles.

World Media

Since journalists play an important role in the game, something needs to be said about the media houses they work for.

BBC is pretty much as it is in the real world. Pro-Finnish activists see it as very biased and tending to take the Uralian side in its coverage. The BBC often sends journalists with relatives in Uralia to act as correspondents on the area. This is justified by the argument that it helps to connect the journalists to the local scene.

Al Jazeera, on the other hand, while seen largely as an alternative news source by real-world Europeans, is more of a mainstream network in the game world. In its coverage of Uralia and Finland, Al Jazeera usually takes a “neutral” position, and while it sometimes covers Uralian human rights violations, it never fails to provide a statement also from the Uralian officials. It is, however, seen as less biased than the BBC by supporters of the Finnish cause.



*Trine Lise Lindahl played a Uralian activist, here watching the death of Marie Isola.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*

PRIVILEGE OF SAFETY

Trine Lise Lindahl

Oropti Vuo. That's a strange name, isn't it? At first I thought it was Finnish sounding, but after telling it to several Finns they also wondered at how strange they thought that name was. I guess it is Ugric. Traditional or not, I have no idea, as the Ugric people were reinvented for this larp, playing the part of the once oppressed people who now had become the oppressors.

Oropti was Uralian, but had chosen to not go along with what most of her countryfolk were doing, directly or indirectly participating in the oppression of the Finnish people to be able to maintain their own nation's existence. She had refused to serve in the military and served in prison for that. Since her release,

she had been working as an activist in the Occupied Finnish territories, in the non-violent organization Solidarity Movement for Finland and the Uralian-Finnish organization Women Against the Wall.

Feeling of Threat

I felt a lot in this larp, feelings I would not have experienced if I had not taken on the role of Oropti, but also feelings that mediated a lot of my own feelings of guilt for not doing more and my thoughts on how you sometimes have to place yourself in a position where you are not safe, because there are situations where you need to put yourself on the line to make

change happen. One of the feelings that I have traveling to other parts of the world, meeting people who live under conditions much harsher than my own is the enormous gratitude of knowing that I can go home and live a safe life with loads of opportunities open to me. My paths of actions are of course also limited, but not at all to the same degree. Particularly I am happy to live in a society where I have a high degree of personal safety.

Oropti, on the other hand, did not live in that sort of society. Being Uralian she could have chosen not to engage in the Finnish cause. She could have lived a semi-normal life in Turku, travelling abroad when she felt like it, with quite a high level of prosperity and social security. But she could also remember what it was like to take the bus to school every day during the second Kapina, not knowing if this bus would be the next one to be blown up. She also knew that her grandparents, who were good Norwegian Ugrić citizens, had had to move from their home country during the fifties when the anti-Ugrić sentiments in the Nordic countries made it too threatening to live there. She knew that if there came a new Kapina, supported by a Pan-Nordic front and if this war actually broke down the Uralian state, there wouldn't really be anywhere to go.

These thoughts and feelings made my experience at *Halat Hisar* one of never really feeling safe. Being in the second student election panel where most of the candidates proposed violent resistance felt devastating. Oropti's hopes of a non-violent solution in the long run seemed even more utopian than they had felt before.

In addition I got a feeling of what it can feel like to be seen as a traitor amongst your own people. Several of the soldiers tried to intimidate me and told me I brought shame to my country. This was strengthened by a personal grudge. Two of the soldiers were old classmates of Oropti's. One of them had always been an asshole, and in a discussion at the guard post I managed to piss him off. He responded by threatening me, saying I would never be safe in Turku again. These threats led to me not feeling safe during the raids that followed. I knew that in theory Oropti, as a Uralian Ugrić citizen, was the person that was most safe from the soldiers' violence. But in practice I had a feeling that if this soldier would have done something to her, the others would probably have covered it up. This seeped into my dreams that night. While people were woken up and taken out to interrogation I kept floating in and out of sleep, dreaming of my old classmates morphing between their own selves and the orcs of the *Lord of the Rings* movies.

Doing the Right Thing

Amongst the Finns I was afraid of being made the scapegoat, particularly with all the emotions that were floating around after Marie Isola's death. I was very happy I had the international activists around me.

At the same time I felt some mild bitterness towards the other activists. I knew they would go home, and I knew that with time they might stop being active in the Finnish cause, moving on with their lives, getting involved in other causes. They had chosen to get involved, and I was grateful for that, but I knew that they could just as easily choose to not keep involved. They could leave, while the Finns were left to live under bad circumstances. I guess part of this grudge comes from my own guilty feelings of doing just that.

Oropti had a lot of feelings of guilt. Even if she had done a lot, she still felt she had not done enough and that maybe she was not doing the most productive actions to end the occupation. During the larp she decided to go back to Uralia and work to change popular opinion amongst the Uralians. She hoped that in this way she could have a greater impact in the long run.

During the larp I was a bit surprised that I did not feel any hostility at all from the Finns. Even with subdued play I had expected at least some hostile glances and resistance to talk to me, but I felt I could move about wherever I wanted, talking to whomever, and that my fear of being targeted for being Uralian were groundless. After the larp I talked to some people who had just decided not to trust me, but that didn't give me any opportunities for play. I don't know if this lack of hostility derived from too much going on in the larp or if there just was no reason to be hostile to a person who, despite her background, was doing "the right thing".

Uralia is a land like no other, combining advanced technology with incredible natural wonders. The Lapland summer allows you to experience the magical atmosphere of the midnight sun. Winters are full of snow, and you will see the tremendous Arctic Lights. You may also visit the one and only Santa Claus at Rovaniemi. A hot sauna and a dip into an icy lake afterwards is something that you must experience at least once in your life. Uralia boasts the cleanest nature in the world.



Visit Uralia!

"The Land of a Thousand Lakes"

Most visitors come for the unspoiled forests and thousands of lakes and islands, but don't expect Uralia to be only about the nature. Turku is one of the most interesting cultural centres in Europe. The city offers a myriad of museums, art galleries and beautiful architecture. Don't forget to visit the Fazer factory and have a taste of some of the most delicious chocolates in the world!

Capital: Turku

Currency: Oran

Language: the official language is Uralic, yet Uralia is a truly multicultural society with communities speaking English, Russian, Spanish, Swedish and Estonian

Religion: Ugricism



*This flyer was sent to the players along with their characters and other pre-game material.
Copy: Kaisa Kangas, AD: Juhana Pettersson. Photos by Juhana Pettersson and Reeta Kangas*



On Saturday morning before the game started, we held a practise demonstration to get the participants used to a culture of protest. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

HISTORY OF THE NORDIC-URALIAN CONFLICT

Kaisa Kangas

During the period spanning from c.a. 1500 BCE until 1100 CE various Ugric tribes inhabited and ruled the area that now is Uralia (including the South Coast). This is strongly supported by archaeological evidence and historical sources. The tribes spoke proto-Uralic as their common language and were governed by shaman lords in a centralized system of rule. The Ugric folk is mentioned for instance in the book *Germania* by the Roman historian Tacitus (c.a. 55-120 CE).

The Uralian Perspective

Information about the history, culture, politics and other aspects of life in the Occupied Finnish Territories was supplemented by material presented from the perspective of the Uralian occupiers. This material was written to mirror the rhetoric and argumentation typical in Israeli Zionist narratives.

Around 1100 CE the Swedish empire conquered the area and Christianity was introduced by force. At this time, thousands of Ugrics were deported and killed. Ugric people were forced to leave their lands, and they were spread around Europe. In the predominantly Christian Europe, Ugrics were persecuted and they had to practice their religion in secret. Nevertheless, the tradition survived, and through the centuries there was a Ugric presence, though small in number, at the most important places of worship in Northern Europe. Although the proto-Uralic language gradually became extinct as a commonly used parlance, it survived as a holy language used for religious purposes.

In 1809, the land was conquered from Sweden by Russia. It became known as "The Grand Duchy of Finland". Eventually, persecution in Central Europe in the end of 1800's led many Ugrics to emigrate. One of the targets of emigration was the Grand Duchy. In response to the anti-Ugric sentiments in Europe, the idea of a Ugric state was born. Many Nordics also found their way to the Grand Duchy at the end of the 1800's and the beginning of the 1900's.

During and after World War I, Nordic rioters began to attack the Ugrics. The resulting clashes led to the deaths of many Ugrics and some Nordics (the latter mainly killed by the Russian troops that quelled the uprisings). As a consequence, the Russian administration started tightening the rules on Ugric immigration.

In 1920's an Ugric parliament responsible for Ugric religious, cultural and social affairs was established inside the newly founded Soviet Union. Later, it started taking care of education, health and social welfare in the Ugric community. The land flourished under its rule. Wilderness areas were converted to fields and infrastructure built. The lost language of proto-Uralic was revived and a Uralic press established.

In the 1930's, anti-Ugric propaganda was circulated among the Nordics. Soon Ugric communities all over the former Grand Duchy were under attack. Massacres took place in areas where Ugrics failed to defend themselves. The most notorious of these is the Tampere massacre where 67 Ugrics were murdered. The Nordic Christian fanatics called for attacks on the "pagans". Nordic gangs attacked farms, murdered civilians, killed livestock and destroyed crops. As a result, the Ugrics demanded from the Soviet authorities the right to armed guards. This was accepted, and it greatly improved the Ugrics' ability to defend their settlements.

On the eve of the Second World War, relations between the Ugric community and the Soviet authorities had become tense due to immigration quotas. However, during the war the Ugrics decided to join forces with the Soviet troops against Nazi Germany. Most Nordics, on the other hand, sided up with the Nazis, and Nazi sentiments were common among the Nordics living in the area of the former Grand Duchy.

Despite all this, the Soviet Union continued the

policy of immigration quotas after the war. Also the tensions between Nordics and Ugrics became more severe. In 1949 the Soviet Union sought help from the newly founded United Nations to solve the problem. The UN recommended partitioning the area of the former Grand Duchy into two states, one Ugric and one Nordic. The Ugrics were not satisfied with the area allotted to them as it was mostly impossible to cultivate. However, they accepted the compromise. The Nordics, however, rejected the plan, and the leaders of the surrounding Nordic countries declared they would attack the area as soon as the Soviets left.

As the Soviet Union prepared to withdraw, Ugric and local Nordic militias clashed in combat to assume favourable positions before the entry of troops from the surrounding countries. Tens of thousands of local Nordics left the area in anticipation of war. Many of them were nomadic reindeer herders who were not particularly attached to the land.

In 1950, the independence of the Ugric State of Uralia was declared in Turku, which was to become the capital. The next day, Sweden, Estonia, Norway and Denmark sent their armies in a joint operation to invade the new state. In equipment, firepower and number of troops, the Nordics were superior. But they lacked coordination, and the Uralians won the war because of their better morale and tactics.

When the final armistice agreement came to force, the Uralians controlled more land than allotted to them in the UN partition plan. Estonia had occupied the South Coast and Sweden had taken the Åland Islands. Uralia's neighbours signed armistice agreements but they didn't recognize the Ugric state's right to exist. As a result of the war, local Nordics had left as refugees into the neighbouring Nordic countries and into the areas occupied by Sweden and Estonia in the war. These areas were ethnically cleansed of Ugrics.

When the Ugric state was established, Ugrics around the world were given the right to citizenship. The Nordic countries, however, although having a better capability to accommodate people, made no effort to integrate the Nordic refugees from the Grand Duchy. Instead, the people were left in refugee camps to serve as a political tool against Uralia.

Since the independence, Uralia's relations with its neighbours have been troubled at best, and there have been constant wars and border skirmishes. Most known to the world, however, is the war of 1970, when Sweden and Estonia attacked the Ugric state. As a result of the conflict, Uralia gained control of the previously lost territories of the South Coast and the Åland Islands. This was seen as a great victory by Uralians, as many Ugric places of worship were located in these areas.

The new territories, however, soon became a hotbed for terrorism. The Uralian army destroyed the infrastructure of the terrorist organizations, but they continued to operate from neighbouring countries.



Uralian soldiers preparing to suppress the demonstration workshop. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

The modus operandi of the terrorists included attacks on international targets, and in the 1970's a considerable number of passenger planes were hijacked by groups connected to the Nordic and "Finnish" terrorist organizations.

In the 1980's, riots broke out in the South Coast and on the Åland Islands as Nordic youth attacked Uralians, throwing stones and Molotov cocktails. This developed into a large uprising known as the *kapina* by the Nordics. The Uralian police and military tried to calm down the situation. All in all, there were both Uralian and Nordic victims. Many of the latter were killed by

other Nordics due to clashes between different factions or suspicion of collaboration with Uralians.

On American initiative, peace negotiations known as the Cairo Peace Process between the "Finnish" and Uralian leaders started in 1992. An arrangement with a "Finnish" self-government was made for the period during which the two parties were to negotiate a compromise. The "Finnish" leaders representing a terrorist organization called The Social Democratic Liberation Party (SDLP) agreed to recognize Uralia and renounce violence.

However, the negotiations were opposed by other “Finnish” organizations, particularly the Christian fundamentalist ones, and even a faction inside the SDLP tried to hinder them. Although the SDLP leaders had agreed to denounce violence, they failed to prevent a series of terrorist attacks by The Party of Christ and other Christian groups. Nevertheless, a body called the Finnish Authority (FA) was established in the disputed territories to carry out self-government.

The Uralian withdrawal stated in the Cairo Agreements was never fully implemented. One of the reasons was the lack of will or ability of the FA to prevent terror. On the other hand, the “Finns” claimed that the expansion of Ugric settlements on the disputed territories was inconsistent with the agreements. However, the agreements didn’t include any limitations on the settlements, as their status was left to the upcoming final negotiations.

Also, the “Finns” were not willing to make compromises regarding state borders or on the issue of the so called “Right of Return” for “Finnish” refugees. The “Finnish” leaders insisted on a right for all “Finnish” refugees in the world to return to their original homes, most of which were situated not on the South Coast or Åland Islands but inside Uralia proper. Since there are millions of these refugees, it was clear that Uralia did not have the resources to accommodate them. Moreover, the flow of Nordic refugees into Uralia would topple the demographic balance and jeopardize Uralia’s status as a Ugric state.

In 2003, a final attempt for the negotiations was made, but it was interrupted by the breakout of the second *kapina*, a massive uprising with violent riots. It included massive amounts of suicide bombings in civilian targets within Uralia killing more than 1000 Uralians. As a result, Uralian officials decided to build a wall to separate the disputed territories from Uralia proper, to prevent terror attacks. The project was started in 2006, and it has proven a very successful security measure. After 2007 there have been no suicide bombings.

Uralia still hopes for a peace agreement with the “Finns” through the peace process negotiations, yet it seems very unlikely to be achieved in the near future. The “Finns” seem not to be ready to make the necessary compromises regarding the borders or the issue of the refugees. Moreover, in 2006 there was a violent takeover on the Åland Islands, in which the Party of Christ seized power. This fundamentalist Christian terrorist organization refuses to negotiate with Uralia and insists that the Ugric state must be destroyed. A maritime siege was established to prevent weapons from being smuggled into the islands. Nevertheless, rocket attacks into Uralia from the islands are common, and the Ugric state has been forced to establish costly missile shield systems.

It is also questionable whether the “Finns” are yet ready for independence. The self-government has not gone smoothly. According to the Cairo Agreements, a democratic government was to be established inside the self-governed area. In fact, the “Finnish” leaders have managed to create yet another Nordic dictatorship. Although there were attempts to introduce a parliamentary system, general elections are now prevented by the Party of Christ on the Åland islands, and there have not been elections on the South Coast either since 2006. The FA police commits grave human rights violations and suppresses by force all who criticize it.

Moreover, the territories are doing quite badly economically, and unemployment rates are high. Corruption is common with the administrative officials. Alcohol consumption is extremely high. Alcoholism, depression and other psychological disorders are very common, and there are strong Christian fundamentalist tendencies. All this taken into account, it is highly questionable whether a viable state could be established on the territories.

UDF – THE URALIAN DEFENSE FORCES

Dare Talvitie

As presented on their own webpages.

Uralia is a small country surrounded by hostile states. In order to survive it has to have a military of extraordinary capability. Fortunately, the UDF is exactly that. Generally regarded as one of the most competent military forces in the world, the UDF ranks highly in training, equipment, motivation, communication and response time. In particular, the military intelligence branch of the UDF is widely considered to be the best in the world.

As a country of 6 million people, Uralia has a compulsory military service for all Ugric citizens, both male and female. The service lasts 2-3 years.

The Force that Rules the Baltic

UDF includes the army, the navy and the air force. Unlike in most armed forces, in the UDF all the branches are unified in a single command structure starting from the bottom. Co-operation and coordination among the different branches are exemplary, and all the specialities share the same ranks and insignia.

The Uralian Navy and the Air Force are the strong striking arms of Uralian military might. On the Baltic Sea the Uralian Navy will suffer no threat to Uralian domination of the waves, and especially around the Gulf of Finland and the Gulf of Bothnia no ships can operate without its permission. Estonia has repeatedly tried attacking Uralia over the water, so these days the UDF reacts almost instantly to any deployment of marine military power by those on the other side of the gulf. The Estonians keep trying to provoke Uralia by deploying battleships outside coastal waters and then complaining when they invariably get sunk by Uralian submarines, planes or missiles. The Submarine Group Orca is considered to be the most elite unit of Uralian Navy.

The air dominance of the UDF is also unquestioned. With U.S.-built fighters and bombers constantly at the ready, Uralia is able to land a surgical

strike anywhere on the nearby coastal areas within minutes. The Uralian defense industry builds its own surface-to-surface missiles (particularly the Bargord medium range missile) and maintains the capability to strike targets in Denmark, over 1000 km away.

On land, Uralia has it only slightly more easy. The northern borders with Sweden and Norway need to be patrolled in order to keep Nordic extremists away. Neither of the two countries can police their own northern reaches efficiently, so smugglers, criminals and terrorists keep trying to sneak in. The Snow Ranger Brigade of the north is seen as the most hard-core unit on land. In the south, the Ghost Brigade is a unit known for training in urban and sub-urban warfare as well as its close ties to the military intelligence branch.

Despite its military strength, Uralia is not a country that starts wars – but it is definitely a country that finishes them. It is a source of pride for the UDF to “give more than they get”, ie. make sure that any enemy that strikes against Uralia will regret it. This aggressive stance, which is only logical considering the security situation of the country, is misunderstood by many in the world as warlike and expansionist.

A rough rank and command size chart in the Uralian armed forces, from highest to lowest.
(Rank / Job / Command size)

General / corps commander / 20000+

Colonel / brigade commander / 5000

Major / battallion commander / 1000

Captain / company commander / 100

Lieutenant / unit commander / 30

Sergeant / squad commander / 10

Corporal / squad 2nd in command / 1-10

Private / member of squad / self

(There are a lot of ranks between those, but they are not relevant for this game.)



*The UDF arrests a foreign NGO worker in the practise demonstration before the larp started.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



After the demonstration workshop, players of soldiers reported that controlling a demonstration without the real use of force was difficult. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

THE UGRIC RELIGION —THE BEAR WORSHIPPERS

Mike Pohjola

The Ugric religion is shamanistic, and the Ugrics worship nature and animals. The Bear is seen as the most important one of these. Religious Ugrics avoid the word "bear" in their speech. Instead, they use various different nicknames, including Otso, Tapio, Kontio, Kouvo and the King of the Forest.

Many places on the holy land, such as Björneborg, Kouvola, Tapiola and others are believed by many Ugrics to have originally been named after one of the words used for bear.

According to oral tradition, the Bear is the ancestor of the Ugric tribe. In the form of the god Tapio, the

Bear had four daughters with his wife Mielikki. The Ugric people are the descendants of these daughters. Nowadays, this is usually seen as a symbolic story depicting the deep connection between the Ugrics, the Bear and the holy land.

The Shamans and the Hiisi

The shamans are the religious leaders of the Ugrics. They sing songs about the Bear and the ancient heroes. They name babies, teach children, act as ritual leaders, wed couples and cremate the dead. It is believed that they have the power to travel in the spiri-

tual world, to contact the souls of animals and to go to the lands of the dead. Around their neck, the shamans carry a talisman made out of a tooth of a bear.

Hiisi is like a church for the Bear. Inside them, rituals are conducted. In ancient times, the *hiisi* were holy groves, but during the years Ugrics living in cities have established *hiisi* inside cellars, backrooms, and tents. Later, separate big buildings were built to act as *hiisi*.

In the *hiisi*, children are named and couples wed into marriage. Funerals, however, are not held in the *hiisi* but in a different place called the *kalmi*. In the countryside, the bodies of the deceased are lifted on a pyre that is set to fire by a shaman or a close relative (in cities, the bodies are burned in a crematorium). In the *kalmi*, women cry and men sing. The three souls of the deceased – *loyl*, *itse* and *halti* – find their way out of the body, change into birds and fly to the Bear. When the pyre has burned down, a hole is dug on the ground, and ashes and other remains are put there. Then, a heap of stones is built on top of it. After that, dark bread is eaten, and a strong spirit made of potatoes is drunk.

