



MALL RATS – A CHAMBER LARP BY SARA SHEIKHI

Originally written for Stockholm Scenario Festival 2021

Game master sheet

Contact: sara-sheikhi@hotmail.com

Mall Rats - An introduction

About this Game master sheet

You will first get a short introduction to the larp, then some preparatory content to read pre-game, and, finally, the content you need in order to run the larp. You will find that there is not so much to read as meets the eye – a decent part of the preparatory content is the character sheets.

About the larp

Mall Rats is a two-hour-long chamber larp exploring the struggles and interpersonal relationships of some workers and visitors in a typical mall. The employees sometimes call the most frequent visitors, a group of unwanted and unruly teenagers, the “Rat Gang”. However, what is really disturbing in the Mall? And what problems are eating the employees? Whilst the Mall offers a sense of anonymity and even a sense of safety for some of them, there are cracks in the Mall that is barely covered by the interior décor. During the game, these problems will become more or less apparent for the characters. The characters will have to choose the best way to deal with these problems in order to protect themselves, the sense of order, and, ultimately, the Mall. This is a larp which focusses on social realism by highlighting the conflict between not wanting to lose face and not wanting to lose honesty and vulnerability in a capitalistic framework.

“In the outskirts of the City, just by the Suburbia and next to the Industrial Area, there is a shopping centre called the Mall. While most people tend to visit there only when they need to leave the comfort of their homes, there are others who spend most of their hours there. Despite the glorious mall facade, the Workers of the Mall have their internal struggles and joys, of which the visitor might never learn. There is also a group of youngsters called the “Rat Gang” which uses the Mall as a second home. Together, they form complex relations which are in turn conditioned by the working place - the Mall. The Mall, however, lives a life on its own and is by no means as perfect as its ideal service approach.

In this two hour long larp, you will be faced with challenges that are both specific to the characters and shared amongst the others. As a player, you will either be playing a Mall Worker or a Member of the Rat Gang. You will have to engage yourself in the conflict of maintaining the facade or dealing the problems eating the Mall in a variety of ways. The larp is based on conversation amongst the Workers of the Mall and the Rat Gang as they try to sort out their struggles. Therefore, this is a conflict focused larp where you will have to work together with other players to find out how to deal with the problems and effectively discover and deal with issues behind the facade of the Mall.”

Practical matters and game design

* *Mall Rats* is a two hour long chamber larp that should be played with 12 players. The room will be divided, either by tape or by putting out papers with the room names on them, so that the floor space represents different parts of the mall. The larp does not use any props and player interaction is based on conversation. As a gamemaster, you do not play any of the characters, but have a small meta-function in-game as “The Janitor”, which will be elaborated later in this sheet.

* The larp consists of a pre-workshop, where the players get to know their characters by creating a small memory of what happened at the latest Christmas party at the Mall, the main part which is divided in three in-game days, and a short debrief session where the players get to comment on the choices of their characters and experiences.

* The events of the larp in the main part takes place during three days in the Mall, where the three days will represent three different stages in internal and interpersonal conflict management. On the first day, the players will explore the day-to-day interactions in the Mall. Problems of the characters remain more or less hidden as they try their best to keep things together for the sake of themselves, order, and the Mall. On the second day, the characters will try the best to solve their conflicts as they become more apparent. Finally, on the third day, the characters will push together for resolving the major conflict, that of the future of the Mall. The larp could however be ended “earlier”, see further information in the document.

* In the larp, there are three meta-structures. The first is that the gamemaster can step in as the Janitor, who can make the other players switch room in the Mall when it is “time to clean”, eg. when the game master sees fit for the players to intermingle with other players. The second is the Restroom, which is where the players can express their characters’ suppressed emotions in monologues. The third is Being on the Phone, which could be used to share information to other players and involve npc:s.

Preparatory content: To read pre-game

1‡ Characters and character sheets

2‡ Map of the Mall

3‡ Narrative overview

4‡ Description of the meta elements

Content: For actually running the larp

‡ Welcome and introduction text

‡ Preparatory workshop

‡ Day one

‡ Day two

‡ Day three

‡ Debrief

Preparatory content

1. Characters and character sheets

Mall Rats is a scenario which can be played by 12 players.

List of playable characters with occupation in parentheses:

Sofia (manager of the Mall)

Martin (assistant manager of the Mall)

Jesper (phone store employee)

Saïd (phone store employee)

Stefan (security guard)

David (security guard)

Alicia (member of the Rat Gang)

Olivia (member of the Rat Gang)

Samira (member of the Rat Gang)

Lena (clothing store employee)

Sandra (juice bar employee)

Liam (juice bar employee)

Sofia

Who are you? You are the manager of the Mall. Not that the title means much to you – sometimes you have the feeling that you are trying to control a business which is set to fail. But after working two years in a bank, counting and signing an endless amount of documents, you knew you had to make a change. You have been at your position for one year now. Really, you deserve better than this, but counting whilst sipping on a juice seems like a better use of your master's degree than the stuffy bank office. You don't really feel at home in the Mall however – the other ones who work here have hardly finished upper high school, and from time to time, you can't help thinking that you are better than them. When you are not in the Mall, you usually meet up with your friends from the School of Economics. It has been more than five years now, but every time you meet over wine, you reminiscence of the days there.

Beneath the surface... Meeting your old friends used to give you a sense of community, of being successful, even chosen to master the market driven society, but the charm has somehow been replaced by despair and a sense of failure. Recently, you can't seem to help yourself from noticing how everyone else is successfully completing the whole package with career, family, and self-realization, while you seem to end up each night watching the wrinkles deepening. The only one who calls you, apart from the regional management, is your mother, who wants you to tell her that you are pregnant when you are not. You have no one around you, and you deserve better than this. Yes, being at the top is lonely, and it has to be, right? But it is so hard to fight, the smile as you drink your wine with your so-called friends each weekend is merely a façade, crumbling faster than the entrance logo of the Mall. But you can't ask for help, especially with your position in the Mall. Or, maybe you could, but surely your co-workers are not apt for having conversations with you? They barely know how to read, well, that is not true, but would they really realize your best self? Your old mottos don't seem to work anymore...

