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**Journal of Interactive Literature and Drama**

**A Multi-Discipline Peer-Reviewed Journal of  
Immersive Narrative Experiences**

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# J I L D

## Journal of Interactive Literature and Drama

### A Multi-Discipline Peer-Reviewed Journal of Immersive Narrative Experiences

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# **Extemporaneous Speaking under Fictional Duress: Impromptu Communication, Confidence, and Performance in Salon LARP Environments**

**Suhani Dune**

## **Abstract**

This essay argues that timed, high-stakes interpersonal salon LARP interactions create conditions of fictional duress that can strengthen students' extemporaneous speaking ability, rhetorical adaptability, and confidence in impromptu public speaking and debate. It distinguishes extemporaneous speaking from both memorized delivery and purely impromptu talk, framing it as real-time speech shaped by purpose but not fixed by script. The essay shows that salon LARP generates meaningful communicative pressure through urgency, uncertainty, social evaluation, conflicting objectives, and shifting audiences, while the fictional frame keeps the consequences bounded enough to remain pedagogically useful. Drawing on communication theory, speech production research, performance studies, and roleplay scholarship, it examines cognitive load, audience adaptation, argument construction, turn-taking, and anxiety regulation under pressure. It also considers whether these gains transfer to debate, presentations, and interviews, while acknowledging the importance of scenario design, facilitation, and learner variation. The essay concludes that students become stronger speakers when they practice speaking under meaningful pressure rather than only in safe, highly prepared formats.

Keywords: extemporaneous speaking, fictional duress, salon LARP, impromptu communication, communication anxiety, rhetorical adaptability

## **Introduction: Speaking Under Pressure**

Communication education has long faced a stubborn asymmetry between the kinds of speaking students practice and the kinds of speaking they are later asked to perform. In many academic settings, students receive extensive training in planned presentations, structured outlines, speaker notes, and rehearsed delivery. They learn how to craft introductions, organize supporting points, and shape conclusions. Yet when placed in genuinely unscripted situations — public questioning, debate rounds, interviews, negotiations, crisis discussion, or rapid-response speaking in civic and professional contexts — many speakers falter. The issue is not only lack of intelligence or content knowledge. It is that extemporaneous communication under pressure imposes very different demands than prepared delivery. It requires speakers to formulate ideas quickly, adapt to shifting interpersonal conditions, maintain composure while being evaluated, and continue producing speech even when certainty is impossible (Levelt, 1989; O’Keefe, 2016).

This discrepancy matters because much real-world communication is not prepared in the strong sense. Meetings change direction. Questions interrupt. Opponents challenge premises. New information emerges mid-conversation. A student may give an excellent prepared speech on Monday and still struggle on Tuesday when asked to defend a position they had not expected to defend or to answer questions before a skeptical audience. Public speaking courses, debate programs, and communication curricula all recognize this problem, but they address it unevenly. Many students are taught to speak well when they can prepare. Fewer are taught to speak well when preparation ends and social pressure begins.

Salon LARP offers a strikingly useful environment for examining this problem because it creates sustained conditions of what can be called **fictional duress**. In these scenarios, participants operate in bounded fictional worlds where the stakes feel immediate, social consequences matter, and speech cannot be fully scripted in advance. A player may need to defend a treaty, expose a traitor, secure an alliance, calm a hostile court, or reverse a public accusation in real time. They are speaking under pressure, but under pressure framed by fiction rather than by real institutional danger. This distinction is crucial. Because the stakes belong to the role, not wholly to the self, salon LARP creates an environment in which urgency is felt without becoming identical to the costs of real failure. The pressure is intense enough to matter, but bounded enough to be pedagogically and socially useful.

Timed, high-stakes interpersonal salon LARPs are especially relevant to the study of extemporaneous speaking because they compress many of the features that make impromptu communication difficult. They involve immediacy, uncertainty, limited planning time, social exposure, shifting audiences, contested claims, and strategic consequences. A participant cannot simply wait to “find the right words” while the room pauses respectfully. Others will move, infer, react, or decide. Nor can a player rely only on generic fluency. They must speak appropriately to different interlocutors, adjust tone and level of formality, answer challenges, make rapid judgments about credibility, and preserve coherence under stress. The communicative demands are therefore both cognitive and interpersonal.

This essay argues that timed, high-stakes interpersonal interactions in salon LARP create conditions of fictional duress that can enhance students’ extemporaneous speaking ability, rhetorical adaptability, and confidence in impromptu public speaking and debate contexts. More precisely, the claim is not that salon LARP magically transforms participants into skilled orators, but that it offers a distinctive training environment in which the central components of impromptu speaking are repeatedly activated. These include rapid message formulation, on-the-fly argument construction, audience adaptation, confidence under observation, conversational timing, strategic turn-taking, and the maintenance of composure when one’s next sentence cannot be known in advance. In that sense, salon LARP does not merely encourage speaking. It forces meaningful speaking under pressure.

The argument proceeds in thirteen sections. First, the essay clarifies what extemporaneous speaking means and how it differs from memorized or purely impromptu delivery. It then develops the concept of fictional duress as a framework for understanding pressure in pedagogical roleplay. From there, it examines salon LARP as a high-pressure communication environment and analyzes the cognitive processes involved in impromptu speech production. Later sections explore audience awareness, confidence and communication anxiety, conversational timing, argument construction, possible transfer to public speaking and debate, and methodological approaches for measuring such effects. A penultimate section addresses limitations and critical cautions, since any claim about educational transfer must remain disciplined. Throughout, the essay draws on communication theory, speech production research, performance studies, and roleplay scholarship to show that salon LARP deserves serious consideration as an environment for speech training rather than dismissal as a colorful extracurricular diversion (Bowman, 2010; Montola et al., 2009).

The broader pedagogical implication is that students may not become better extemporaneous speakers simply by speaking more often in low-stakes, teacher-structured environments. They may improve more powerfully when they are required to speak under conditions where words have consequences, audiences shift, and silence is itself a decision. Fictional duress matters because it creates precisely those conditions while keeping them bounded enough to be educational rather than purely punitive. In an age when communication competence is increasingly invoked as a transferable skill but often taught in sanitized formats, salon LARP offers an important reminder: effective speakers are not only those who prepare well, but those who can think, adapt, and remain rhetorically alive when preparation runs out.

## **Defining Extemporaneous Speaking in Academic and Applied Contexts**

Extemporaneous speaking occupies an awkward but important place in communication pedagogy because the term is often used loosely. In some contexts, it is treated as synonymous with impromptu speech. In others, it refers to speeches that are planned in outline but delivered with flexibility rather than memorization. In still others, it names any public speaking that must be produced with limited preparation. For the purposes of this essay, extemporaneous speaking is best understood as **real-time speech production guided by purpose and structure but not fixed by script**. It lies between fully impromptu utterance and rehearsed manuscript delivery. The speaker has goals, often some prior knowledge, and perhaps even a broad plan, but must formulate the language and much of the structure in the moment (O’Keefe, 2016).

This distinction matters because public speaking instruction often emphasizes preparation at the expense of adaptive live response. The speaker who memorizes a text may sound polished and still be poor at extemporaneous communication. Conversely, a strong extemporaneous speaker may speak with more hesitations or local roughness while demonstrating far greater adaptability, audience awareness, and rhetorical resilience. Extemporaneous ability therefore includes several distinct capacities: rapid idea generation, retrieval of relevant content, real-time organization, verbal fluency, and the ability to adjust speech to emerging circumstances.

In public speaking classrooms, extemporaneous speaking is often practiced through short speeches based on limited preparation or topic prompts. In debate, it appears in

rebuttals, cross-examination, refutation, and responses to unexpected lines of attack. In negotiation and professional communication, it appears in high-stakes conversation: one must answer immediately, often without the luxury of extended planning. In interpersonal settings, it appears whenever a speaker must respond coherently to social challenge, emotional confrontation, or rapidly changing circumstances. Across all these domains, the core feature is the same: the speaker must generate effective discourse without relying on memorized language.

Several common student difficulties arise in such contexts. One is idea latency: students know they must say something, but the transition from thought to formulated speech is slow. Another is structural drift: the speaker begins but lacks a clear internal map, resulting in wandering or circular talk. A third is anxiety-driven collapse, where self-monitoring becomes so intense that formulation and delivery deteriorate. A fourth is audience fixation, in which awareness of judgment overwhelms attentional resources. These are not signs of lack of intelligence. They are symptoms of the fact that extemporaneous speaking demands simultaneous cognitive, affective, and interpersonal regulation (Levelt, 1989; McCroskey, 1984).

This is one reason communication apprehension matters so centrally to the topic. McCroskey's work on communication apprehension defines it as fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons (McCroskey, 1984). Public speaking anxiety is a more specific variant, and recent measurement work confirms that it has real effects on speech duration, self-rated performance, and observer-rated quality (Gallego et al., 2022). Students who are linguistically capable may still underperform if the perceived evaluative threat is high enough. In other words, extemporaneous speaking is never a purely technical matter. It is also bound up with confidence, anticipation, and tolerance for uncertainty.

At the same time, extemporaneous speaking is trainable. Communication research and speech pedagogy both suggest that repeated exposure to speaking tasks, especially those that require real-time adaptation, can reduce situational apprehension and improve functional performance. Rumbough's study of impromptu speech exercises found reductions in situational communication apprehension even if trait-level apprehension remained more stable (Rumbough, 1999). Brooks's work on anxiety reappraisal likewise suggests that how speakers frame pre-performance arousal can affect the quality of subsequent speaking performance (Brooks, 2014). These findings matter because they imply that extemporaneous skill is not fixed

temperament. It can be shaped through repeated encounters with bounded speaking pressure.

From a pedagogical standpoint, extemporaneous speaking is therefore best understood not as the absence of preparation but as the ability to remain rhetorically functional when preparation cannot fully govern the situation. A student with strong extemporaneous skill can organize under pressure, improvise within purpose, respond to opposition, and continue producing socially and rhetorically coherent language while judged by others. That is precisely why salon LARP becomes relevant. It offers repeated, meaningful, socially dense situations in which this capacity must be exercised. Rather than training extemporaneous speaking through isolated drills alone, it embeds the skill inside complex interpersonal action.

## **Fictional Duress: Conceptual Framework**

The notion of fictional duress is useful because it names a special kind of pressure environment: one in which urgency, uncertainty, and social consequences are experienced as real enough to alter behavior, yet remain bounded by a fictional frame that limits the cost of failure. Fictional duress is not identical to ordinary classroom stress, nor is it identical to real institutional danger. It occupies a middle zone. Participants feel compelled to act because something matters within the scenario, but the thing that matters is protected by artifice, role, and consensual play.

This distinction matters pedagogically. Real stress can easily become counterproductive. High anxiety can narrow attention, disrupt working memory, and produce speech breakdown, especially for novice speakers. The classic Yerkes–Dodson formulation has often been invoked, albeit sometimes oversimplified, to suggest that performance improves with arousal up to a point, after which excess stress impairs it (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). More recent work in psychology and communication makes the same general point in more nuanced ways: some pressure can sharpen attention and effort, but too much pressure can overwhelm the cognitive systems necessary for coherent performance (Gallego et al., 2022; Brooks, 2014). If educational design aims to produce useful speaking development, it must therefore generate enough urgency to matter without collapsing participants into unmanaged panic.

Fictional duress offers a candidate for that middle space. In salon LARP, the speaker is under pressure because the scenario imposes urgency. An accusation must be

answered, a bargain struck, a public impression maintained, a rival countered, or an ally reassured. Time limits, social scrutiny, competing actors, and uncertain outcomes all increase arousal. Yet the frame remains fictional. The person failing is the ambassador, the courtier, the negotiator, the heir, or the envoy. The student is protected by role distance. This does not eliminate real emotion or embarrassment, but it alters their meaning. The costs are experienced through the mask of play.

