



The Passage

May the Saints be with you. Remember why we are here.

It was the second year without a summer when we left Non-don. I can still remember how the slag settled around the factory as I made my way through the mud. I could see my breath in the air. I wished I could still remember insects and small critters, but they became more of a distant tale than a memory. A tale from an exotic land that I read somewhere, but never saw with my own eyes.

We had hope when we saw a glimpse of spring, but then it looked like autumn again. For most people life was a struggle, fighting every day against all odds, surviving another day at a factory, fighting over what little food and hope they had left.

While the old world was crumbling, we decided not to falter but heed the call of the saints. High up in the mountains close to the sun is an oasis of green fields and warm springs. We are here to find it.

We put our trust in Saint Isobel to guide us to this oasis, in Saint Alaric to keep the darkness at bay and Saint Elysia to tend to our sorrows along the way. I put my trust in you my friends and the hope that one day we will find a way out of here.

I know now, I won't make it, but have no doubt, Camp Persephone will survive - Camp Persephone will remember.

*The last words of Professor Ophelia Pendleton
as recited by B. Abernathy.*

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Vision

The Passage is a narrative dark game set in an alternate timeline inspired by late 19th century Europe. The game tells the story around the events of a frontier basecamp that was set up as a result of a desperate last resort to lead humanity out of misery. It focuses on how the individuals cope with the situation and how they manage to keep up hope or how they react when hope dwindles.

We want to create a game about the emotions created under pressure. The pressure of being a nation's last hope, being locked in a situation where one has to entrust one's life to unknown or even detested people, and the pressure of balancing on the edge of sanity.

The design of this content LARP provides a dense, dramatic narrative experience for 29 players. It facilitates an interesting story arc for each character with several key choices. In order to achieve the intended dramatic narrative, the players' choice will be limited in key story moments, but up to the player in key character moments.

Each player will receive a pre-written character including their goals, motivations, relations and other content, and players will not be able to change or add anything story-significant. There will however be a lot of interpretational liberty in how one wishes to play on the character's goals, motivations and relations and especially how the character expresses emotion.

Despite the dark themes, drama and cosmic horror elements the game is supposed to have an overarching wholesome ending.

Important Themes

Hope

Will the characters keep up hope or how will they cope with the loss of it?

Uncertainty

Will they live another day, will a small expedition return and what news brings the telegraph?

Sacrifice

Will someone value the survival of the group over their own wellbeing or will someone sacrifice the cause for their own gain?

Faith

Who do we turn to in dark times and who do we blame for them?

A World without Summer

Three years ago the sky darkened and the world turned into a hopeless place without summer. Spring came late and autumn early, leading to crop failure and famine around the world. People across all countries tried to find out the reason for this darkening. Some claimed it to be the result of the eruption of a volcano, others believe it was the wrath of the Saints because people stopped believing in Providence, and some blamed witchcraft to be the cause for this catastrophe.

Once thriving countries now struggled for resources and with unrest on any level. After a first wave of conventional and civil wars left peoples' hope and land in ruin, more people became susceptible to all kinds of outlandish ideas like building societies into the warm rock of volcanoes, building gargantuan, impossibly to maintain, greenhouses that would contain whole cities, or venturing out into the wasteland to find more hospitable landscapes.

One of those ventures arose from a tale of a warm oasis or a passage into the land of spring high up in the mountains.



The City of Nondon

The prosperity of Nondon is built on three pillars: Faith, science and social hierarchy.

Faith gives the people hope and guidance. The Saints are the guardians of Providence. They help those who do right and punish those who do wrong.

Science brought a new age, an age of prosperity, innovations and industrialisation. While the nobility gains more power, most of the common folks suffer under the squalor of the industrial revolution.

Social order keeps stability and peace. Everyone knows, the nobles look out for the less fortunate and the common people carry their burden with dignity.

When the years without summer came, Nondon managed to keep out of most wars, but they did not remain unscathed. The political unity suffered, many people resorted to stronger anti-witch sentiments and everyone suffered from the imminent threat of a famine.