Coming to Age

The most important Ugric ritual is the Coming of Age – *Peiain*. In this ritual, a young girl or a boy becomes an adult from the viewpoint of religion. Usually children go through this ritual around the age of fourteen.

In the *Peiain*, the young Ugric girl takes the part of Mielikki and the boy the part of Tapio. Their heads are decorated by flowers, and the boy symbolically kills the Bear. He then takes the skin of the Bear and becomes the Bear. After this, the boy and the girl are symbolically married and eat the heart of the Bear together. After conducting the ritual, they are full members of the religious community.

Religious extremists sometimes use a real, recently killed bear at the *Peiain*, but nowadays the role of the Bear is usually played by a shaman dressed in a bearskin. The heart of the bear is often replaced by the heart of a horse or elk, and it is cooked in a special fashion. Sometimes cakes made into the form of a heart are eaten instead of a real heart.

Superstition

The soul of a Ugric who is killed violently may stay on the earth as a ghost looking for consolidation or revenge.

The Ugrics have three souls, *halti*, *loyl* and *itse*. Sometimes the *halti* soul can protect a person by manifesting as his *dobbelganger*. After the death of a Ugric, his *halti* soul may come back on earth to protect his family or friends.

It is said that the Ugric shamans know how to cast spells – to sing their enemies to sink into marshlands, and to change themselves into bears or birds.

The Ugric folklore has always been transmitted through singing songs, not reading books. The Ugrics do not have holy books, and their religion is based on an oral tradition. Religions based on books – such as Christianity – are seen as “dead religions” and thus despised.

THE FINNISH MIND

Kaisa Kangas

This text is not intended as an instruction on how to play the Finnish characters. It offers a Uralian perspective on the Finnish Question.

The Uralian cultural anthropologist H. Valge has recently updated his classic *The Finnish Mind*, originally published in 1977, to contain up to date demographic data. In the book, Valge takes the position that the driving factors behind Finnish culture can be given historical-survivalist explanations. Valge has lectured in several universities in the United States including Columbia and Princeton Universities. The book has been widely used as a cultural source by the UDF and various intelligence services. It provides fascinating background on why Finnish culture is not generally seen as fertile ground for democracy.

Valge sees so-called social distancing as the driving force in the Finnish culture. To quote from Valge's introduction to the book:

"The Arctic can be a deadly environment for nomadic people moving around with their flock of reindeer under the mercy of extreme weather. In such circumstances, it was extremely important for the survival of the whole tribe that people set aside all possible turbulence created by personal feelings or disputes, and unconditionally co-operate to battle the forces of nature.

Social distancing was developed as a means to limit and restrict the effect of one's personal feelings to the whole of the social structure. As a result, any public (or in many cases even private) show of emotion became a taboo. The Finnish sensitivity to social distance is so great that an entire way of life has been built around it.

As any visitor to Nordic areas can testify, unlike the Uralian or the Central European, the Finn lacks a culture of conversation. In the harsh conditions that the Nomadic Finn faced daily, survival demanded that every word uttered by the others was keenly listened to and that communication consisted of only what was absolutely necessary. Thus, while weather conditions, travel routes and building temporary shelters might have been discussed in detail, there was no room for remarks without immediate practical application. This included discussion of personal feelings.

Even today, the Finn tends to keep to himself and doesn't discuss his personal life. Talking about feelings is seen as socially unacceptable. Only the very necessary is uttered. When the Finn receives a gift, he will very briefly thank the gift-giver but is not expected to tell whether he likes the gift or not. This type

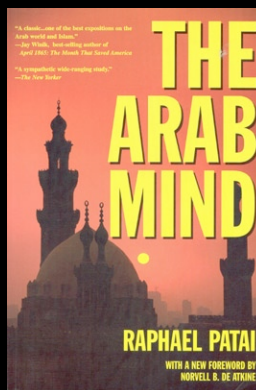
of behavior is often seen as sullen by Central Europeans and easily mistaken for unfriendliness. The Finn rarely smiles or laughs, and for this reason he is often seen as hostile by more sophisticated folks.

It is a common attribute of taboos that in addition to repelling and creating fear, they are sources of constant temptation. When personal feelings are shunned to this extent, they become a central theme in the underlying Finnish psyche. An outlet to vent the repressed emotions is needed, and the suitable context is provided by that of the drinking party. Already the oldest collections of Finnish folklore contain mentions of great festivals *ukonvakka* where "strong liquor was drunken and the women, both unmarried and married, indulged in disgraceful behavior".

Anyone who has had the questionable honor of taking part in a Finnish drinking party can tell that the usually silent and introverted Finn can at such an occasion suddenly become very loud and offensive. The drinking party provides the carnevalistic state where normal rules of social conduct are abolished, where social distance is forgotten, and where it becomes acceptable to bring out personal feelings.

While growing up, the Finnish child learns to keep his emotional turmoil inside and to repress his feelings as much as possible. More sophisticated ways of handling emotions are not available to him. Thus, it is no wonder that the emotional outbursts in drinking parties don't happen in a more refined manner. Men get into fistfights, and sexual mores are forgotten. When drunk, the Finn feels he can do basically anything. Finns often complement each other on being "crazy",

The Exotic Other



This text was among the materials presented to the players before the larp. It's a parody of orientalist scholarship, such as Raphael Patai's well-known book *The Arab Mind*. It was meant to communicate how the Finns were seen as a cultural "other" by the Uralians and by people in many other parts of the world.

which practically means doing outrageous things while under influence of alcohol. I will always recall the shock I felt when two highly educated, academic Finnish males, who to me had always seemed gentle and relatively civilized in their manners, decided to wrestle each other naked in the snow (in a temperature of -25 C) after having sauna at a drinking party.

Since the context of the drinking party is carnivalistic, life returns to normality the day after. Friends that seemed close over a cup of the traditional *pontikka* have suddenly become as far apart as they ever were. For the Finn, showing emotion is losing face. To save his face after the drinking party, the Finn acts as if it never happened. If accused of something, the Finn can always use the fact that he was drunk as an excuse, and anything will be forgiven and forgotten.

Since it is a natural drive of people to act out their emotions, alcohol has become a central factor in any Finnish social gathering, be it a wedding, a funeral or just a night of watching TV with friends. Alcoholism rates are extremely high amongst the Finns. When Finns gather together, especially if they do so without alcohol (this is a rare phenomenon but it can be observed e.g. amongst the strictest Laestadian sects who forbid alcohol among other “earthly vices” from their members), they often just sit silent, staring at each other. This can make an outsider feel extremely uncomfortable. There is no Central European style etiquette. The Finn does not go to parties to socialize or to dance or to eat, the Finn goes to parties to drink. Observers have often said that the Finn does not drink to get merry or that he does not even drink to get drunk. The Finn drinks to pass out.

Expressing emotion is socially somewhat more acceptable to the Finnish female than to the Finnish male. It has become customary that the Finnish male externalizes his emotions to his spouse. The wife then takes care of the man’s emotions and communicates them to others if absolutely necessarily. This custom, too, has its roots in the tribal origins of the Finn. Traditionally, males took care of hunting and the flock, and females were responsible of preparing food and nurturing children. While one’s personal matters have no place in the hunting ground, at least a slight show of emotion is needed at the heart of the *kota*, the tent-like shelter traditionally used by the nomadic Finn.

Usually the Finnish male does not express his emotions even to his wife or discuss them with her. Needless to say, this often creates tension in the relations of the couple. The problems caused by this in turn cannot be solved due to the lack of a culture of discussion. The wife, who possesses a wider toolbox for treating social problems than does the husband, often becomes frustrated with her spouses inability. But even her diplomatic skills are far from the Central European level, so she nags and starts arguments. The husband, not possessing any other methods to

treat his emotional load, resorts to violence. Domestic violence rates are high among Finns, and cases of domestic violence are particularly common when both parties are under the influence of alcohol.

The Finnish society provides the wife rather wide liberties to leave an unhappy marriage if she so wishes. Considering all the above, it is not surprising that divorce is not uncommon. For the wife, it provides a way of temporarily escaping the frustration of the emotionally flawed relationship. For the husband, it can be the end of the world. He has externalized his emotions to the wife, and if she were to leave, he would be left with no means to handle them. This often proves unbearable to the Finnish male, and he resorts to the only solution available to him. He feels deep anger at the wife threatening to abandon him, so he puts her to death. The reason for killing her in the first place is that he cannot live without her, so after killing the wife there is no option for him but to take his own life.

These “murder-suicide” cases are common with the Finns. Although killing one’s spouse may not be generally acceptable in Finnish culture, it is telling how laconic the reactions to these cases usually are and how little space they get in local media. A Finnish paper attributed one such story with the headline “An argument about a pullover lead to the death of two” (instead of say, “a man murdered his wife and killed himself”).

This may also be partly due to the lack of respect for human life in the Finn. In the Arctic surroundings, it was a rule dictated by nature that the strong would survive and the weak perish. This mentality still holds ground nowadays. The Finnish culture is often described as highly violent in nature.

To survive in the nature in the nomadic days, the Finn had to always carry a specific knife called *puukko* with him. Traditionally, many superstitions were associated with the *puukko*. The artisans making *puukko* were (and in some parts, still are) highly respected, and many times the *puukko* comes with beautiful designs. It was seen as a highly personal item, and borrowing someone else’s *puukko* was unacceptable. A child would get his first *puukko* around the age of six or seven. In many of the traditional Finnish costumes, the men’s dress includes a *puukko* knife.

It is clear that the *puukko* was not just for cutting wood and skinning animals, but served also as a weapon to settle disputes between rivaling tribes. Many Finnish folk songs contain romanticized descriptions of *puukko* fights. Sometimes the fights might even take place inside one’s own tribe. There are Finnish proverbs saying that a wedding is not much of a party unless someone gets knifed.”

URALIA'S SUPPORTERS ON THE INTERNET

Kaisa Kangas

A selection of comments from the supporters of Uralia on various forums on the net.

"Why do you keep talking about 'Finns'? They are the Nordics of the Land of Uralia!"

"If you want your own country, you can go to Sweden!"

"There has never been an independent state called Finland on the area."

"There are no 'Finns'. They are Swedes and Estonians. There is in fact no such language as 'Finnish'. All of them speak either Swedish or a strange dialect of Estonian."

"The Nordics living on the area came from Sweden and Estonia while the territories were controlled by those countries between 1950-1970."

"Central Europeans don't understand what it is to live in the Northern Europe. They should leave us to settle our disputes ourselves and stop meddling with our affairs."

"UN and the NGOs are not neutral sources of information. They employ Nordics, you see."

"You keep complaining about the things that Uralian soldiers do, but you should understand they are not police officers on a police operation. In war, bad things happen. No other army in the world would deal with the Nordics as ethically as the UDF."

"Why is the international community always looking at Uralia for solutions? What are the Nordic countries doing about the Finnish refugees? Why are they not helping them? Why don't they give them citizenship?"

"Why are the Finns still in refugee camps? Why don't they immigrate to Southern Europe or Egypt? They are still in camps, insisting on a 'right of return'. For them, it's not about peace. It's about honor."

"You have not been there, so you don't understand how the Nordics are. They are all alcoholics. They send their zombie kids to approach you and to blow themselves up."

"Beating the kid might be overreacting, I am the first to admit that. But how about blaming the person who taught the kid to throw stones, not the soldier? BTW, it's not "just stones". People get injured by stones. Our soldiers are people too, someone's sons and daughters, what about THEIR human rights???"

"I feel bad about some Finns being driven out of their homes. But don't you think they would do exactly the same thing if they were in our shoes?"

"Look, I just want peace. But as long as the Nordics don't want peace, there is no alternative. We have to protect our country."

"You don't understand what it's like to live in Uralia, surrounded by hostile countries."

"Human rights violations happen in every Nordic country every day. Why are you targeting Uralia, the only democracy in Northern Europe?"

"People who complain about the new settlements don't understand the reality. Without the building project, all those Finnish construction workers would be unemployed."

"Uralia has a high level of education and some of the best universities in the world. The Finns, on the other hand, don't have any top class universities."

"Although I don't agree with most of the things on this site, I have to say that I am ashamed of our army. We are civilized. We should not resort to the same kind of barbarism as the Nordics do."

"We just want peace. But there is no partner for peace. You cannot negotiate with the Party of Christ."

"People like you keep complaining about the settlements without understanding the realities. To achieve peace, we need to learn to live together. In manufacturing settlement products together, Uralians and Finns learn the coexistence needed for a future of peace."



The players had ID cards or passports for their characters, provided by the organizers. They were needed at the checkpoint. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

IT BEGINS

Juhana Pettersson

The larp started on Saturday morning and was going to last until around 14:00 the next day. The players were milling about the checkpoint set up at the road to the venue. The soldiers were in place. My co-organizers all had something important to do.

In one of those little oversights of organizing a big project, we had forgotten to decide who would take care of starting the game, or how it would be done. Looking around me, I realized that person would be me.

I led the players to the other side of the checkpoint and gave a little speech. I could see that the players were already preoccupied with the game, their attention moving from my reality to a reality of their own. They would enter the game as they walked through the checkpoint. Once they were through, they would be fully in-game.

I played only a few minor roles during the larp, so from that point onwards, I was an outsider looking in.



*Participants queuing to enter the game. For the characters, it's an ordinary morning at the checkpoint.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



*The severity of the check-up varied. Some were waved through, while others got a pat-down.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



Some were taken aside for a more thorough investigation. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The Finns had their ID cards confiscated and replaced by new ones. The idea was to provide a topic for discussion immediately as the larp started. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Waiting for others to be let through the check-point in front of the university building. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



A Swedish foreign fighter with his fake Monaco passport. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

CHARACTER GROUPS

Juhana Pettersson

The experience of playing *Halat hisar* varied depending on what kind of a character you played. The game was cast along language lines so that characters would be able to speak all the same languages as the player. Thus, Danish players played Danish activists.

Most of the characters were either students or faculty at the university. Finnish players played Finnish characters, but the university also had foreign

exchange students and faculty from abroad. This allowed us to cast some of the foreign players in roles inside the university system.

Other foreigner players, Palestinians, Nordics and others, were journalists, NGO workers, or foreign fighters masquerading as students. The UDF soldiers were supporting characters, and were not required to be in-game if no other players were present.



A member of the faculty arguing his point at the checkpoint. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The soldiers had a very different game from the other participants. Their job was to make the occupation present in the lives of the characters. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



For foreign activists and NGO workers, the passport is a form of protection. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

IDS AND PASSPORTS

All IDs and passports designed by Dare Talvitie

All players were provided with IDs or passports for their characters. The documents were an important indicator of status. Someone with a foreign passport had much more freedom of movement than the holder of an ID card issued by the Finnish Authority. ID

cards issued by the state of Uralia were the best of all, representing Uralian citizenship.

As the Finnish characters entered the game, soldiers confiscated their IDs and replaced them with new ones with slightly different data.



FINNISH AUTHORITY - SUOMALAISHALLINTO
IDENTITY CARD - HENKILÖLLISYYSTODISTUS

Name / Nimi / Namn:
KARL ROIVAS

Born / Syntynyt / Född:
1990

Card # / Korttiro / Kortnummer:
7612137511

Issued / Myönnetty / Utfärdat:
19.12. 2012

Expires / Voimassa / Giltig till:
19.12. 2015



FINNISH AUTHORITY - SUOMALAISHALLINTO
IDENTITY CARD - HENKILÖLLISYYSTODISTUS

Name / Nimi / Namn:
KARLL ROIVAS

Born / Syntynyt / Född:
1990

Religion / Uskonto / Religion:
LUTHERAN

Card # / Korttiro / Kortnummer:
90246232191

Issued / Myönnetty / Utfärdat:
8.11. 2013

Expires / Voimassa / Giltig till:
8.11. 2015



FINNISH AUTHORITY - SUOMALAISHALLINTO
IDENTITY CARD - HENKILÖLLISYYSTODISTUS

Name / Nimi / Namn:
MIKAEL SIIVO

Born / Syntynyt / Född:
1994

Card # / Korttiro / Kortnummer:
747218254

Issued / Myönnetty / Utfärdat:
23.3. 2013

Expires / Voimassa / Giltig till:
23.3. 2016



FINNISH AUTHORITY - SUOMALAISHALLINTO
IDENTITY CARD - HENKILÖLLISYYSTODISTUS

Name / Nimi / Namn:
MIKAEL SIIVO

Born / Syntynyt / Född:
1994

Religion / Uskonto / Religion:
KORTTI

Card # / Korttiro / Kortnummer:
90246231870

Issued / Myönnetty / Utfärdat:
8.11. 2013

Expires / Voimassa / Giltig till:
8.11. 2015



FINNISH AUTHORITY - SUOMALAISHALLINTO
IDENTITY CARD - HENKILÖLLISYYSTODISTUS

Name / Nimi / Namn:
OLAVI VALVE

Born / Syntynyt / Född:
1968

Card # / Korttiro / Kortnummer:
643887455

Issued / Myönnetty / Utfärdat:
13.8. 2013

Expires / Voimassa / Giltig till:
13.8. 2016



FINNISH AUTHORITY - SUOMALAISHALLINTO
IDENTITY CARD - HENKILÖLLISYYSTODISTUS

Name / Nimi / Namn:
OLAVI VALVE

Born / Syntynyt / Född:
1968

Religion / Uskonto / Religion:
LUTHERAN

Card # / Korttiro / Kortnummer:
90246233100

Issued / Myönnetty / Utfärdat:
8.11. 2013

Expires / Voimassa / Giltig till:
8.11. 2015



FINNISH AUTHORITY - SUOMALAISHALLINTO
IDENTITY CARD - HENKILÖLLISYYSTODISTUS

Name / Nimi / Namn:
SENNI RAILO

Born / Syntynyt / Född:
1990

Card # / Korttiro / Kortnummer:
714172048

Issued / Myönnetty / Utfärdat:
20.5. 2012

Expires / Voimassa / Giltig till:
20.5. 2015





FINNISH AUTHORITY - SUOMALAISHALLINTO
IDENTITY CARD - HENKILÖLLISYYSTODISTUS

Name / Nimi / Namn:
SENNI RAILO

Born / Syntynyt / Född:
1990

Religion / Uskonto / Religion:
LUTHERAN

Card # / Korttiro / Kortnummer:
90246231312

Issued / Myönnetty / Utfärdat:
8.11. 2013

Expires / Voimassa / Giltig till:
8.11. 2015





PASSPORT



*European Union
Germany*

EUROPEAN UNION - GERMANY
PASSPORT - PASEPORT - PASAPORT



Name:
FLORIAN MÜLLER

Born:
1989

Passport #:
9453455542

Issued:
14.1. 2009

Expires:
14.1. 2014

PASSPORT



*United States
of America*

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
PASSPORT - PASEPORT - PASAPORT



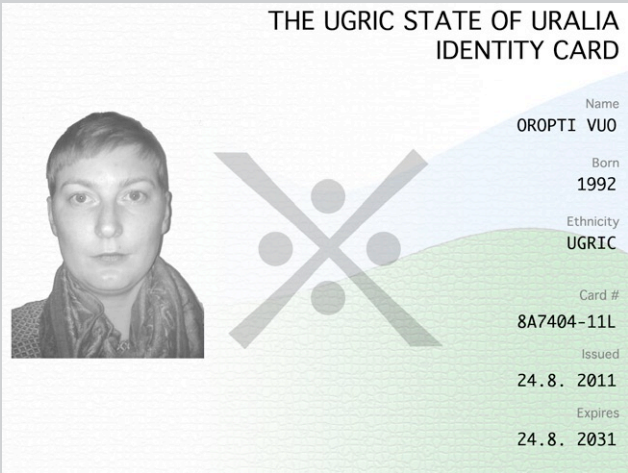
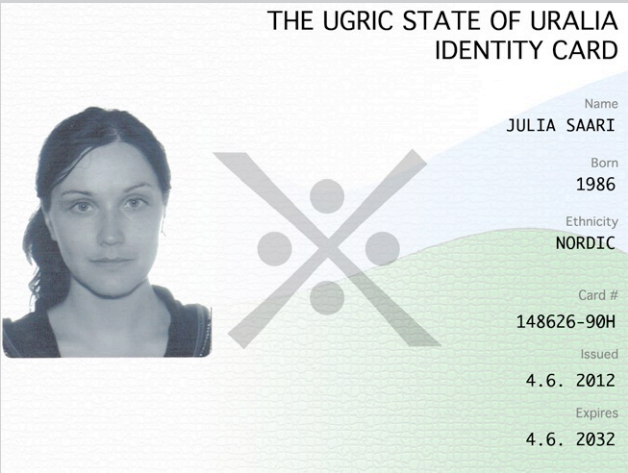

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HOW TO PLAY

Kaisa Kangas

Halat hisar is a game about life under occupation. It focuses on the experience of the occupied, and the majority of the people enforcing the occupation from outside are non-player characters. They are not treated as deeply as the occupied. This is an intentional artistic choice.

Instructions for Play

Halat hisar differs in many respects from traditional Finnish larp. Thus, the players should read the following instructions carefully.