This helps explain why fictional duress may be especially effective for communication training. It combines urgency with boundedness. Participants can become behaviorally authentic under pressure precisely because the pressure is not life-defining outside the frame. They may argue, improvise, or defend positions more vigorously than they would in ordinary class discussion because the scenario gives them reason to do so while also protecting them from some of the identity threat associated with speaking “as themselves.” This role-mediated protection resembles what drama pedagogy has often described as a productive distancing effect: learners enter difficult communicative terrain more readily when speaking through role rather than through exposed selfhood (Kao & O’Neill, 1998).

The concept also intersects productively with flow theory. Csikszentmihalyi’s account of flow emphasizes the importance of a balance between challenge and skill, along with clear goals and immediate feedback, in producing states of deep engagement (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Although salon LARP is not identical to the classical flow situation, fictional duress often contains similar ingredients. The challenge is high. Goals are immediate and intelligible. Feedback from others is continuous. When the scenario is well designed and participant skill is sufficient, the result can be a state of focused communicative engagement in which attention is intensely present and action feels consequential. This matters because such states may encourage repeated practice of difficult speaking behaviors without the deadening quality of rote drills.

Performance psychology further supports the importance of how arousal is interpreted. Brooks (2014) found that reframing pre-performance anxiety as excitement could improve outcomes in public speaking and other evaluative tasks. Salon LARP may support a similar reappraisal structurally. Because the environment is fictional, physiological arousal can be experienced not only as threat but as part of the event’s dramatic energy. “I am nervous” can become “my character is under pressure,” and that reframing may make continued speech more likely. The duress remains, but its meaning changes.

Thus fictional duress should not be dismissed as mere make-believe pressure. It is a meaningful pedagogical condition in which speech is produced under urgency, uncertainty, and social evaluation, but within a frame that preserves enough safety to support experimentation and persistence. That combination is rare in communication pedagogy. It may also be precisely what makes salon LARP valuable for developing extemporaneous speaking ability.

## **Salon LARP as a High-Pressure Communication Environment**

Salon LARP creates a communication environment unlike most classroom or training exercises because it combines several kinds of pressure at once. It is unscripted, socially consequential, temporally dynamic, and interpretively dense. A participant usually enters with a role, objectives, relationships, and constraints, but not with memorized language or a stable sequence of turns. Others are pursuing their own goals simultaneously. Information is unevenly distributed. Alliances shift. Public and private talk overlap. In such a setting, speech becomes necessary not because the teacher has announced “discussion time,” but because silence, hesitation, or poor timing can alter the unfolding situation.

Time pressure is central. A player may have only a few minutes to influence a decision before the room changes. Another participant may interrupt, contradict, or reveal new information before one’s argument is complete. Unlike a conventional oral presentation, where the speaker can largely control tempo, salon LARP is a moving environment. One must formulate quickly enough to remain socially relevant. This alone makes it a useful analogue for many real impromptu speaking situations, including debate rebuttal and crisis response.

Social evaluation is equally important. Players speak before others who are not passive listeners but active interpreters and strategic actors. Every utterance can be judged for confidence, weakness, credibility, allegiance, emotional control, or inconsistency. This resembles debate and negotiation more closely than traditional classroom recitation, where listeners may be polite but comparatively inert. In salon LARP, the audience can answer back immediately and consequentially. Speech is therefore not only produced under evaluation but under counteraction.

The environment is also high-pressure because objectives are often conflicting. In a debate, the opposing position is explicit. In salon LARP, opposition may be partial, hidden, unstable, or distributed across the room. One is often speaking without full

clarity about who is sympathetic, who is neutral, and who is listening for ammunition. This creates a more complex communicative field than a simple adversarial format. The speaker must decide not only what argument to make, but how publicly to make it, how strongly to commit, and whether the moment requires declaration, probing, or retreat.

Information asymmetry intensifies the pressure further. Since no one has complete knowledge, every speech act takes place under interpretive risk. A confident statement may collapse if one has misjudged the facts. A persuasive appeal may be undermined by information held privately by another actor. This resembles real-world high-pressure communication situations, where incomplete information is often the norm rather than the exception. The speaker must construct usable certainty even when certainty is unavailable.

Most importantly, salon LARP combines these features with narrative motivation. Unlike a speech drill, the environment gives participants reasons to care. They are not simply practicing argument; they are trying to achieve something. That motivational layer matters because it sustains effort. Players often push themselves harder in role-driven interaction than in decontextualized oral exercises, not because the language is easier, but because the scene matters to them in immediate and embodied ways. The fictional frame thus increases the willingness to remain in communicative difficulty.

This is why salon LARP can be compared to debate, oral examination, or negotiation, but not reduced to any of them. Debate often provides strong pressure but relatively stable roles and explicit rules. Oral exams provide evaluation but limited participant agency. Negotiation exercises provide strategic communication but may lack dramatic immersion. Salon LARP combines spontaneity, social immersion, and consequential interaction in one environment. That combination is exactly what makes it relevant to extemporaneous speaking development.

## **Cognitive Processes in Impromptu Speech Production**

To understand why salon LARP may affect extemporaneous speaking ability, one must look beneath the observable performance to the cognitive demands of real-time speech production. Speaking spontaneously involves several overlapping processes: conceptualizing what to say, selecting relevant content, ordering it into some form, formulating linguistic expression, articulating, monitoring the result, and revising

while continuing forward. Levelt's classic model of speech production remains useful here, particularly its account of conceptualization, formulation, articulation, and self-monitoring as interacting processes rather than neatly separated stages (Levelt, 1989).

In prepared public speaking, much of the conceptual and organizational work occurs before performance. The speaker enters with a plan already stabilized. In extemporaneous speaking, however, these processes occur in compressed time. The speaker must generate a communicative intention under pressure, often while already listening, judging, and anticipating response. This creates high working-memory demand. One must hold current goals, relevant facts, rhetorical structure, and immediate audience feedback in mind at once. Salon LARP intensifies this because the goals are not merely informational. They are strategic and relational. The speaker must decide not only what is true or useful, but what is safe, advantageous, timely, and appropriate to the current social configuration.

Because planning time is limited, speakers often rely on heuristics and chunks. They draw on discourse routines, familiar structures, stock phrases, and simplified argumentative templates. This is not a weakness. It is how much real-time speech remains possible. In debate and public speaking pedagogy, students often learn frameworks for impromptu organization precisely because working memory is finite. Salon LARP may encourage the development of such heuristics organically. Players repeatedly encounter situations that reward concise framing, conditional phrasing, strategic repetition, and quick structuring of claims. Over time, this may make speech production more efficient because some aspects of organization become semi-automated.

Repeated exposure matters here. Task and speech repetition research suggests that repeated engagement with similar speaking demands can improve control and fluency by reducing processing burden and allowing attentional resources to shift from content generation toward delivery and adaptation (Bygate, 2001). Salon LARP is particularly well suited to this kind of repeated practice because many interactions share structural similarities even when the narrative details differ. A player may repeatedly need to reassure, redirect, deny, accuse, summarize, or buy time. Each new scene differs in content, but the communicative patterns recur. This kind of patterned variability can strengthen cognitive efficiency without turning speech into rote repetition.

Real-time monitoring is another important process. Speakers in high-pressure environments must continuously assess whether they are being understood, whether their tone is landing properly, whether they are revealing too much, and whether a new formulation is needed. In salon LARP, the need for such monitoring is amplified because audience feedback is immediate and consequential. A raised eyebrow, interruption, silence, or sudden agreement may all require instant adjustment. This supports development not only in production but in metacognitive control over production.

At the same time, the cognitive benefits of fictional duress are not automatic. Excessive pressure can overload working memory and degrade coherence. This is why scenario design and participant support matter. If the number of moving variables is too high, the speech challenge becomes noise rather than training. But when challenge is calibrated, salon LARP can function as repeated practice in cognitive agility under communicative constraint. Students are not only speaking. They are learning how to think while speaking.

## **Rhetorical Adaptation and Audience Awareness**

One of the clearest weaknesses in novice public speaking is the assumption that once an idea has been formulated, it can simply be delivered as such. Strong extemporaneous speakers know otherwise. They continually adapt to audience, situation, and response. This adaptive capacity is often difficult to teach through static exercises because the audience remains too stable, too polite, or too passive. Salon LARP changes that by making audience variation and responsiveness unavoidable.

Every participant in a salon LARP faces multiple audiences, sometimes within the same minute. One might speak privately to an ally, publicly to a room, cautiously to a rival, and deferentially to an authority figure. These audiences differ in knowledge, motive, relationship, and likely reaction. As a result, speakers cannot use one uniform rhetorical style. They must tailor message, tone, and degree of explicitness to the interlocutor at hand. This is precisely what communication competence requires in complex social environments.

Audience adaptation in such settings includes more than vocabulary choice. It involves deciding whether to be direct or indirect, assertive or tentative, emotional or restrained, public or confidential, explanatory or evasive. A participant who speaks

identically to everyone will usually fail. Success depends on rapid social assessment. What does this person want? What can they hear? What must be concealed? What style will make them more receptive? Such assessments mirror the audience-centered reasoning that speech and argumentation pedagogy often claims to value, but in salon LARP they become unavoidable rather than merely advisable.

This kind of rhetorical adaptation also cultivates interpersonal sensitivity. Speakers must listen not just for factual content but for stance, status, and vulnerability. They learn to detect when someone wants face-saving language, when a public challenge will backfire, or when a firm declarative move is required. In communication terms, this is not simply message production. It is relational design. The speaker is shaping discourse with awareness of social consequences.

For public speaking and debate training, this matters because many evaluative speaking contexts now involve responsive rather than monologic performance. Speakers are questioned, challenged, or placed in interactive formats. The ability to adapt under those conditions may matter as much as the ability to deliver a polished opening. Salon LARP repeatedly exercises this capacity because every conversation is an audience problem before it is a content problem.

## **Confidence and Communication Anxiety**

Confidence in speaking is frequently misunderstood as either personality or performance style. In educational settings, some students appear naturally confident while others seem chronically hesitant, and the contrast can tempt instructors into treating confidence as stable trait. Research on communication apprehension suggests a more nuanced picture. Anxiety can be trait-like, but it is also situational and context dependent (McCroskey, 1984). A student may fear formal presentation more than private discussion, peer judgment more than teacher feedback, or self-disclosure more than role-based speech. If so, the structure of the speaking environment matters greatly.

Salon LARP may support confidence development because it alters the meaning of exposure. Players are certainly still observed and judged, but the judgment is filtered through role and fiction. This role distance can make risk-taking easier. A failed line or awkward pause belongs partly to the character. A bold argument can be attempted because it is dramatically motivated. In this way, fictional framing may reduce some of the self-focused rumination that intensifies public speaking anxiety. The speaker

is still under pressure, but their attention is often redirected outward toward objectives, alliances, or threats rather than inward toward self-monitoring alone.

Repeated experience of surviving such pressure may matter as much as any single “successful” performance. Confidence often grows not from one perfect speech but from repeated encounters with difficulty in which collapse does not occur. Salon LARP offers exactly that: frequent, meaningful exposure to unscripted speaking challenges that are intense but survivable. Over time, students may begin to reinterpret physiological arousal less as danger and more as readiness. Brooks’s findings on reappraising anxiety as excitement are relevant here because fictional duress may structurally encourage such reappraisal (Brooks, 2014). A racing pulse can feel like dramatic engagement rather than impending failure.

This does not mean salon LARP eliminates anxiety. Some students may remain highly anxious, and the social complexity of the form may intensify pressure for some rather than reducing it. But even then, the environment can provide useful data for learning. It reveals when students shut down, when they recover, and what kinds of support allow continued participation. Confidence development is therefore not simply emotional uplift. It is improved capacity to remain communicatively functional under observation.