Managing the Mall You have received a notification from the accountant that the last year's results of the Mall were disappointing, to say the least. Online shopping and the suburban location of the Mall makes it hard to present the numbers the regional management wants. In order to downsize it further and survive the upcoming year, the regional management wants you to fire Martin, your assistant manager. You should have this conversation with him as soon as possible so that he gets his chance to find a new work soon. Martin has worked in the Mall for five years, he loves this place and this place loves him. You think he is a bit silly when he walks around "checking in" on the employees, but maybe that is the human touch which keeps the Mall going. Martin is a real softie, and it feels like you are firing possibly your only friend. To be honest, you would rather fire someone else. But the regional management seems to think that Martin is not effective enough. What if you could find someone else to fire? You are not looking for scapegoats or to defend Martin, but you really feel like you can't afford to lose a friend right now. That is not all. You need to inform and discuss with all employees in a general meeting, maybe tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, that they either all will lose their jobs next year, or that they have a chance to keep the Mall alive, whereas they will work there for a slightly lower wage. Maybe you should be strategical and tell Martin first, and then announce the meeting...

Martin

Who are you? You are the assistant manager of the Mall. You love your job – you love the people, and you love knowing that you worked yourself to the top after working in the stores earlier. You have worked here five years - five years of a solid income, of lovely meet and greet with the customers and employees - truly not just a workplace. You start each day with drinking some juice in the bar and always pay all employees a visit in the morning. Usually when you come home to your single apartment, it feels a bit lonely, but you are satisfied at the end of the day. The Mall is worth working for! Just like the Youth Centre that used to be here before, it is a social arena, and you are a social being. You chit-chat with the employees rather than pushing the necessary papers. The manager, Sofia, who arrived here one year ago, doesn't always seem to understand that there are more important things than facts and figures, but, hey, she is a smart lady. Ever since the Christmas party you arranged, she seems to have loosened up a bit. You might not have all the fancy papers from a fancy education, but you work hard and treat everyone as equals. You are convinced that everyone is doing their best and believes in the Mall. People seems to have been disturbed by the so-called “Rat Gang”, a group of youngsters frequently hanging out in the Mall. But surely, they are hanging out here because they like being here. They feel like the Mall is their home, just like you do.

Beneath the surface... The Christmas party was lots of fun, but it was also soaked in drinks and some epic black-out inbetween the jokes. In fact, you can't seem to remember certain episodes, except that you got emotional and your hands really touchy. A great night! Apparently however, Lena, the clothing store manager, got in an argument with you at some time late at night, which is very strange, because you have always been very lovable and kind towards Lena. She is an elegant and clever lady, and to be honest, it all seems weird that you had some kind of argument since the two of you have been, more or less, flirting. This should have been an easy-going thing, why does everything has to be a conflict? The Mall needs more positivity and love, not tension, because, damn, people here are tense. Is not life made for enjoying it? The Mall is your family and you hate when there is conflict in the family. Those types of conflicts remind you too much of your upbringing in your biological family. No, the Mall is a peaceful place full of love, and it should remain so in the long run. What else do you have worth fighting for? Not much really...

Managing the Mall You should talk to Lena and explain to her that you are not angry with her so that you could continue with the good vibes and write another chapter in your slow burn flirt story. She will see that the “argument” was clearly based in some misunderstanding, because, seriously, there was some kind of drunk drama going on, that's all. And to be honest, you feel like you need to uplift the spirits of everyone in the Mall the upcoming days. Sofia looks even grumpier than usual and it is quite bothering how the workers in the Mall treat the poor “Rat Gang”. In a family, one takes care of each other. People does not seem to appreciate what they have, they have jobs and a great workplace. Is it so hard to smile and be easy-going while working in the Mall?

Jesper

Who are you? You are working in the Phone Store. You don't really have a passion for it, to be honest, if you could choose, you would rather just lay on the couch home and take it easy. But you live in this shitty society, and you reckon you can't change it, just escape once in a while. You enjoy the first smoke and coffee of the day and take pride in that you are a "chill" and down to earth guy. After work, you usually meet up with your "clan" and you share some smoke and meditate on the state of things. One thing that is clear to you is that the Mall doesn't mean a shit, it is a superficial place where people come to consume things, and you barely make enough money trying to sell meaningless phone contracts. That's why you have a small side gig selling some cigarettes and various drugs under the table. You have been gradually saving money to break free completely from the Mall and go with your van to Asia or something. It feels like the other guy working in the Phone Store, Saïd, is your exact opposite, a serious and strung up probably Muslim or something guy who is constantly thinking about money. Ok, you are also thinking about money quite a lot, but it is because you are going to buy your way out of this shithole because you want to be zen. In your meditation and through the vaping you have learnt that nothing really means anything in the bigger picture, so, hey, relax, man. You usually try to explain to Saïd how using psychedelics could make us come in touch with our real self and why that is an essential part of the karmic journey, maybe one day he will learn and discover just like you have.

Beneath the surface... Managing your side business of drugs so that Saïd doesn't notice your doings is quite a hustle, however, you have never failed so far. Your main client is a member of the Rat Gang, Olivia, but you are both real smooth and relaxed folks, so there is an unproblematic exchange. Just another month of dealings, and you should have saved enough to leave the Mall forever. Strange things have been occurring though, you have started to have a feeling that you are followed or that someone is going to get you, even if things are fine. You have barely slept in one month, when it all started, whatever "it" is... You had your regular green and 432 hz meditation but instead of smooth sailing you woke up hearing singing and screaming voices, even if you were completely alone. You immediately started playing some video games to center your energy, but it kind of backfired and you were just firing at things that were not in-game, or outside of the screen for that matter. You feel shit scared, but who would help you if you were going crazy? Wouldn't they all just lock you up and laugh at you if you told them about the voices? You already hear their evil laughter, you are sure of it, and you could feel that they are watching you, conspiring...