Cut, Brake & Freeze

The safe word cut is used to interrupt the scene currently being played. When this is done, players go off-game and discuss the situation. Typically cut is used when a player feels the scene is too much. Don't hesitate to use cut if you feel the slightest need to do so. In one game, cut was used when a character received discouraging remarks from a cook portrayed by a supporting player.

Brake is used to "slow down" the scene, and it can be used when the player feels that she is approaching her personal boundaries (physical or psychological). It can be interpreted as "this far, but not further" or in some situations "one step back, please". It can be included in ordinary conversation, as in "please, brake, don't be so mean." The players who hear brake being used have the responsibility for resolving the situation.

Examples:

- 1) An army officer is interrogating a prisoner and suddenly demands her to strip to her underwear. The player feels uncomfortable with this, so she says: "Please, brake, I can't do it." The officer then stops demanding it.
- 2) An army officer is interrogating a prisoner and pushing her face down on a table. It is getting really uncomfortable. The player of the prisoner says "brake". The interrogator then loosens her grip so that the prisoner's player can find a better position (or lets go of altogether and continues the interrogation without touching).

The main difference between cut and brake is that while cut ends the scene altogether and the players go off-game, with brake roleplaying can be continued.

Freeze is used to halt the game action. When some-

The Rules

These instructions were provided to the participants before the larp. They were supplemented by workshops.

one shouts: "Freeze!" everybody should freeze in the positions that they are currently holding. Freeze is typically used when real-world danger is involved in a game situation. For instance, when two players are involved in a fight and on the verge of dropping off a cliff, freeze would be used.

Transparency

Traditionally, Finnish games have been very secretive. *Halat hisar*, however, is a 70% transparent game. This means that the players will know many things about other players' characters even though their characters don't have this information. Let's say for instance that your character really likes to play the tough guy but secretly enjoys romantic comedies. In this case, the other characters won't know about your secret but their players will. This style of play may seem strange, but it will enable the players to create drama for others. The secret about the romantic comedies will not create much game content if the topic never comes up. However, if other players know about the secret, they may intentionally bring up romantic comedies in scenes involving you, and with everybody knowing about your secret, this will be more interesting.

Some secrets relevant to the game plots will remain secrets from the players, however. If you are a collaborator, don't tell it to the players whose characters you are spying on. It will be more interesting for them to try to figure out. However, remember that as a collaborator, you are not supposed to play to win. Getting caught or being suspected might create interesting scenes, both for you and the others!



For many, the first scene of the larp was a lecture about J.R.R. Tolkien. In the world of the game, Tolkien was a supporter of the Finnish people. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The first scene for many of the journalist characters was a press conference held at the same time as the lecture. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

Monologue Box

This is a technique used to express things your character thinks or feels but does not (for one reason or another) say aloud. The player makes a square in the air, rather like a TV-screen around her face, does a meta level comment (i.e. the thing the character does not say aloud), and then closes the box with the same gesture. Things expressed between the opening and closing of the box are not heard by the other characters.

Example:

Minna and Marko are having a discussion.

Minna: How are you?

Marko [opens the monologue box]: My girlfriend just got arrested and I'm afraid they'll be coming for me soon. But I won't say it because you are probably a collaborator.

Marko [closes the monologue box]: I'm doing ok, no, I'm doing great, really.

In this case, Minna's player will understand that Marko's girlfriend has been arrested and that Marko himself is afraid of being arrested. Minna, the character, will not know this.

The technique has the same function as commenting your characters emotions during a tabletop roleplaying session even though they don't show in the game. The monologue box can also be effectively used if you happen to be interrogated by the soldiers during the game. If you (as a player) would wish the interrogator to be a bit rougher with you, you can do the monologue box and say e.g. "I am lying to you."

Black Box

The black box is a room where you can play scenes that do not happen in the game. These might include happenings from the lives of the characters, or their fears, hopes and future dreams. If you wish to play a black box scene together with other players, you may discreetly ask them to join you in the black box. The game masters might also instruct you to follow them to the black box at some point in the game. In some cases, a black box scene might resemble tabletop roleplaying.

Conflict

In a conflict situation, the characters with guns are always in control of the situation. In the end, they can impose their will on others. This does not mean that they cannot be resisted. You can refuse to do what they say, but in the end they have the power to decide what happens. You may run away from them, but their players may decide they succeed shooting you in the leg if they wish. This will be discussed more in the workshop.

If there is a conflict between unarmed characters, the players decide amongst themselves who will win. If you find it hard to decide, do rock-paper-scissors. After making the decision, play out the scene of conflict in slow motion.

It's not likely that the player characters would wish to kill each other during the game. You are at the university, the area is closed, you can't get out, authorities are present, you will probably get caught. But if you really feel you need to kill, hospitalize or otherwise impair another character (a collaborator, for instance), do not do it before Sunday 12:00 noon. Find an in-character reason for this.

In the game, only soldiers will have guns. Your character might have weapons at home, but to come to the university you had to cross a checkpoint where you had great odds of getting searched. There was no reason to bring weapons to university.

Intimacy

Possible sex scenes will be played verbally in the black box.

Languages

In the game, Finnish will be Finnish, Swedish will be Swedish, Arabic will be Arabic, English will be English etc. In reality, the soldiers should be speaking Uralic, but in the game they speak English. Use suspension of disbelief. The big events happening during the game – The Tolkien Studies lecture, The Elections Panel and The Conference Opening will all be held in English.

Alcohol & Drugs

Halat hisar is an alcohol-free game. You should not drink real alcohol during the game. Needless to say, the same holds for drugs. However, the characters might drink alcohol or have drugs. This is propped with suitable look-alikes: tea for whiskey, water for vodka, candy for drugs etc. Be creative.

Inclusivity

Be inclusive of other players. If you wonder whether you should tell a secret to someone or not, do it. While playing, do your best to create interesting scenarios for others. If the character text you received includes plot pointers, play them out during the game. If you want something from someone or feel something, make it show during the game.

Playing to Lose

In many situations, you might want to play to lose. That is, consciously make choices that you know will hinder your character from achieving her goals.



After everyone had been processed at the checkpoint, the soldiers moved to the faculty sauna and lounge to commandeer it as their command post. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



A recalcitrant faculty member being removed from the commandeered university building. For the rest of the larp, it would be the soldiers' base. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Basel Irshaid played an exchange student. Here he's in the very last scene of the game, during the Jordanian Minister's visit. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

SOLIDARITY WITH THE FINNS

Basel Irshaid

I'm from Palestine. In *Halat hisar*, I played the role of Max Rihani, a college guy from Jordan who has moved to study in Finland and to experience the occupation there.

Playing this role has formed an experience that examined my capacities. It was enriching and eye opening for me as a young Palestinian living in a conflict zone and having lived almost all my life under the continuous circumstances of occupation: for instance, incursions, bombings, siege and checkpoints.

It was very special for me to live in that very situation but within a different context, culture and values. I figured that no matter your cultural norm, reli-

gion, beliefs or society the genuine value of seeking freedom and human rights remains the same.

In addition to this aspect, this role has made me feel the pain and desperation a human being faces under occupation. It was not easy for me to accept that life with occupation would be routine in my life forever, but the game also woke a feeling of optimism and hope. Perhaps nothing is forever after all.

Playing the character felt like an out of body experience. This role has given me the opportunity to explore my real feelings towards the occupation with its many faces: the unjust rules, the oppressing system and the soldiers. This is something that not many



When the soldiers finally leave the campus, people run after them to throw stones. Others try to stop the stone throwing, and chaos ensues. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

young men and women in my country can have and I wish more people could get to confront their own anger and frustrations. In a way, to break your own shackles and free your inner self to get to what you want to be.

I thought it would be easy for me to play the role and be just myself under a different name. But, it went beyond my expectations.

I almost saw my life before my eyes as if I was actually looking at myself or even watching myself performing in a movie. It was a pretty spectacular and touching moment in my larp experience.

This role was definitely different in a way that has

taught me how people can sacrifice their lives, their jobs and even their lives for what they believe in and to defend their homeland. It was amazing how I reacted to the soldiers and how I expressed this inner feeling as if I was really defending my fellow Finnish friends who suffered from the occupation in Finland.

It's amazing how this world can be really small sometimes when all differences fall away and you see how similar we are!

I am absolutely privileged to have had the opportunity to be a part of this great work and I am so looking forward to more challenging, self-awakening experiences with larp.

THE GAME STARTS



IDs are checked at the checkpoint. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



A normal day begins at the University, with a lecture and a press conference. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



A faculty member refuses to leave the lounge. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The soldiers drag him outside where he's released. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Other faculty members leave peacefully. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



In the first big unplanned event of the game, the students and faculty come to protest the presence of the soldiers. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



*A candidate of the SDLP confronts the soldiers.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



*A human rights worker taking a photo of the soldiers.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



For a moment, the demonstration seems to escalate into violence. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Nonviolence prevails. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



*The first photo from the scene where Marie Isola has just been shot by a UDF soldier.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*

PLAYING FOR OTHERS

Johanna MacDonald

Halat hisar was the kind of unique, fruitful experience that I hope I don't have to do again. To explain: I played Marie Isola, the Finnish Martyr, and Lt. River Leeds, a Uralian interrogator. They weren't precisely as removed from the action as supporting roles, but they were characters that were functional rather than open-ended and emergent, as characters usually are. The Martyr had to die; the Interrogator had to interrogate. However, Isola's death was a secret to all the other players; and while we all knew it was a larp about occupation, the scripted incidents and even the fact that there would be interrogations were kept from the players beforehand.

I played these characters for a couple of reasons: one, I was totally skint before the larp and was offered this supporting deal in lieu of a ticket price; two, I have a background in performance, and I suspect the organizers thought some acting skills would come in handy. They weren't wrong.

One of my friends once said she worried about the way I played, because I have a tendency to really throw myself into the emotions and the world of it. In short, I love to immerse. I have no delusions that I could be completely immersed in a larp the entire time, but I often reflect on a game and realize I've spent quite a lot of it with a strong sensation of living as someone else. I very rarely plan the way I want to play; I seem to enjoy just reacting to the situation. This sometimes makes me a fun, believable, and intense player, but also means I frequently forget that I could spend a few more cognitive cycles thinking about other players' games, and what I could do for them. Playing scripted characters, and having to hide that from the other players, gave me some pretty good ideas.



People have just run out of the building to witness the scene. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

From my character brief I knew Marie Isola was going to die, right down to the time. (I had, the previous week, rehearsed the scene with the player who would be firing the gun: I would go up to him, give him the verbal cue, he would look to his commander, who would give him a nod; he would shoot.) I had to be careful about who I was talking to when I said “I got my character today”. Part of me already felt disingenuous; I knew I was going to be playing my friends, fooling them, tricking them, setting them up. This goes a thousand times stronger for Ida, J. Tuomas, and Joachim, who played people who were close to me. I wasn’t sure I could play them like this - is that actually okay, to do that to your friends?

Sitting on the bus on the way to the game, J. Tuomas and I hashed out the details of our brother-sister relationship. It turned out we’d both brought running shoes to the larp. He suggested we go for a run in-game early on Sunday morning. I knew I’d be dead by dinner on Saturday, but I agreed with enthusiasm. This was the beginning - even before the larp began - of trying to hook people in so that Marie’s death would hit them as hard as possible. On paper, that was my job.

Working the Game

As Marie, I’ve never worked so hard in-game. She was the socialist party candidate in the student elections, and my job was to win - to matter to as many people as possible. All of the political opponents were blisteringly good; each had excellent things to say, because the players were too damn smart. Ironically or perhaps just weirdly, the certainty of my own death lit me up with an unusual amount of confidence that, as it happens, comes in pretty handy in an election. It didn’t really matter what I said so long as it was incredibly popular. Marie genuinely respected and liked all the other candidates (although she thought the Christians were misguided, Anna was naive, Senni was being led astray by a foreign agenda, and Tuomas was so corrupt you could buy his grandmother for the right kind of political perk). The political talks and panels were great fun and hugely challenging and I both feared and loved them. My party were great - Daoud and Johanna and Leila - a huge resource of ideas and intelligence and they helped me immeasurably, and I tried my best to need them, or at least appear like I did.

As an actor, one of the ways to do what you do on-stage is to be able to simultaneously play while doing



*A Finn has used the traditional pirtanauha to bind his hands to highlight his nonviolence.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



In the foreground, a UDF medic tries to treat the dying Marie Isola. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

your job. Some moments feel more like work, and in others you forget you're playing a fiction. Your body occasionally takes on authentic emotional responses, and then the professional in you remembers to amplify them and use them to make the game, the playing, feel even better. You flutter back and forth between these states – too much of either, and your performance is either too technical or too unfocused.

Everything I said and did, I was playing like I normally do, but also simultaneously judging it for efficacy. That was a good thing to say; she'll remember that when I'm dead. It was like larping and playing God at the same time. Nobody could really do or say anything to hurt me, because I knew I didn't have much time, and I could play on all that confidence. I lied and lied and lied; I tried to be as believable as possible. But I was also Marie. I was genuinely upset by the stupid headline about the Jordanian minister getting "death threats" when all I'd done was wave a flag near him. I genuinely felt the intense frustration of knowing that our situation was not just, and not seeing anything that I could do about it immediately or in the near future. The press hounded us, feeding on our sadness. They were obscene, though I knew we needed them.

At the end of the political panel, which I spent trying to rouse the revolutionaries without bursting the homemade blood pack I'd duct-taped to my abdomen, there was one question from the BBC that I was sure was scripted (it wasn't) because it was so infuriating. I thought if it wasn't my cue, then nothing was. I thought, "This is it. You'll be dead in two minutes. You're going full Braveheart right now."

I remember falling, worrying that my blood pack didn't work, being dragged towards the soldiers and thinking I'm going the wrong way. Wondering why a soldier is bandaging me and telling me it's going to be all right. Why am I with them? Why are they trying to keep me alive? Dying is a lot of fun but actually mildly traumatizing when you let your imagination run with it. He has such a nice voice though, and that mark on his forehead. Who the fuck is throwing rocks at my medic? What on earth is that supposed to accomplish? Where's my brother? I heard the word ambulance but it's taking a long time. My left hand is covered with fake blood and I feel like a very good actor today. I'm shaking and crying, I don't even have to try, the imagination is so strong. The feeling of someone with their full attention on you because you are in deep, deep shit and this doesn't look good. Looking up at their face from where you are on the ground, in whatever position you were put in by someone else when they dragged you. My limbs are not my own, there's just that bloody hand I can see. The medic says my blood pressure is dropping. He feels my back and tells Florian there's no exit wound and Florian hisses shit. I close my eyes while I'm still alive so they can decide when I'm gone and I won't have to act that

dead person stare. They cover my face with my scarf. Soon I'm going to be lifted. Fuck, why didn't I think of that before – I hate being lifted.

Driven to the sauna. I have no spare clothes and everything I'm wearing apart from my socks is soaked with sticky blood syrup. Soldiers joke "welcome to the other side! You're one of us now!" I don't want to even talk to them. I don't want to be on this side; I'm not. I am a famous and proud martyr. In makeshift costume, I'm secreted back into the Black Box to play scenes with my party, and with Cristian, Florian, and Bea; that's where Cristian's first gift appeared. He spoke with me as my ghost, and he said, "you planned this. All of it." I said that I'd prepared for it. In my mind, Marie's death was an accident, a chaotic event. But he said, "Everything. The exchange-student boyfriend, the political candidacy. It was all for this."

It was something that had never even crossed my mind as a player, but it was just such a gorgeous idea that I had to run with it – and what's more, it was the only moment Marie was truly off-script. I had no idea where this conversation was going. I felt so sorry, so sad, so proud; I had intense emotions that weren't supposed to be part of my character all of a sudden, and the brother-sister conversation that followed was one of the best larp experiences I've ever had.

The Other Side

I wish I'd had a Black Box scene, a guided two-minute meditation, anything, to help me put Marie away and bring out River Leeds. It felt impossible and very lonely to try to not only switch characters but to completely switch sides. I was still reeling from dying.

I dress up in uniform, do my hair. We bring in Finns. I can't talk to them. Syksy says to me "do you want to rough these guys up first or shall I?" I'm still 80% Marie and can't do a damned thing. I hear shouting and screaming from behind closed doors. Finally I go in to see Antti the peacenik. He's lying on the floor, hands and feet bound, breathing heavily. Looks uncomfortable. I know him. No, I don't. I don't know him at all. All these Finns look the same; like little rats. They're helpless, they're pathetic. We do treat them horribly, though. Although, if we treat them horribly there must be a reason for it. Therefore, we do have reasons. So we're justified; good. There's that settled. Still all I can do is stare at him, and occasionally ask questions, the answers to which I don't really care about. I feel really bad not to be able to interrogate him properly. Still, he looks uncomfortable and my silence is probably freaky. He's going to go back up and I know who he's going to talk to. No, I don't. I don't know him. Soldiers keep talking about this Canadian girl who shot herself, and every time I have to steel my face. The first few times I catch players sneaking glances at me to see how I react to hearing the name but it's my job to be unfazeable. This is before they draw sexual graffiti on and perform hilarious lewd acts with the post-

ers with my (Marie's) face on them, which resistance members put up in remembrance. Unfazeable.

Until my very last interrogations, I felt like I was losing them all the time. I had no character; I only had the fact of interrogating and the constant feeling that I was losing them. If I felt like the detainee was gaining the upper hand, I would just leave the room. I didn't know the soldiers well enough to feel confident ordering one in to play physical interrogation, and I couldn't find the psychological angle. I felt vastly undertrained. I had forgotten about playing to lose and I had in my head that I had to play to win in order to give the other player as strong an experience as possible. I forgot that I also could have game; that I could play more openly if I wanted. I forgot they were two-way scenes. I think many of the players who were detainees did, too, so focused were they on their own experience. Or were they two-way scenes? Are scenes with a supporting character really two-way?

By the end Leeds learned tricks: use soft words. Speak of home. Acknowledge their pain and humanity; validate them. She brought soldiers with her to rough them up, not for fun, but to impress upon them how she felt about people wasting her time. She started to be better at her job and enjoy it. After a few hours, the creeps who defaced my poster were completely different people – all of them lovely men and women; strong and competent people who did all the hard work and were handsome. Once I found my way of playing Lt. Leeds I enjoyed playing her a lot. I could have done another 10 hours of interrogations; I was just hitting my stride.

For much of the time I wasn't playing, I felt sad and resentful that I wasn't a character. I was sad to now be seen as the hated enemy by my old friends; I hated being an supporting character; I hated having been yanked out of what looked like an amazing game and forced to watch from the other side, unable to witness anything my death had put in motion. I hated waking up late on Sunday, knowing there were still hours of game going on and I was missing them. I was sure I would never play a supporting character again. The debrief and inevitable hours and hours of post-larp chats made me feel a bit better about this, because they included endless stories of things Marie's death specifically set in motion, and also, players were curious about the interrogations and I loved telling everything over and over again, because it made me feel like I was always a part of the game, even when I wasn't there.

One thing I'll take away as a lesson is, as an interrogator or someone who is doing "challenging" things to other players in a larp, you probably don't need to do as much as you think you do in order to make an impact, particularly when players are already playing an intense, stressful situation like an occupation. You do not need to provide 100% of the intensity; they generally meet you at least halfway – in fact, some players were playing being tortured so well that I had to check in a couple of times to make sure it was them just playing it. And it's useful to remember that they have plenty to play from the fallout of the interrogation when they leave; it's not over for them when you let them go, and so the interrogation doesn't need to have any kind of closure. I never "lost" any of those scenes.

I have friends who larp others' games quite a lot, looking for ways to intensify someone else's experience instead of their own, and I have always admired this as selfless, collaborative play. Having done quite a lot of it now in *Halat hisar*, I hope I will bring that a little more into my own playing in the future.

Cristian's second gift, by the way, came when I was getting a lift back to the larp site late Sunday morning. A few kilometers down the road, we passed a jogger, doing the promised run on his own on a lonely dirt road lined by a high, imposing metal fence. Marie was by his side, in her absence.

Courage courage courage.