## **Turn-Taking, Timing, and Conversational Control**

Extemporaneous speaking ability is often discussed as if it concerned only one’s capacity to generate content. Yet much effective impromptu communication depends on control of timing. Speakers must know when to enter, how long to hold the floor, when to interrupt, when to yield, and how to recover if displaced. Debate training recognizes this in cross-examination and rebuttal, but many communication classrooms underemphasize it because turn-taking is managed externally by the instructor. Salon LARP does not permit such passivity.

In a salon environment, turns are negotiated socially rather than assigned. Participants must claim space, hold it, relinquish it strategically, or intervene when necessary. This teaches an important lesson: communication is governed as much by timing as by wording. The best argument delivered after the coalition has already shifted may be useless. A delayed response can read as weakness. An interruption can seize momentum or destroy credibility depending on tone and context.

Players therefore practice floor management. They learn to open quickly, to use bridging phrases while formulating the next idea, to cut in when the moment demands it, and to regain attention after being challenged. These are valuable skills not only for conversational competence but for debate and public questioning, where hesitation can lead to loss of control. Salon LARP is especially good for this because it creates overlapping conversational currents. Speakers must choose when to leave one conversation and enter another, when to prioritize public announcement over private persuasion, and when to defer until a better moment.

Such timing skills are difficult to cultivate in heavily regulated classroom discussion. When the teacher decides all turn order, students can succeed while remaining passive in one of the most important dimensions of speaking: the ability to manage entry and pace themselves against others. Salon LARP returns that management to the participants. In doing so, it transforms turn-taking from background convention into skill.

## **Argument Construction and Real-Time Reasoning**

Speaking under fictional duress is not only a matter of fluency or confidence. It also places pressure on reasoning. Participants must make claims, support them, answer objections, reinterpret new information, and do so without the luxury of written notes or extended preplanning. This makes salon LARP particularly relevant to the study of extemporaneous argumentation.

Real-time reasoning differs from prepared argument construction in one central respect: one cannot assume stable argumentative terrain. In a prepared speech, the speaker chooses the sequence. In salon LARP, others alter the terrain continuously. A listener may introduce new evidence, reinterpret motives, challenge premises, or shift the frame. The speaker must therefore reason responsively. They need not always produce perfectly formal argument, but they must produce enough structure that others can follow and potentially be moved.

Heuristics become important here. Speakers often rely on familiar argumentative forms: appeal to shared danger, appeal to mutual interest, appeal to prior commitment, appeal to fairness, appeal to precedent. These are not signs of weak reasoning. They are practical shortcuts that allow argument to proceed under time constraint. Salon LARP encourages this kind of rapid structuring because delay is

costly. Over time, repeated use of such structures may improve students' ability to organize ideas quickly in other impromptu contexts as well.

Counterargument is equally central. A player's claim is rarely left untouched. Others resist, evade, reinterpret, or expose contradictions. The speaker must then decide whether to concede, restate, shift frame, or attack the underlying assumption. This is excellent training for debate contexts, where the ability to respond is often more important than the ability to initiate. Salon LARP makes counterargument vivid because the opposing voice is embedded in an immediate social world. The pressure feels live.

Thus argument construction under fictional duress is not a diluted version of formal reasoning. It is reasoning made adaptive. Students learn to build, defend, and revise arguments under conditions where the audience answers back and the room changes around them.

## **Transfer to Public Speaking and Debate Contexts**

A central practical question is whether the skills practiced in salon LARP transfer beyond the fictional environment. Educational claims about roleplay often become inflated at this point, so caution is necessary. No single activity guarantees transfer. Still, there are plausible mechanisms by which salon LARP could improve performance in public speaking, debate, interview, and discussion contexts.

One mechanism is confidence under observation. If students have repeatedly spoken under social scrutiny in fictional duress, they may experience ordinary classroom or competition pressure as more manageable. Another mechanism is improved tolerance for uncertainty. Many weak impromptu speakers fail not because they know nothing, but because they panic when they cannot fully plan. Salon LARP repeatedly normalizes speaking without full certainty. A third mechanism is rhetorical adaptability. Learners who have practiced shifting tone, framing, and argument for different audiences may be better prepared for question periods, debate rebuttals, and interviews.

There is also likely transfer in conversational timing and audience reading. These are general communication skills, not LARP-specific content. A student who learns how to enter talk strategically, hold a floor, or calibrate assertiveness may be better equipped for seminars, presentations, and advocacy settings. Similarly, practice in

responding to challenge may carry into debate, where many students struggle less with prepared cases than with live rebuttal.

That said, transfer is never complete. Salon LARP includes dramatic motivation, fictional stakes, and role distance that public speaking contexts may not share. Some students may perform brilliantly in role and remain anxious when speaking explicitly as themselves. Others may transfer confidence but not content organization. The relationship is therefore best understood as enabling rather than automatic. Salon LARP may build capacities that support other speaking contexts, but those contexts may still require targeted practice in their own conventions.

## **Methodological Approaches to Measurement**

If the impact of fictional duress on extemporaneous speaking is to be evaluated rigorously, then clear methodological approaches are necessary. The question is not only whether participants “feel better” after a LARP-based intervention, but whether measurable changes occur in confidence, fluency, responsiveness, and impromptu speaking performance.

One useful approach would combine pre- and post-intervention self-report measures with observed performance. Confidence and communication apprehension can be measured through validated instruments such as McCroskey-derived communication apprehension scales or context-specific public speaking anxiety measures (McCroskey, 1984; Gallego et al., 2022). These could be administered before and after a series of salon LARP sessions. Such measures would not prove improved skill, but they would provide evidence about self-perceived comfort and anxiety.

Performance measures are equally important. Students could complete standardized impromptu speaking tasks or debate mini-rounds before and after the intervention. Independent raters could assess coherence, fluency, responsiveness, audience adaptation, and confidence of delivery using rubric-based scoring. Speech duration, pause patterns, and turn-management behaviors could also be tracked. If salon LARP truly affects extemporaneous skill, differences should appear not only in self-report but in observable speaking behavior.

Discourse analysis offers a richer complement to rubrics. Selected LARP interactions and pre/post impromptu tasks could be transcribed and analyzed for markers such as discourse organization, repair behavior, hedging, audience-oriented reformulation, and counterargument management. This would help reveal not just

whether performance improved, but how it improved. For example, a student might not become significantly faster, but might become more strategic in delaying, bridging, and restructuring talk under challenge.

Observational coding within the LARP itself would also be valuable. Researchers could track how often participants initiate public speaking, respond under challenge, interrupt, summarize, persuade, or shift stance. These behaviors could then be compared over repeated sessions. Because salon LARP is distributed and simultaneous, multiple recordings or focused observation of selected participants would likely be necessary.

Finally, reflective interviews could help clarify perceived transfer. Students might report whether LARP participation changed how they approached presentations, debates, or classroom discussion. Such data would not be definitive but would provide insight into whether participants themselves experienced the fictional duress as relevant to real speaking situations.

A mixed-method design is therefore best. Quantitative measures can indicate change; qualitative analysis can explain its nature. Given the complexity of the phenomenon, any serious study should resist relying on anecdotal enthusiasm alone.

## **Limitations and Critical Considerations**

Despite the promise of fictional duress as a pedagogical tool, several limitations remain. First, not all students benefit equally from socially intense improvisational formats. Some may flourish; others may feel cognitively overloaded or socially excluded. The very openness that makes salon LARP powerful can also make it uneven. Stronger or more confident participants may dominate, leaving quieter students with fewer chances to practice meaningful public speech unless design deliberately redistributes access.

Second, scenario quality is decisive. A poorly designed LARP with vague stakes, weak roles, or underdeveloped conflict may fail to generate the intended pressure and instead produce confusion or shallow play. In such cases, students may not practice extemporaneous speaking in any rigorous sense. They may simply drift through loosely connected conversations. The educational effectiveness of salon LARP cannot be separated from design competence.

Third, fictional duress must remain duress in the useful sense, not become uncontrolled stress. If the pressure is too high, participants may shut down. If the environment is insufficiently bounded, socially vulnerable students may experience humiliation rather than growth. Facilitation and debrief therefore matter. The line between productive challenge and harmful overload is not abstract.

Fourth, transfer remains an empirical question, not a rhetorical certainty. Even if salon LARP improves performance inside the game environment, the degree to which this carries into ordinary public speaking and debate contexts will vary. Speakers may transfer confidence, timing, and responsiveness, but still need direct practice in formal speech structures, evidence use, and competition rules. LARP should be understood as a supplement and laboratory, not a complete replacement for other modes of training.

Finally, there is a conceptual risk in celebrating pressure too eagerly. Students do not become better speakers simply by being stressed. They become better speakers when pressure is meaningful, bounded, repeated, and structured in ways that reward adaptation rather than panic. Fictional duress is pedagogically interesting precisely because it can satisfy those conditions. But it can also fail to do so.

## **Conclusion: Learning to Speak When It Matters**

Extemporaneous speaking is often treated as the residue left over when preparation is unavailable. This essay has argued for a different view. Extemporaneous speaking is a distinct communicative competence: the ability to generate, organize, adapt, and deliver meaningful speech in real time under pressure. It requires not just knowledge, but responsiveness, timing, confidence, and rhetorical control. Timed, high-stakes interpersonal salon LARP creates an environment in which these capacities are repeatedly activated under conditions of fictional duress.

The argument has unfolded through several linked claims. First, salon LARP differs from many classroom speaking tasks because it combines urgency, uncertainty, audience responsiveness, social consequence, and distributed interaction. Second, fictional duress offers a theoretically useful account of why such environments matter: they produce meaningful pressure without equating failure with real-world catastrophe. Third, repeated participation in such environments can plausibly enhance cognitive efficiency in speech production, audience adaptation, turn management, argument construction, and confidence under observation. Fourth,

these gains may transfer, at least partially, to public speaking and debate contexts, though transfer should be studied rather than assumed.

What makes salon LARP especially promising is that it does not simply ask students to speak more. It asks them to speak when silence costs something. It asks them to answer before they are ready, to organize while listening, to persuade while being challenged, and to remain rhetorically functional when the room is changing faster than they would prefer. These are exactly the conditions under which real communicative competence often becomes visible.

The educational value of such environments is not that they replace formal speech instruction, but that they train the capacities formal instruction often leaves underdeveloped. Students may learn how to build a well-prepared speech from a textbook chapter. They become different kinds of speakers when they must improvise under social pressure with others pushing back. Salon LARP offers a structured way to create that pressure without abandoning pedagogical care.

In that sense, the larger lesson is straightforward. Students do not become better extemporaneous speakers merely by speaking more often in safe, low-consequence settings. They improve when they are asked to speak under meaningful pressure where words have consequences, audiences respond, and hesitation cannot simply be hidden behind preparation. Fictional duress matters because it makes that kind of practice possible. Under those conditions, speaking becomes not just a classroom task, but a live act of thought, strategy, and presence.

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# **Micro-Societies in the Classroom: Emergent Social Structures and Sociological Learning through Parlor LARP**

**Lucan Voss**

## **Abstract**

This essay argues that closed-room parlor LARPs function as micro-societies in which social hierarchies, resource economies, norms, and institutional structures emerge through real-time interaction, offering a powerful experiential approach to teaching foundational sociological concepts. Drawing on social constructionism, symbolic interactionism, structuration theory, and emergence theory, the essay demonstrates how participants collectively produce social order within a bounded environment. It examines the spontaneous formation of power relations, the development of informal economies based on information and reputation, the creation and enforcement of unwritten rules, and the negotiation of roles and identities. Communication is analyzed as the infrastructure through which these processes unfold, while conflict and cooperation reveal the dynamics of collective behavior. The essay also explores how repeated interaction leads to institutionalization, making social structures appear stable and legitimate. Pedagogically, parlor LARP enables students to experience and later analyze social processes directly, transforming abstract theory into observable practice while highlighting both the possibilities and limitations of emergent classroom societies.

