

Fantasy Warplay (FANWAR)

A Live Action Role-Play (LARP)

Fantasy Warplay is a form of Live Action Role Playing developed over many years of playing and testing out safe and effective ways to simulate combat. It grew out of playing in the woods of Mendocino County, CA in association with the Melville Montessori School and was influenced largely by the Role Playing Game Arduin, the card game Magic the Gathering and dramatic play. Fantasy Warplay has been in operation in Saint Helena for the past four years, and before that at the Melville Montessori School since 1996. While Fantasy Warplay developed completely on it's own it owes much in it's most recent developments to NERO (New England Role-playing Organization) who inspired us to take the game to a level we had formerly only dreamed of.

FANWAR- What is Live Action Role Play? A LARP is a Role Playing Game requiring players to take on a character and act as that character in a live setting. A good example is to think of it like a play with no script. The players are writing the story as they go along. The game develops skills in large motor control, strategy, social skills, logic, mathematics, history, creativity, and drama as well as offering young adults a much-needed place to vent aggression and violent behavior in a safe way, so that that behavior does not negatively affect the community. A Live Action Role Play is a game in which participants pretend to be someone from a different time and place, exploring strange worlds and encountering fantasy creatures such as dragons, goblins and wizards, rescuing friends, slaying villains and solving problems.

Safety: In order to keep people from getting hurt in such games, complex padded weapons have been designed and crafted out of foam, tested and re-tested for years to develop both realistic looking, yet harmless props for battling. These weapons, and only these weapons, which have been approved for safety by the Game Master, can be used at an event. This is the same standard of safety used by The Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) and New

England Role-playing Organization (NERO). Even with such harmless weaponry, we have strict rules about the way in which weapons can be used and where players can be hit to further increase the safety of the game. We also teach players the appropriate way to strike, how much force to use and consideration for other players when battling. All players know that if they ever were to injure another player, by accident or otherwise, the injured player has the right to call a “fumble” and have the offending party suffer the consequences of their own attack (in other words, if the attacker was trying to “kill” the injured player, he ends up killing himself instead because he has actually hurt another player). Thus players learn quite quickly that it is to their advantage to battle as carefully as possible and one must always play with safety first in mind. The reality is that more people get injured playing youth sports than have ever been hurt in a LARP, it is that safe.

Game Master: Though the players get to choose what they want to do and where they will go in the fantasy world, the events that will transpire due to their decisions are controlled by the Game Master who is the story teller. The Game Master serves as the referee for combat and role-play as well as the teacher, choosing what sort of events will transpire and what the players will learn from their actions. Though not often thought of as a safety precaution, the Game Master is actually the ultimate safeguard in a LARP. If there is ever a problem in combat the Game Master calls a “hold” in which all players freeze and the situation is discussed until a suitable solution can be reached. This teaches players appropriate problem solving techniques and insures that players have recourse should they find themselves in a difficult situation. The Game Master also controls the mood of play, teaching players that they are responsible for their actions, that helping each other is better than turning on one another, that it is better to ask questions before attacking and that no matter how evil or mean their character is, they must always play the game fairly, with a good attitude and honesty. Players who cannot meet these requirements are not allowed to play.

Events: FANWAR has two types of events; weekday events and weekend events. The weekday events are shorter, starting at 4:30pm and ending just before sunset. These events are now being offered at Low Gap Park, in Ukiah. Weekend events are longer, starting at 10:00am and going until sunset with a break around 2:00 for lunch. Weekend events are usually held at a

central wilderness area (such as Riverfront Park in Windsor) but are sometimes held in town or at other State Parks such as Paul Dimmick Campground in Navarro or Jackson State Forest in Mendocino County. An event can never have more than 30 participants, as beyond that it becomes logistically unmanageable.

Purpose: It is my goal as the creator of FANWAR to provide a much needed after school and summer program for teens and young adults that offers them an opportunity to vent aggression and violent behavior so that that same behavior does not spill out onto the local community. I have a personal interest in Youth Violence and give speeches and workshops on how to deal with violence. My research indicates that appropriate expression is the best means to combat violence in our culture. As Michael Gurian, author of “The Wonder of Boys” says,

“Unless you have a tribe, especially of elders to guide the boys and peers to test them, the testosterone is going to get out of hand. It's not contained.. If we don't help the boy contain himself within space, either in the living room, or in a football game, or with his gun on the street, what we're going to get is out of control boys.”

By providing an appropriate container for repressed emotions, I allow players to work out their frustrations and destructiveness in a harmless way and thereby improve the quality of life for the entire community. Not only are players helped by getting to “beat on things” but by having to be attacked, as they learn how to stay calm and collected even while having someone beat on them with a padded sword. This teaches tolerance and recognition of when you are really threatened. These two skills, appropriate expression and tolerance combine to keep people from flying off the handle, exploding and or resorting to violence- at FANWAR and in the rest of the community. As Michael Gurian explains,

“One of the most important wisdom lessons that the male has to learn is to differentiate between the world in which he can express his negative shadow and be tested by his peers, and the world where, if he expresses this shadow he will cause harm.. One of the things that male culture has forgotten is that males need to say, ‘Look, you're allowed to do that within the container, and we'll step into that container and get messy with you. But once you step outside that container it's finished.’ Males have to learn that, and they have to start learning that when they're really young. They need to learn how to contain their energy so that it can develop and then explode in healthy, appropriate ways.”

Taking on a role, acting and reacting to situations as they arise and being “powerful” can curb violence as well. As Gerard Jones, author of “Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super Hero’s, and Make-Believe Violence,” says,

"through identifying with a fantasy figure who displays intense sexuality, wields destructive power, and exudes heroism, kids can help themselves feel more control over these forces."

Jones book shows, as we have just discussed, that fantasy and make-believe violence play an integral part in processing aggression, and function as an appropriate container for dangerous emotions.

Beyond the fantasy and swordplay is the simple value of a positive peer group, where teens can hear that they are wonderful, important human beings, that their ideas matter, and someone is going to listen to them. As philosopher Cornel West said in response to what young people need,

"You need for people to tell you, people you love and trust, that you are somebody, that your beautiful and intelligent and so forth--- the family, the church, the civic organization, the teacher, the Little League coach."

FANWAR allows young adults to be somebody, to rescue their older brother from Ogres, charm the local Elven Princess or even solve the riddle to the treasure trove and then share in the retelling of these great deeds, appreciated by people who have shared in their experience and learn from it as well.

Free!: FANWAR is a FREE program and is not for profit (we do not have Non-profit status but work through a non-profit, The Hermeneutic Institute for Holistic Health and Education). We do not charge a fee for playing FANWAR as the goal is to provide a needed service to the community. However, players who want to play characters in the adventure are expected to make donations to the program, either by coming to a “build” and helping to repair equipment, donating supplies such as shin guards, socks, and foam, or contributing monetarily. This keeps FANWAR in operation as a free service instead of as a private club.

More Information: If you want or need any more information of FANWAR or LARPs there are numerous resources available. For information on FANWAR, go to www.fanwar.com and check out the site, you can download the rulebook, a demo video or even order a copy of

Description of FANWAR – by Christopher Melville, Director www.fanwar.com page 5

the full documentary. If you are looking for more information on LARPs you can check out www.nerowest.com and download their rulebook, it is a great primer on standard LARP rules and regulations. Also check out The Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) www.sca.org or go to the local Renaissance Pleasure Fair and ask around about local LARPs.