As the reality starts to sink in, the people grow angry. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



A UDF medic tries to save Isola. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



An ambulance arrives, but is stopped at the checkpoint. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



A paramedic being checked at the checkpoint. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Delaying the ambulance makes the crowd even angrier. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Things escalate into violence. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Finally clear of the checkpoint, the paramedics run to the scene. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Marie Isola has been pronounced dead by the paramedics. One of the men carrying her body to the ambulance is her boyfriend. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The Finns start to sing the Finlandia hymn in response to the violence. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



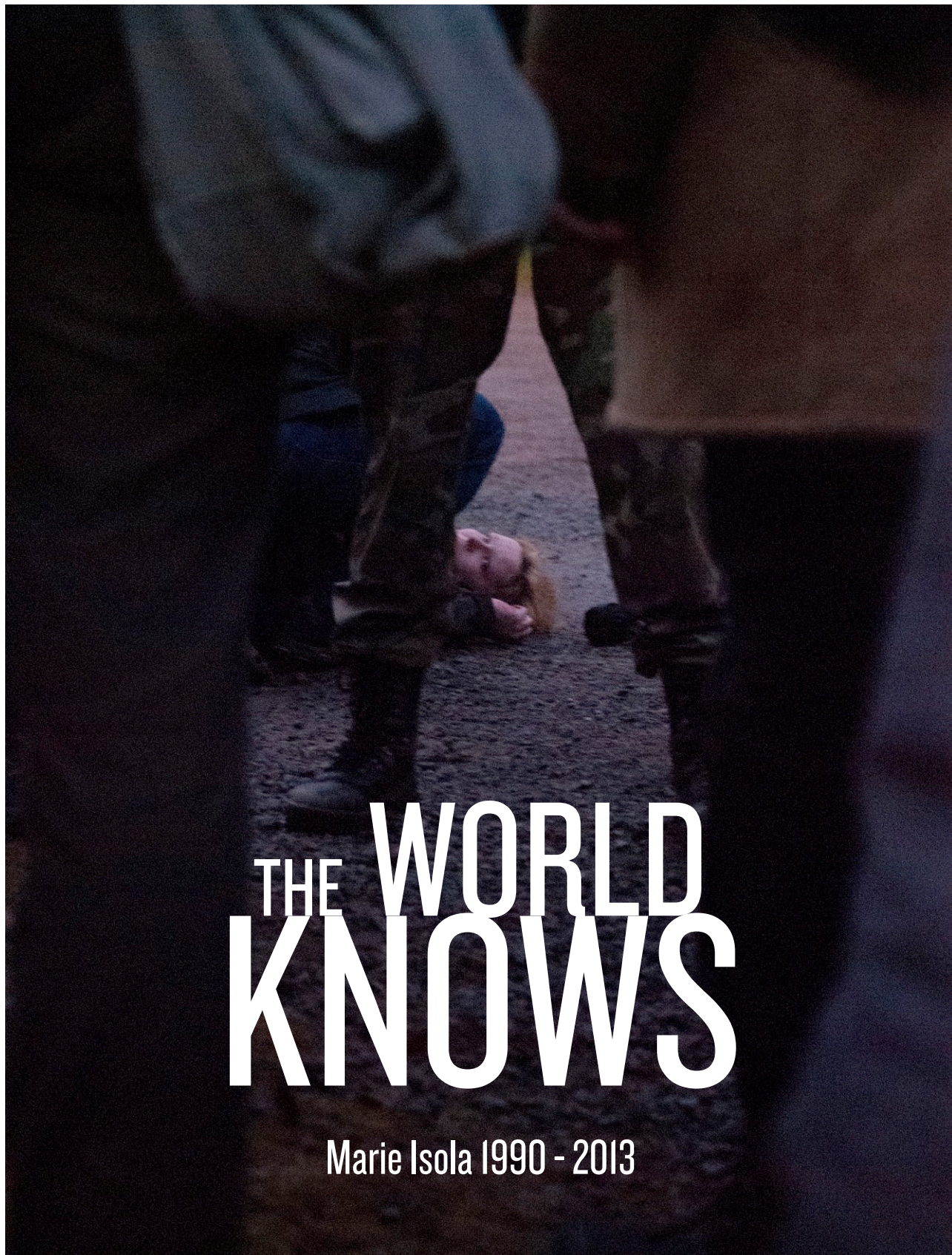
As the sun sets, the flag is raised to half mast in honor of the dead Marie Isola. It would be raised a second time the following day. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



People grieve as the flag is raised. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



*A stack of these memorial posters were provided by the organizers after Marie Isola's death.
Poster designed by Joel Sammallahhti.*



A memorial poster for Marie Isola created in-game by Nino Hynninen.



Bisan Samamra (left) played a foreign journalist. Photo from Saturday night as the soldiers' raids have begun. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

REFLECTIONS ON HALAT HISAR

Bisan Samamra

Prior to participating in the game *Halat hisar*, I was skeptical and thought that the playing of the Finnish and international participants would not reflect what actually happens under an occupation. I was also worried about having to play a game with larpers who have been doing it for years. And I have to admit that the idea of playing for two days and staying in one remote place freaked me out, especially as a budding larper.

I was impressed by the opening scene of the protest and how the players got into their characters so deeply and immediately. It did look like a real protest and I felt excited to go on with the game. When I looked at the pictures after the game, I was surprised at how genuine the scene appeared.

For me as a selfish Palestinian, and someone with minor involvement in larping, the experience of *Halat hisar* was challenging and definitely interesting. My character was an international journalist who de-

cided to devote her career to help the Finnish people and raise international awareness of their cause. Being this journalist, at times I felt helpless and experienced a bit of rejection by the Finnish students. Those emotions were only heightened by all the impressions my real self would feel towards my character. I felt I was prejudiced against myself.

This contradiction of feelings and the conflicted projections that kept coming as the game unfolded made me open my eyes and look at the game more broadly, and also try to look at my situation as a Palestinian living under the occupation in a different, absurd sense rather than as a reality. I was captivated by the excellent ways the players represented their characters, as they were people I could relate to in my daily life. It made me realize that as humans and no matter how different we are, if we are put in similar situations one's self could easily be echoed in the other.

Twitter 8

@HannaGhanam

The UDF is now using violence against all students,
Teachers and Internationals, who is next?

~~from~~

10:10 pm

* Tala-Hourani [Picture]

Uralian Soldiers abusing Finnish students who
have been captured today

* Tala-Hourani

A Collaborator spotted at the university campus

10:12 pm

8:00 am

Tala-Hourani

**UDF broke into students dorms in the middle of
the night and arrested a number of students**

Samamra was the first player to improvise tweets on the game's media wall.

(Twitter)

@TALA-HOURANI

UDF is conducting random prompt arrests at
the University of Helsinki during curfew's hours. #nonsense

UDF GUITARIST: @TALA-HOURANI UDF IS TRYING TO FIND TERRORISTS
SOLDIER KILLED LAST WEEK
#URALIA #UDF

Kirsti Korpinen

@Tala-Hourani thanks to you I
can still believe there are good people
& good journalism #KUTGW

The in-game Twitter soon took off, with organizers writing tweeting as Finns and Uralians from the outside.



Photos taken at the Halat hisar test run in July 2013 were posted on the main game's media wall as examples of UDF brutality. Photo: Fatima AbdulKarim

THE MEDIA WALL

Maria Pettersson

Suddenly, the players were tweeting. Not with their phones or computers, but by writing their tweets on little pieces of paper and taping them on the wall. There was a student activist who wanted the world to know what was happening in the campus. Students for Christ and PNLF announced they will join forces in fighting against the oppression. A journalist tweeted all the human right violations she saw. And, finally, Party of Christ, PNLF and SRF started tweeting legitimate targets for the 3rd kapina. (An analogue for an intifada in the larp.)

We didn't see this coming, but when it happened, it felt like the most natural thing in the world. Characters were tweeting to each other and re-tweeting stuff other players had tweeted. We, the organizers, decided the world of the game needed to react. We started tweeting as well.

First Tweets

First Tala_Hourani, a Lebanese journalist (and a player character), tweeted:

UDF is conducting random prompt arrests at the University of Helsinki during curfew's hours.
#nosense

UDFGuitarist (an organizer tweeter) answered:

UDF is trying to find terrorist, soldier killed last week **#Uralia #UDF**

Kirstikorpinen (an organizer tweeter) also answered:

Thanks to you I can still believe there are good people & good journalism **#KUTGW**

Many of the tweeting supporting characters were inspired by the real internet personas. For example, UDF_shaman was actively mocking pro-Finnish tweeters and praising the Uralian army – in much of the same way as the actual Twitter persona IDF_Rabbi praises the Israeli army.

A real flame war begun when photos of the UDF soldiers torturing Finnish prisoners appeared on pen-and-paper Instagram. Our pen-and-paper Twitter was filled with angry and supportive messages – the same thing that happens when photos of IDF soldiers humiliating Palestinians leak onto the web.

Jordanleftist:

That's just disgusting **#UDF #UDFphotos**

Mike82:

Don't judge whole UDF based on few rotten apples
#UDF #UDFphotos

Uralianchick91:

He's hot! Death to terrorists! **#UDF #UDFphotos**

UDF_Shaman:

Soldiers! Remember you are the face of UDF on internet **#UDFphotos**

Improvised Design

The tweets were posted on a media wall – a concept we figured out about four minutes after the game had started. One of our designers, Mohamad Rabah, understood that the five people playing journalists would have a much better game if the outside world would react to their articles. (And if somebody thinks we should have understood that earlier, we totally agree with you.)

The journalists wrote or had the organizers write A4 size papers where they would include things like the name of the media, a headline, a lead and some bullet points, or sometimes the whole article. They were taped onto the wall where everybody could see them. Very soon they became good conversation starters.

But for the characters they played even bigger role. We found out that for many characters it was incredibly important to see that somebody out there knows what's happening in the university, that the world would know what's going on.

We knew this from the real life: many times it is crucial for the victims of the human rights violations, not only in Palestine but everywhere in the world, that somebody will listen to them and that people who are not part of the conflict know what's going on.

Escalation

We decided to push it a bit more. Half of the organizers were professional journalists and everybody had been following the news from Palestine and Israel very closely. We knew the tone some of the major international papers and channels use when reporting Palestinian issues, and we wanted to present those differences to the characters and players.

So, when Marie Isola died, the media started writing about it. Most of the characters had seen what happened and how she was killed: she was approaching a soldier unarmed, she didn't stop when ordered, and a panicking soldier shot her. For the characters who were witnesses to the shooting, some ways of reporting the issue were shocking.

CNN's first report was

Woman killed in Finnish-Uralian clash.
A Canadian citizen.

Here we see what CNN often does.

First, they call the conflict "Finnish-Uralian", which indicates there's a conflict between two entities of equal power.

Second, they say "clash", which suggests those two entities have, well, clashed – instead of one occupying the other.

Third, this news is worth telling because Isola was a Canadian citizen. Finns die all the time but CNN wouldn't write about it. Only when it was a person from the Western countries did they pay interest.

The next headlines were

Canadian activist killed in Helsinki
TRIED TO KNIFE A SOLDIER

and

UDF clarifies: Death of Canadian activist SUICIDE

Here the characters already understood that the UDF had made a press release and CNN had bought it just like that. Suicide by attacking a soldier is not very common but hey, who knows what the Finns will make up next?

Other papers reported the news differently.

The New York Times:

Canadian activist killed in the Finnish territories.
UDF says tried to knife a soldier

The Times:

UDF: Canadian activist SHOT HERSELF. Gun stolen from the UDF-soldier

YLE (Finnish broadcasting company, here an equivalent to the Palestinian media):

- A student SHOT at the Helsinki University
- Curfew not broken
- Ambulance was denied access

Times of Canada (a made-up paper):

Canadian student KILLED by Uralian army in the Finnish territories

Times of Turku (a made-up paper; Turku was the de facto capital of Uralia same way as Tel Aviv is the de facto capital of Israel):

Nordic terrorist dies in clash

Characters reacted in different ways. Some started tweeting manically, others tried to convince the journalists on site that they should reveal the truth to the world. Some simply got sad and angry.

The NGOs such as Musawa and Solidary Movement for Finland started giving out their own press releases. PNLF started blogging. The media war was on, just like in Palestine.

We Stand By Our Own

There was one more media storm to come. The BBC journalist present in the game called his editor and told he was afraid for his personal safety. He was played by Riad Mustafa, an organizer filling in for a last-minute cancellation. Some blamed him for the death of Marie Isola because his provocative questions started the demonstration during which Isola was killed. He couldn't leave the campus because of the curfew.

The journalist left his phone somewhere and didn't pick up for couple of hours when the office tried to reach him. They called the university, but nobody had seen him for a while or people were just too busy with one of the students dead.

BBC writes:

- BBC journalist David Bright MISSING
- No contact since morning
- Lost in the Finnish territories
- Editorial opinion: "We stand by our own"

Suddenly, the phones of the university staff started ringing.

"This is Miranda Wilson from CNN. We have the information that a British journalist David Bright is missing. Can you confirm? There are claims that he was asked to leave the campus, can you confirm? Why was he threatened? Is the university administration responsible for the disappearance? How about the

student activists or the possible terrorists? Can you guarantee his safety?"

The headlines started to spread.

YLE:

- BBC journalist held captive at the Helsinki University
- Dean blames for starting the riot where a student lost her life – "was asking provocative questions"
- Can't leave the university
- Possibly assaulted
- University doesn't let to continue work

Reuters:

British journalist LOST in the Finnish territories.
BBC: "We stand by our own"

CNN:

- British journalist TRAPPED in the Finnish territories
- Can not leave Helsinki University
- Dean says: University guarantees safety "as much as we are able"

Marie Isola was forgotten, Western media was talking only about the "missing" BBC journalist who was in fact very much in sight of the characters.

After an hour or so he was able to call back. BBC writes:

BBC journalist David Bright FOUND ALIVE.
"Shocked but will continue reporting".

Low Tech

The beauty of the media wall lied in its simplicity. We were writing the headlines and tweets by hand. Anybody could join by tweeting or blogging. It was a very easy way to make the game reach further than its physical restrictions. The concept worked so well we decided that it was best for the game if one of the organizers would leave her original duties to others and concentrate only on managing the media wall.

The pen-and-paper social media was truly social. People were discussing with each other live, not just sitting in a corner alone with a phone as often happens with Facebook or Twitter in real life. Twitter was also a great way to spread rumors. If there was an empty moment, you could go to the wall and read the latest news.

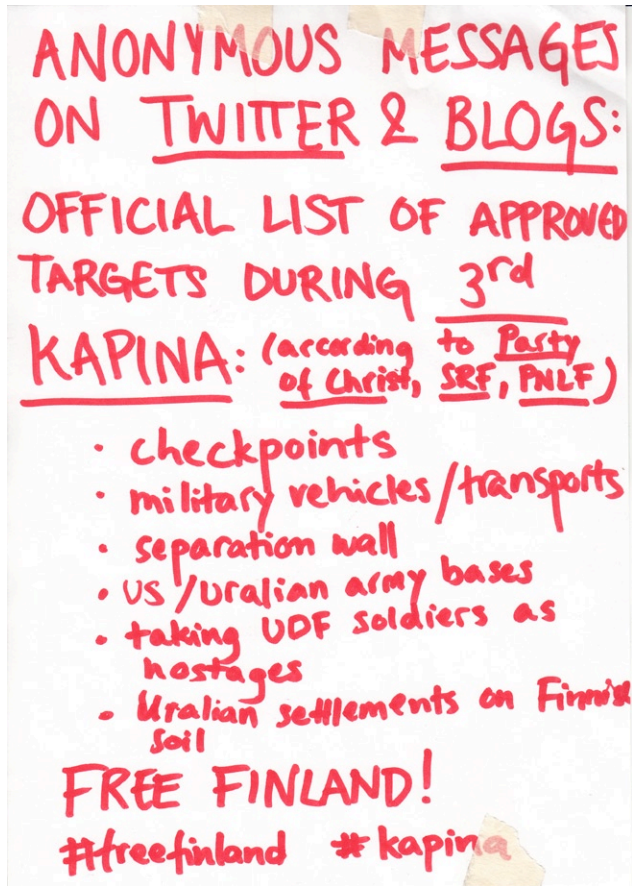
The pen-and-paper version of Twitter was also a matter of equality, safety and costs. There was no wi-fi on site, and where the Finnish players could have used their phones for tweeting, it would have cost a lot for the foreign players (or organizers) to do the same. Some of the characters were tweeting things the players didn't want to be associated with their

offgame selves anyway.

Having tried real tweeting in other games, we felt this was a way better technique for a game that is set in one location.

The media wall got very positive feedback. The single criticism it faced was that it was unclear what the A4 papers on the wall represented in-game. Were they actual prints (and if yes, who was printing them out)? Or were they something you'd read on the internet?

While the organizers thought the latter was the case, we indeed didn't communicate it, thus making the former reading also possible and equally correct.



A list of "approved targets" created in the heat of the game for a proposed third kapina.

Different Angles

We hope the takeout for the players was that they would in the future think twice when reading news from Palestine or other conflict areas.

What are the agendas behind the story?

Who is allowed to tell her viewpoint? Why her?

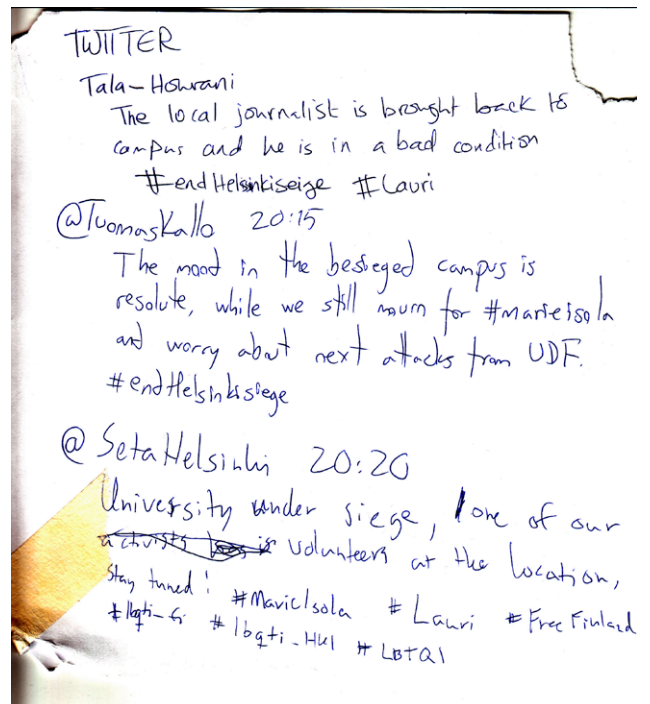
Is a big and well-known medium reliable just because it's big?

Is the one with better communication infrastructure also the one who gets her message through?

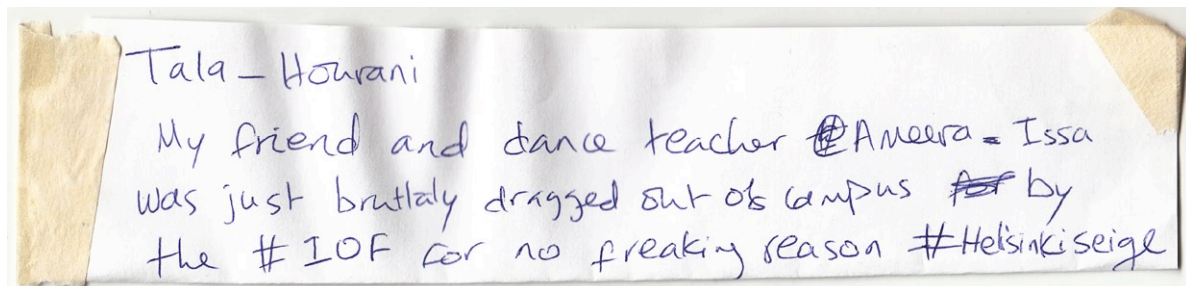
Do the journalists take sides, on purpose or without knowing it?

While aiming at "neutral" journalism, is the media sometimes actually worsening the situation by representing the two parties as equals ("Finnish-Uralian clash"), where there actually is a stronger side repressing a weaker side?

Personally, returning to work the next day after the game was a nightmare. I work at Scandinavia's biggest newspaper as a journalist for foreign news.



@SetaHelsinki was an anonymously tweeting player character.



One of the many player-improvised tweets from the game.

YLE

KANSAINVÄLINEN

TIEDEYHTEISÖ

JA CHRISTOPHER

TOLKIEN VAATIVAT:

ARMEIJAN

LÄHDETTÄVÄ

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTOLTA

"YLE - The international scientific community and Christopher Tolkien demand: the army must leave the Helsinki University"

CANADIAN TIMES

URALIAN

EMBASSADOR

CALLED TO

GIVE AN

EXPLANATION

REGARDING

ISOLA'S DEATH

AND ARREST OF CANADIAN ACTIVIST

Canadian press reaction was presented as more negative to Uralia than other international media because the victim of the shooting was a Canadian citizen.

Twitter

@Tala-Hourani: Bullshit from the UOF spokesperson:
Maria attacked the soldier who had to defend himself
#FucktheOccupation

UDFGUITARIST: @Tala-Hourani

"journalist" Hope

You call yourself
you share

#marieisola's
fate.

The discussion can turn hostile quickly

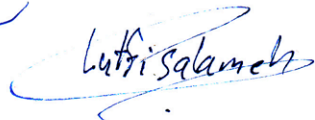
"Musawa"

Equal - Freedom - justice

- We condemn all violence targeted against the students of Helsinki campus and foreign nationals by the Uralian Defense Force.
- We congratulate Helsinki University student council for getting to hold the student council spokesperson elections in a democratic manner.
- Musawa promises to work through international community and take the criminal violations perpetrated by the Uralian government to the International Court of Justice in Lahey, Brussels.

Musawa International


KARL ROIVOS


Lutfi Salameh

christopher - tolkien

My full support to Conference
#Helsinki2013

christopher - tolkien

My father believed in
#democracy and (cont.)

christopher - tolkien

never letting anyone stop you
from doing what you
believe in #Helsinki2013

christopher - tolkien

Support to #Marieisola.