Keywords: micro-societies, parlor LARP, social emergence, hierarchy formation, norm construction, experiential sociology

## **Introduction: When a Classroom Becomes a Society**

One of the persistent frustrations of introductory sociology is that students can often define a concept without being able to recognize it when it happens. They can

memorize “social stratification,” “norms,” “status,” “role conflict,” “symbolic interaction,” or even “institutionalization,” yet still struggle to identify those processes in live experience. The problem is not ignorance alone. It is also pedagogical distance. Social life is usually presented in textbooks as if it were something already stabilized, already visible, already named. Students encounter diagrams of class systems, summaries of norm enforcement, and cleanly described theories of power, but actual society almost never appears to them in that form. It appears as confusion, pressure, etiquette, rumor, hierarchy, awkwardness, charisma, exclusion, compromise, and improvisation. In other words, society is rarely experienced first as theory. It is experienced as interaction.

This gap between abstract sociological language and lived social process has long generated interest in experiential pedagogy. Instructors turn to simulations, classroom games, mock institutions, and role-based exercises in the hope that students will move from passive recognition of concepts to active observation of them. Yet many of these activities remain illustrative rather than generative. They are designed to represent preselected phenomena, often in simplified form. Students may “play” inequality, policy negotiation, or institutional procedure, but the underlying dynamics are frequently too scripted to reveal how social systems actually emerge from interaction. The problem, then, is not only that social science is often taught too abstractly. It is that many pedagogical activities still present society as something to be imitated rather than something that can be made.

Closed-room parlor LARP offers a different possibility. In a well-designed classroom parlor LARP, students are placed inside a bounded environment with roles, partial information, limited resources, conflicting motives, and a common social space. They are not merely asked to talk about hierarchy, trust, norm formation, symbolic value, or institutional power. They are required to navigate conditions under which such things become visible because the group itself begins to produce them. Some participants gain influence disproportionate to their assigned role. Some become brokers of information. Some form alliances. Some are deferred to because of confidence or perceived legitimacy. Informal economies of trade emerge around tokens, secrets, promises, or access. Norms appear, harden, and are enforced. In such a space, the classroom does not simply simulate society. It begins, temporarily and in miniature, to function as one.

That claim requires careful framing. To say that parlor LARP generates a “micro-society” is not to indulge in theatrical exaggeration. It is to identify a sociologically

significant phenomenon: the rapid emergence of patterned social relations, differential power, shared expectations, and informal institutions within a finite, rule-bounded, interaction-dense environment. The room becomes a compressed social world. It is small enough to observe directly, yet complex enough to produce real hierarchy, norm formation, resource exchange, conflict, cooperation, identity negotiation, and institutional stabilization. Because the environment is bounded and repeatable, these processes become unusually teachable. Students can encounter them from inside as participants and from outside through later analysis and debrief.

This essay argues that closed-room parlor LARPs function as micro-societies in which social hierarchies, resource economies, norms, and institutional behaviors emerge spontaneously through interaction, making them a powerful experiential framework for teaching foundational sociological concepts. The emphasis here is on emergence rather than instruction. The sociological value of the form lies not simply in the fact that it can be used to “demonstrate” theory, but in the fact that it produces observable social structure through live interaction under constrained conditions. Students do not merely hear about power; they find themselves in situations where influence must be claimed, recognized, resisted, or institutionalized. They do not merely discuss norms; they become participants in the production and enforcement of unwritten rules. They do not merely define symbolic value or informal economy; they watch reputations, information, objects, and loyalties become exchangeable resources.

The argument unfolds in fourteen sections. The essay first defines parlor LARP as a micro-social system and distinguishes it from adjacent forms such as games, simulations, and theatre. It then grounds the discussion in sociological theory, drawing especially on social constructionism, symbolic interactionism, structuration theory, and emergence theory. From there, the essay examines the spontaneous formation of hierarchy, resource economies, unwritten rules, social roles, communicative infrastructure, collective behavior, and institutionalization inside closed-room LARP environments. Later sections consider pedagogy, methods of observation, and the limits and risks of the approach. Throughout, the essay maintains a central claim: parlor LARP teaches sociology most powerfully not by representing society from the outside, but by generating society in miniature and making its processes available to reflective observation.

This is especially important in contemporary classrooms, where students often encounter institutions as finished structures rather than as outcomes of repeated

human behavior. By compressing social emergence into an observable time frame, parlor LARP lets students watch how power, normativity, and organization come into being. It lets them see that society is not merely a set of rules imposed from above. It is also a continuously negotiated accomplishment. If sociology aims to make the ordinary strange and the invisible visible, then the classroom micro-society may be one of its most effective pedagogical instruments.

## **Defining Parlor LARP as a Micro-Social System**

Parlor LARP is often described in broad terms as a live-action roleplaying form centered on conversation, social maneuver, and relationship rather than combat, travel, or large-scale physical action. That description is useful, but insufficient for sociological purposes. What matters here is not simply that participants play characters in a room. It is that parlor LARP creates a finite, interaction-dense environment in which social order must be produced through real-time coordination among mutually aware participants. In that sense, it is best understood as a micro-social system.

Several features distinguish this system. First, parlor LARP is closed or semi-closed in spatial terms. Participants generally share a bounded environment, whether a classroom, hall, salon, meeting room, or staged interior. This shared space matters because all significant social actions occur within a finite field of visibility. Bodies, alliances, exclusions, gestures, and rumors circulate within an environment that can be collectively sensed. Unlike dispersed online interaction or large-scale live-action environments, the parlor format compresses social relations into direct coexistence. This makes emergent structure more legible.

Second, parlor LARP is finite in population. The number of participants is limited, often small enough that most actors can become at least partially aware of one another over the course of play. This creates a social density in which status shifts and information flows are not abstract. Everyone matters to someone, and the patterns of who matters to whom begin to create the skeleton of a society. Even those who appear marginal can become pivotal through information, access, charisma, or symbolic value.

Third, the environment is rule-bounded without being fully scripted. Participants are usually given roles, background, objectives, relationships, or constraints, but the actual social order is not wholly determined in advance. This is crucial. A board

game may have fixed mechanisms, and a scripted drama may have fixed outcomes, but a parlor LARP typically requires players to produce the social world through interaction. Structure exists, but it is underdetermined. This allows emergent behavior to appear. The game does not tell players exactly who will become influential, what norms will harden, or which exchange systems will dominate. Those outcomes are produced through play.

Fourth, parlor LARP is a system of mutual dependence. Participants need one another for information, recognition, cooperation, conflict, validation, and narrative movement. No one can meaningfully “play alone” for long. This interdependence is what turns a room of roleplayers into a social system rather than a collection of parallel performers. Actions gain meaning only in relation to others’ actions, expectations, and responses.

These features together justify the term micro-society. The room contains a population, a set of roles, a shared symbolic space, contested resources, differential power, and evolving norms. The scale is small, but the social dynamics are structurally recognizable. Students in such environments do not merely perform characters. They participate in the generation of social order.

This distinguishes parlor LARP from several adjacent forms. It is not identical to a classroom simulation in which roles are often more procedural than relational and outcomes more tightly controlled. It is not simply theatre, because participants are not primarily performing for an external audience; they are producing society for one another from inside the same social field. It is not just a game, because the central activity is not optimization within fixed mechanics but the social negotiation of meaning, authority, and exchange. Nor is it reducible to free-form discussion, because the fictional frame, asymmetrical knowledge, and bounded environment produce intensified stakes and patterned interdependence.

Sociologically, this matters because micro-societies allow one to observe how macro concepts appear in compressed form. Stratification can emerge without formal class instruction inside the scenario. Informal institutions can arise before anyone names them. A reputational economy can stabilize around nothing more material than trust, secrecy, or access. Such developments are not metaphors. They are social facts within the duration of play.

At the same time, one must be careful not to overstate the claim. A parlor LARP is not society in the fullest sense. It lacks duration across generations, durable legal

coercion, complex division of labor, and many other features of large-scale social systems. Yet this limitation is also pedagogically useful. The bounded scale makes social emergence more observable. In ordinary life, students encounter hierarchies and norms that seem already established. In parlor LARP, they can sometimes watch the moment at which such structures begin to form. The social system becomes visible while it is still being made.

Thus parlor LARP is valuable to social science pedagogy precisely because it is small enough to observe and complex enough to matter. It converts the classroom into a finite social laboratory in which society appears not as inherited background but as emergent process.

## **Theoretical Foundations: Sociology of Emergence**

To understand why parlor LARP can function as a classroom micro-society, one must place it within a theoretical framework capable of explaining how social order arises from interaction. Several sociological traditions are especially useful here: social constructionism, symbolic interactionism, structuration theory, and emergence theory. Each contributes something essential to the argument, and taken together they show why a bounded roleplaying environment can become sociologically meaningful rather than merely theatrically entertaining.

Social constructionism provides the most basic premise: social reality is not simply found but made. Berger and Luckmann famously argue that the social world is produced through habitualization, typification, institutionalization, and legitimation; it confronts later participants as objective reality only because it has already been socially generated and sedimented (Berger and Luckmann). In a parlor LARP, one can often watch this process in accelerated form. A repeated greeting formula becomes expected. A certain person becomes “the one” through whom negotiations must pass. An informal arrangement hardens into perceived rule. What is sociologically striking is that these realities are not usually decreed as such by an external authority during play. They are constructed through patterned interaction and then recognized as if they had weight of their own.

Symbolic interactionism sharpens this point by emphasizing that meaning arises in and through social encounter. Mead’s work on the self as emergent from social interaction and Blumer’s formulation of symbolic interactionism both insist that people act toward things on the basis of the meanings those things have for them,

and that such meanings arise from interaction and are modified through interpretive process (Blumer; Mead). This is invaluable for analyzing parlor LARP because much of what matters in the room is symbolically constituted rather than mechanically fixed. A chair becomes a throne because people treat it as such. A player becomes a leader because others orient to them as one. A token becomes valuable because it is collectively recognized as carrying leverage. Symbolic significance is not merely attached to the social world from outside. It is what makes the social world function.

Goffman's dramaturgical sociology is equally relevant, though often cited more casually than fully used. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman argues that social interaction is organized through performances, impression management, region behavior, and audience segregation (Goffman). While parlor LARP obviously literalizes social performance through explicit roleplay, that is precisely what makes it so analytically useful. It reveals with unusual clarity that hierarchy, status, and legitimacy are performed. A person becomes authoritative partly through how others read and ratify their presentation. In classroom micro-societies, students can observe that social power does not appear only through formal designation. It also appears through successful management of interactional presence.

Structuration theory helps move beyond the false opposition between free improvisation and rigid rule. Giddens argues that structure and agency are not separate domains but mutually constitutive. Structures both constrain and enable action, while repeated action reproduces or transforms structure (Giddens). This is perhaps one of the most pedagogically important lessons parlor LARP can teach. Participants enter with some assigned roles, stated rules, and scenario constraints. Yet these do not fully determine what the social world becomes. Players act within structure, but in doing so they produce additional structure: routines, reputational hierarchies, gatekeeping norms, and unofficial institutions. The room therefore becomes a practical demonstration of the duality of structure. Students can see that structures are not merely imposed from outside. They are sustained through repeated action and can be altered through coordinated behavior.