Managing the Mall You need to get your shit together and make the voices stop. You can't afford to lose focus, you only have one month where you need to keep saving so that you can leave this place and have peace, peace, peace of mind... You know it is ridiculous, since you hate your job and the Mall, but you can't afford losing your job right now, you need that income so that you could finally break free from this materialistic prison in this plane of corporeal existence. At the same time, maybe you should ease your mind a bit. You know that Sandra, who works in the juice bar, is on the same vibe as you. She is a top secret agent who you know is actually working for the angels, even if she, understandably, prefers not to talk about it since there is a strong destructive force in the Mall. Maybe she could use her powers to redirect the bad energies that are threatening you...

Saïd

Who are you? You are an employee in the Phone Store. Apart from that, you take pride in being a responsible and hard-working father, even though the meagre salary of the Phone Store has you counting at the end of each month. You often feel socially isolated, despite the constant flow of customers waiting to be fooled by the phones' flat rates. The Mall is a cold place, even if you try to make it warmer by your daily interactions. Not only do you support your closest family, which consists of your two children and intelligent wife; each month, you send your parents and sister in the Home Country whatever is left to send. You left them many years ago when the War destroyed the last sense of safety, but you can't help but feeling a pang of guilt whenever you think about the people you left behind. However, you wouldn't like to stay in this situation forever either, especially since your so-called boss and colleague Jesper hardly does the bare minimum. He chats with you about the most senseless subjects and leaves you to sell the poor costumers bad phone deals. Truly, you would rather be doing something else in order to help the world, but the rent must be paid for your children to have a proper home, and your parents decent healthcare. Your dreams will have to wait a little bit longer...

Beneath the surface... The house market is truly a nightmare and coming across an apartment large enough for your family was easier said than done. Nevertheless, it was indeed too good to be true, and in the last two months ago, the landlord has been showing up at your home at strange hours asking you for a deposit which you are quite sure never appeared in a contract to begin with. You tried to keep your children from asking about it, pretending that it was the neighbor and not the gruesome landlord. But is it any use pretending? You and your wife know too few people in the City in order to have "contacts". Let's be honest, that is what it takes to find a contract for an apartment here "average" people seems to come over so easily. You try not to feel like a fool for getting trapped in a fraud, but the stress has been keeping you up at night. It is not that you are not a realistic person, it is just because you are, that you have reached the conclusion that something has to change for you to stay out of homelessness. But the options seem bleak, yes, it even seems false to call them options. After working hard to gain a sensible life for several years, you are once again crawling on all fours, grasping for hope and more money to buy it with.

Managing the Mall You have to make ends meet and sort the landlord situation out. Phoning your parents to tell them that you will be homeless soon because you got tricked by a fraud in the Good Country is almost equivalent calling them to say that you have failed as a son. But phoning them to tell that you will have to stop sending money the upcoming month is condemning them to the black market supply of meds and the dark surge of its side effects. No, you can't do that, you can't live with that guilt! But the salary is just too poor. Maybe you should ask for a raise? However, time is of essence, you can't wait, you can't have another night of the landlord banging at the door while you tuck your children in bed. Damn, you are an honest man and you are almost working twice as much as Jesper. He is a real weird type. Why is he still here and "chilling around"? You need more money, preferably yesterday. But better not tell anyone about the fraud, you don't want to be the Stupid Refugee, right...?

Stefan

Who are you? You are a security guard at the Mall. You love your job, maybe because it offers you a security which you have fought to gain throughout your life. There are no drunk parents, senseless fights or silent treatments in the Mall. There is just a sense of ease, security and relative cleanliness as you stroll through its rooms and give your coworkers a professional nod now and then. You are not much for talking. It is like you finally have time to think through your shitty past. Or, rather, not to think about it at all. Your work got much more exciting ever since you gained a new colleague in David. He is more of the talkative type and even if it is kind of sweet, sometimes you give him one of your music earpods just to share a moment of silence together. You don't own the Mall, but you feel a sense of responsibility for it. Even the Rat Gang. You see so much of yourself in them, even if they probably see you as a weird old dude. Well, you probably are quite estranged now from your old drinking buddies, at the least.

Beneath the surface... Getting out of your alcoholized family system and out in the world meant going straight to the bottle when things got real. It held you trapped in a daze for several years, you were angry at everyone who had failed you. The angry teenager became the angry middle-aged man, and as your parents passed away in the chaos surrounding them, you could only wish for a place to put the blame. Inside, a black hole of sorrow was eating up your insides, and what was actually nagging you was fear, not anger. Coming clean was not an easy process, and it is something you still struggle with. You were not raised to be accustomed for a stable life, and, more importantly, you don't feel like you earn it, even though it is what you yearn for. When things get too good, when people get too close to you, your immediate response is to push back and destroy it, before someone else might spoil it. You can't lose if you are in control, right? You never managed to uphold any stable relations or jobs before. However, you realized that a part of it was not dictated by addiction or your tendency to push people away, but your preference to find a good man, and not a woman, to couple with. It feels like it is impossible to talk about, and you are not even a big talker to start with. Maybe you could just avoid it and push the thoughts away.

Managing the Mall As you went around to turn on the lights and unlock the doors yesterday when you were opening, you discovered that there was a sleeping bag lying in the slide in the small playground. No one was there, but it was obvious that someone had been using the sleeping bag and at the least spent a night in the Mall. Maybe this person slept more nights here, but that you failed to notice? Well, you better come across as not overlooking the duties you have. You confiscated the sleeping bag, but you find it disturbing imagining that someone is using the Mall for the wrong purposes. It looked really sloppy, and it has you wondering why people are destroying this modern and clean sanctuary of play. The person who did this must be someone really sucking out the system and with no money, possibly no home. Maybe it is a Lazy Immigrant, a Careless Youngster, or a Weedhead? It is really none of your business, but why shouldn't you be able to do some investigations to fix the situation. You should report this to the Management of the Mall. And if they don't do enough to fix it, you will solve the problem on your own. You have your shit together and littering around the Mall is obviously a provocation and general disturbance which should not be tolerated in this peaceful place.

