Online Larps in Japan

CLOSS

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Abstract

This short note provides a brief, abridged overview of online larps and web-larps organized by Japanese larp organizations since 2019. Especially during the pandemic, many larpers in Japan experimented with online formats.

Keywords: Japan, online larp

要約

このショートノートでは，2019 年以降に日本の LARP 団体が主催したオンライン LARP とウェブ LARP の概要を簡潔にまとめている．特にパンデミックの時から，日本の多くの LARP プレイヤーがオンライン形式の実験を行った．

キーワード：オンライン LARP，日本

1. WEBLARP（#WEBLARP）

Period: May 2019

This first venture into the possibilities of online larp rested on the idea of using a social networking service such as Twitter for play. The organizers created a setting in which people lived in a shelter because the air was polluted after the collapse of civilization. From this shelter, they could only communicate using text information, for which the game utilized the hashtag #WEBLARP in tweets and comments. By using this hashtag, the larp skillfully incorporated the vital element of linking the game world to the actual environment of the players who participate in the larp through the tool of Twitter.

Users who loved this game became known as "Shelter people" and established an avid fan base.

However, concerns emerged about using such a public space like an SNS for games, and thus, the possibility of unnecessary trouble between users… Fortunately, nothing untoward happened. Because of these concerns, hashtags on SNS for larps have decreased.

Still, as a larp initiative using online services, we feel that this project was a fantastic idea and an opportunity to create a possibility space for online larp in Japan.

2. Scattered Flowers -THE LAST SHINOBI- (Roman Little Wing)

Period: September 2019

Roman Little Wing developed this game using simple rules and dramatic role-playing scenes with conversations and physical expressions. Players take on the roles of fictional ninja or samurai and are divided into opposing camps such as Iga-clans vs. Kōka-clans or the Shinobi Village vs. the Shogunate. They are involved in a battle for life and death. One of the larp's great features is that it can be played anywhere. The game was also played at the TRPG Festival in 2019, so that some of you readers may have played it there instead of online.

Related Website:
https://twitter.com/romanlittlewing/status/1168007191493656578?s=21 (accessed 2021/11/08)

3. Endgame World Story (Math-Game)

Period: January to February 2020

This game was a fusion of online and offline larp.

The organizers solved the problem of concerns about using a public SNS, which was an issue with WEBLARP, by utilizing online chat and SNS services where users had to register first. By representing the various "places" of the larp setting as multiple chat rooms, the participants could gather and interact as characters in these "places" even if

there was a physical distance between the players.[1] In this way, the organizers could fully utilize the advantages of online larp.

In addition, the fun of larping and role-playing resulted from the organizers providing an attractive world setting for people to gather and interact in such places and thus an opportunity for living as a character in that world. This world is relatively close to ours, where life as we all know it abruptly ended, and people need to find ways to survive.

Furthermore, the story's ending was set as a landing point for the users to actually get together as their characters, in contrast to the situation where there was only online dialogue and interaction through chat. We feel that this is a beautiful piece of larp craft created by the organizers.

Related Website: https://worldendstory.memo.wiki/ (accessed 2021/11/08)

4. A Fool's Choice (Shooting Star LARP)

Period: April 2020

Shooting Star LARP released this work as an online-specialized larp amid the Corona pandemic, which caused much social upheaval in Japan. Currently, people describe it simply as an RPG to be played on the web.

By employing the same tools that users expect to use to communicate, such as voice chat, video chat, and text chat, there is an unmistakable ingenuity in following through with the design to address users' concerns when conducting larp online accurately.

The game design offers simple basic rules, and a web service provides the tools for the game, including special tools for GMs. The game revolves around yes/no questions, which players need to answer to determine who may lose something or win their greatest wish. Players take on the mantle of the wealthiest people in the world, so there is much to lose.

Related Website: https://shootingstar-larp.jp/archives/967 (accessed 2021/11/08)

5. ViewScream 2nd Edition

Period: April 2020

If you ever thought, "I want to larp online amid Corona!" you may have come across information that there are online larp initiatives abroad. Following this line of information, you will most likely have encountered *ViewScream*.

Undoubtedly, this game broadened the awareness of larpers in Japan of online larping techniques such as video chatting, as an example of such techniques used overseas.

You become a character in a closed-off science-fiction setting, such as a marooned spaceship, interacting with other characters and making decisions about your survival. We feel that this is a great giving people who have not had the chance to experience the fun of larping the opportunity to discover this hobby. The translation into Japanese by HAL99 and neijima, provided with the original author's permission, is also outstanding.