Emergence theory provides the final conceptual bridge. In complex systems thinking, emergence refers to the appearance of higher-order patterns from local interactions among simpler units. The resulting system-level order is not reducible to a single central command even though it may later appear stable or coherent. This

framework is especially useful for parlor LARP because many of the most interesting social phenomena in such environments are not directly scripted. No one may decree a hierarchy, yet one appears. No one may explicitly announce the room's etiquette, yet participants begin to enforce it. No one may formally establish a market, yet information, favors, or symbolic objects become exchangeable resources. Emergence theory helps explain why such patterns are neither mysterious nor accidental. They arise because the interactional conditions permit them.

The sociological value of parlor LARP lies precisely in the convergence of these theories. Social reality is constructed, meaning is interactional, structure emerges from and shapes action, and complex order can arise from local exchange. Classroom LARP does not merely illustrate these claims after the fact. It operationalizes them. Students can watch meanings becoming real, repeated actions becoming expectations, and expectations becoming proto-institutions. The room becomes a compressed demonstration of sociology's central insight: society is made and remade through patterned human interaction.

There is an important caution here. The fact that micro-societies emerge in the classroom does not mean they are miniature copies of large-scale society. They are stylized, bounded, and temporally compressed. Yet that very compression is what makes foundational processes visible. In daily life, students inherit stratification, legal systems, and institutional norms that seem already given. In parlor LARP, they may witness the early moments of hierarchy formation, the birth of a reputational economy, or the tacit creation of sanctions. These are sociological processes in embryonic form. Their small scale does not invalidate them; it makes them teachable.

For this reason, parlor LARP is not best understood as "learning by pretending to be society." It is better understood as learning by participating in the emergence of a temporary society. That is a much stronger claim, and one that fits the theoretical traditions just discussed far better than any simple language of simulation.

## **Hierarchy Formation: Status, Authority, and Power**

One of the most immediately observable sociological processes in a closed-room parlor LARP is the emergence of hierarchy. Even when the scenario assigns formal roles with nominal power, the distribution of actual influence often changes rapidly once interaction begins. Some players become central regardless of title. Others with

apparently strong formal positions find themselves bypassed, ignored, or subtly undermined. This divergence between assigned authority and enacted influence makes hierarchy formation one of the most pedagogically productive dimensions of the form.

Hierarchy in such contexts emerges through several mechanisms. The most obvious is formal status embedded in the scenario: some roles begin with titles, resources, legitimacy, or command functions. These are important because they create an initial stratification structure. Yet formal status alone is rarely sufficient to explain who actually shapes the room. Charisma, confidence, informational brokerage, emotional composure, and perceived strategic usefulness often matter just as much. A titled ruler may lose authority if they appear indecisive. A seemingly minor secretary may become indispensable because everyone needs access to what they know. A quiet observer may become powerful because others treat them as trustworthy. Thus hierarchy becomes visible not as a static chart but as a dynamic accomplishment.

Status signaling plays a major role in this process. Participants communicate rank not only through explicit claims but through voice, posture, interruption patterns, control of space, ritual fluency, and the assumption that others should orient toward them. Goffman's framework is useful here because legitimacy often depends on convincing performance rather than abstract right alone (Goffman). In parlor LARP, students can watch the remarkable speed with which people begin reading confidence as authority. This does not mean confidence always wins, but it does mean that authority is socially interpreted and reinforced through interaction.

Information control is another major source of power. Those who know more, or who are believed to know more, frequently gain influence even without official status. This makes hierarchies of knowledge as important as hierarchies of title. Participants may defer to those who can provide updates, interpret events, or connect otherwise separated factions. In sociological terms, this resembles brokerage and gatekeeping functions in social networks. The room demonstrates that power often belongs not only to those at the top of a formal order, but to those who control circulation between otherwise disconnected actors.

What makes parlor LARP especially useful in classroom settings is that the instability of hierarchy is easy to observe. Students can compare what the scenario said about power with what actually happened. A "leader" who commands no loyalty is sociologically revealing. So is an untitled mediator whose influence grows because they successfully become the room's trusted broker. The resulting

discussions can move quickly from abstract claims about power to concrete questions: What made others defer? Why did this person's authority feel legitimate? How did another person accumulate influence without obvious formal right?

Weber's distinctions among traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational authority offer one helpful framework for analysis here. Even in a fictional room, students may see authority claimed through inherited status, through personal magnetism, or through procedural role. They may also observe how these forms support or undermine one another. A player with legal authority but weak charisma may struggle. Another with strong charisma but no procedural legitimacy may still command attention. The room thus becomes a vivid arena for discussing legitimacy as socially sustained rather than mechanically fixed.

Parlor LARP also reveals the moral ambiguity of hierarchy. Some hierarchies emerge because they are useful. Groups may centralize around a coordinator because confusion needs managing. Others emerge because exclusion is easier than broad participation. Some are accepted because they appear legitimate; others because resistance seems costly. In this sense, students do not simply observe that hierarchies form. They observe that hierarchies are negotiated, reinforced, contested, and rationalized. That is a foundational sociological lesson.

Perhaps most importantly, hierarchy in micro-societies becomes visible in the moment of becoming. In ordinary institutional life, students encounter power after it has hardened. In parlor LARP they may see the exact sequence by which influence starts to coalesce: one person speaks first and is obeyed, another becomes the source of verified information, a third repeatedly frames the room's reality and is granted interpretive authority. Hierarchy ceases to look natural. It looks made. That is precisely the kind of analytical shift sociological education aims to produce.

## **Resource Economies and Exchange Systems**

No society exists without resources, and parlor LARP quickly demonstrates that resources are not limited to money or officially assigned goods. In a closed-room LARP environment, what becomes valuable may include information, reputation, access, promises, symbolic tokens, emotional support, procedural legitimacy, or physical objects supplied by the scenario. The resulting exchange systems are often one of the clearest ways students can see economic sociology in action. They

discover that economies do not begin with currency. They begin with scarcity, value, exchange, and social recognition.

Scarcity is a central mechanism. If everyone has access to the same knowledge, alliances, or symbols, those things cannot easily become leverage. But in parlor LARP scarcity is often built in. Only one character knows where the missing document is. Only one possesses the key token that allows entry. Only one is trusted by a certain faction. Scarcity turns otherwise inert qualities into social resources. It also encourages exchange. A player who holds something rare must decide whether to hoard, trade, share selectively, or convert it into influence.

Information often becomes the most powerful currency. Participants quickly learn that knowledge can be exchanged for loyalty, safety, prestige, or material advantage within the game. Yet informational economies are unstable because information can be copied, distorted, or devalued. This makes them especially interesting pedagogically. Students can observe that unlike physical goods, information's value often depends on timing, exclusivity, and trust. A secret too widely known ceases to be leverage. A rumor from an unreliable source may be worthless. A true fact delivered at the wrong time may have no exchange value at all.

Reputation also functions economically. A person known to keep promises can trade on trust in ways unavailable to someone seen as unreliable. In this sense, symbolic capital becomes exchangeable capital. Bourdieu's insight that different forms of capital — economic, social, cultural, symbolic — can convert into one another becomes visible even in miniature environments. A player's composure, eloquence, or seeming moral authority may allow them to "purchase" deference, allegiance, or access even when they lack formal resources. What looks like personal style is often functioning as economic leverage in social form.

Physical tokens, when present, can make these dynamics especially easy to observe. If the scenario includes invitations, markers of office, letters, medicine, food, or certificates, those objects may begin circulating through barter, coercion, gifting, or theft. But even when no literal economy is built into the design, informal economies usually appear. Favors become exchange media. Access to a powerful player becomes a scarce commodity. A promise of future support functions like credit. The room begins to look less like a simple dramatic setting and more like a market of social goods.

Economic sociology emphasizes that markets are socially embedded, not separate from norms and relationships. Parlor LARP demonstrates this elegantly. Exchanges are rarely purely transactional. They are shaped by friendship, obligation, fear, prestige, resentment, and ideology. A player may refuse a beneficial trade because it would associate them with the wrong faction. Another may accept a poor bargain because symbolic recognition matters more than material gain. The room shows that value is relational and that exchange is inseparable from social meaning.

This is pedagogically potent because it unsettles simplistic notions of economy. Students can see that “resources” are whatever a group treats as scarce and consequential. They can also observe how exchange systems rapidly become moralized. Some forms of trade become acceptable, others dishonorable. Some exchanges happen openly, others covertly. Soon the micro-society has not only an economy but an ethics of exchange. That development is a sociological event, not merely a game mechanic.

Thus parlor LARP teaches economic sociology not by presenting students with a market model, but by showing how social actors construct and negotiate value under conditions of limited access. The lesson is not that everything is currency, but that what counts as a resource is socially produced. Once students witness information, loyalty, and legitimacy becoming tradable, the idea of economy itself becomes more expansive and more sociologically precise.

## **Norm Formation and Unwritten Rules**

If hierarchy shows students how power emerges, norm formation shows them how order stabilizes. One of the striking features of closed-room parlor LARP is how quickly unwritten rules begin to appear even when the formal rule set remains minimal. Participants start developing shared expectations about interruption, accusation, privacy, leadership, conflict intensity, alliance etiquette, or the handling of contested claims. These norms are rarely announced explicitly at first. They emerge through repetition, reaction, and sanction.

This is where symbolic interactionism and social constructionism become especially visible. A behavior becomes normative not because an instructor labels it so, but because participants begin to treat it as expected. Once enough actors orient to a pattern as appropriate, deviations become noticeable. One person repeatedly interrupts and is read as socially transgressive. Another enters a private conversation

without signaling and is met with visible resistance. A third attempts to take a role no one has tacitly granted them and is ignored or corrected. The micro-society begins to produce its own standards.

Norms in parlor LARP often emerge around communication first. Who gets to speak in conflict. What counts as an acceptable level of aggression. Whether secrets are respected when signaled. Whether public confrontation is legitimate or rude. Whether accusations require evidence. These are not trivial matters of table manners. They are the beginnings of social order. They tell participants how to act if they wish to remain legible and acceptable within the room.

Sanction is crucial in this process. Durkheim, Parsons, and later theorists of norms all stress that expectations become socially real when deviations evoke response. In parlor LARP, sanction can take many forms: disapproval, exclusion, ridicule, loss of trust, refusal of cooperation, or explicit calling-out within the frame of play. Often the sanction is subtle. A player who violates emerging etiquette may simply find doors closing socially. Others stop volunteering information. Their bids for authority fail. This is pedagogically important because it reveals that enforcement need not be formal or violent to be effective. Much social control operates through distributed reaction.

At the same time, norms are never completely unanimous. Different factions may support different standards, and some norms remain contested. This is useful because it prevents students from imagining norms as monolithic. They can see that order may be locally stable and globally disputed. One cluster may treat deception as expected strategy; another may condemn it unless justified. One group may normalize loud confrontation; another may prefer coded maneuver. The room becomes a patchwork moral landscape rather than a single cultural block.

The speed of norm formation in parlor LARP is especially revealing. In ordinary life, norms often seem ancient or invisible. In the classroom micro-society, students may remember exactly when an unwritten rule first appeared. They can often identify the event, the reaction, and the repetition by which it became normal. This makes the social construction of order unusually teachable. Instead of being told that norms arise historically and interactionally, they see it happen.

This also opens discussion of deviance. Once norms exist, deviations become meaningful. Some deviants are punished; others become innovators. A participant who ignores the emerging hierarchy may destabilize it productively. Another may

expose a hidden contradiction in the room's moral order. Thus parlor LARP can be used not only to illustrate conformity, but to examine how deviance reveals the boundaries of the social world.

Perhaps most importantly, unwritten rules in parlor LARP show students that much of society functions through expectations no one ever formally codifies. The classroom micro-society teaches that one can feel the force of a rule before anyone writes it down. That lesson is difficult to convey abstractly. Inside the room, it becomes immediate.