David

Who are you? You are a security guard in the Mall. When you started to work here, Stefan, the other security guard, a silent and brooding type, made you acquainted with all the routines of closing and opening the Mall and you asked a lot of questions to get it right. You are quite talkative and at your last job at a café, you had a lot of fun giggling and chatting to the customers, which eventually got you fired for “general inefficiency”. The Mall is however a place with a slower pace, which fits your twitching brain better. You get especially nervous around Stefan, because he seems to be that solid person which you most definitely are not. Also, Stefan is hot as hell, but that is something which seems unfitting for the cool masculine silence that underlies your professionalism.

Beneath the surface... As you realized that you had developed an actual crush on Stefan, it became painfully obvious that the heterosexual relationship you and your girlfriend had been entertaining with mild interest over the last two years was nothing more than self-denial and prolonged destruction. Thus, you decided to tell her that you are actually not in love with her, as that seemed easier than to accept the fact that you couldn't be able to love the opposite sex. She accused you of being a parasite on her household, which was not entirely far-fetched, since you did live half-a-year at her place for free when you were “browsing jobs”, and she threw you out of the home without much hesitation. It was fairly undramatic and it felt like a relief finally ending something which was not right, but the bliss ended quickly as you realized that you were now homeless. You have debts from before and the prospect of getting a home might be quite unattainable. You called some friends and couchsurf for some weeks, but after a while, they were all fed up with you and the hospitality ended. You kept everything for yourself for once while trying to solve the situation. Everyone thinks you are still in a couple and that you are doing fine. That is of course not the truth, and ever since your friends' patience ran out, you have been sneaking in to the Mall's playground in order to get a good night's sleep.

Managing the Mall

Maybe you could see if someone could offer you a place to stay? You don't want to come across as desperate, and especially not in front of Stefan. You have to make sure not to talk about what has actually happened. You really need more time to figure the situation out and even if the Mall is a place of gossip, maybe you shouldn't feed it. You have to try not to talk about your feelings, your (lack of) home – really, maybe you should just stay silent? But how could you solve your problems if you don't talk? And what if Stefan really hates you after all? The other day, you were almost caught by Liam from the Juice Bar, but for some reason, he was very slow and didn't see your face in the hoodie. Your head is spinning but you must try to keep it cool. You need a job, a place to sleep, maybe you need love? One thing is sure, and that is that all things must change.

Alicia

Who are you? You are a bubbly and fun young girl, or at least, that is how the world tends to see you. You more like to identify yourself as a member of the Gang, a group of teens who likes hanging out in the Mall. Samira and Olivia, your crew, are not in the same class as you but you started hanging out in the cafeteria and the corridors. You share the same taste in music and you have the best taste ever. Olivia flirts with Liam (the hottie) in the Juice Bar and it is real fun. Nowadays, you almost immediately meet up after school in the Mall. But you usually feel like the school is getting increasingly hard, you can't seem to find the focus anymore. Especially not at home, even if nothing really seems broken. You would get hugs and love there, but you just can't seem to let it in. You used to be a decent student, now you already seem dizzy by lunch. That's why you'd rather sneak out after the lunch break and go to the soothing music of the Mall. Usually, Samira and Olivia meet you up there after school, but you pretend that you just arrived.

Beneath the surface... You have been sleeping poorly, suffering from nightmares that left you with a feeling of being haunted, even if you know that you are secure. It all started when you and the Gang went to a party at friend's house. Everyone got pretty drunk, and by the time the older brothers of the organizer arrived, everyone first thought it was a joke. But they were angry, and the screams hurried everyone toward the door. You were laughing at something now unknown and gasping for air in the sofa, falling behind the stream of guests going for the entrance. At some point, your body decided to pass out, and you woke up finding that one of the brothers had their arm around your shoulder, speaking to you, which he had apparently been doing for a while. He thanked you for the lovely company and said that you really should meet up again for this. You nodded and said you had to go see someone, grabbing your coat and heading out in the apartment house. You felt like you almost forgot about it, sitting on your bed in a dreamy haze. Then your phone vibrated and a small profile picture of the brother appeared, and it said "Hey we need to talk". Your heart started pounding, you felt dizzy and ran and threw up the last of the vodka. Ever since, you have been trying to ignore the messages, but your brain is running in circular circuits, repeating the whole situation. But how could anyone understand if you can't understand or even remember it yourself?

Managing the Mall You need to find a way to get guidance in the situation. Your parents are freaking out ever since they found out that you seem to spend the afternoons in the Mall, and they want to ban you from hanging out with the Gang and the Mall until you have "regained control of your studies". But they don't understand, the Gang and the Mall is everything. If they take it away from you, you only have confusion and the twisting thought of what has happened left. You could trust no one any longer, but you are in desperate need of someone who would trust you. You may or may not know the answer, but what is even the question? And whom to trust? If only you could understand what the problem is and navigate the hate and shame. If only someone could see you and understand you...

Olivia

Who are you? You are a cool punk girl, or at least, that is how the world tends to see you. You more like to identify yourself as a member of the Gang, a group of teens who likes hanging out in the Mall. Samira and Alicia, your crew, are not in the same class as you but you started hanging out in the cafeteria and the corridors. You share the same taste in music and you have the best taste ever. Nowadays, you almost immediately meet up after school in the Mall. You usually visit the Juice bar to flirt with Liam (Liam the hottie), then to the Phone store to get some weed from Jesper (the ugly), which you smoke by yourself whilst blasting music in your headphones in the restroom. The second is something you do with discretion, whilst your courting of Liam is a spectacle where you make sure the Gang is with you to watch. In fact, you are quite theatrical and you tend to poke fun at most people.

Beneath the surface... You feel like you are missing the point somehow. You have got the brains, the style and you know exactly what you want. But it seems to be so damn hard to do exactly what you want. It is like you are trapping the wild raven you are and need to be in a small cage, just so that it makes sense to keep it as a pet. But you are no pet, you are wild. How come you became so tamed? You wanted to shave your head, instead you cut it slightly shorter. You wanted to learn more about physics and the mysteries of the universe, instead you binge watch the most conventional dramas you find until 3 a.m.. You wanted to flirt with ladies you find attractive, instead you are looking for the perfect Disney male. You wanted to be the drug of the masses, instead you are slowly becoming a pothead dissolving in the crowd. You are a fake version of yourself, the only version which would make sense to others. You are living the story you were told to have a happy ending, and it is making you fucking unhappy.