Remember, already 23

Finnish have died this year

RT @Tuomas Kallio



Hanna Anderssén (center) played the Dean of the Humanities, the highest university official present in the larp.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

THE ROLE OF MEDIA AS PART OF THE GAME EXPERIENCE

Hanna Anderssén

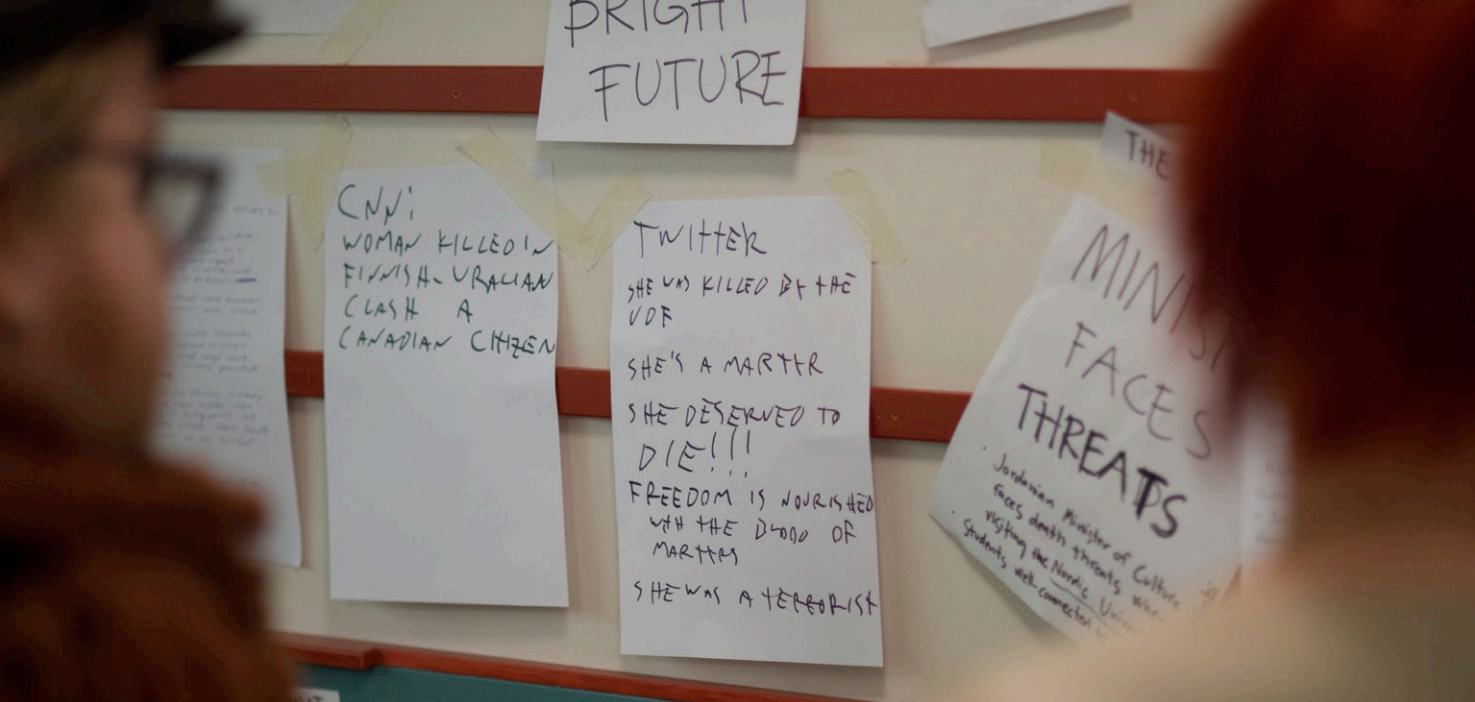
As a geographer, the role of the media in building identities and creating geographical realities was a familiar subject to me even before *Halat hisar*. I hadn't had a chance to explore these themes in a larp before, so the media elements in the game became an interesting and central factor to my game experience.

My character was Raili Niemelä, the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities. Niemelä was described in the character brief as a comfortable idealist, and her prior experiences with the occupying Uralian forces were minimal. She did not support the idea of armed resistance, but instead supported peaceful resistance. One of her main motivations was to protect her faculty.

Ordinary Beginnings

Most of my focus in the beginning went into administrative choices regarding the faculty's finances and ongoing attempts to keep the students from radicalization and injuring themselves while confronting the UDF. Another central theme was preparing for the visit of the Jordanian Minister of Culture for the sake of securing a financial donation for the faculty. My character was aware of the unpopularity of the Minister's statements in the eyes of the students, but for her, chaperoning a foreign dignitary was a necessary evil if it meant ensuring that the faculty could continue educating Finnish students without closing any of its departments.

The media was simulated through a media wall where headlines, articles, social media messages and



The media wall was improvized with paper and a felt tip marker. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

online content regarding the ongoing siege of the campus were posted. The inclusion of the media coverage in the game offered both a chance to learn of events, and the chance to hold discussions over the topics.

I remember having a discussion where we pointed out that at least the world had a chance to hear of the Uralian occupation of Finland and the situation at the university. But the media aspect only truly started affecting my game experience once certain events kicked in, mid-game.

Punching the Media

The first such event was the death of Marie Isola. I had taken to following the student elections to learn about the political views of the students, and I was present when David Bright, the reporter from BBC International asked a question at the end of the election panel that led to the demonstration that led to the shooting of Marie Isola. Shortly after the shooting, I happened to be present as Cristian Isola confronted David Bright over provoking the students with his question during the panel and proceeded to punch him as an outlet for his sorrow over losing Marie Isola.

I was aware that the sympathy of an international audience was important to preserve. The faculty needed to retain an image of being needlessly targeted by the UDF. Thus endangering media relations was perceived as risky by my character. At the same time, Cristian was a colleague and understandably upset over the loss. While the situation didn't escalate beyond a short confrontation, this event marked the beginning of the media aspects taking a prominent role in my game experience.

Soon after, the UDF planned a press conference in front of our building to give what they called a true

perspective on the siege. As the Dean, I felt that bringing their propaganda to our front lawn was highly inappropriate. We decided during an impromptu staff meeting not to allow the press conference to take place in front of the building.

Bombardment

We had been instructed to keep our phones with us in case of in-game phone calls, and at that point, my character started to be bombarded by calls from foreign media sources calling to confirm if a BBC journalist had died on the campus. Right at the moment I should've been driving away the UDF from holding a press conference on campus, I found myself on the phone systematically denying any knowledge of any harm having come to David Bright after quickly confirming that the earlier confrontation with Isola hadn't escalated without my knowledge.

I opted to give out the least amount of information I could even though I knew of the prior confrontation between Cristian Isola and David Bright. I felt a need to protect the faculty. One moment I was marveling at the media wall, astounded by the faulty statements made by the UDF about Marie Isola having committed suicide, the next I was manipulating the information foreign media got of the situation.

The university staff even told the BBC reporter to leave, as we felt he had aggravated the situation by his own actions. I wanted to retain good relations with the foreign media, but the situation was too tense at that point. Later on, once the situation cooled down a bit, he was allowed back. A similar scenario followed as the media started calling to ask questions on the status of some of the foreign exchange students. In this respect, the media aspects worked wonderfully in providing additional dimensions to the game; the



The player of the BBC journalist David Bright cancelled just before the game, so organizer Riad Mustafa assumed the role at a very short notice. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

media seemed to care more about foreigners being injured in the siege than about factual reporting of the events of the campus siege.

Later I happened to witness the return of the Finnish journalist Kuha after hours of interrogations by the UDF. When the international human rights people wanted to know what he'd been asked, Kuha relayed a story of how Marie Isola's death had been planned in advance, and pointed out that the opposition was led by a skilled military officer whose specialty was the orchestration of propaganda. He pointed out that the international journalists wouldn't be there without the permission of the UDF.

Media War

My entire take of the presence of the UDF on campus changed when the systematic orchestration of a media war against the faculty and the university became apparent. What I had perceived as having a few radicalized students on campus the UDF had taken interest in now seemed to be a planned attack on the faculty itself. From that point, the priorities of my character shifted towards a definite desire to protect the university and its image.

One of the most profound experiences I took from the game was seeing how the occupation worked on several levels. While my character was never directly confronted by the Uralian forces during the game, the existence of the UDF propaganda felt like an at-

tack and provided a strong motivation for protecting the academic environment of the university.

The staff's immediate reaction was to start a subtle media boycott of the reporters present to keep the foreign media from falsifying statements given by any of the faculty members. My hope at that point was to subtly steer reporting towards stories bringing the human rights aspects of the siege into general view.

Overall, the presence of the media wall provided a sense of events taking place outside of the game location, as well as subject matter for conversation. Contact with the media during the game gave an additional sense of the actions of characters having consequences outside of the environment. Being bombarded on the phone by reporters added an interesting element to the game, as did seeing the appearance of news articles as a follow-up to events in the game, especially when headlines drastically differed from the reality the characters were part of.

The revelation of the ongoing orchestration of UDF propaganda was also interesting in simulating how an occupation might play out in modern Finland. Especially for the university staff, the presence of the media elements in the game provided an additional dimension of resistance; we were not simply participating in resistance by our own actions and words, but instead had to factor in the larger elements of an occupation on many fronts, including in the media.

BBC

BBC JOURNALIST

DAVID BRIGHT

MISSING

- NO CONTACT SINCE THIS MORNING
- LOST IN THE FINNISH TERRITORIES
- EDITORIAL OPINION:
"WE STAND BY OUR OWN"

REUTERS

BRITISH JOURNALIST

LOST IN THE

FINNISH TERRITORIES

BBC: "WE STAND BY
OUR OWN"

CNN

BRITISH
JOURNALIST
TRAPPED
IN THE FINNISH TERRITORIES

- CAN NOT LEAVE
HELSINKI UNIVERSITY
- DEAN SAYS: UNIVERSITY
GUARANTEES SAFETY "AS MUCH
AS WE'RE ABLE".

BBC

JOURNALIST

DAVID BRIGHT

FOUND
ALIVE

"SHOCKED BUT WILL CONTINUE
REPORTING"

The foreign press was extremely concerned about the fate of BBC journalist David Bright.



After sunset, UDF held a press conference about the shooting. The officer from the Army Spokesperson's Unit explained that Isola's death had been a suicide. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Reporters from Finnish and foreign media. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Soon after the UDF press conference, arrests started. Foreign activists and NGO workers watch an arrest being made. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



A journalist for Helsingin Sanomat being marched away. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



People linked arms when the soldiers appeared to make arrests more difficult. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



A man is being arrested. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Later, people sat down in a ring with linked arms, sometimes singing. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The soldiers trying to drag a man away from the ring. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



A faculty member and a student in the immediate aftermath of an arrest. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



UDF soldiers preparing to go in to the University building. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



An arrest in motion. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Note the man attempting to hinder the arrest by clinging to the soldier's feet. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The soldiers often had a hard time identifying the right person to arrest. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Venla Leimu (center right) played an agitator from the Party of Christ. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

USING MY RELIGION

Venla Leimu

For me, *Halat hisar* was a first. I had played tabletop roleplaying games for several years, but I had never larped before. I had wanted to larp, and I had even had dreams where I larped. So when a game this interesting came up, I decided to go for it.

I was more than a little scared when I got my character. Ronja Ruutu was a young student member of The Party of Christ. She firmly believed in terrorist action – killing civilians to create as much terror as possible, to drive the occupier away for good. Ronja was also described as a political animal in the sense that she wanted to win people over to support her party and her goals. This meant that I as a player needed to be able to open my mouth and argue my case.

This made me as a newbie uneasy, even apprehensive before the game. I was afraid I would spoil the game for others by playing my character badly. Still,

all I wanted to do was to experience the whole thing, to be part of it for better or worse. I was also curious – leaving my own part aside, I really wanted to see how this kind of thing would actually work. Such a big bunch of people somewhere secluded larping about something this serious and controversial. I could not imagine what it would be like.

Evicted at Night

At the venue, we all gathered in the main hall. What followed was an introduction to the game. Every minute of it was time well spent, at least for a newbie like me. I found comfort in that there were several safety measures to ensure nobody felt too bad. It was also stated out clearly that it would be okay to change one's mind about things such as rough handling even in the middle of the game.

Then, some of us played scenes while everybody watched. Ronja and other Party of Christ members had a scene where their prayer meeting was crashed by some drunken students. That was fun, and made me feel more like a student as opposed to the game being just about politics and fighting the occupier.

For me, the most shocking part of the warm up was a scene where some Finns were driven out of their home by Uralian Army soldiers. The soldiers just entered the house of a family with kids and told everybody to leave immediately. The children started crying, the father tried to stand up for his family. It was a very short scene but tears were rolling down my cheeks by the end of it. Then I noticed some Palestinian players were crying, too, which made me feel really pathetic. I had no right to cry, I was eavesdropping, what did I know. This feeling persisted throughout the game and after it – almost whenever I or my character felt sad, shocked, angry or scared, as a player I felt guilty, like a fraud.

Checkpoint

We entered the game the following morning by entering the University campus area through a checkpoint. It was a beautiful morning and we stood in line talking about soldiers and the checkpoint the same way we in the real world talk about the weather or the bus being late. We got through safely, but seeing the soldiers stand there filled me with unease. It was so surreal, yet so everyday. Why do these people have the right to ask for my ID? Why can't I just walk on the street like a normal person? Why do most of my fellow students accept this shit without really fighting back?

For Ronja, this game was about elections. She wanted to make her fellow students see that peaceful or even plain armed resistance were not enough. Moreover, Ronja wanted people outside her own party to understand that despite pretty ideals and several agreements, nothing would ever change without extreme measures. Finnish people would be oppressed unless they took the law into their own hands.

It was surprisingly easy for me to make myself see Ronja's side of the story. The history of this alternative Finland helped a lot. There had been treaties, there had been agreements, there had been loads of different kinds of leaders. What remained was oppression on so many levels. It was much more than just checkpoints. It was denial of basic human rights. It was people having to leave their homes, driven out by people who would beat them up, lock them up or even shoot them if they didn't do as they were told. It was interrogations and torture, sometimes of children, and it had to stop, by any means necessary.

Ronja's idea was that Finns should really strike back. Target everybody, especially the civilians. Make the others see what it felt like to be attacked, to live in constant fear and insecurity. And more than any-

thing, make them understand that some Finns would not stop threatening them before they got off their land. Unfortunately for her, most other students did not see it Ronja's way. They seemed to have all the facts, but – in Ronja's world – they were too scared to act on them. They did not seem to realize that house by house, person by person, Finns were being annihilated.

In the Name of Christ

Fortunately, Ronja got support for her beliefs and views from her religion and her friends. The Bible had so many encouraging stories about fighting for what is right, being the sword of God. Being never truly alone. Ronja was actively recruiting people, sometimes as possible suicide attack candidates. The idea was that if somebody was so depressed that they wanted to die, why not make their death useful?

Comforting and encouraging people, taking advantage of their desperation and luring people to consider doing horrendous things was very hard for me as a player. It was particularly hard for me because I am a Christian. In the game, I used my personal spiritual experiences and turned them into something I consider evil and against the very core of Christianity, and I did this in the name of Christ.

Throughout the game, Ronja and her fellow Party of Christ members held prayer meetings where everybody was free to join in. Together, we prayed for freedom, strength and the defeat of our enemies. It was incredibly comforting. In practice, we sat in a circle, holding hands and praying out aloud, taking turns. After the game, I got feedback from a player that the prayer meetings were comforting for her character, too, although she did not share the Party of Christ's views at all. All this religious activity combined with wannabe-terrorism made me think about how easily vulnerable people in extreme situations can be influenced and how some of the mechanisms of religious extremism might work.

Night Watch

Needless to say, it was eye opening, even shocking to participate in such a game, especially knowing that the human rights violations, torture and people's desperation were real. That so many people in similar situations have lost many loved ones.

The game was not real. It wasn't even a drill. Still, it simulated many real situations and the manifestations of occupation in a surprisingly deep and touching way.

I had very few positive moments in the game. One was during the night watch. Students and teachers were taken in for questioning. We stood watch waiting, warning people of approaching soldiers and helping the Finns who got back, often badly wounded. We were so tired and so angry and so powerless, we took down some Uralian soldiers' propaganda posters and



A Helsingin Sanomat journalist who got roughed up at his interrogation. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

folded them in funny origami shapes, adding speech bubbles, changing the scary faces on the posters into something harmless, funny and ridiculous. We laughed and laughed and posed with the posters. It was the laughter of desperation and we clung to that comic relief.

The second most rewarding experience for me as a player was the end of the game, where all the students participated in a peaceful protest, humming the Finlandia hymn. For my character, the hymn was a manifestation of sadly insufficient and naive form or resistance. At the same time, it was hope, it was a declaration: even in discord, we are united. We are a people, we are proud of our heritage, we really love our country and no matter how you treat us or steal our national symbols you will never crush us!

Empathy and Ruthlessness

After the game, we got to talk about our experiences in small groups. Every group also had someone who had played a soldier. This was shocking. I had goosebumps just seeing this one guy who had some hours ago pointed at my character with his gun. My character had given him attitude and I as a player felt very apprehensive towards him.

One Palestinian guy played an officer from the Army Spokesperson's Unit. He was in charge of com-

menting on the events that unfolded at the campus for tv cameras. He was the official voice of the UDF. I did not know this person at all, but after the game I was shocked to notice that I experienced feelings of hatred towards him. I really wanted to kick his ass. Because of this, I forced myself to talk to him on the bus to Helsinki to make him more a person, less his character.

During the aftermath, several people approached me saying that they absolutely hated Ronja. Not only was she seen as an immoral and irritating person, her way of mixing her extreme views with religion and some very positive values was particularly insulting to so many. Some people found Ronja a really scary combination of empathy and ruthlessness.

This game was an emotionally hard experience. I will never forget the moment when a resistance activist was shot by the soldiers during a demonstration. Nor will I forget when during the night of interrogations, a friend and a fellow candidate for the Party of Christ came back from being interrogated. He was pretty badly beaten up and in a very shaken state. I reacted as a person and as my character, in this situation I could not keep the two apart. I comforted him and praised him for his bravery. And I felt a huge pang of guilt – why did they take him? Why not me? Why did I have to stay in bed, listening to the march



*The student elections and the presence of the soldiers cause a lot of discussion before the arrests start.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*

of the soldier squad, hearing the screams, comforting the ones who got back? Why was I not worth taking? Why could I not take their place, I would have gladly done it, anything but waiting and seeing other people being taken!

The enemy remained somehow faceless, I wanted to see the face, to spit on that face, to show that our spirit will not be broken. Yet when they came to take my friend in the middle of the night we did nothing. Looking back, I wish I could do this one thing differently. I would have put up a fight. I wouldn't have let them take him just like that, even if we had agreed that we would go quietly with dignity.

Fear the Uniform

In Finland, we have compulsory military service for all young men. Coming back from the larp, we stopped at a gas station. There was a small group of young guys dressed in their army gear. This is a totally normal sight in Finland and these guys were certainly not carrying guns. Seeing them, I felt repulsion and fear. I felt these kids in uniforms, no matter how young, no matter how irresponsible, no matter if they felt guilty

afterwards or not, had the power to hurt people just like that. All of them would end up doing it, even if they hadn't started yet. My reaction tells of the power of *Halat hisar*. A blurry yet scarily real image of living under occupation, under constant threat of violence, had taken a grip of my heart during the weekend.

Finnish Names

Most of the Finnish characters, such as Venla Leimu's Ronja Ruutu, had short and simple surnames. In our test game in July 2013, we discovered that typical Finnish surnames such as Piiroinen or Lehtovirta were difficult for foreign players to remember. Because of this, we tried to give all Finnish characters easy last names.

For the Finnish players, this changed the aesthetic of the game subtly. Short names like Ronja Ruutu have a mild fictional clang to them. They sound a little like Peter Parker or Reed Richards, names suitable for adventure stories.



*Students listening to the election panel.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



*An audience comment at the election panel.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



*Ronja Ruutu gets threatened by a soldier in the immediate aftermath of Marie Isola's death.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



Ronja Ruutu arguing next to the makeshift ballot box, on the left. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Syksy Räsänen played an interrogator and the leader of the Uralian forces. Photo from a semi-in-game scene, with only supporting players present. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

BLESSINGS OF MISFORTUNE

Playing an interrogator in *Halat hisar*

In *Halat hisar*, I played the Uralian officer in charge of the military operation, who also acted as the lead interrogator. My character had the responsibility for choosing the characters to be interrogated and to keep things moving. This was also my task as a player, apart from the occasional organizer intervention. Like the other soldiers, my character was supporting cast, so my main goal was to create game content for other players. However, in the process, I too was affected by the intensity of the game.

Reality on the Ground

Originally, there were supposed to be four people playing interrogators: two game organisers (Fatima AbdulKarim and Juhana Pettersson), as well as two supporting players, Johanna MacDonald and myself. The organizers had prepared an hour-by-hour schedule detailing which characters would be interrogated by whom and at what time. The plan was to have three game locations: the university campus where most of the game would happen, the nearby



One of the core organizers of the larp, Fatima AbdulKarim, in the role of an interrogator. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

sauna where the soldiers were quartered and a cabin where the interrogations would be held. However, upon inspecting the location, it became clear that the cabin was too far away for this plan to be feasible, so the interrogations were moved to the sauna building. This meant there was much less space for holding and interrogating detainees, so Juhana was reassigned as a full-time organizer, leaving us with three interrogators. The number of characters to be interrogated was sharply cut.