## **Social Roles and Identity Negotiation**

Parlor LARP begins with assigned roles, but it does not end with them. One of the most sociologically revealing aspects of the form is the gap between role assignment and role enactment. Participants are given a starting identity — perhaps as host, servant, noble, official, debtor, heir, or outsider — but what that identity becomes in the room depends on social negotiation. Roles are therefore not static containers. They are positions that must be occupied, interpreted, resisted, or transformed.

Role theory is useful here. Sociologists have long emphasized that roles are bundles of expectations tied to social positions, but that actors never inhabit them mechanically. There is room for improvisation, strain, conflict, and reinterpretation. In parlor LARP, these dynamics become visible because the role arrives quickly and is then placed under interactional pressure. A “leader” may discover the room refuses their authority. A “subordinate” may become central. A role intended as comic relief may gain gravity. A supposedly peripheral character may become a moral center because of how others orient to them. Students can therefore observe that roles are relational achievements, not merely designations.

Identity performance matters greatly in this process. A participant must make the role legible to others. They do so through speech, posture, claims, refusals, alliances, and emotional tone. Goffman's work helps again here: role performance is inseparable from impression management and audience response (Goffman). A player may be assigned nobility, but if they cannot convince others to treat them as noble, that status weakens. Conversely, a role assigned low formal rank may accumulate symbolic importance through successful performance. The room thus reveals that identity is co-produced. One is what others ratify one as being, at least within the limits of the game's fiction.

Role conflict frequently emerges as well. A participant may discover that their assigned identity contains incompatible demands: loyalty to family versus loyalty to institution, deference versus initiative, sincerity versus strategy. These tensions are pedagogically productive because they mirror real sociological role conflict. Students can feel how difficult it is to satisfy contradictory expectations simultaneously. The concept ceases to be a textbook term and becomes a live experience.

Some players resist their assigned roles or expand them beyond what the scenario seems to anticipate. This too is sociologically valuable. It shows agency within structure. Actors do not simply receive social positions; they negotiate them. They push against type, reinterpret expectation, or seize openings for status mobility. In a classroom micro-society, this can spark discussion about social reproduction and social change. When do people stay within role? When do they contest it? What conditions make reinterpretation possible?

The fictional frame adds a useful layer of safety to these processes. Because identities are role-based, students can experiment with authority, submission, deviance, diplomacy, or charisma in ways they might avoid in ordinary classroom interaction. This does not make the experience unreal. It makes it analyzable. The classroom becomes a site where identity work can be practiced and then reflected upon.

For sociological teaching, this is invaluable. Students learn that social roles are not simple scripts. They are negotiated positions within a shared symbolic order. They constrain behavior, but they also depend on recognition, performance, and resistance. Parlor LARP therefore offers a vivid laboratory for examining how identity becomes socially real.

## **Communication as Social Infrastructure**

No micro-society can exist without communication, but in parlor LARP communication is more than a medium through which society is described. It is the infrastructure through which society is built. Information flow, rumor, persuasion, signaling, silence, and gatekeeping do not merely reflect structure. They create it. This is one of the reasons the form is so useful for social science teaching: it lets students observe the extent to which communication is not an overlay on social life but one of its constitutive mechanisms.

Information flow is the first obvious point. In a closed-room environment, who knows what, who can verify what, and who can circulate what becomes socially consequential almost immediately. Some players become hubs. Others become endpoints. Some act as relays between groups that do not trust one another directly. These patterns are sociologically recognizable as rudimentary communication networks. They also generate power. The player who can connect two otherwise separated factions gains leverage simply by becoming infrastructural.

Rumor is especially important. In ordinary education, rumor is often treated as noise or distortion. In parlor LARP, it becomes a visible social force. A rumor can redefine reputations, create moral panic, destabilize authority, or solidify factions. Its power does not depend only on truth-value. It depends on who spreads it, who believes it, and whether it fits emerging narratives of the room. Students can therefore observe something central to sociology and communication studies alike: information matters not only because it is accurate, but because it circulates through trust-laden channels.

Gatekeeping also appears in miniature. Some participants control access to people, spaces, or knowledge. Others must pass through them. This converts communication into a form of social infrastructure. If one person becomes the accepted interpreter of events, others depend on them to orient themselves. If one group controls access to the host, the official, or the symbolic center of the room, that access becomes communicatively and politically valuable. Students can see that gatekeeping is not always formal. It can arise from repeated reliance and socially recognized convenience.

Communication in parlor LARP also reveals how social structure depends on narrative framing. Different participants tell different stories about what the room is, what is happening, and what matters. The faction that successfully defines the situation often acquires power. In Thomas's famous formulation, situations defined as real are real in their consequences. The room demonstrates that principle vividly. If enough participants accept one narrative — of threat, betrayal, legitimacy, or crisis — then behaviors reorganize around it. Communication has become constitutive.

Silence is part of this infrastructure too. What is not said, who is excluded from information, which topics become taboo, and when people decline to speak are all socially meaningful. Students often learn here that communication is not reducible to overt discourse. Omission, delay, and selective non-response can be infrastructural acts. They shape the possibilities of the room just as surely as speech does.

The pedagogical gain is substantial. Students who experience such environments can more readily grasp that society depends on communicative patterning. Networks, reputations, moral orders, institutional authority, and factional solidarity all rely on flows of meaning. Parlor LARP gives those flows a room, a duration, and a set of consequences. The invisible labor of communication becomes visible because the society is small enough to watch.

## **Conflict, Cooperation, and Collective Behavior**

No micro-society remains static. Once hierarchies, resources, and norms begin to form, participants must decide whether to cooperate, compete, align, resist, or mobilize collectively. Parlor LARP is especially effective at making these processes visible because cooperation and conflict are rarely abstract. They are embodied, strategic, and consequential in the moment.

Cooperation often begins instrumentally. Players form temporary alliances because they need information, support, witnesses, or coordinated action. Yet over time these instrumental relationships can deepen into trust, obligation, or factional identity. This helps students observe that collective behavior is not always rooted in shared values from the outset. Sometimes values emerge from cooperation rather than preceding it. A group that first assembles pragmatically may later begin speaking as if it had always been unified by principle.

Conflict operates similarly. Disagreement in parlor LARP can arise over resources, authority, insult, suspicion, or incompatible goals. Because the room is small and socially dense, conflict rarely remains isolated. Others notice, interpret, and align. Private tension can become public crisis. A dispute over one object or one decision can generate polarized blocs. This makes the room an excellent site for observing how conflict scales. Students can watch the transition from interpersonal friction to group division almost in real time.

Collective behavior becomes especially visible when the room responds to perceived crisis. Someone issues a warning. A leader falters. A taboo is broken. An accusation spreads. Suddenly participants begin clustering, evacuating, rallying, or searching for authority. Such moments reveal that collective action need not be centrally commanded. It can emerge through rapid mutual interpretation. Again, the small scale makes the process visible. Students can ask afterward: who moved first, who followed, who resisted, and why did others treat that action as legitimate?

Trust is the thread running through both cooperation and conflict. Alliances require enough trust to coordinate, but conflict often depends on the collapse or strategic suspension of trust. Betrayal is particularly instructive because it reveals how much collective order depends on taken-for-granted expectations. When betrayal occurs in a parlor LARP, students do not simply observe a plot twist. They experience the fragility of social cohesion. The room's moral order shifts.

The form also teaches that cooperation and conflict are not opposites in any simple sense. Groups cooperate internally in order to conflict externally. Rivals may cooperate temporarily against a greater threat. Open conflict may produce new rules that stabilize later cooperation. In this respect, parlor LARP reflects sociological reality more closely than simplified classroom exercises in which consensus and disagreement are treated as separate phases. The micro-society reveals them as intertwined processes.

From a civics and social science perspective, this is powerful because it teaches students to see collective life as contingent. Order is not automatic. Cohesion is produced. Solidarity has costs. Division has mechanisms. The room lets them witness how quickly group formation can happen, how emotionally compelling it can become, and how unstable it often remains.

## **Institutionalization: From Interaction to Structure**

A micro-society becomes most sociologically interesting when repeated interaction begins to harden into structure. This is the process of institutionalization: behaviors, expectations, and roles become stable enough that they are treated as objective features of the social world rather than merely contingent interactions. In parlor LARP, this process can occur with startling speed.

At first, participants simply act. Someone mediates. Someone announces. Someone keeps records. Someone adjudicates disputes. If these patterns repeat, they begin to feel less like individual choices and more like institutional facts. Participants come to expect that disputes go through one person, that announcements occur in a certain format, that access must be requested through a certain channel, or that some symbolic space in the room serves as the center of authority. The micro-society has begun to generate institutions.

Berger and Luckmann's account is especially useful here. Habits become typified, typifications become reciprocal expectations, and reciprocal expectations become

institutional reality (Berger and Luckmann). Parlor LARP makes this sequence unusually visible because the timeframe is compressed. Students can often identify the moments when interaction crosses into institution. “At first, participants simply act. Someone mediates. Someone announces. Someone keeps records. Someone adjudicates disputes.” If these patterns repeat, they begin to feel less like individual choices and more like institutional facts. Participants come to expect that disputes go through one person, that announcements occur in a certain format, that access must be requested through a certain channel, or that some symbolic space in the room serves as the center of authority. The micro-society has begun to generate institutions.

Berger and Luckmann’s account is especially useful here. Habits become typified, typifications become reciprocal expectations, and reciprocal expectations become institutional reality (Berger and Luckmann). Parlor LARP makes this sequence unusually visible because the timeframe is compressed. Students can often identify the moments when interaction crosses into institution. “At first she was just the loudest person in the room” becomes “she was the one everyone looked to when decisions had to be made.” “At first that corner was just where three people happened to gather” becomes “that was where official meetings happened.” “At first we asked him because he knew more” becomes “he was effectively the chamberlain.” What is sociologically significant is not that titles appear, but that repeated behavior begins to feel normal, legitimate, and difficult to bypass.

This process is often accompanied by path dependence. Once a room has oriented itself around one mechanism of decision-making or one distribution channel for information, alternatives become more difficult to establish. Participants adapt to the existing pattern because it is known, legible, and predictable, even if it is imperfect. A micro-institution may therefore persist not because it is ideal, but because it arrived early and accumulated recognition. This is a valuable lesson for students, who often imagine institutions as rationally designed. In parlor LARP they can see that institutions may be accidents of sequence that later harden into structure.

Institutionalization also changes the meaning of agency. In the early phases of play, actions often feel improvisational and highly contingent. Once institutions begin to solidify, participants start acting with reference to those structures. They ask permission because that is now “how things are done.” They appeal decisions rather than simply contesting them. They bring new information to the recognized authority rather than broadcasting it indiscriminately. In Giddens’s terms, structure

begins to constrain and enable action simultaneously (Giddens). The students can therefore observe the shift from spontaneous interaction to patterned conduct without having to imagine it abstractly.

A particularly revealing aspect of institutionalization in parlor LARP is that legitimacy often follows after practice rather than preceding it. In formal civics education, institutions are frequently presented as already legitimate because they are already established. In a classroom micro-society, legitimacy must be produced. An emergent rule matters only if enough participants treat it as binding. An emergent office matters only if people defer to it. A norm of consultation matters only if those who violate it are sanctioned. This makes legitimacy visible as social labor. Institutions become real through collective recognition.

This in turn allows for the study of informal institutions. Sociology and political science alike have long recognized that actual social life often depends as much on unwritten systems as on official rules. Patronage networks, channels of influence, unofficial hierarchies, and back-room procedures may govern outcomes more effectively than formally stated structures. Parlor LARP can make such phenomena startlingly obvious. A scenario might begin with one official process for decisions, only for players to develop an alternative and more effective process through hallway negotiation, whispered consent, or tacit delegation. Students then see not only what institutions are, but how formal and informal institutions can coexist, compete, and hybridize.