Managing the Mall

You need to stop pretending that you are in love with someone you are not, you need to stop pretending you are a docile lady – you need to stop pretending, period. Jesper is an idiot for selling you drugs and it is fucked up that no one in the Management seems to care. You should let them know about that he is a Major Dickhead. But at the same time, you don't want them to suspect anything about you. You have to present it in smooth and adultly words to avoid trouble... To be honest, it would feel nice to get some kind of revenge. The pot has really stolen a lot of your brains. Fucking Jesper! There is another quite soft-spoken guy, Saïd, who works in the Phone store. You are not sure if he knows about Jesper's side gig, but if he knew, maybe he could help you to get your revenge? Jesper has been acting quite weird lately too. But what if Saïd would suspect you? It is certainly a risk... Goddamn, you have been spending way too much of your precious energy and intelligence making plans you hate and calculating how to be spontaneous. The time has truly come to let that raven inside of you fly free...

Samira

Who are you? You are a quiet girl with not much agency, or at least, that is how the world tends to see you. You more like to identify yourself as a member of the Gang, a group of teens who likes hanging out in the Mall. Alicia and Olivia, your crew, are not in the same class as you but you started hanging out in the cafeteria and the corridors. You share the same taste in music and you have the best taste ever. Nowadays, you almost immediately meet up after school in the Mall. Olivia flirts with Liam (the hottie) in the Juice Bar and it is real fun. In the Mall you usually follow the Gang around on shenanigans, but you are more of the cool one in the background observing. Before you hung out with the Gang in the Mall, you used to visit a Youth Centre that used to be in what is now the parking lot of the Mall. You really miss the days there and usually, you can't help feeling a bit bored in the Mall. People here are superficial and strange, and you miss watching films and such things you did at the youth centre. You have made it a habit to write about the people you see in the Mall in the evenings, and if your observations are correct, the Mall is truly a messed up place, even if most people working here seems to believe that the Gang is the problem.

Beneath the surface... You have been keeping a watchful eye on the Gang and you are sure that none of them are doing well. You got your suspicions confirmed just some days ago when you sneaked after Olivia to the restroom and caught her smoking pot and looking miserable. This was not the worst part, however. The worst part was that the fire alarm detector didn't seem to mind her smoking there. After discovering this, you have methodically been making small experiments and come to the conclusion that the fire alarm system of the Mall is wacked. You first thought that you ought to tell one of the security guards, but one of them you have sometimes seen been struggling with a bottle and is sparing with words, whilst the other one can't seem to stop talking. They don't seem to make the place safer, to be honest. You wonder how they got their jobs. Damn, adult society is weird. The management must be the worst management ever. You are sure they are not even making enough money on this Mall. Why did they build the Mall to start with? You hope it gets removed soon, so that you could back to the innocent times of the film club at the Youth Centre. But the Youth centre and your film dreams are smashed to the ground by a huge commercial sign and the plastic scraps flying over it in the wind. And the icing of the cake is the fact that the Mall will not protect you. The Mall sells nothing which you nor the Gang actually need. The Mall is a fake capitalist hellhole built on the grave of your childhood. You are determined to at least save your friends' souls from this hideous place and, in case of a fire, their lives.

Managing the Mall It is messed up how the adults working in the mall tend to see the Gang as a problem. Obviously, the Mall has some problems of its own. They have built this shitty building who offers drugs and is unsafe, they have removed the Youth Centre, and they wonder why you are bored, frustrated and taking drugs? People are just incredibly stupid. You don't really respect people here, they seem to be toxically positive, but it seems like your duty to inform them about your discovery. Then again, you don't, like, really, you don't want to badmouth the Gang. You need to find a way to put this in the best way possible. You also need to make Olivia and Alicia talk, because they have been acting weird, and you fear that this might be the end of the Gang. Also, you found a sleeping bag in the playground in the Mall, which definitely seems like a mystery for the Gang to solve...

Lena

Who are you? You are a middle-aged woman working in the Clothing Store. Before the Mall ever existed, you used to work in the city centre in a small and cosy clothing shop. You knew your clientele and sales were consistent and easy to come by. Ten years ago, you split up with your husband, one of the best decisions in your life. Suddenly, you gained the power to do what you enjoy in your spare time instead of cleaning after that man-baby's sloppy doings. Then came the death of the City Centre and you realized that the golden age of your carefree days was over. So you installed yourself in the Mall in one of the chain stores. But you did so with a heavy heart. You don't get the same contact you used to with the customers here. And seeing the Rat Gang, a group of young girls, hanging around aimlessly is nothing but a painful reminder that the vast empty spaces of the Mall replaced the liveliness of the Youth Centre that used to be here. You feel a lack of genuine connection and you usually find yourself walking around in order to try to get to know the others. However, you try to avoid Martin, the assistant manager who almost stalks you. You cherish your independence and have no more time to waste on useless and heartless men.

Beneath the surface... Ever since the Christmas party, the situation at the Mall has gone from manageable to uneasy. Martin, the assistant manager, talked to you constantly throughout the whole night, barely leaving you alone to visit the bathroom. You repeatedly told him to leave you alone, but after a while he started putting his arm around you, asking what was wrong. You froze in panic and couldn't let out a word while he kept his arm around you. You managed to escape his grip and you rushed away from the party, feeling disgusted and lonely in this world. The next day, you met with your friend group and you decided to tell about last night. They installed you with enough support and anger about Martin to form a plan. It is Martin who is at fault. The Management should not harass the Workers of the Mall. This is just another sign that people seems to have lost all sense of what is reasonable. What happened with the sense of community and mutual respect? What if the poor girls of the Rat Gangs are the next victims for the lack of boundaries and safety? Or worse, what if they have already experienced something, while you failed to notice? This has to stop, and you need to stop it before the fuel of resistance runs out, and you become cynical.