As soon as the tale of the passage spread, many people from Nondon joined the race. Some political and military leaders made an effort to join the race as well, but they were never united enough for full involvement. Therefore they did just enough to claim that they were involved if any of these efforts would turn out to be fruitful.

The City of Lutece

Lutece is a city of beauty, arts and opulence. Due to its history it also became a boiling pot of different ideas of equality which led to quite some turmoil in the past and an attitude that anyone with the right mindset and providence can rise.

When the years without summer came, the Lutecian empire got pulled into many different wars. After a while the Lutece commune, a union of Lutecian commoners, decided to rise up, take over the city and expel all nobles from the city.

There are rumors that the Lutecian nobility was harboring witches.

Faith and the Saints

In Nondon and Lutece people worship the Saints. In their lifetime the Saints were humans who ascended into sainthood because of their selfless deeds.

After their death the Saints became guardians of Providence. A Believe, that any person acting righteously will one day get something in return and any person acting selfishly will get punished for their deeds one day. Most people agree that Providence can be inherited and that one's deeds not only affect yourself but also your next of kin.



Design Ready to play

The Passage is a ready to play larp and you are only required to read the written source material for your character, put some thought into how you want to interpret your character, and consult with the organisers if there are any issues. You will neither be asked nor get the possibility to partake in writing the character, creating additional connections or preplan scenes for a character.

You will receive all the equipment (costume, expedition gear, provision, weapons, bandages) needed to play this game except a few specific costume pieces, your out of character sleeping gear and personal sanitary products. The costumes will be provided by a professional tailor.

You will also receive a "diary" containing a shortened version of your character information, and for each chapter of the game (approximately 3-4h of playtime) a short text containing inputs for your game. Many of these inputs can be discarded at the player's discretion, some are meant as a guide for the pacing of the game and give you permission to take the spotlight. In some instances there are clearly marked instructions that you have to follow because they are important for the story of other characters.

We encourage you to enrich your character play and the aesthetic of the game by bringing decorative elements, songs, poems, memorabilia and stories from your character's past. Please do not bring any game relevant equipment without checking in with the organisers before the game.

Surprises and Transparency

The Passage is not transparent by design. There are certain aspects to the characters and the story that we don't want to be shared before the game, that can be discovered in-game. The game is still designed in a way that you as a player will be able to react to the surprises in character and not be overwhelmed out of character.

As a result we will ask you to keep the pre-game calibration down to the guided workshops, and neither to exchange any character information, nor tell any other player what your characters really think of each other. However, players will have the chance prior to the game to get to know each other as well as set general boundaries and play preferences.

You will not participate in planning any scenes out of character ahead of the game nor during the game. We will provide a selected set of meta techniques that you can use to opt out of a scene and that you can use to indicate to other players that you want to escalate.

Narrative and Fateplay

The passage works with pre-written narratives for each character. During the casting process you will have the possibility to express what types of narratives you wish to experience. Many of these narratives contain fateplay to a certain degree. There will be moments where the fate of your character will be decided by something that you can't control.

Fiction vs History

The passage is set in a fictional setting that takes a lot of inspiration from late 19th century Europe. Despite Nondon being inspired by London and Lutece being inspired by Paris we ask you not to add an artificial French or British accent to your character.

We do understand that gender was a really important topic for the late 19th century, but apart from the aesthetic aspects gender roles and conflicts will be ignored in the game.

Safety and Content

Your safety is important to us. We will do our best to ensure your physical safety and mental wellbeing during the whole experience. We will have designated people to provide emotional support during the game and we will have safety briefings and workshops on physical play.

That said, this game takes place in winter in a cabin in the alps and tackles certain heavy topics. Each player will have to agree on sign-up to be okay with being exposed to certain topics and be prepared for the physical demands of this game. You will also have to agree that you won't have the possibility to calibrate certain elements and you will be responsible for your own limits and opt-out of scenes accordingly using the meta techniques that we will provide.

