

The meaning of life isn't about finding God or our place in the cosmos. It's about filling in the time between being woken up by the neighbours' children and collapsing into bed. Most people manage to fill the gap with working, shopping and watching television. But there are those out there who have found so much more. They put these things above work, shopping – and possibly even television. Their interests may seem bizarre and unfathomable to the rest of us, but who can argue against a passion?

Hans Edward Hammonds is dressed like a monk. "Out there is Auckland. In here is in the Eranian Cathedral in the middle of the Pearl of The North," he announces. The nine others nod in agreement at the tall Norwegian. Apparently

definitely not "those people who re-enact historical battles". A scenario can be anything from a boardroom takeover to a relationship melodrama. "I think it's really human, and when I'm larping I always feel really normal," says 20-something larper Craig Neilson. An "imagineer" is what he likes to call himself. He makes all his own costumes and, like many larpers, he has a theatrical bent. He also happily survives in the world the rest of society occupies. Well, mostly. "It's a holiday from yourself, where you can try out what it's like to be somebody else." It's an appealing thought where, thanks to the imagination and likeminded people, you can, theoretically, forget about all those bad decisions you made in real life and go make some in a fictional world.

Which begs the question: what's stopping someone pulling a gun and,