Managing the Mall Martin should be fired immediately, but before you state your case to the management and all others, you ought to investigate if any other people have been affected by the Mall's poor safety measurements. Your story might not be enough proof, from what you have learned by this gruesome society. The security guards, David and Stefan, might know something, that is, if they are actually doing their job. They seem to be more interested chit-chatting with each other. First and foremost, you are concerned for the safety of the young Rat Gang and you should have a talk with them. Also, it might be a good idea to speak with someone who is central within the Mall and possibly has seen things which you might have missed. The Juice Bar is the most central place, and Sandra who works there is a bright and educated person who seems to keep her eyes open. If Martin is not going to get fired, there is something truly rotten with the Mall. You want to get a clear plan of how things should improve and rally people to highlight the poor conditions. If you don't find someone who listens, you will resign and walk out of the Mall, just like you left your toxic husband years ago.

Sandra

Who are you? You are an employee in the Juice Bar together with Liam, a handsome guy who you have good banter with. Despite your master's degree in Social studies, working in the Juice Bar in the Mall seems to be the financially most secure place you could be at. It pays the bill, offering you just enough money to pay the rent of the apartment. Still, it is quite humiliating that all your knowledge of the structure of the capitalistic society has led you to wiping up the traces of energy boosting drinks left from business people, a habit you would never be able to afford. The Workers of the Mall are in general very kind and offer you glimpses of genuine human connection, even the assistant manager Martin comes down to say hello each day. But it breaks your heart that everything is subordinated to the chase of profit and that the youngsters now growing up don't even have the comfort of a youth centre or such, you see them flocking in the Mall instead. And even if you could spell everything out, it doesn't seem to make much of a difference. It is just like your mother said, either you remain a puppet of the free market, or you become an enlightened puppet of the free market.

Beneath the surface... Your colleague Liam has developed some kind of strange relationship to you, where he will follow you home, have sex with you, and then cry while still in bed. You liked it to begin with, as he is a quite handsome and kind person. But the constant crying and his confusion has made you feel like an unpaid therapist. Lately, he has been seeking your attention also when you are working in the Juice Bar, which annoys you, since you can't seem to get anything done. Not that you really enjoy your work, but you need it. Liam obviously is feeling unwell in some way, but instead of addressing the core issue, he seeks comfort in you. Not only in you, you have noticed that that Liam alarmingly seems to respond to the awkward flirting of a member of the Rat Gang, Olivia. You don't know what games Liam is playing, but you know that you don't like it anymore. You also don't like Jesper, a weed-reeking dude working in the Phone Store. You have seen that the Rat Gang goes to him and you are sure that he is doing something stupid. Well, what did they expect would happen when they removed the Youth Centre to build the parking lot of the Mall? You don't need a master's degree in social studies to understand, still, everyone seems to enjoy putting the blame on the girls in the Rat Gang. All of these things are nagging at you and you need to get rid of some of them in order not to have a complete emotional breakdown. The work here is humiliating enough without men seeking you out for even more labor.

Managing the Mall You have to make it completely clear to Liam that you can't continue having your undefined crying-friends-with-benefits relationship anymore. Yes, he seems to be fragile, but you can't always be the strong one carrying the world's suffering. Just the work alone is enough to make your back and morale break. You also feel very troubled by the fact that three young girls spend an awful lot of time in the Mall, and it is even more troubling that no other adult seems to care. The security guards are a joke. Removing the Youth Centre was a huge mistake and surely someone must share that opinion. What if there could be a Youth Centre instead of a Mall? Surely, it would be better for future generations, and, you rather would be working there instead of in the sucking void of this Mall...