Author: Rafael Chandler; publisher: Neoplastic Press; Japanese translation: neijima / HAL99. Booth sales site: https://booth.pm/ja/items/2061718 (accessed 2021/11/08)

6. Memories of Round (Green Hat Treasures Trade)

Period: April 2020

Originally conceived as a game to be played around a single table, it can also be played as an online larp due to its structure. In such a case, the content of the online larp is as follows. The player characters participate in a *nomikai* (drinking party) but are so drunk already that they do not remember why they are there and who the other characters are. Then they have to deal with a problem posed by the GM. Since the story progresses based on the five senses recognized by the player (character), it is desirable to use video chat. With the game setting being like an online drinking party, we feel that this is a wonderful way to enjoy online larp in this age.

Related Website: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-C0BJS9f4ga4y-CdiPXJNRq1RGf783co7a1dM6M8e1s/edit (accessed 2021/11/08)

7. Distance Communication LARP Remote Scope, Audience-Participatory Fantasy Region of Magic (CLOSS, Japan Larp Association)

Period: May 2020

We at CLOSS have been thinking about how to do larp online for quite the time. We proposed the

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[1] See the paper by Dixon and Marsh in this issue regarding such a dissonance between player and character location.

idea of remote scoping as an open resource for various people to think about how larp could be conducted online.

As an attempt to tackle online larp, we considered the requirements. We divided them into the following categories: "basic frame" is the basic idea for an online larp, "skin" is the world setting that serves as the basis for the character's behavior when larping. The rules for larping are called "gear rules," and the limited rules for realizing special situations we named "piece rules." At the same time, we also published a gear rule called "Region of Magic," where alien visitors need assistance by the player characters called "operators."

We also ran this larp at the TRPG Festival in 2020.

You may want to call this a "delivery-type" online larp. An unspecified number of people can participate because it is conducted using a tool called "Twikas," an interactive tool that allows viewers to send comments to the distributor.

Related Website (Distance Communication LARP: Remote Scope): http://ex.closs-larp.com/archives/273 (accessed 2021/11/08), related Website (Audience-Participatory Fantasy: Region of Magic): http://ex.closs-larp.com/archives/260 (accessed 2021/11/08),

8. Ikusa Magic Academy (Math-Game)

Period: June 2020

This game was a new online larping service launched by the staff who worked on Endgame World Story. The service ran from the 1st to the 3.5th period of the world setting and was a great online larp content that many users registered to enjoy. The service was shut down on September 20, 2021, but it was an excellent opportunity to experience online larp.

Related Website: https://worldstory.larp.love/top.php (accessed 2021/11/08)

9. The Oracle of Laplace: Backdoor of the Gang (CLOSS/Green Hat Treasures Trade (Laymūn LARP))

Period: May 2021

The larp was broadcasted on Youtube, and the player characters were god-like beings called "Transcendents" who watched the broadcast from the "god's point of view." Observing the humans, they could interfere in the actions of the humans (NPCs in the broadcast). This game is an example of a larp where the rules were not initially designed for online use but were customized to allow online play.

Related Website: https://the-oracle-of-laplace.playing.wiki/ (accessed 2021/11/08)

10. Debate LARP "Where the Labyrinth Goes" (Bear LARP)

Period: May 2021

The plan was to play a debate online and as a larp. In Japan, debate is often associated with a negative image, but organizers wanted to make it fun. In the setting, the Sorcerers' Guild held discussions between adventurers – seeking treasure in a dangerous labyrinth – and representatives of the surrounding kingdom who sought to seal the labyrinth due to demons terrorizing the country. We found that this was an incredible game that also focuses on the education possibilities of larp.

Related Website: https://twipla.jp/events/481505 (accessed 2021/11/08)

11. Improv x LARP – Stage LARP (LLC Behind the Scenes)

Period: September 2021

This project may seem slightly different from online larp, but it works as an indication of what to expect from a new experiment under the label "Stage and LARP" to be launched in 2022. The project attempts to break the fourth wall by engaging the audience fully in the interaction with the actors. The performance is also planned to be distributed online so that there is a possibility that a new way of enjoying online larp will emerge as these trials evolve. We hope that this exciting and wonderful experiment can be realized.

Related Website: https://note.com/himeno0627/n/n7f6559c7c867 (accessed 2021/11/08)

12. Summary

Although the above is but a rapid succession of projects and events, we hope it helps envision the trajectory of online larp in Japan between 2019 and 2021. Unfortunately, we could not participate in all the larps, so we may not be able to explain everything in detail. Despite the corona disaster, many people creatively launched great projects, so that we are very impressed with the development of larp as a rich culture.