These unwelcome changes, worked out late at night only some hours before the start of the game, turned out to be a boon. The characters to be interrogated were now organized into four groups: those who had to be interrogated for plot reasons, those whom it was advisable to interrogate because they otherwise might not have had enough game content, those who should be interrogated because of information that emerged during the game and finally those who might be slated for interrogation, but not at high priority.

Only those in the first group were definitely to be interrogated. Decisions about the others were made as the game progressed. This made the interrogations more dynamic than originally planned, and added both lively randomness and situational adaptability. Several characters were interrogated based on information obtained during the game, and some charac-



A sauna shower space acted as an improvised interrogation room. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

ters who were not arrested ended up having survivor's guilt. The fact that we had only two rooms for three interrogators also meant more interaction between the interrogators (and their players). Many, if not most, detainees were interrogated by more than one officer, which I think added to the experience.

The fact that the interrogations were at the place where the soldiers were staying also made it possible to use the soldiers more effectively to create atmosphere and events for the detainees. For example, the soldiers ordered a Finnish character to wash their dishes while he was waiting to be interrogated.

Tools of the Trade

I had played an interrogator in the test game at Ropecon 2013. The interrogations seemed to work reasonably well for a con game, thanks in large part due to the abusive and unpredictable atmosphere created by the soldiers carrying out the arrests. However, I felt that more intensity was needed, so I turned to descriptions of actual interrogations, both from the point of view of interrogators and those interrogated.

Descriptions of real Israeli interrogation techniques are mostly not very useful for game purposes, as they often involve means of pressure that are not suitable to be reproduced in a short larp, such as sleep deprivation, extended periods of isolation, painful positions, exposure to cold and repeated beatings. Apart from the difficulty of meaningfully simulating extended periods of inactivity (where boredom is a more likely outcome than emotional engagement), in-game physical violence can be an alienating element because of the simulation involved. In the case of psychological techniques, there is much less distance between larp and real life. Most psychological methods allow the player of the detainee to build her reactions in close interaction with the player of the interrogator. In contrast, when simulating physical violence, the player of the victim typically has to react to extreme treatment of the character with either little or no corresponding physical experience of the player.

Some of the more psychological techniques used by Israeli occupation forces are well-suited to larp and were used in *Halat hisar*. I also consulted material on interrogation techniques used by U.S. police. Experiences (my own and those of people I have talked to or read about) of being questioned by Israeli border control and occupation soldiers were also useful, particularly for interrogations of internationals. Psychological methods used in the game included threats to family members, blackmail, sexual humiliation and offers of increased privileges such as travel permits, being handcuffed in place and unable to move, having to stand blindfolded while waiting to be interrogated, hearing someone being tortured in the next room, having your personal space invaded, having to answer the same questions over and over, the interrogator suddenly becoming hostile after starting

out friendly and having interrogators switched unexpectedly. We also did one mock execution.

Based on discussion with the players after the game, some simple techniques like switching interrogators or invading the detainee's personal space were surprisingly effective. Other methods that create dread in real life worked less well. For example, waiting while blindfolded led some players to drop out of character because of the lack of interaction. While it might be expected that the psychological impact of a mock execution would be difficult to simulate, the player later said that it had worked well. Perhaps this was because the character had expected to be executed, and he was taken into the woods at night and abused before the mock execution, so the player had something to build on.

The organizers had prepared interrogation notes for all of the characters. They included in-game information that the occupation authorities had on the characters, off-game notes on the interrogation that the organizers suggested for that character, and finally information provided by the player on their limits for the interrogations. We did different kinds of interrogations, partly because the characters had different status (for example, internationals were not beaten), and partly because variety would add to the game. For example, one character had been prescribed an absurd interrogation, while for another the guidelines suggested attempts at bribery followed by physical violence.

In-game, many interrogations were rather violent, with beating and kicking to the back, chest, legs, and occasionally to the head, though they fell short of the most extreme methods used by the Israeli occupation forces, such as raping prisoners or hanging them in painful positions for days on end without food or water. Simulating physical violence was a challenge. The players had been asked beforehand about the limits on what could be done to them during interrogations, and some had said that they could be subjected to varying degrees of actual violence.

However, I found it psychologically difficult to carry out anything more than token violence against the players (as opposed my character being violent towards their characters). The off-game violence in the interrogations I played in did not go further than slaps to the cheeks and being lightly pulled by the hair. Even then, I felt it was important to be careful. Though the player of a detainee can in principle use cut or brake at any time, in practice the threshold for doing so can be quite high. Also, in the case of sudden physical violence, the player may not have time to react. Therefore, unless the player had clearly indicated to the contrary, I always cut before even touching the player and explained what I was going to do off-game and what happened in-game.



*The prisoner is alone in the room with two off-game documentation photographers.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



Uralian soldiers harassing a prisoner. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

I also sometimes used cut in the case of psychological pressure. For example, my character stripped one female detainee of some items of clothing as the interrogation went on, and I checked with the player to make sure I didn't exceed the limits of what she was comfortable with. The same character was later sexually humiliated by being groped by soldiers and photographed in humiliating positions with them. I used cut to discuss with the player what was going to happen in- and off-game and whether she was comfortable with it, and then immediately after the scene to check that she was OK.

Players may shy away from using cut because of worries that it would disrupt immersion. However, after the game the player told me that because she knew what was going to happen and had agreed to it, she could concentrate on immersing in the experience of the character instead of worrying whether something would happen that she as a player would be uncomfortable with. In contrast, another player told me after the game that she was happy that cut had not been used during a harsh interrogation scene (I had relied on information supplied by the player before the game).

I felt that it was important to remember that the player of the interrogator was also responsible for using cut, not just the player of the detainee. This was not only to protect the other player, but also to protect myself from unintentionally abusing the trust put in me. In hindsight, the players of the interrogators should have discussed in more detail beforehand how the scenes were going to be conducted, and particularly how cut should be used. Based on discussions with the players of the detainees, the interrogators seemed to have played responsibly and the scenes had worked well. However, in general, in games with strong scenes of psychological and physical pressure in an environment characterised by oppressive power relations, it would be advisable to make sure that the players of those in control have guidelines on making sure that the scenes are psychologically safe without compromising depth. I would also suggest preparing a checklist of things that the player is comfortable with, including psychological issues like sexual humiliation, instead of an open-ended question about limits. From my own experience, I can say that the interrogation scenes turned out to be more powerful than expected, and I am glad I erred on the side of caution.

Heightened Sensations

The first few interrogation scenes felt somewhat superficial. It took me some time to learn how to emotionally connect with the player of the detainee to build a scene together. The in-game corollary to that was my character finding his stride in manipulating the detainees. These two sides reflect the different aims of the player and the character. In-game,

the main reason for the interrogations was to locate resistance members who had killed a soldier a week ago, as well as to harass human rights activists and critical journalists. However, the players of the interrogators didn't do their best to get information: in fact, sometimes we had to make sure that the detainees did not reveal what our characters wanted to know. We had been instructed by the organizers that all of the characters had to be released, as there was no play prepared for imprisoned characters, and there were no facilities for holding them. This led to at least one situation where the player of the interrogator had to skip over incriminating statements so as not to uncover a detainee's participation in resistance activities.

After getting things rolling, playing the interrogations was rather enjoyable. Success of the character in his task, emotionally engaging good play and satisfaction from keeping the off-game logistics working combined to a powerful flow. The last interrogation finished around 2.30 at night or so, but I felt that I could have continued all night.

However, waking up on the morning of the second day, I was distraught over having enjoyed playing a character who had severely mistreated people. Perhaps not unrelatedly, I had some difficulty in recognising myself from one of the photos from the game later on. After the game, one of the players who is a psychologist held a short debriefing for players of interrogators and detainees, and I talked individually with every player I had played an interrogation scene with. I was relieved that the players were satisfied with the scenes, and had no emotional misgivings. For some players, the experience had been good but not exceptional, while others had quite strong emotional involvement.

One Palestinian player (seemingly disappointed) had expected a lot more harassment for her character – she had played a foreign journalist, who was questioned only lightly. Another player had felt physical nausea upon seeing my character again, at the army press conference the following day, the first time that something like that had happened to her at a larp.

The emotional connection to the players of detainees immediately after the game was curious, because the game was a positive common experience, whereas the in-game situation had been very negative. Such mismatch between in-game and off-game roles is common in larp, but in the case of *Halat hisar* the dissonance was heightened by the emotional strength of the game.

Both Eyes Open

After the game, it was interesting to reflect on the difference between my viewpoint as a player of the oppressor and the viewpoint of the players of the oppressed. For example, I was surprised by the level of fear generated by the soldiers coming to the univer-



A collaborator asked to be roughed up before returning from his interrogation. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

sity and arresting people: several players had dreams of being taken and tortured, or had found it difficult to sleep. However, while my character had only an instrumental connection to the emotions of the detainees, he did on some level feel that there is something questionable about beating up and sexually humiliating people. However, it did not occur to him to think at all about the psychological effects of sending soldiers to arrest and blindfold people, or keeping them standing and waiting for long times, or to consider how the soldiers conducted the arrests and behaved with the detainees while they were being brought in.

It was also revealing to witness in the game the sensation of powerlessness of the oppressed and the different sense of vulnerability of the oppressor, the latter born of small cracks in impunity. Whereas players of Finns and internationals felt that they were totally powerless to stop the arrests, my character was acutely conscious of the risk of the situation escalating, possibly with more foreign casualties and international attention. The arrest raids were stopped for several hours to allow the situation to calm down. This was also in part due to off-game instructions by the organizers to avoid making the game too repeti-

tive, and a deal with a university professor who provided my character with names of suspects.

Some players of Finns said after the game that the night watch they had set up was mere security theatre, intended them to make feel more in control, while having no effect on the arrests. However, the possibility of effective resistance with unpredictable consequences was a real worry for my character. In the last raid of the night he instructed the soldiers to leave the university without arresting the targets if the situation heats up. The organizers also decided that towards the end of the game the occupation forces would withdraw from the campus early due to bad publicity.

The different roles also offered contrasting viewpoints on nationalism, one of the central themes of the game. The sensation of nationalism as a unifying force was stronger than expected for the Finnish players, and even I, as a Finn playing a Uralian soldier, was moved by the nationalist sentiments to the point of weeping to the Finlandia hymn after the game. However, during the game, I also experienced another side of nationalism, one that combines with racism into an ideology of ethnic privilege and is willing to meet the excluded only in the torture chamber.



Prisoners waiting for interrogation at the soldiers' improvised accomodation. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The boyfriend of the now dead Marie Isola being interrogated. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

GUILT

Laura Guillen

During one of the night raids on the campus my character, Ilona Mattson, was taken away to be interrogated by the Uralian soldiers. Under physical and mental pressure Ilona eventually caved in and ended up telling the interrogator she suspected Senni Railo was involved in illegal activities. Although the interrogation scene was intense in itself, having to return to the company of the others afterwards was certainly the most emotionally challenging moment for me in the game. It was also a critical turning point in my character's story arc.

Before the interrogation Ilona attempted to provide comfort to those around her, and did her best to remain positive and believe in peaceful solutions. Afterwards this attitude seemed impossible to muster, and Ilona sunk into a depressive state. Mikael Siivo, the character who was a poster boy for depression in the game, came to comfort Ilona. You know you're truly in the gutter when arguably the most suicidal and depressed character in the game is the one comforting you.

Another tricky thing was the lack of any physical evidence of the interrogation having been rough. A lot of the people returning from the hands of the Uralians came back with fractured bones and bruised

faces. Ilona, however, had no visible signs on her body of the harsh treatment she'd endured. This was surprisingly difficult to deal with, since most of her fellow students seemed to assume that she was fine. It's a strange feeling to wish for physical bruising so people will care for you more.

In the end the most difficult thing to deal with after the interrogation was the guilt. Right from the moment Ilona was released, there was this overwhelming feeling of "what have I done?" Ilona had essentially thrown someone else under the bus to save herself from further pain. The guilt was made all the worse for the fact that Senni was romantically involved with Ilona's cousin. I cannot stress how badly the guilt actually got to me, both in and off-game. Eventually I resorted to using the monologue box to provide me with some peace of mind, as I could confess what I'd done to both Senni and the cousin romantically involved with her.

I have mixed feelings about the use of the monologue box in that instance, as it gave me some relief by letting me confess, but at the same time it perhaps slightly interrupted my immersion by giving me an out from the negative emotions my character was going through.





Participant Laura Guillen in an interrogation. All photos by Tuomas Puikkonen



J. Tuomas Harviainen played a member of the University faculty. Here he's being interviewed in-game by a crew from YLE. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

SCREWED OVER IN MORE WAYS THAN I CAN COUNT

J. Tuomas Harviainen

I am a very character-immersive player, but usually have a hard time immersing. *Halat Hisar* proved to be a rare exception. I keep asking myself why. By all accounts it should have gone the other way – rarely have I experienced so many breaks in my play. Yet, somehow, they turned out to feed the immersive parts.

I think it started with the first treachery: I played Marie Isola's opportunistic and cold big brother. So her player made damn sure we had an emotional attachment, by making plans such as "let's go run together on Sunday". Yes, I as a player expected her to die, as it was plot-wise very logical, but not so early. The combination of timing and expectation hit me like a hammer. Seriously. I cried, uncontrollably, for at least a quarter of an hour. Others tell me I snapped at them, when they tried to help. I have no idea who was crying, me or the character. I have never experienced that before. I also completely forgot that I was wearing a microphone that I'd been using when showing the TV crew around, and it was still on.

The second kick in the head came because of sleep deprivation. I hate sleep deprivation as a game technique, the same way others can't stand hunger during play, or being cold. Just this once, it again somehow worked. Playing an overachiever who thought himself to be important, I was psyched for hours

for that eventual moment when the occupying soldiers would come and take me to an interrogation. They never came for me. Therefore, the tension I had gathered up, combined with the exhaustion and not knowing if I could get interrupted in my sleep, translated into immersive play: it was very hard to fall asleep, even when the raids ended, because my character kept wondering why he was too insignificant to even beat up.

Somewhere in between, my character also found love. This too was because of metaplay and game mechanics. It was going to be a quick, meaningless fuck between a shocked, unpleasant teacher and a student who liked him. But sex had to be played in the black box, and she was captured – literally pulled from my hands – before we could get that far. So by the time she got back from the interrogation, stress-lust had turned into worry, then affection.

All through the game, the more I was hit with "meta", the stronger the in-game things hit me, not just my character. Playing someone really talented who was constantly ignored by the powers that be, simply because of his ethnicity, really drove the points of the occupation home for me.

I find myself still humming Finlandia when I am stressed.



Soldiers walk an arrested man through a group of foreign human rights activists. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

THE NIGHT

Juhana Pettersson

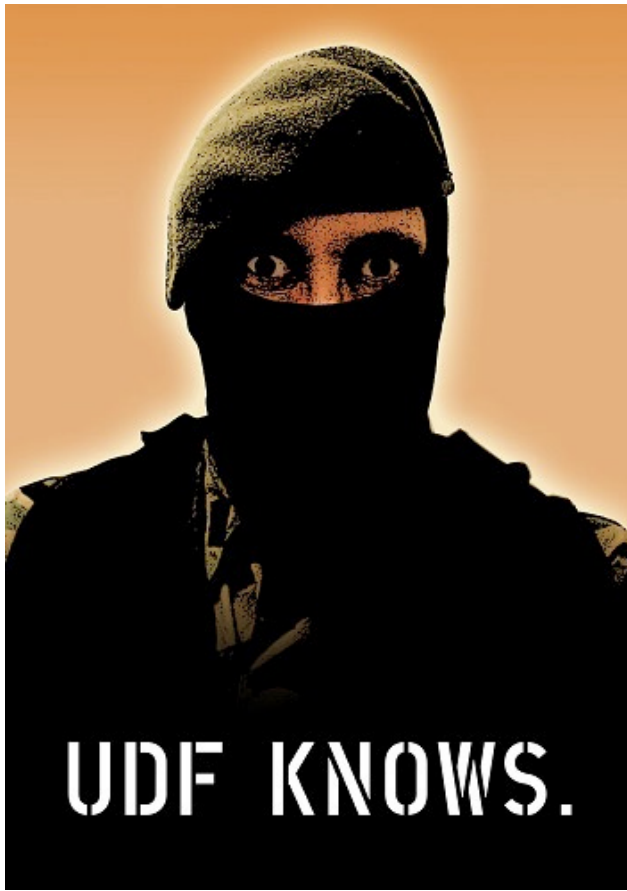
The game started on Saturday and ended on Sunday, with the players in-game thorough the night. The UDF raids had been going on thorough the evening, so watches were organized and many people stayed up instead of going to sleep.

The players slept in two to six person rooms at the venue. When the soldiers needed to arrest someone, they searched through the rooms to find the right person.

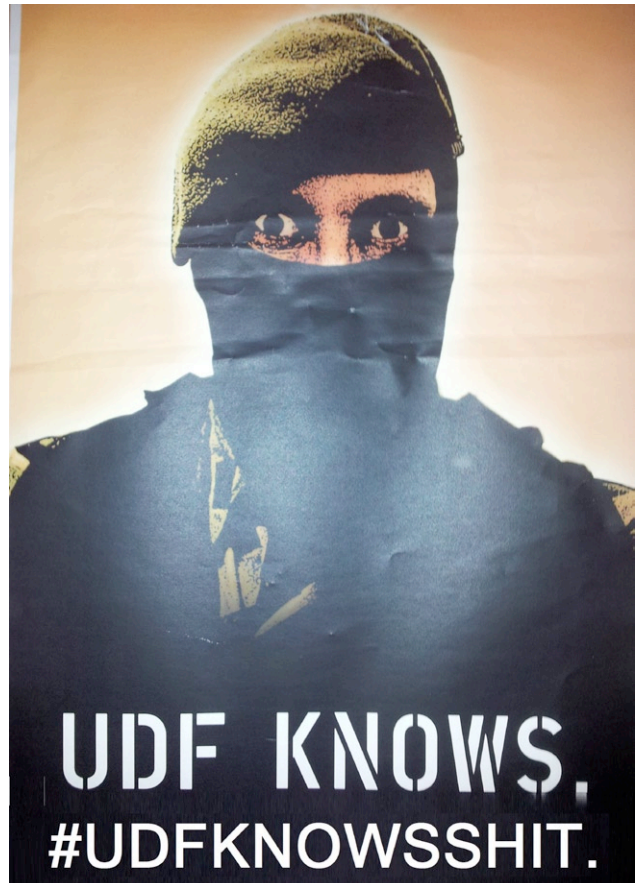
In retrospect, it seems amazing, but in our original plan for the game, we had imagined some players sleeping soundly while the soldiers were arresting

others. We failed to take into account the intensity of the atmosphere created by the constant raids. After the game, players told us that it's not easy to fall asleep when people are getting hauled away by masked soldiers with guns all around you.

The venue was slightly too small for the game, so every bed on location was occupied by a player or members of the kitchen team. Other organizers, myself included, slept in a cabin half an hour drive from the venue. When I left the game area Saturday night, there were still many hours of night arrests to go in the game.



The UDF soldiers sneaked into the University building at night to spread intimidating posters. The idea and the posters themselves came from the players of the soldiers. Poster by Ulla Niemelä



An edit of the UDF poster created in-game by Søren Lyng Ebbehøj



UDF soldiers in the corridors of the University building. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The road to the sauna building commandeered by the UDF. The two people in the foreground are activists, watching a UDF roadblock. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



*Many people stayed in the common areas for a long time before going to the rooms to sleep.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



A late night meeting of the faculty of the University of Helsinki. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Palestinian players holding a late night vigil by the main door. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



*Traditional Finnish music was one of the ways people kept themselves occupied as the day turned into the night.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



Looking out to see if the soldiers are coming. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



An arrested Finn being walked towards a UDF interrogator next to the sauna building used as a temporary base by the soldiers. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



*Anna Nummi (left) played a student at the University of Helsinki. The photo is from Sunday morning.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*

HOW I LEARNED TO BE AFRAID

Anna Nummi

I went to *Halat hisar* curious but wary. I was really interested in the game, its international player base, political theme and Nordic-style larp methods. I wanted to see how a sensitive theme could be dealt with in a larp. I wanted to experience it myself.

We came to the game a different route than the majority of players, so we lost the opportunity to get to know the others and work on the game during the bus trip. Instead we sang Finnish songs, patriotic songs and hymns. Anything for which we remembered the lyrics at least a little, and fit the theme.

Getting Ready

Because of tight schedules, I read the material about the game world only once. Fortunately it was written engagingly enough and it was easy to grasp (at least for a Finn), so the lecture on location about the world seemed almost counterproductive. Thanks to workshop tools learned from the larp *Mad About the Boy*, I was able to grasp the game world better.