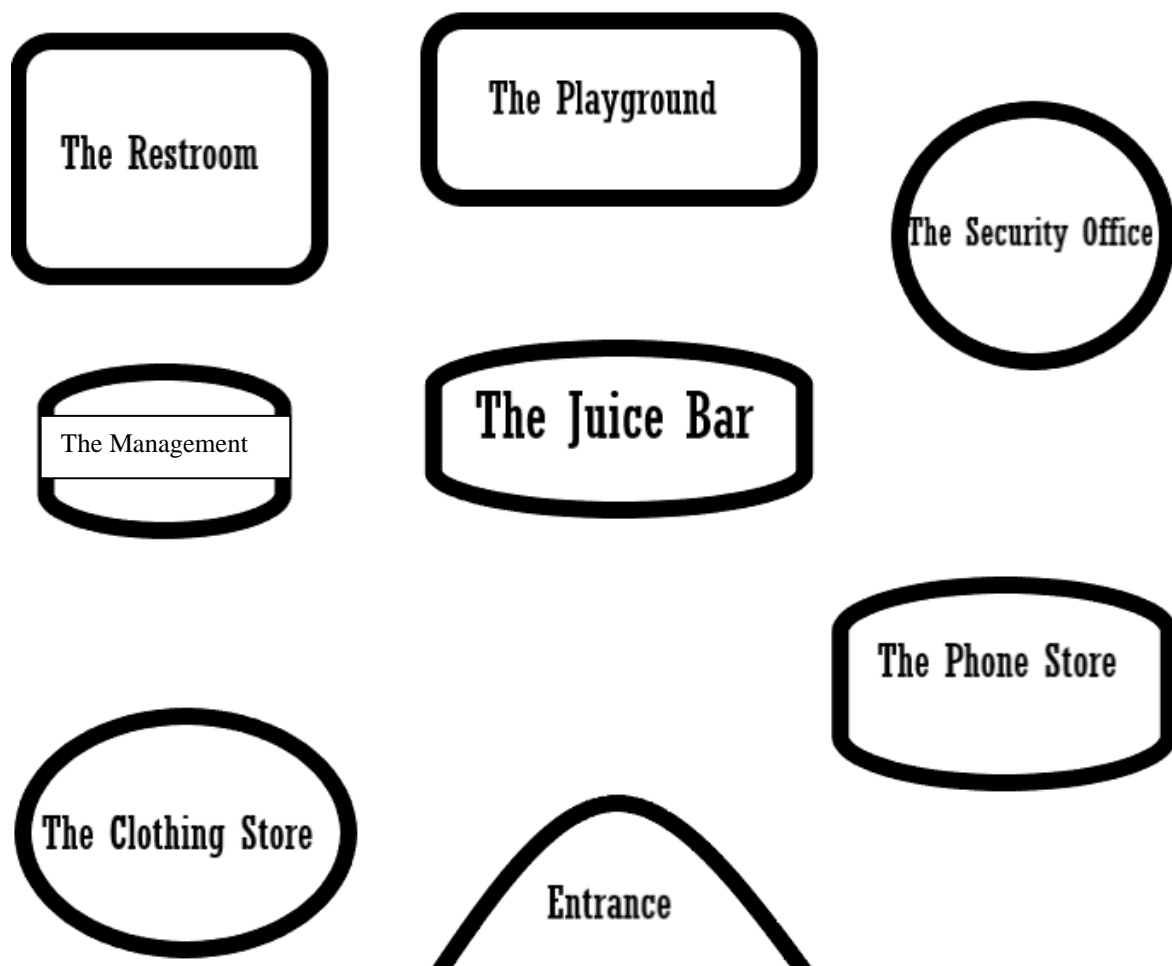
Liam

Who are you? You are an employee in the Juice Bar, working together with Sandra, a good-looking and intelligent woman. People claim that you are good looking too, and, to be honest, that is probably why you got the job. You and Sandra are friends with benefits, and having sex with her makes you feel very safe. She has been to the university and you feel like she knows how to feel good in this crazy world. At least, she makes you feel good for a while. Apart from Sandra, the Rat Gang, a group of young girls come up to you and court you with flirting, a real nice part of your work day in the Mall. It makes you feel like you are seen and enough as you are. You usually feel terribly lonely after work and you spend countless hours watching yourself lifting weights in the mirror of the gym, trying to become something worth being.

Beneath the surface... The last months, your workout routine has escalated. You tell everyone that you love working out and eating healthy, but really, you feel like you are so disgusted with yourself that you mustn't allow yourself to do anything else, if you are ever to become pure. You are terrified with the aging, the weighing down of skin and lustre that your 30s are pulling you towards. You are considering starting filling yourself out with some botox so that you are still a part of the market. Ever since you were young, your major asset and skill (skill?) has been your appearance. It is what made you get this job. You failed school, you are stupid, and you know it. You would never manage an education, besides, education is for pussys who believe they are special, at least that is what your father said. How come you feel like a failure then? You have been crying a lot about it, also when you have done it with Sandra. You feel exhausted and dizzy most of the time, your thoughts are slow. It just proves that father was right, you are a slightly dumb guy who will hardly manage a proper job. Is making juice proper enough? You are not sure. And if you are not thin enough and attractive enough, you will probably lose it, right? Your lack of energy has been causing you some problems. The other day whilst opening the Juice Bar, you suddenly noticed a man covered up in a hoodie running with what looked like a pillow toward the rest rooms. It might have been something else than a pillow, maybe it was a robber? In that case, you failed to catch him as you got short of breath running after him. It was definitely someone trespassing, since the Mall was locked at that time in the morning.

Managing the Mall You have to prove to everyone that you are thin and fresh enough to keep your job. You are not sure if you should tell anyone about the trespassing man you saw in the morning. Doing so would possibly be admitting that you failed to catch him, thus admitting that you are weak and out of shape. Maybe there is a way to inform the security guards about this without looking like a failure? Or maybe talk to Sandra, because Sandra has studied human relations or something like that in the university, so she should know what to do. Also, you feel like having some more sex with Sandra in these stressful times really could make you feel better about yourself.

2. Map of the Mall



3. Narrative overview

- **The main plot of this larp** which might affect all characters is the one related to if the Mall is going to downsize or completely shut down. As you could see, the character Sofia is the one responsible for initiating and involving other players in this plot. All players ought to be involved in this decision/discussion to some extent. In case the player of Sofia does not initiate this plot as intended or fail to do so “in time”, it is therefore crucial that one as a game master goes off with the player to ask them to initiate the plot or make sure that the overall plot takes place.

- **Because of the fact that there are several narratives in a short game time**, the gamemaster could and should use the meta-function of the Janitor to speed up plots. Gameplay is conversation driven, thus, by bringing players together, you have opportunity to create play opportunities if players seem to be unsure of what they should do next.

- **As the existence of customers in the Mall is a mere minds-eye**, players are de facto not playing on their everyday duties in the Mall or “shopping scenes”. The actual gameplay is conversation based conflict play on all other social aspects except the actual buying/selling.

- **The game ends as all players decide the fate of the Mall**. This means that the larp could be much shorter than two hours if the dynamic and tempo calls for it. In case the game master notices that there has been no initiation to a meeting to decide the Mall’s fate (the main plot) after 1½ hours, the player of Sofia needs to be informed that this event needs to happen. In case the player initiates it very early, inform them that they should wait until day 2 or day 3.

4. Description of the meta elements

The Janitor: As a game master, you have the function as the Janitor, who has the power to ask people to leave spaces that should be cleaned. The game design idea here is that you are able to make players move strategically to other places to intensify play. This is also a metafunction to help if a player has misunderstood and does not think they are allowed to move from a certain spot. Players can not talk to the Janitor, as the Janitor is not a named character. In order for players to talk with the game master, they should start with “off” to signal.

The Restroom: In the area of the Restroom, players can act out monologues and inner thoughts. The idea behind this metafunction is to give players a chance to deep delve in to internal conflicts and get in touch with their character. What is said in the Restroom could accidentally be heard by other players in the Restroom. The players hear this information and could play with it – the characters might not know of it.

On the Phone: Players can, by putting up one hand facing their own face and pushing in the hand with the other, signal that they are texting on their phone. While “pressing the buttons” the player then says out loud “I’m texting *person x* [the message being sent to person x]”. The idea behind this metafunction is to create the illusion of relationships outside of the actual characters. By being On the Phone, other players will automatically know of the message sent. Therefore, this should be used as a way to share information or complicate conflicts.

Content: For actually running the larp

- Print the character descriptions and put them on a table face down. Write the character name on the blank page.
- If you can tape the floor, tape the floor in the rooms as shown on the map and put papers saying the names of the rooms. If you cannot tape the floor, put papers with the names of the rooms accordingly.
- Make sure that you have tape (for writing nametag on) and pens.
- Make sure that the small track for day/night can be played from an audio device.