The speed of institutionalization in parlor LARP also helps students grasp that social order is neither mystical nor fully planned. A handful of repeated actions, if recognized and expected, can become the architecture of collective life. This can lead naturally into questions central to civics: What gives institutions authority? When should people obey them? How are they challenged? What makes an emergent structure fair or unfair? Because students have lived through the formation of the structure, they are better positioned to ask these questions with precision.

Pedagogically, this may be one of the strongest reasons to use parlor LARP in social science teaching. It allows students to witness a process that in ordinary life is obscured by historical distance. Institutions usually arrive in the classroom already old. Here, they can be seen while still young. The room becomes a time-lapse society, and institutionalization becomes something students can point to, not merely define.

## **Pedagogical Implications: Teaching Sociology through Emergence**

If parlor LARP is valuable as a micro-social system, its pedagogical significance lies in what this makes possible for teaching. Social science education often struggles with abstraction because students encounter many of its key concepts as terms before they encounter them as lived processes. Power, norms, institutions, stratification, and symbolic value are named in textbooks and lectures, but they are often understood only retrospectively or superficially. Parlor LARP offers an alternative route: it makes these concepts experientially available before or alongside formal explanation.

This matters because experiential learning is not simply “fun learning.” Kolb’s model of experiential learning emphasizes that concrete experience becomes educationally powerful when followed by reflection, conceptualization, and reapplication (Kolb). A parlor LARP session on its own is not enough. What matters is the cycle that follows: students participate, notice, debrief, theorize, and then re-interpret what they experienced through sociological language. When this cycle is handled well, theory becomes not a set of definitions to memorize, but a vocabulary for describing what one has just lived through.

The pedagogical gain is especially strong in the area of visibility. Students often assume social structures are obvious after the fact. Once hierarchy has stabilized, it feels natural. Once norms exist, they feel given. Once institutions operate, they feel inevitable. Parlor LARP interrupts this illusion by allowing students to see those structures while they are forming. This early-stage visibility is invaluable. It helps denaturalize social order. Students realize that many things that feel fixed in ordinary life are, in fact, socially produced and maintained.

Engagement is an obvious benefit, but it should not be treated as the main argument. Students may indeed become more attentive and invested when they are participating in a live scenario rather than listening to lecture. Yet the deeper value lies in the specificity of what they can learn. They do not simply become interested in sociology. They gain better conceptual traction on key ideas because those ideas are anchored in remembered interaction. A student who has watched a classmate accumulate informal authority despite lacking official status is better prepared to understand Weber, Goffman, or Bourdieu. A student who has experienced an

unwritten rule becoming binding is better prepared to understand norms, sanctions, and institutionalization.

Reflection and debrief are therefore essential. Without guided reflection, students may simply remember the event as dramatic or entertaining. With carefully structured discussion, however, the instructor can redirect memory toward analysis. Who gained power, and why? What counted as a resource? When did the room begin enforcing unwritten rules? What made a leader legitimate? Where did communication become infrastructural? Which roles reproduced their assigned status, and which escaped it? These questions transform the game into data.

The debrief also allows students to compare perspectives, which is pedagogically significant in its own right. No participant sees the whole micro-society from inside. Different students witness different processes. The post-game discussion therefore becomes a second sociological exercise: the collective reconstruction of a social world from partial standpoints. That, too, is a powerful lesson. Social knowledge is perspectival, and understanding structure often requires pooling observation.

Parlor LARP also supports civics teaching more specifically because it makes the relationship between informal and formal order vivid. Students can see that legitimacy is negotiated, that procedural systems matter, that authority can be both useful and contested, and that collective life requires rule-making even when no one initially intends to become a legislator. This moves civics away from pure institutional description toward a more sociologically realistic understanding of public life.

There are, of course, practical pedagogical considerations. The activity must be designed at an appropriate level of complexity for the students. The instructor must be ready to facilitate without overdetermining. Reflection must be structured enough to connect experience back to theory. Yet these are arguments for thoughtful use, not reasons to dismiss the method. Properly handled, parlor LARP can teach sociology with an immediacy that lecture alone rarely achieves. It allows students to understand society not only as an object of study but as something they can watch themselves helping to produce.

## **Methodological Approaches to Observation and Analysis**

If parlor LARP is to be treated seriously as a pedagogical and sociological tool, then the phenomena it generates must be observable and analyzable in more than

anecdotal ways. One of the strengths of the form is that it produces social processes in compressed, bounded conditions. One of the methodological challenges is that those processes can be fast, overlapping, and distributed across the room. Careful observation is therefore necessary if the activity is to yield robust teaching insights or research value.

Ethnographic observation is an obvious starting point. An instructor or researcher can watch the room with particular attention to emergent patterns: clustering, deference, interruption, alliance formation, gatekeeping, sanctioning behavior, and the circulation of objects or information. Field notes taken during or immediately after the session can help capture moments when hierarchy began to shift, when a new norm appeared, or when a resource changed value. Because parlor LARP is temporally compressed, relatively small events may have outsized structural significance. A detailed observational approach is therefore useful.

Interaction mapping can deepen such observation. One can track who speaks to whom, who is approached repeatedly, who becomes a bridge between clusters, and who remains isolated. Even a relatively simple network sketch can help students and researchers see how centrality emerges. A participant with modest formal status but high communicative centrality may turn out to be structurally more important than the nominal leader. This offers a concrete way to teach ideas from network sociology without reducing them to abstract diagrams.

Discourse analysis is also especially appropriate because communication is one of the main infrastructures of the micro-society. Researchers can examine how participants frame authority, justify rules, accuse, defer, sanction, negotiate, or redefine situations. Such analysis can reveal when a “suggestion” becomes treated as an obligation, or how a rumor becomes stabilized into accepted social fact. It can also show how legitimacy is rhetorically constructed. For classroom use, even short transcript excerpts can be powerful if paired with analytical questions.

Video or audio recording can make these methods more precise, though recording raises practical and ethical considerations. In some classroom contexts, selected recording of key scenes or use of an observer team may be enough. In others, full-room video may be helpful for later analysis of movement, clustering, and floor control. If recording is used, students should know in advance and the pedagogical purpose should be clear. Recording can also be useful for debrief, since replaying a brief exchange may reveal to participants how much sociological information was embedded in seemingly ordinary interaction.

Coding schemes can make analysis more systematic. One might code for indicators of hierarchy formation, such as deferred-to speakers, successful interruptions, seating control, or recurring command language. One might code for norm enforcement through rebuke, exclusion, or visible discomfort. One might code for types of resources exchanged and the terms of exchange. Even relatively simple coding can show students that “society” is not too vague to analyze if one operationalizes what one is looking for.

A mixed-method approach is especially valuable. Quantitative patterns, such as frequency of being approached or number of successful coalition-building interactions, can complement qualitative interpretations of legitimacy, style, or symbolic meaning. In a classroom setting, this also helps prevent the discussion from becoming purely impressionistic. Students can move between felt experience, observed evidence, and theoretical interpretation.

The instructor’s own role in observation deserves attention as well. If the teacher acts too directly within the scenario, they may distort the emergent system they hope students will study. If they remain entirely passive, important processes may go unnoticed or undeveloped. Methodologically, the challenge is to facilitate enough for the system to function while allowing enough autonomy for emergence to occur. That balance is not unlike the challenge faced by ethnographers more generally: to be present without collapsing the social phenomenon into one’s own intervention.

This methodological richness is itself pedagogically useful. Students can be invited not only to participate in the micro-society but to observe it sociologically. They can be taught to look for evidence, not just to rely on narrative memory. In that sense, parlor LARP can become a site not only for learning sociology’s concepts but for practicing some of sociology’s methods.

## **Limitations and Critical Considerations**

No pedagogical method should be treated as a universal solution, and parlor LARP is no exception. Its strengths are significant, but so are its limitations. These must be acknowledged if the method is to be used responsibly and critically in social science education.

A first limitation is artificiality. A classroom micro-society is not the same as a large-scale society. It lacks long historical duration, entrenched institutions, generational transmission, full economic reproduction, and many of the coercive

dimensions of real political order. Participants know they are in a bounded exercise, and that knowledge shapes behavior. The fact that emergent social processes occur within the room does not mean they can be generalized straightforwardly to all real social systems. The classroom society is a compressed and stylized environment, not a full social analogue.

A second concern is participant variability. Not all students enter such exercises with the same comfort, social confidence, improvisational ability, or willingness to engage. Some may dominate because they are naturally assertive, already socially central in the classroom, or more comfortable with roleplay. Others may withdraw, not because they fail sociologically, but because the format privileges certain forms of expression. This can distort the emergent system and the lesson drawn from it. If the same few students always become powerful, the activity risks reproducing existing classroom hierarchies rather than illuminating social emergence in a fresh way.

Power imbalance is therefore both a subject of study and a practical risk. An exercise designed to teach hierarchy may unintentionally intensify exclusion. Students from marginalized backgrounds, introverted students, or those uncomfortable with conflict may experience the scenario differently from confident peers. Careful role distribution, facilitation, and reflective framing are needed if the classroom is to remain pedagogically valuable rather than socially punishing.

There is also the problem of overinterpretation. Because parlor LARP produces striking social dynamics, instructors may be tempted to read every moment as profound. Not every alliance is a theory of class. Not every interruption is a new regime of domination. Students need to learn analytical discipline, which includes recognizing when a pattern is robust, when it is contingent, and when it is simply noise. A good debrief should therefore invite interpretation without rewarding inflated claims.

Ethical concerns matter as well. Closed-room, high-intensity interaction can create emotional spillover, interpersonal discomfort, or post-game confusion if not handled carefully. The more successful the micro-society becomes, the more important it is to help students step back out of it with clarity. Debrief and decompression are not optional extras. They are part of the pedagogy.

Finally, one must guard against treating emergence itself as inherently educational. A chaotic or badly designed room may produce “emergent” phenomena that are

simply arbitrary or unhelpful. The value of parlor LARP depends on thoughtful design and guided reflection. Emergence without analysis is just experience. Sociology requires more.

These cautions do not weaken the argument for parlor LARP. They strengthen it by locating the method where it belongs: as a powerful but bounded tool. It can make society visible in the classroom. It cannot replace sociology, careful teaching, or critical judgment.

## **Conclusion: Seeing Society in the Room**

Parlor LARP offers social science education a rare opportunity: it allows students to witness society while it is being made. In the bounded environment of the classroom micro-society, hierarchy forms, resources acquire value, norms harden, communication infrastructures emerge, conflict scales into collective behavior, and repeated interaction becomes institution. These are not metaphors for sociology. They are sociological processes happening in miniature and in accelerated time.

The central argument of this essay has been that closed-room parlor LARPs function as micro-societies in which social hierarchies, resource economies, unwritten rules, and institutional behaviors emerge spontaneously through interaction. Because these developments arise in a compressed and observable way, they offer a powerful framework for teaching foundational sociological concepts. Rather than merely representing society from the outside, the form generates social order within the room. Students then become not only recipients of theory, but participants in the very processes the theory describes.

This argument has been developed through several interlocking claims. First, parlor LARP is best understood not as a simple game or theatrical exercise but as a bounded interaction system capable of producing real social structure. Second, social constructionism, symbolic interactionism, structuration theory, and emergence theory together explain why such a form can become sociologically meaningful. Third, the micro-society reveals major sociological processes with unusual clarity: hierarchy formation, resource economies, norm creation, role negotiation, communication networks, collective behavior, and institutionalization. Fourth, the pedagogical power of the form lies not in novelty alone, but in its capacity to convert abstract concepts into lived and later analyzable processes. Finally, its use requires

careful observation, debrief, and ethical attention if the lessons are to become sociological rather than merely anecdotal.

