

It's Just a Stage – draft script

A chamber larp for 10–15 players, designed for Consequences 2016 and Stockholm Scenario Festival 2016. Duration: 4 hours.

Introduction

Setting

A succession of backstage rooms associated with the theatre, in the modern day. Successive scenes take place at auditions, and before and after performances.

The characters are an assortment of actors, who join together to form the Intro|Spective stage company, and work together for some years. The larp runs from the company's foundation, through to the point when they are about to perform a farewell show representing highlights and key moments from their shared history; after which, the company will be disbanded.

Theme

The larp is about performance: in the literal sense of presenting a theatrical play (and facilitating its presentation); in the metaphorical sense of how well one performs one's duties, and progresses towards one's life goals; and in the figurative sense of performing one's persona and of performing different aspects of self and different roles to different people.

It is not a didactic design; rather, it presents a space for people to explore their own thoughts and feelings around performance.

Experience

The larp plays out naturalistically in real-time, but with use of meta-techniques to allow internal-monologuing.

The experience of play is intended to be about: preparing oneself for, and reacting to, actual performance (on stage / of one's duties); and the performance task of presenting different sides of oneself in different contexts and to different people.

Structure

Workshop

Prologue – the auditions

Scene 1 – the founding (10 years ago)

Scene 2 – the heyday (5 years ago)
Scene 3 – the crisis (2 years ago)
Scene 4 – the farewell (now)

Timings

Section	4 hours
Workshop	60
Prologue	30
Scene 1	30
Recalibration 1	10
Scene 2	30
Recalibration 2	10
Scene 3	30
Recalibration 3	10
Scene 4	30

Workshop

A normal kind of workshop to prepare the players for the game, to establish mutual understanding of facts about the world, to establish hierarchies, relationships and backstory between characters, and so on.

Introduction and practicalities

Introduce the game

Practicalities of using the room, timing, etc

Explain the workshop

Expectations of play

Explain that play is expected to be naturalistic and dramatic. The characters are real people living in our real world, but they are more emotional and demonstrative than the average, so there's no need to hold back in scenes.

Safety etc

Tell players that they will be inventing material, including backstory, but that they only have authority what happens to their own character. It is fine if you want to improvise facts about the shared past during play, as long as they are plausible and don't clash with the tone of the game.

Try not to establish anything major for the other characters - definitely do not endow them with any traumatic events, pregnancy etc. The time to introduce and discuss major events is during the recalibration phases. If you don't like something that another player established about your character during play, just say "Off game", or make a "time-out" hand gesture and tell them what you want changed, without stopping play for others. Example:

- "You must be so hungover after yesterday, I sure am!"
- "Off-game: my character doesn't drink"
- "I'm so hungover after yesterday's party, nice to see *someone's* fresh as a daisy!"

Tell them that the company has internal anti-discrimination rules and is made up of fairly liberal people by default. However, people don't always obey such rules perfectly, and so there may be incidents of discrimination, prejudice etc in play. If a player feels uncomfortable about this – or about any other situation in play – they can **Cut** to stop the scene, without having to explain themselves. The organizers will address the situation and help restart things.

Alternatively, anyone can leave a conversation or other situation by using the **Lookdown** technique. It's important to understand that this is non-diegetic – ie. it's not the character walking out of a difficult scene, in which case the other character might well want to pursue them and continue it – it's the player backing away, and that signal must be respected completely.

And finally of course **The Door Is Open** – players can leave the game at any point, if they wish to. They don't need to explain – although it would be helpful to let the organizers know if you are actually leaving the game rather than just going to the toilet or something.

Meta-techniques

Each player is strongly encouraged to use at least one of these two techniques, and preferably both of them, at some point during the larp.

TV interview – for showing off the facade

Any player can, by taking up the microphone and ringing the bell, invoke an imaginary TV crew to whom they are giving an interview. They can pitch this as communicating genuine thoughts and feelings, or as strengthening their 'legend' – as they prefer. (But from the meta point of

view, it's desirable that it convey something that their character wouldn't say in the main body of the scene.)

Other players are free to pay attention to this or not, as they prefer.

Mirror – for exploring the inner life

Any player can go to the mirror, ring the bell, and muse while removing their makeup. It should convey inner thoughts and feelings honestly (or as honestly as the character might be with themselves).

Again, other players are free to pay attention to this or not: but, importantly, they can only hear it out-of-character, not in-character.

Character choosing and building

Choose archetypes

We give them their archetypes and a couple of moments to think about the character they want to play. Then there is a quick round of (out-of-character) introductions, where the players briefly describe the publicly known aspects of their characters.

Calibration of externals for Prologue and Scene 1

This activity allows players to agree elements of the game reality, so their world-image is consistent. These should be objective statements that they're making as players/designers, and should not be related to their individual characters' viewpoints etc.

Each player in turn should make a calibration statement that they would like to be true about one of the topics, eg. "the theatre was built in the 1930s and is now rather decrepit". Other players can ask for this statement to be changed or tweaked if they wish (they don't have to explain why, unless they want to). If not, then the statement becomes a fact about the setting. Once everyone's made a statement, allow further statements if it seems desirable: but there probably won't be any need.

The topics are:

- The theatre in which the auditions are taking place.
- The town/city/village/etc in which the theatre is located.
- A fact about the day of the show (eg. weather, news items, minor incidents that happened earlier).

Relationship building

Allow the players to talk and mix freely so as to establish which of the others will fit into the relationships described on their character sheets.

Spread out the miscellaneous relationship cards and allow players to choose from them. They should calibrate the indicated relationship with the person who has the matching card.

Transition into play

Allow players to use the bathroom, etc. Remind them of the sequence of play, and of the bell signals. Remind them of the safety techniques. Then talk them into character in preparation for the Prologue.

Structure of play

Prologue

A GM-led scene in which the characters are all auditioning for some sort of performance.

Each character briefly introduces themselves (“Hi, I’m Andy, I’ve always dreamt of acting, I think theatre can change society, etc.”) This serves to convey the character’s facade, in a ‘good first impression’ style.

Then, they diegetically perform a solo 1-min scene – using the suggestion on their character sheet (chosen to make sense of and emphasise their archetype), or devising something of their own. It could be body language + short monologue. They can use other characters as silent extras.

Finally, the GM (as ‘casting director’) conducts a short series of tableaux to warm people up or discover potential acting chemistry. The themes are: talent, drive, success, friendship, love.

The end of the Prologue is marked by a set of ringing bells.

Scene 1

The Prologue segues straight into Scene 1, in which the characters agree to form the Intro|Spective company together.

Remind the players that at some point during the four scenes, they should use at least one of the two monologue meta-techniques.

A bell signals five minutes to go in the scene; then a set of bells signals the end.

Recalibration 1

The players use this interlude to:

- brainstorm the play that is going to be the focus of Scene 2;

- adjust their interrelationships, using the miscellaneous relationship cards;
- think about their character progression during the years between scenes, as indicated on their character sheet;
- tell the others about any development that they need to know.

Scene 2

Same structure as Scene 1, but the setting is backstage just after the premiere of a very successful show.

Recalibration 2

Same structure as Recalibration 1.

Scene 3

Same structure as Scene 1, but the setting is backstage just after (what turns out to be) the only production of an unsuccessful show.

Recalibration 3

Same structure as Recalibration 1.

Scene 4

The stage company gather in preparation for their farewell show. The scene ends with bells as usual, as they prepare to go on stage.

This is followed by a moment of darkness (if the lights can be controlled), then the lights come on, accompanied by ecstatic applause, as the players/characters take a big curtain call.