1. Welcome and introduction text (max 10 min)

- Wish the players welcome to the larp and inform that this is a two hour long chamber larp

- Inform the players about some general rules:

1. No touching allowed. The larp is based on conversation and it is not allowed to touch other players.
2. If you need to opt out, get more information or get out of the game, contact the game master by starting “off”. The same applies for going off with other players. It is always possible to opt out of plots.
3. There will be a short debrief as the larp ends, but if needed, talk to the game master after.
4. The game focuses on conflict management in conversation, and you will not play on any actual buying/selling or working. Because of this, the rooms are more symbolical spaces and you are free to walk around the rooms and talk to other players without restrictions.

- Inform the players about the metafunctions:

The Janitor: The game master has the function of the Janitor, who has the power to ask people to leave spaces that should be cleaned. The game design idea here is that players can be moved strategically to other places to intensify play. This is signified by the gamemaster making sweeping motions and informing that the room will be cleaned.

The Restroom: In the area of the Restroom, players can act out monologues and inner thoughts. The idea behind this metafunction is to give you a chance to deep delve into internal conflicts and get in touch with your character. What is said in the Restroom could accidentally

be heard by other players in the Restroom. What is said in the Restroom will give the Player knowledge of certain things.

On the Phone: By putting up one hand facing their own face and pushing in the hand with the other signal that you are texting on your phone. While “pressing the buttons” the player then says out loud “I’m texting *person x* [the message being sent to person x]”. The idea behind this meta unction is to create the illusion of relationships outside of the actual characters. By being On the Phone, other players will automatically know of the message sent. Therefore, this should be used as a way to share information or complicate conflicts.

- Inform the players that you now will read the introduction text, then you will let them pick a character which is basically random (name only partly reveals gender) and play through a small scene before the actual game, which consists of three days.

- Read the introduction text:

“In the outskirts of the City, just by the Suburbia and next to the Industrial Area, there is a shopping center called the Mall. While most people tend to visit there only when they need to leave the comfort of their homes, there are others who spend most of their hours there. Despite the glorious mall facade, the Workers of the Mall have their internal struggles and joys, of which the visitor might never learn. There is also a group of youngsters called the "Rat Gang" which uses the Mall as a second home. Together, they form complex relations which are in turn conditioned by the working place - the Mall. The Mall, however, lives a life on its own and is by no means as perfect as its ideal service approach.

In this two hour long larp, you will be faced with challenges that are both specific to your character and shared amongst the others. As a player, you will either be playing a Mall Worker or a Member of the Rat Gang. You will have to engage yourself in the conflict of maintaining the facade or dealing the problems eating the Mall in a variety of ways. The larp is based on conversation amongst the Workers of the Mall and the Rat Gang as they try to sort out their struggles. There are many small conflicts and one main plot. The larp will end as all players come together in the main plot to decide how it should be solved. Therefore, this is a conflict focused larp where you will have to work together with other players to find out how to deal with the problems and effectively discover and deal with issues behind the facade of the Mall.”

- The players are instructed to pick a character and read through the description. The Game master will answer any questions about the descriptions.

- All players will use a piece of tape that they put visibly on their clothes where they write character name and occupation.

-Make a final check if anyone needs to visit the bathroom or drink some water before the game starts.

2. Preparatory workshop (max. 10 min)

- The Workers of the Mall all get to share (construct) a memory of the last Christmas party with the others. The Rat Gang members get to share what they did in their Christmas holiday with the others.

3. Day one (max. 15 min)

- Ask all players to get to their rooms in the Mall (the Rat Gang goes to the Playground)

- Ask the players to close their eyes and read the following script:

“Every time you enter the Mall, you seem to forget the most important things. There is something equally alluring and depressing about the vast open space of polished floors that is filled with people, then emptied again. In the sparkling electricity and warmth of its inside, you always get a sense of peace, of being outside the actual world, like being in a capsule drifting through space, far away from your problems. Then again, in this capsule, you carry all your troubles and secrets, and if you look very closely at the wall, you can see its cracks. But every time you enter the Mall, you seem to forget the most important things. A new day starts. You open your eyes. ”

- Gameplay

- When you see fit (after a maximum of 15 min.), announce that the Mall now is closing for the day.

- You let the music track for Night play

4. Day two

- Ask all players to get to their rooms in the Mall (the Rat Gang goes to the Playground)

- Ask the players to close their eyes and read the following script:

“Every time you enter the Mall, you seem to forget the most important things. There is something equally alluring and depressing about the vast open space of polished floors that is filled with people, then emptied again. In the sparkling electricity and warmth of its inside, you always get a sense of peace, of being outside the actual world, like being in a capsule drifting through space, far away from your problems. Then again, in this capsule, you carry all your troubles and secrets, and if you look very closely at the wall, you can see its cracks. But every time you enter the Mall, you seem to forget the most important things. A new day starts. You open your eyes. ”

- Gameplay

In case there will be a meeting on the Mall’s future, let this play out and make sure all players get involved. End the larp after a mutual decision has been met.

In case no such meeting is approaching and you see it fit, announce that the Mall now is closing for the day.

- You let the music track for Night play

5. Day three

- Ask all players to get to their rooms in the Mall (the Rat Gang goes to the Playground)

- Ask the players to close their eyes and read the following script:

“Every time you enter the Mall, you seem to forget the most important things. There is something equally alluring and depressing about the vast open space of polished floors that is filled with people, then emptied again. In the sparkling electricity and warmth of its inside, you always get a sense of peace, of being outside the actual world, like being in a capsule drifting through space, far away from your problems. Then again, in this capsule, you carry all your troubles and secrets, and if you look very closely at the wall, you can see its cracks. But every time you enter the Mall, you seem to forget the most important things. A new day starts. You open your eyes. ”

- Gameplay

- (if the game has not yet ended) Game ends when they have had a meeting and voted on the future of the Mall

- Play the Night music

6. Debrief

- Let all players sit down and applaud them

- Do go arounds where all players are welcome to comment on

1. Why their character made the decision they made in the end

2. How they are feeling as players