The game tells the story of a dire situation, a desperate last resort in a fight for survival. All players will encounter fake blood, injuries, violence, tales of domestic violence, spiders, bullying, death (including suicide), class segregation, xenophobia and witchhatred (a conflict using similar mechanisms as racism, ableism and othering).

Despite the historical inspiration for the game there are certain elements that will not be part of the game. We will not play on gender, sexism, homophobia and racism.

Every social role can be taken on by a character of any gender and every player can take on any gender representation no matter their gender. That said, you will have to decide on the gender representation on the costume form.

There will be no homophobia. In our gameworld it can be absolutely normal, that someone has two biological fathers or two biological mothers.

There will be some character connections that we encourage to be played as romances and others with the option to be played as romances or close platonic friendships. We will flag them accordingly during the casting and you will get the possibility to calibrate them with your partner.

There won't be any play on intimacy and sexual violence will not be part of this game. The limit is what is nowadays accepted in public in Switzerland, which means that consensual physical contact is allowed.

Accessibility

We expect the participants to be physically fit enough to walk in heavy snow and climb steep inclines.

We will have to adjust the routes of the expeditions to the weather. If the snow allows, the longest route (one way) will be about 3 km in length and 150 m rise. People will go on up to four expeditions during the whole game.

We would like to make the game as accessible as possible. There is a limited number of spots for people that don't want to go on any expedition, you will still have to be able to march about 1 km through difficult terrain. If you are unable to do this, please contact the organisation and we will work on a solution together.



Practical Casting

The character distribution will be based on your game and content preferences and does not depend on any out of character abilities nor characteristics. Once you get your spot at The Passage confirmed you will receive a questionnaire about your game and character preferences. Based on these preferences we will present you three to four characters that we think fit your expectations. You will then have to place them in order of your preferences and get the possibility to add any comments.

Please note that due to the intersectionality of the characters you might receive characters from categories that you'd prefer not to play. This means that we believe that other aspects of the character outweigh them.

Together with the final character distribution you will receive a final questionnaire for practical information like costume preferences, costume sizes and dietary needs.

Food and accommodations

We will provide three meals per day starting with Thursday dinner and ending with Sunday breakfast. We will also provide some simple snacks and hot and cold non-alcoholic beverages around the clock. The play on food scarcity will be portrayed through luxury food like fresh fruits, chocolate etc. No-one will go hungry out of character.

Sleeping accommodations will be communal bunk beds in off-game rooms of 8 to 10 people. You will have to bring your own sleeping bag. There are mattresses, pillows, pillowcases and woolen blankets at your disposal.

Location

The game takes place in and around a remote scout's cabin on a mountain at 1111m above sea level. We are hoping for and expecting snow.

For people arriving by public transport we will organise shuttles from Schwanden GL as well as facilitate carpooling on our discord.

People arriving by car can drive up to the cabin to unload and then move the car to the parking that is about 1.5km from the house. The last 1.5km to the

house is a single track mountain road with reduced winter service. If you are insecure about driving to the house please reach out to us and we will find a way to pick you up further down the mountain.

Time Table

Thursday

Check in Starts around 14:00

Check in Closes at 17:00

Beginn Workshops: 18:00

Dinner 19:00-19:30

End Workshops 22:00

Friday

Breakfast 8:00

Last workshops and game preparation 9:00 - 11:00

Game Starts: 11:00

Saturday

The game ends on Saturday evening with a hard cut.

After game party

Sunday

Breakfast 8:00-9:00

Cleaning of the house until 12:00

We appreciate help with the cleaning but you don't have to stay for it if you don't have the time.





Credits

Writers: *Lukas Henrik Riesen, Polaris Lodestar*
Producers: *Carlo Müssli, Jasmin Stoff, Lorong Habicht*
Pictures: *Alicia Francino Meier, Lukas Henrik Riesen*

The original version of this larp was written and produced by Lukas Henrik Riesen in 2023 as part of their diploma project for their BA in art education at ZHdK (Zurich university of arts).