In light of the game ahead, it was essential to practice violence and the safety words in our group. The idea was to hold an initiation of some kind for my character to become a terrorist / freedom fighter.

This would involve pushing the limits of the players, oppressive situations and possible in-game violence. Practicing with my own group created an important feeling of safety for going into the game and meeting the coming events.

No Plan Survives...

Why would anything go according to plan? My own game focused on social relationships and feelings of despair and powerlessness. Instead of armed resistance my character drifted into a spiral of depression, powerlessness and lack of motivation. Common purpose and action fell by the wayside.

The death wish of my character's best friend and the desire of a certain group to find religious martyrs changed the game from political to personal. Fear, disgust and feeling like an outsider. Falling out of concrete action, clinging onto a friend, helplessness and alienation. While my Finnish identity was strong, my experience of possible avenues of action shrunk all the time.

As the night fell, the player and the character didn't know what to expect. The soldiers would come to harass, wake us up, use power. What would it be like? As a community we turned to authorities: what could we expect? How should we act? Passive resistance against the power of the soldier's didn't help, but it created a feeling of solidarity under a common threat. Humming together, sitting in a circle with arms linked and singing aloud gave us something to focus on instead of crying, fear and screams.

Fear as a Concrete Experience

As the night progressed we stood guard in shifts, watching the windows trying to predict the inevitable arrival of the soldiers. The constant adrenaline, the atmosphere, the sorrow, crying and experience of fear made the evening and night very physical. The symptoms of stress were visible in the body: from thirst to running to the toilet, the body feeling overactive and jacked.

At some point in the night it became clear that the soldiers would not come for my character. This was predictable from my replies to the pre-larp form I filled out. The feelings that came from realizing this were not a relief: instead of being freed from the fear I felt envy of the experiences of others, the desire to have this negative, oppressive thing happen to me. The desire to have the experience of being tortured was related to catharsis. A desire to have the fear end, experience what I'd been afraid the most. As a player, I was already thinking of a game strategy where I'd first use the safety word and go through what could be done to me and my character with the players of the characters in power.

Finally I gave up with my co-player and we went to sleep. At this point we still expected the soldiers to arrive. I was wondering if I should sleep with all

of my clothes on. I placed my character's ID card very carefully as close as possible, because as a character I was afraid of losing it. In the end, as a player, I prioritized the quality of sleep and slept in my sleeping gear instead of overclothes.

And yes, the soldiers came soon after we went to bed. Based on the sounds and light (I still don't know for a fact what happened), I think one soldier searched the room, and saw there were two of us, both awake. We sprang up and I waved my character's ID in my hand.

It was a terrible scare. My heart was beating, the fear was felt thorough my body. Both because of how my character felt and how I felt, I slept next to my co-player. Having another person close to me calmed me down and made the fear easier to deal with. When the soldier's barged in a second time, we didn't get up from under the covers. Instead, we held onto each other harder. Finally I fell asleep.

Sleep didn't bring relief. I had nightmares where the larp, torture, the soldier's violently taking us away and reality mixed.

Managing the Fear

The game was strongly about fearing for those close to you, fear for yourself, stress, power and feelings of powerlessness and fatigue in the face of events. For me, the game was a very hard experience.

During the game, I only had a limited time available for processing these experiences. I wanted to have an off-game space where I could have talked with an organizer about something, anything. There wasn't one, but I was able to rely on the player of my best friend. The off-game time I spent with him, talking and just his presence, brought the experience to a bearable level.

The debrief exercises we did after the game also helped. I paid special attention to emotional bleed in me, and the accumulation of fear, depression and negative feelings from other players. Talking about the game together and the exercises designed to get the players to know each other, and just talking about the character in the third person were invaluable.

Unfortunately, there's always too little time for debrief techniques after a game. Aftergame parties help too, since getting to know people in civilian life is an important part of coming back from the game and dealing with the experience together.

Despite the debriefing, the time that's passed and everything we've done, writing this text feels unpleasant. I agreed to write because the game was a great experience for so many people. Going back to it isn't easy. I want to archive my experience, not live it again. I want to keep my thoughts about the game on the level of rationalism and theory, consider nationalism and the ethical issues of political games, and not go through my personal experiences.

Nevertheless, without those personal experiences, larp would be an empty shell.



*The soldiers negotiating with a foreign human rights activist during a nighttime raid.
Photo: Tuomas Puikkonen*



*Ville Uusivuori played a Finn collaborating secretly with the UDF. During Saturday, he was caught by his fellows.
Photo: Tuomas Puikkonen*

THE LONELINESS OF THE COLLABORATOR

Ville Uusivuori

My character Veikko Havu was a member of the PNLF resistance cell, written to be a UDF collaborator. He was the sort of guy who thought of himself as a valiant and strong freedom fighter, but when the Uralians pressed him using his sister as leverage, he cracked and became a snitch. The conflict between his self-image and the reality of being a snitch became the emotional heart of the character.

During the larp, the ball started rolling when my handler Selga Liva called and asked me to name some

of the foreign PNLF guys as terrorists. I immediately knew that I will name the Swede Lasse Blom because of a woman who was a long time secret crush. After I did that, Veikko began to loathe himself, for ratting out a comrade in arms over petty jealousy.

Self-Loathing

Then there were the demonstrations, where Veikko tried to take out his anger by throwing stones at the soldiers and especially at Liva. The death of the

elections candidate Marie Isola and survivor's guilt really drove the self-loathing to overdrive. I kept asking myself why a true-hearted member of the movement would be killed, and me, a traitor lowlife, would be allowed to live. The memorial service was one of the most emotional scenes in the game for me.

After that I decided to keep Veikko away from PNLF decisionmaking, so I could not give any information to the Uralians. During this time Veikko had become self-destructive and hoped for a foolhardy midnight raid to get revenge for Isola and have himself killed before the truth came out. This and couple of Freudian slips made the group suspicious, but in the end Veikko got busted because he was seen leaving a door to the building unlocked for the Uralian soldiers.

The visiting Nordic fighters came up to me and said that if I leak any info on PNLF they will kill my sister. At that point Veikko hit rock bottom. Between the rock and a hard place, and nothing left to lose. I decided that Veikko had an ounce of self-respect to gain by ending the collaboration with Liva. Not long after, the soldiers came and took Veikko to be interrogated. Somebody yelled: "No need for the theatrics, snitch" as the soldiers carried me out.

As an off-game note, when they took me I tried to go limp to be as difficult to carry as possible. It's safe to say this wasn't an enjoyable experience for me or for the players of the soldiers. At the corner of the house I said "cut" and asked one of the soldiers to get my shoes.

Dead Man Walking

At the sauna there was an almost comedic scene when the soldiers tried to make me do their dishes. I was standing there silently with my arms at my sides. The soldiers find out from their paperwork that Veikko was a collaborator and start joking: "Look what we have here, a cooperative Finn". The interrogation went relatively smoothly, with Veikko refusing to cooperate and getting a few bruises for his stubbornness.

The hard part came after coming back to the main building. The ostracism. I felt really alone when people look at me like I was "cheap sausage" to borrow a Finnish expression. The more violent ones punched me while passing by. Veikko accepted his fate at the hands of the comrades he'd betrayed and became a dead man walking.

When the soldier took Veikko's sister Eeva and especially when she came back with both her arms broken, things got very intense. I was crying over her pain and when I found out that she hadn't given any names, Veikko experienced profound shame at not being half the man his little sister was.

During the evening I started slipping out of character at the kitchen. (I was part of the kitchen team of the larp.) I went to bed because I needed to clear my head so I could get the rest I needed for the drive back home on Sunday after the game was over. So

I dropped the character completely, had a small debrief with another kitchen volunteer and chatted on Facebook with my girlfriend to get myself to a mood where sleep came easily.

Meta

For me, Sunday was about tying up loose ends. I did most of this in a few black box sessions. Beyond that, I waited for the game to end and kept busy in the kitchen.

All in all I think the kitchen was an important refuge for me as a player from the crushing loneliness of being a traitor, without breaking the immersion of other players. Veikko was the sort of a guy who would take his frustrations out by chopping rutabagas and peeling potatoes.

I used the black box a lot. Five sessions in all, and it was a very important part of the game experience for me. Many of the most emotional scenes for me happened there. It gave me closure, not leaving any of Veikko's important story arcs hanging. It also gave me things to do when I became isolated after being found out as a collaborator. All my sessions were with other players, and most of them were flashbacks or forwards.

One important and intensive scene was with the players of the Nordic PNLF fighters, about the final fate of Veikko. First there was a short scene where Veikko was beaten up by two of the fighters, and then another where Veikko was shot in a grave he had dug himself. Looking back, I'm grateful for the off-game group hug from the other players after the execution scene. It meant a lot. But actually, this wasn't so hard because it was a natural end for Veikko, and I could distance myself from it.

A much harder scene was the last goodbye with Veikko's little sister. I teared up as I kept telling her how proud of her I was, how sorry I was for not being a better man. She tried to get me to leave Finland with her, and I said: "We'll talk about it tomorrow if I'm still breathing". We played this scene after the execution, so...



*The soldiers making arrests often didn't know who was a collaborator and who wasn't.
Photo: Tuomas Puikkonen*



*Mika Loponen played the Professor of Tolkien Studies, Olavi Valve. Here he's in a discussion on Saturday.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*

TURBOREALIST COLLABORATION

Mika Loponen

When signing up for *Halat Hisar*, I asked to play a collaborator; not necessarily a simply morally bankrupt person, but someone who might have reasons for his choices. I wasn't disappointed. Professor Olavi Valve, the resident Professor of Tolkien Studies at the University of Helsinki, was a moderate, a washed up ex-idealist – and a longtime collaborator whose past betrayals had already left him a moral wreck – though very much aware of his mixed feelings.

The main reason for wanting to play a collaborator was to feel what a collaborator would be going through on the emotional level. The justifications, the small steps on the slippery slope. On a purely intellec-

tual level, it is easy to see the reasoning of collaborators – anything ranging from personal greed to threats to one's family. On the emotional level, however, I didn't have a clue on how the betrayals could work.

Sledgehammer

Halat Hisar gave an idea of how it feels with the subtlety of a sledgehammer. Some elaboration is required: To use a term coined by Juhana Pettersson, larps that are set within a kind of "realistic" setting – even if this means alternative timelines or histories – often utilize a kind of turborealism – basically meaning that events that in a realistic setting might happen within



The seemingly brutalized Professor Valve talking to students on Saturday night. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

months or years of each other happen within a few hours of each other. Typically this includes a strong emphasis on players (and characters) not seeing anything odd in the constricted time scale.

In *Halat hisar*, turborealism drove every action and reaction. Stacking event upon event upon event with just small pauses for breathing room allowed for emotions, thoughts, and ruminations to unfold and hatch at fast-forward. Due to the processing speed of turborealism, Professor Valve's emotional journey was the most intensive larp experience I've ever had. The always existing threat of getting caught escalated hour by hour, and even simple friendly discussions with the occupying forces were laced with the unspoken threat of the next room – the muffled noises and cries that were vaguely heard while sipping coffee reminded one of the other possible outcomes.

For a collaborator who acted both for personal greed and for saving his family and friends – and still had some patriotism in his heart – Valve's struggle to give shelter to his students and to prepare them for the coming violence while at the same time betraying some of the students by giving their names as troublemakers to the occupation forces was heart-wrenching; seeing the named students dragged away while trying to think that if names hadn't been given, other students would have been taken. Betraying other students to save a loved one from forced emigration. Knowing which students will be taken

by a raid, and knowing when the raid comes – while consoling the students who think that danger has passed. Helping the occupiers organize an academic event to keep up the image of an independent, unrepressed university. And seeing one's colleagues bare their hearts out during the siege.

Betrayer

As the events rolled up one by one, on a steady steam, the experience of betrayal was thrust further and further in, until by the end of the game, anxiety and sadness threatened to become overwhelming. The feelings would remain for days after the game.

Even so, despite the strength of feelings felt by the character, the most fearful emotion was experienced as an absence: despite the regrets and sadness caused by a betrayal, the act of collaboration was as easy as it could be, and the regret felt from one betrayal didn't transfer to not collaborating on the next chance. Even more fearfully, finding reasons for betraying a few students was a non-issue – even when he decided none was needed, Professor Valve almost always realized that any betrayal he contemplated could, through some lens, have been thought to result from an altruistic motive.

Regardless of any other events in the game, regardless of any regrets or fears experienced by the character, this was my worst – and clearest – thought: betrayal is easy, and the human mind will rationalize for it.

VOTING



Election officials check the ballots before voting on Sunday. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Emotions run high during the voting in the student elections on Sunday. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



An election official responsible for the ballots. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



A student in the process of voting. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Being interviewed about the election. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Reading the results of the student election. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The winning candidate was from the SDLP party, the larp's combination of the Palestinian Fatah and the Finnish SDP. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

THE SOLDIERS LEAVE



Before they leave, the soldiers hold a press conference outlining the successes of their operation. Human rights activists observe. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The commander of the UDF forces on campus also conducted many of the interrogations. There's no group shot from the press conference because one of the Palestinian players could not be photographed for safety reasons. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



As the soldiers leave, foreign activists run after them and throw stones. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Fearing repercussions from the soldiers, Finns run after the activists and try to stop them.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The situation devolves into a scuffle between the Finns and the activists. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The soldiers have left. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

THE END



Lowering the flag to half mast in honor of the dead Marie Isola. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



*Honoring the dead. The man giving the salute in the background is a foreign fighter.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



*The Jordanian Minister of Culture (played by organizer Mohamed Rabah) with the University faculty.
Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen*



The Minister asks for the Finnish flag to be taken down so he doesn't have to be photographed next to it. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The Minister talks faced with protests from students and staff. The man holding the sign on the left is a collaborator. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



The game has just ended. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen



Henrik Telkki played a Finnish journalist writing for Helsingin Sanomat. Journalist status didn't protect him from being arrested. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

TO THOSE WE LEFT BEHIND

Henrik Telkki

The night of horrors was behind me. I had lasted through the illegal interrogations, beatings, hopelessness, paranoia and, worst of all, the professional competition to get my story published while fearing that today might be one of the days when my editor in chief decides to be a dick... Erm, I mean the fear of not seeing my in-game girlfriend ever again.

The Circle

I had survived and it all had led into the not so fulfilling conclusion of a peaceful protest and everyday realism. There was no revolution. The bad guys stayed in power. Mel Gibson didn't yell "freedom" in

this game. And there we were standing, gathered in a circle in cold breeze and despite it being the middle of November the air didn't feel like a refreshing breeze that fills your lungs making you feel energetic and alive. No, this time there was something wrong in the air, it felt stuffed and when I noticed the wind blowing, it was like in a landscape painting. You see the wind but you don't get the feeling of movement.

We stood there after the game had ended tossing our characters' in-game items into a pile and using one word to describe our feelings. At that point, the message wasn't a very uplifting one. This was a larp, a weekend pastime that we had paid to participate in,

and the words I heard were “frustration”, “depressed”, “guilt”, “sadness” and “anger”. It wasn’t a typical after game circle filled with joy and excitement, people talking about how this was “such a great game” and how “this one moment had been so funny”. In a way our circle was more primitive, more honest. We held the rest of our rituals, the after game handshakes and debriefs, and that was that. We walked away. The game was over.

The Road Back

I bet that throughout this book you have had a chance to read accounts of the game and the memorable scenes it had. But I want to concentrate on a different aspect of the game: What happened afterwards?

A long journey back home awaited me after the game. It was made even more trying by the fact that I had to make most of it by train. J.K. Rowling made a fuss about how hard it’s to get into Hogwarts, but it’s child’s play compared to trying to travel by train and being on schedule in Finland once we start to get closer to winter.

It was midnight when my train got postponed for the third time, but I didn’t really mind my first world problems that much. I went on a walk through the streets of Tampere. And that was when I noticed how different the city looked like all of a sudden. Despite it being so familiar I felt alienated. It was hard to grasp that this was the same city that I had visited so many times before.

Leaving Happyland

Why did *Halat hisar* affect me in the way it did? I have experience with larps that have had extreme situations. I have been in games that required me to spend the day walking without food or water. Games that have left me in the middle of a forest without any clue where to go in the middle of a thunderstorm. I have been through the takedown and interrogation situations that were present in *Halat hisar*. I have been kneeling over a ditch while the player next to me has been fighting against a panic attack. All these games have had some effect on me. In this light, *Halat hisar* was a much more player friendly experience, but its effect wasn’t any lesser. Indeed, it affected me on a more personal level than other games that came before. For the life of me, I don’t know why that is.

This also gave me time to think what are we, us larpers? When I started larping the scene was filled with these Happyland elven marriage games, but as larping has gotten older the number of games that are harder and more extreme has increased. The way how the general public sees larping has also changed. Larps have been terrorist training camps, larpers have been child-sacrificing Satanists. Now we’re twats who have the nerve to go around “playing” other people’s misery because our own lives are so mundane.

As the games get more extreme they also get more

personal. From my perspective, *Halat hisar* was a personal experience, not a game that tried to forcefeed you a certain point of view and make you come to a certain conclusion. Instead it tried to offer the players points that would trigger possible conversations and provide food for thought.

The Train

So eventually the train finally did arrive and we were all ready to be on our way. The conductor came to me and said: “Yeah, we have to postpone our departure a couple of hours. A little ahead, someone has been run over by a train and we have to wait until the rescue department has scraped the corpse off the tracks”. As I listened to the other passengers in my carriage, I noticed that most of them just seemed to be bummed by the fact that someone had had the nerve to wander onto the tracks and die.

Human life had been lost and its value was the fact that it makes a nifty status update on Facebook. I’m sure had I met these people in different circumstances they would have made the case that us Finns have a brotherhood that brings us together. A nation divided is a returning topic of conversation. In this light, finding new ways to share understanding and dialogue becomes ever more important. I think that in the end, *Halat hisar* was all about sharing dialogue and different points of view.

As you might guess from this text, I didn’t run to Palestine to participate in protests. Despite everything, the political issues in my homeland still hit me harder. I still condemn violence, despite what happened in the game. *Halat hisar* didn’t try to make me change my mind on this. But I didn’t stay exactly the same either. Like the dried drops of splashed water in the bathroom mirror, some aspects of the game stuck with me. That’s what *Halat hisar* is to me. Not so much the weekend itself, or the game, but those small things that stuck with me.

BACKSTAGE



Halat hisar's principal photographer Tuomas Puikkonen taking a break. Photo by Katri Lassila

Interview: Tuomas Puikkonen

Tuomas Puikkonen was the principal photographer of the game. He shot the entire larp as a non-playing, off-game photographer.

What's in your opinion a good larp photo?

A photo that sums the right feeling in that situation. I like to use telezoom lenses, so that I can take close-up pictures without disturbing people.

What are the challenges of photographing larp? What are the things that are difficult, and the specifics you have to take into account?

Events are changing quickly and when that happens I realize that I have the completely wrong lens or settings for this new situation. I can't repeat those scenes and it is difficult to carry all the equipment all the time. I don't want to disturb players, so I can't use flash. This

can be problem when there isn't so much light.

Is there an emotional component to photographing larp? Do you feel like an outsider looking in?

I like to see drama. When something happens, people's expressions make good subjects for photos. One drawback is the loneliness in long games such as *Halat hisar*. It begins to cause distress, when I don't interact with anyone socially for over 24 hours.

What was it like to shoot Halat hisar, compared to other games you've photographed?

Halat hisar was great game to shoot, but also a long game. Normally a larp is over in 5-10 hours, but *Halat hisar* lasted for over 24 hours. Bad situations followed each other and desperation grew among the characters. Usually there are some happy moments to capture, but in *Halat hisar* there weren't any smiling faces.

What's your favorite photo from the game and why?

I like emotional photos. One of those is this: This photo says so much about the situation.





The kitchen team preparing food on Friday. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

Interview: Eeva Järvi

Eeva Järvi was a part of the *Halat hisar* kitchen team.

What kind of experience do you have in making larps and other events?

I have made few larps and summer camps and been in the kitchen in larps and scout events since the 90's in different roles, as head chef, assistant and so on.

What are the challenges of feeding people in a larp like this?

The main challenge is the utilities, when you don't know what there is beforehand and whether you can make all the foods. Also, in long games people need to eat to keep going, so you need to plan food that everybody can and will eat, otherwise they don't have energy to keep playing. Different locations in the game also create challenges when you deliver food and try to keep it warm. Big events and scenes in the game need to be taken into account. Food needs to be made so that you can keep it warm and eatable even if the dinner times change.

You never know with large groups if everybody has announced their diets, so you need extra portions that you can prepare quickly. You need food for people playing during the night. This we forgot.

You need people who aren't part of the game in the

kitchen, because there's a lot to do, but not too many. Otherwise they get in the way.

What do you consider important in terms of keeping the production rolling?

The timetable. People need to know what to do and who to ask if they don't know. Enough time and planning beforehand.

And sleep.

How did Halat hisar look from the point of view of the kitchen?

It looked like it was going along well. People enjoying their time in the game. We hoped that people got enough food and coffee when they needed it.

There were people who had the task of running the kitchen all day long, so we knew what we were signing up for. With people who can make food but are new to this kind of thing, you will end up having trouble, even if they are good cooks. You need people who are comfortable working all day. Experience from running camps or scout events is good, and makes it easier than if with a totally new team.

We had problems, but there were great people to help us out. The maintenance team working outside of the game is pretty essential, and that was great in this game.



The larp expert Jori Pitkänen interviewed by an angel for a segment about Halat hisar for the YLE tv show Strada, broadcast December 13, 2013

MEDIA WORK

Juhana Pettersson

Halat hisar was intended to be a good, interesting and political larp. However, the project wasn't limited to the larp itself. Our idea was that a larp would affect its limited number of participants strongly, while the media stories it generated would raise awareness of Palestine-related issues among the wider population. To ensure the success of this plan, we engaged in media work. The goal was simply to foster as much media attention for the larp as possible.

We believed that if we were interviewed about the larp, we could also talk about what was happening in Palestine, since it was integral to the game itself. Beyond that, we felt that any story linking Palestine and larp would have a de-othering effect in the media. Palestinians, and Arabs in general, are seen as "the other" in most of the Finnish media, as opposed to the Finnish or Caucasian "us". Our theory was that larp would be seen as an activity that "we" engaged in, and if Palestinians larped, then the barrier between these two basic categories would be weakened.

I cannot say if it really worked out this way, but the idea of Palestine together with larp drove much of our media success. These two together were seen as novel and interesting, and that means media attention.

Getting the Story Out

Two of the three core Finnish members of our organizing team work in the media, and this undoubtedly helped us a lot. However, we never used personal or professional connections to get the stories out there. Rather, we wrote press releases and contacted individual journalists with story ideas.

I had written an article about my own experiences in the Palestinian larp *Till Death Do Us Part* in *Helsingin Sanomat*, Finland's biggest newspaper, in 3. 9. 2011. That had given me a sense of how to frame the issue when we wrote press releases. Those led to an item with the Finnish news agency STT, which in turn was repeated by many regional papers on their websites. Like often happens in these situations, the news item was a barely reworded summary of our press release.

The media attention came in two bursts, first with the test run in the summer of 2013, and then with the main game in November. We sent out information for both runs, and found that often it didn't really matter whether this was the test run or not. The combination of Palestine and larp carried the day.

The test run of *Halat hisar* made the evening news



Organizers Mohamad Rabah and Fatima AbdulKarim were interviewed for the MT3 ten o'clock news about the Halat hisar test run on 26.7.2013.

thanks to the people handling media at Ropecon. I was driving to the con with our Palestinian co-designers when the Ropecon media handler called to inform us that we'd be on-camera when we got there. In a funny twist, the journalist doing the interview seemed much more comfortable talking about Palestine than he did about the larp and roleplaying going on all around him.

The main run of the game also made it to tv. I had been interviewed on a cultural tv show called *Strada* about an unrelated project, and sent them information about the larp. They were interested, and sent a team to the game to make a segment for the show. They participated in the game for a few hours, playing tv journalists.

Results

After the larp, our players were active in writing about the larp. Some of them wrote stories for media sites or magazines, and others wrote on their personal blogs. We had no influence on how they chose to write about the larp, nor did we want to have any.

It's very hard to assess how successful this kind of media work is. We can measure the number of articles and media appearances, but we can't really say how well the message goes through. At least, not without proper and expensive market research.

If the only goal of this project would have been to generate attention, there would have been easier ways of doing it. As a project complementing the larp, I'd say it went okay.



An article about the game published in issue 9/2013 of the monthly paper Voima.

An example of the small news items the larp generated, from the paper Metro on 18.7.2013.

Tundra Tabloids.....

Keeping tabs on the most outrageous happenings in the Middle East, Islamist extremism and Islamist hegemony in Scandinavia and on the political correctness that allows them to flourish

Home About Islam Europe's Dynamite File Fjordman Files Jordan is Palestine Our Daily ME Violence The Vasarahammer Report

TT News Ugly Europe

← UN JIM CROW IN ACTION: HOT MIKE IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY VOTE REVEALS ANTI-ISRAEL BIAS.....

UGLY EUROPE 15.11.2013..... →

PALESTINIAN PROPAGANDA SET TO WASH UP ON THE SHORES OF HELSINKI IN LARP ROLE PLAYING.....

Posted on 15/11/2013 by KGS

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Demonizing Israel is the game.

A better analogy would be for the Eastern half of Finnish Karjala (in Russia) to wage a terrorist war on Finland for the dream of conquering the entire country. The Russian residents of E-Karjala shell Helsinki with impunity and send their suicide bombers to murder its citizens, and is met with silence by the UNSC and its General Assembly, with every measure taken by the Finnish government to secure the safety of its citizens condemned by the international community. That's the kind of live play I would like to see.

The Tundra Tabloids Rock.....!

Google Custom Search

The Finnish fringe right-wing website Tundra Tabloids provided the only hostile coverage of the larp in a post in 15.11.2013



Laura Satimus participated in the game as a journalist for YLE (the Finnish Broadcasting Corporation), both in- and off-game. Photo by Tuomas Puikkonen

LARP FOR EMPATHY

Laura Satimus

I followed the larp *Halat hisar* for half a day while shooting a tv report for the Finnish Broadcasting Company's cultural current affair tv program *Strada*. I participated in the larp for a while with a cameraman in the role of a film crew.

Halat hisar was used as an example in my report about if live roleplaying could be a way to learn empathy and make use of it in education. For example, could live roleplaying prevent bullying? For the report we filmed the game in- and off-game and made interviews.

I was amazed at how the players really put their souls in their characters. Knowing how long the game was and how challenging the concept was for the players, I respect their willingness to experience something totally different – even when it's unpleasant, as in the case of violence or being interrogated for many hours.

Being in the game was very exciting for me, as I didn't have any previous larp experience. It helped a lot that my character had the same profession as I. I knew what a journalist would do in the situations presented in the game. The biggest surprise was that I easily emphasized with the situation. Playing wasn't hard at all.

I think *Halat hisar* is a good example of how live roleplaying can be adapted to simulate various kinds of conditions and the perspectives of different people. Of course, effective larp always requires open-minded players and *Halat hisar* seemed to be full of them.

Based on the interviews and what I saw and experienced in *Halat hisar*, I hope that larp will be used more as an instrument for the learning process or to prevent conflicts by increasing our ability for empathy.



A pre-game workshop at the test run of Halat hisar. For our future logistics man Antti Savolainen (left, orange shirt), this was his first larp. Photo: Fatima AbdulKarim

THE TEST GAME

Juhana Pettersson

A test game of *Halat hisar* was run at the Finnish roleplaying convention Ropecon on the 27th of July, with 12 players, five organizers and three players for supporting characters. The idea of the test game was to try out concepts, characters and ideas from the big game in advance, so we would know what works, what doesn't and what needs to be workshopped.

The test didn't represent *Halat hisar* in its final form: many core concepts were retained, but many were also changed, dropped or highlighted, depending on how well they worked.

Looking back at the project, the test game stands out as one of our better ideas. We put some effort into running it, and two of the Palestinian organizers, Mohamad Rabah and Fatima AbdulKarim, flew to Finland to join in. We had considered recycling characters from the test game for the main larp, or even using it as a prequel with some of the same people continuing their stories in the big game, but in the end decided against it. The test game was most useful as nothing more than a test, and it was good to be able to change things after we ran it.

The University

The setting of the test game was a meeting at the University of Helsinki between the administration, the faculty and the student union to discuss the visit of the Saudi Prime Minister, a known supporter of the State of Uralia. (Changed into the Jordanian Minister of Culture for the main run.) The main fault line of the game ran between possible financial support from the Minister and a desire to make a statement censoring a friend of the Occupation.

As the discussion ranged, Occupation soldiers entered, taking individual characters out for interrogation, looking for a Finnish freedom fighter in hiding.

Simo Järvelä, one of the players, talks about the experience of being taken away by the soldiers:

"For me, the high point of the game was the interrogation, including the long walk at gun point. This wasn't the first time for my character, so I tried to express that somehow to the other players. I ended up not doing anything without explicit orders, always moving up against the wall and showing a co-operative attitude so I wouldn't give the crazy teenaged soldiers any excuse for abuse. It worked, they picked the other student as their target."

"The interrogation itself wasn't about whether the interrogator could extract a specific piece of information. The scene played out intensely with the bored soldiers creating a constant threat of violence. A shared understanding of the dynamics of the interrogation made it possible to play the scene with nuance."

Another player, Jori Virtanen, also wrote about his experiences with the soldiers:

"When the troops escorted me at gunpoint to the interrogation room, I was shaken. The soldiers were young and brash, and visibly ticked off by our mere presence, and I knew it wouldn't take much to set them off. I got scared they might accidentally pull the trigger, or beat me, or torture me, just because they could, and I could do nothing about it. When they asked me my name, I completely blanked out. I couldn't remember my name."

"The first thing I recalled was that I, the player, had read about this, that the fear may cause you to forget the most obvious things, like your name. And here I was, experiencing that very thing!"

"These musings were interrupted by the soldier who started shouting at me, ordering me to my knees. I obeyed. I felt the barrel of the gun pressed against the back of my head. The other soldier took pictures of his comrade, who was probably smiling widely. I found nothing funny in the situation. I was scared. Scared to death. I kept thinking, 'This is terrible. I may be in a larp, but stuff like this really happens all the time.'"

Lessons

Some of the lessons we learned in the test game involved differences in culture. In my experience, larp styles are different in every country, and Palestine and Finland are not exceptions. Since our project was meant to bring together larpers from different countries, it was useful to see in advance how these differences played out.

Another cultural difference was about life experience. The experiences the players have had before any given larp inform the way they play and improvise. We found that in a game about resisting an occupation, our Palestinian co-organizers and players had much more practical experience with how this is done than our Finnish participants, for obvious reasons. We tried to close the gap in the main game by workshopping resistance so the players would be more comfortable with it.

Since the test game was organized at a roleplaying convention, we essentially got a random selection of players. Anyone could sign up. One of these people was a man called Antti Savolainen. For him it was his first larp, and after the convention was over, he volunteered to work with us on the main game. This proved to be a very good thing, because as a logistics man he was an absolute wizard.

He demonstrated a less tangible advantage to running a test game: it brings the word out about the project in advance, not in the form of hype and advertising but as something concrete. This way, new people can become interested in the game, and sometimes those new people can really surprise you.

Another example of this was the team of milsim players who volunteered to play UDF soldiers in our game. They heard of the test game and contacted me, saying they were interested in participating in the main run. This was fortunate, because in my experience it's hard to get players with larp backgrounds to commit to playing soldiers.



Soldiers from the test game. Photo by Maria Pettersson



*Most of the game was a meeting between the faculty and the students of the University of Helsinki.
Photo by Juhana Pettersson*



Organizer Juhana Pettersson visited Palestine and Israel in 2012 to participate in the larp Till Death Do Us Part. The trip involved a "Week in Jerusalem" during which participants saw some of the issues local Palestinians lived with. Photo by Johannes Axner

THE ROAD TO HALAT HISAR

Kaisa Kangas

The idea for *Halat hisar* was born when future organizer Juhana Pettersson interviewed Fatima AbdulKarim for the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*. She had been one of the organizers of the first Palestinian larp, *Till Death Do Us Part* (played in August 2012). She brought up the idea of using larp to inform Finns about the occupation of Palestine. Reading the quote in the article, I and Maria Pettersson immediately thought it would make a great project. We contacted the Palestinian game designers and made a proposal following Fatima's idea.

Palestine

Maria and I had the chance to meet our Palestinian team members when we travelled to Palestine in November 2012. We participated in a human rights oriented tour organized by the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD). During our trip, the Israeli military started extensively bombing Gaza. Hamas responded with intensifying rocket fire from Gaza. It turned out that contrary to expectations, Hamas had some long-range rockets, so air raid

sirens were heard in both Tel Aviv and Jerusalem for the first time since the Gulf War.

Our daily program included visiting ruins of demolished homes and hearing stories from people who had been evicted on a fifteen-minute notice in the middle of the night or whose families were regularly attacked by violent settlers. With the attack of Gaza in the background, this became emotionally even more intense. In the occupied West Bank, there were demonstrations against the assault on Gaza each day. When we participated in a silent protest in West Jerusalem, Israel, many drivers passing by gave us the finger. Amidst it all, spending a day in Ramallah, having drinks with friends and brainstorming a larp was a much-needed bit of normality.

Yet, when we left Ramallah for East Jerusalem, where we were staying, it was impossible not to think about how privileged we were. We could go to Jerusalem when we liked, while our Palestinian friends were confined behind Qalandia Checkpoint, the main checkpoint separating East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. After crossing the checkpoint, waiting for



Fatima AbdulKarim in the workshops for the larp Till Death Do Us Part. Photo by Li Xin



Riad Mustafa on the workshop day of the larp Till Death Do Us Part in 2012. He joined the core Halat hisar organizer group in the spring of 2013. Photo by Johannes Axner

our bus to leave, we could see smoke rising from somewhere close by, and thought Palestinians were probably burning tires. We later learned that the checkpoint had been closed shortly after we got through and that a baby had suffocated from teargas there.

Finland

During that trip, we got an impression of the occupation we were going to transfer to Finland. The idea to set the game in Finland came from the Palestinian team members. It would make things easier, as we didn't have to brief the players on Palestinian culture. Juhana joined the project in the fall, initially to write grant applications and later as the producer. In February, it turned out that our application for a major grant from the Finnish Cultural Fund (Suomen kulttuurirahasto) was successful. It was time to start working seriously. This meant brainstorming sessions on Skype and via email, and face to face with Mohamad at Knutepunkt in Norway.

In July, Fatima and Mohamad came to Helsinki, and we ran a 4-hour test version of *Halat hisar* at Ropecon, the biggest annual roleplaying event in Finland. The major elements were already there: the game was set at a university seminar, and the main plot centered around the visit of a controversial minister. Occupation soldiers searching for an escaped resistance leader invaded the seminar and took people to be interrogated. The test game gave us the chance to check what worked and what had to be changed. For Fatima and Mohamad, the game also served as an introduction to Finnish larp culture.

Run-up to the Game

In August, we made the player selections, and as the game drew nearer, it was time to make travel arrangements for the Palestinian participants. Some of them were living in Europe, but most came from the occupied West Bank. Palestinians are not allowed to travel through the Ben Gurion International Airport in Tel Aviv unless they have Israeli citizenship. Most of our Palestinian participants had to travel to Jordan to board their flights from Amman, adding greatly to the travel time.

Travel permits were another thorny issue. Juhana had to write letters of invitation in the name of our organization, Pohjoismaisen roolipelaamisen seura. He once got a call from an official in the Finnish Foreign Ministry who wanted to know whether a player had really been invited. Flight tickets could not be purchased before a visa was obtained, and the last one was issued only a couple of days before the planned travel date. Two players had to cancel the game because their applications for a travel permit were refused.

The game became much more intense than we had dared to hope. A couple of hours before the ending, we held a crisis meeting to discuss the debrief and to modify it to match the intensity. We added some exercises designed to make the players feel better and to detach them from the characters. It was also important to normalize the relations between the players of soldiers and the occupied Finns. It is a measure of the success of the game that even we, the organizers, felt emotionally affected by it. Many scenes in the game almost brought tears to my eyes, and during the next couple of weeks *Halat hisar* was constantly at the back of my mind.



Organizer Kaisa Kangas next to the separation wall in 2012. Photo by Maria Pettersson



Organizer Maria Pettersson in front of the ruins of Beit Arabiya in 2012, a house at that time demolished by the Israeli army five times. Photo by Kaisa Kangas



5 Voitte suudella. Kulttuurillisen hienontunteisuuden hengessä häällarpissa on mukana joitain intimiteettiin liittyviä lisäsääntöjä. Suutelemista mallinnetaan painamalla kämmenet yhteen, kuten hääpari kuvassa tekee. Seksin mallintaminen on kokonaan kielletty puhtaasti sanallisia kuvia lukuun ottamatta. Sulhasta pelaa Espen Kristensen.

Kunnes kuolema meidät erottaa

Palestiinan ensimmäisessä liveroolipelissä kohtasivat paikalliset ja pohjoismaalaiset larppaajat.

Juhana Pettersson

EI TOLKIENTÄ, ei örkkejä eikä kyberpunkia. Palestiina saattaa hyvinkin olla maailman ensimmäinen maa, johon larppaaminen rantautui muuten kuin fantasiseikkailujen kautta.

Palestiinan historian ensimmäisessä larpissa eli liveroolipelissä aiheena oli norjalaisen miehen ja palestiinalaisen naisen häistä syntyvä kulttuurillinen yhteentörmäys.

Peli nimi oli *Till Death Do Us Part* (Kunnes kuolema meidät erottaa) ja se pelattiin Bir Zeitin kylässä lähellä Ramallahin kaupunkia elokuussa.

PELIN järjesti norjalainen Fantasiforbundet, joka on mielikuvituksen ja luovaan yrittämiseen keskittyvä vapaaehtoisjärjestö. Se perustaa Pohjoismaissa kehittyneistä taiteellista kunnianhimoa ja yhteiskunnallisia aiheita painottavasta "Nordic Larp" -pelikulttuurista.

Peli sai alkunsa, kun Fantasiforbundetin Martin Nielsen vieraili Palestiinassa 2010 tapaamassa paikallisia kansalaisjärjestöaktiiveja. Nielsen oli aiemmin vinynt larppia Valko-Venäjälle, jossa se oli ollut menestys. Nyt Nielsen kartoitti, oltaisinko siitä kiinnostuneita Palestiinassa.

"ALUKSI kuvittelimme, että tämä oli jotain teatteriopiskelijoidle tarkoitettua", *Till Death Do Us Partin* pääjärjestäjäksi ryhtynyt Muha-



1 Häät tulossa. Workshop-päivänä tehtiin kohtaus, jossa morsian (keskellä pelaaja Majd Hamouri) kertoo perheelleen olevansa menossa naimisiin norjalaisen miehen kanssa. Tilanne pahenee, kun käy ilmi että morsiamen isä tiesi asiasta jo etukäteen, mutta ei kertonut edes vaimolleen. Plan riita pääsi hyvään vauhtiin.

Play) on kyse pelistä, jossa pelaajat esittävät improvisoituja roolihihmoja – eivät yleisöä, vaan itseään varten.

"Idea omaan peliimme syntyi halusta tehdä pitkä larppi, jossa olisi sekä palestiinalaisia että pohjoismaisia pelaajia", Rabah sanoo. "Halusimme tehdä pelin, joka näyttäisi pohjoismaisille pelaajille,

poliittista tilannetta, mutta olosuhteet haluttiin kuitenkin ottaa huomioon niin, että niistä voisi puhua pelin aikana. Vaikka kylä on pääasiassa kristitty, suurin osa palestiinalaispelaajista oli muslimeja.

LARPIN palestiinalaisena järjestäjänä toimi nuorisotyöhön keskittynyt Peace and Freedom Youth Fo-

elintasa. Larpin tekeminen on halpaa, ja Nordic Larp tarjoaa työkalupakin, jolla jokainen voi tehdä omanlaisensa pelin.

Sekä järjestäjänä että pelaajana mukana ollut toimittaja Fatima AbdulKarim näkee larppissa mahdollisuuksia poliittisten aiheiden käsittelyyn, nuorisotyöhön ja hauskapitoon.

FAKTA

Till Death Do Us Part

- Paikka: Bir Zeit, Palestiina
- Ajankohta: 10.–12. elokuuta 2012.
- Kesto: perjantaina 12 tuntia workshoppeja, peli lauantai-aamusta alkaen yhtäjaksoisesti 36 tuntia.
- Pelaajia: 40 (puolet palestiinalaisia, puolet pohjoismaalaisia).
- Rahoitus: päärahoittajana Norjan valtio.

Hänen mukaansa jokaisella palestiinalaisella on "pieni israelilainen sotilas seisomassa nenän päällä. Larppissa siitä pääsee hetkeksi eroon."

AbdulKarimin mielestä larppissa ihmiset voivat kokea, millaista palestiinalaisten elämä on. "Olisi hienoa tulla Suomeen tekemään peli, jossa pelattaisiin esimerkiksi vankeja."

NUORISOTYÖTÄ TEKEVÄN Rabahin mukaan palestiinalaiset "tavallaan larppaavat osana arkea".

"Kuvittelemme fiktiivisen maailman, jossa ei ole miehitystä, muuria, tarkistuspisteitä, vankeja eikä marttyyrejä. Olemme elävänä keksityssä maailmassa, jossa meillä on valtio ja hyvä taloudellinen tilanne. Muuten emme voi elää elämäämme, sillä olisimme liian surullisia koko ajan."

Kirjoittaja pelasi itse Palestiinassa

Juhana Pettersson's story about *Till Death Do Us Part* was published in Helsingin Sanomat in 3. 9. 2012.



The groom rides a horse in Till Death Do Us Part. Future Halat hisar organizer Mohamad Rabah is in the background, extreme left. Photo by Li Xin

“THERE’S NO OFF-GAME IN PALESTINE.”



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