There is a larger implication here for both sociology and civics education. Students often encounter social order as something finished. Laws exist, institutions operate, hierarchies persist, and norms feel natural. This can make society seem distant, inevitable, or opaque. Parlor LARP interrupts that impression. It shows that even in a small room, with little more than roles, motives, scarcity, and interaction, people begin producing order almost immediately. They create authority, exchange, belonging, exclusion, etiquette, and procedure. What appears in the room is not all of society, but enough of its basic architecture to make visible what is often hidden by scale and habit.

Perhaps that is the strongest reason to bring such forms into the classroom. Students understand society most powerfully not when it is described to them as an object already complete, but when they experience how quickly and how contingently it can come into being. To see society in the room is to recognize that social order is not only inherited. It is made, maintained, justified, and contested through action. Once students have seen that happen around them — and because of them — many of sociology's foundational concepts become harder to forget and easier to understand.

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## Lucan Voss

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# **Consent as Stagecraft in Participatory Theatre: Safety Mechanics, Aesthetic Control, and Ethical Form in Salon LARP**

**Ivara Reed**

## **Abstract**

This essay argues that consent and safety mechanics in salon LARP should be understood not as external protective add-ons but as forms of stagecraft that shape participatory theatre from within. Drawing on performance theory, dramaturgy, intimacy coordination, and larp studies, it shows how calibration, boundaries, interruption mechanics, and aftercare function as theatrical technologies regulating intensity, representational distance, and ethical sustainability. The essay examines consent tools such as Lines and Veils, check-ins, and cut-and-brake systems as compositional devices comparable to scenic design, rehearsal process, and live direction. It argues that these mechanics do not diminish artistic possibility but instead make specific kinds of intimacy, confrontation, and emotional risk playable and aesthetically coherent. By reframing consent as stagecraft, the essay concludes that ethics in participatory theatre is not external to form but one of the primary ways form is built, maintained, and made inhabitable.

Keywords: consent as stagecraft, participatory theatre, salon LARP, safety mechanics, representational distance, intimacy and calibration

## **Introduction: From Safety Tool to Stagecraft**

Discussions of consent in participatory performance are often framed in a curiously external vocabulary. Safety mechanics are treated as add-ons, protections, emergency systems, or ethical supplements attached to the “real” artistic experience. In salon LARP and related participatory theatre forms, this way of speaking is no

longer adequate. If a mechanic determines whether a confrontation may escalate, whether intimacy remains implied or enacted, whether a player can stay inside a scene, whether an emotional beat lands as realism or stylization, and whether a difficult subject is approached through direct embodiment or mediated distance, then that mechanic is not outside the art. It is part of the art's formal machinery. It is helping make the scene. The argument of this essay is that consent tools in salon LARP should be understood as stagecraft: as theatrical technologies that shape intensity, framing, distance, visibility, timing, and sustainability. (Nordic Larp, "Safety and Calibration Design Tools"; IDC Professionals FAQ)

The claim may sound initially provocative only because stagecraft is still too often imagined narrowly, as scenery, lighting, costume, sound, or choreography. Yet stagecraft in the larger theatrical sense is any set of techniques that makes performance possible in a particular way. It determines what kinds of actions can occur, how audiences receive them, how bodies occupy space, and how risk is transformed into form. Scenic design shapes where actors can move and what worlds can be perceived. Lighting shapes attention, intimacy, and revelation. Intimacy choreography shapes physical storytelling while preserving performer agency. Consent systems in participatory theatre do analogous work. They delimit possibility not by shrinking the aesthetic field, but by making certain aesthetic fields inhabitable. Lines and Veils decide what belongs onstage and what belongs offstage. Calibration workshops decide what emotional register the event can sustain. Interruption mechanics determine how a scene can be revised without collapsing the larger frame. Check-ins regulate escalation. These are not merely policies. They are tools of composition. (Routledge, *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*; IDC Professionals blog)

Salon LARP is a particularly powerful case because its participants are not separate from the performance. They are the performance's bodies, its witnesses, and often its co-authors. This collapse of performer and audience means that the management of consent cannot remain hidden in rehearsal rooms or production meetings the way some traditional theatre protocols can. In salon LARP, consent is often negotiated through explicit mechanics available to everyone at the point of play. That visibility can mislead observers into imagining that safety tools interrupt immersion or aesthetic continuity. The opposite is more often true. Their visibility reveals what all theatre has always depended upon: the shaping of permissible action through socially and technically organized constraint. The difference is not that LARP has safety while theatre has art. The difference is that LARP frequently shows the

mechanics that more conventional theatre has naturalized or hidden. (Routledge, *Postdramatic Theatre*; Nordic Larp, “Playing Safe?”)

This essay therefore asks a specific question: how do consent and safety mechanics function as aesthetic technologies in participatory theatre, especially in salon LARP? The answer advanced here is that they shape three interrelated dimensions of performance. First, they regulate **intensity** by determining how far scenes may escalate emotionally, physically, or psychologically and how players can remain present under pressure. Second, they regulate **representational distance** by deciding whether difficult material appears directly, symbolically, abstractly, or only in aftermath. Third, they regulate **ethical sustainability**, making it possible for players to enter, remain in, and meaningfully contribute to scenes that would otherwise be unplayable or artistically incoherent. Consent, in this view, is not merely a limit. It is a technology of theatrical possibility.

The essay proceeds through sixteen sections. It begins by locating salon LARP within participatory theatre and by tracing the historical relationship between performance and safety protocols more broadly, including stage combat and intimacy coordination. It then develops a theoretical framework combining performance studies, dramaturgy, and ethics. Subsequent sections examine a taxonomy of major safety and calibration tools; calibration as rehearsal; boundaries as scenic design; interruption mechanics as forms of directorial control; representational distance; intensity management; ethical possibility; player agency as co-directorship; and the aesthetic consequences of different safety architectures. The essay concludes by arguing that ethics in participatory theatre is not external to form but one of the ways form is built. To call consent stagecraft is therefore not metaphorical flourish. It is a precise claim about how participatory performance works.

## **Defining Participatory Theatre and Salon LARP**

Any argument about consent as stagecraft must begin by clarifying the object of analysis. Participatory theatre is not simply theatre that invites mild audience response. It refers to performance forms in which the audience’s role is materially altered so that reception and action become intertwined. Sometimes this means spectators move through environments, choose pathways, or interact with performers. Sometimes it means they intervene in scenes, assume roles, or help determine outcomes. The degree and kind of participation vary widely, but the

defining point is that the spectator is no longer imagined as a purely receptive body placed at stable observational distance. Instead, participation becomes one of the means by which the event unfolds.

Salon LARP belongs within this broader field while also exceeding some of its assumptions. Unlike many immersive theatre forms, salon LARP generally does not retain a separate, non-performing audience. All participants are both viewers and doers, both witnesses and embodied agents. They enter the fictional frame not as observers invited to occasional interaction, but as constitutive elements of the performance itself. This matters because it changes how theatrical control operates. In a conventional stage production, the director, dramaturg, fight director, and stage manager shape the event from outside the live decision-making of the audience. In salon LARP, much of this shaping must either be designed into the structure beforehand or made available through mechanics that participants can activate during play.

This makes salon LARP an especially dense case of participatory theatre. It is improvised, but not formless; co-authored, but not structureless; embodied, but not merely spontaneous. Players enter with character materials, relational positions, goals, constraints, and often thematic expectations. The event emerges from their interactions, yet those interactions are shaped by genre, briefing, physical environment, and design mechanics. When the subject is consent, the significance of these mechanics becomes impossible to ignore. A check-in, a no-touch policy, a tap-out, a boundary negotiation, or a Veil does not float above the fiction as administrative matter. It helps define what kind of fiction is possible and what kind of theatrical world is being produced.

Positioning salon LARP within theatre studies is important because it prevents two common errors. The first is to treat LARP as socially interesting but aesthetically secondary, as though questions of safety belonged only to games or communities and not to performance form. The second is to romanticize improvisation as pure freedom. Participatory theatre of this kind is highly structured, and consent systems are part of that structure. They distribute authority, regulate risk, and mark the threshold between imaginative possibility and embodied reality. As a result, salon LARP provides a particularly clear vantage point from which to rethink theatre's long relationship to rehearsal, choreography, permission, and embodied limit.

## **Historical Context: Safety in Performance Traditions**

The idea that safety might be part of performance form is not new, though it is often discussed as if it were. Theatre history is filled with examples of procedures, conventions, and professional protocols that transformed potentially dangerous material into repeatable artistic practice. Stage combat is one of the clearest examples. No one seriously imagines that a sword fight on stage is artistically pure when actors simply strike one another without agreement or technique.

Choreography, spacing, cueing, and weapons protocol are not regrettable constraints on the “real” fight. They are what make the fight stageable at all. The audience sees danger, but the art depends on the disciplined conversion of danger into form.

The same is true of many other theatrical practices. Dance partnering, acrobatics, stage blood effects, aerial work, and pyrotechnics all require safety protocols that are inseparable from aesthetic outcome. A scene involving a fall does not become less theatrical because someone calculated weight, timing, and landing surfaces. On the contrary, that calculation is one of the conditions under which the effect can be achieved persuasively and repeatedly. Stagecraft has always included the engineering of risk into controlled spectacle.

More recently, the rise of intimacy direction and intimacy coordination has made this relationship newly visible in theatre and screen performance. Intimacy professionals explicitly describe their work as choreography, advocacy, and liaison work for scenes involving nudity, simulated sex acts, or intimate touch. Their role is not merely to stop harm after it appears, but to structure the conditions under which intimate storytelling can be ethically and artistically realized. The profession’s language makes this especially clear: intimate scenes are choreographed, negotiated, and bounded so that performers can tell the story without surrendering agency or safety. That is not external to aesthetics; it is a way of building aesthetics. (IDC Professionals FAQ; IDC Professionals blog)

Salon LARP inherits this history while also altering it. Because the players are not distinct from the performers and because there is usually no external director managing every live moment, the shaping work accomplished in theatre through rehearsal-room hierarchy often appears in LARP through distributed mechanics. Pre-game workshops, calibration exercises, opt-in touch rules, Lines and Veils, hand gestures, cut-and-brake systems, sanctuary spaces, and safety teams are all techniques for doing what theatre has always done: enabling risky material to

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become playable by transforming unbounded possibility into structured action. Nordic larp discourse has explicitly framed safety and calibration as design tools that help players access story, trust one another, and take emotional risks that would otherwise be unavailable. (Nordic Larp, “Safety and Calibration Design Tools”; Nordic Larp, “A Matter of Trust”)

The continuity, then, is stronger than many debates acknowledge. Theatre has never been pure art later constrained by ethics. It has always relied on techniques of managed embodiment. What changes in participatory forms such as salon LARP is the visibility and distribution of those techniques. Since participants must often negotiate in real time and from within the fiction, the craft of consent can no longer remain backstage. It becomes part of the visible architecture of play. That visibility has led some critics to imagine that consent mechanics are somehow antithetical to immersion or theatrical effect. Historically, however, theatre has always depended on protocols that mediate embodiment. Salon LARP simply reveals those mediations with unusual clarity.

## **Theoretical Framework: Consent, Performance, and Structure**

To treat consent as stagecraft requires a theoretical framework broad enough to hold ethics and aesthetics together without collapsing one into the other. Performance theory is useful here because it already understands theatre as something more than text plus acting. Performance is a relational event structured by space, embodiment, timing, reception, and convention. Dramaturgy, similarly, is not limited to plot arrangement; it concerns the principles by which a performance becomes legible, affective, and coherent. Consent can enter this field not merely as a moral category but as a set of structuring relations that determine what can be shown, how bodies can encounter one another, and what degree of risk is theatrically inhabitable.

Peggy Phelan’s work on performance and visibility remains important because it reminds us that performance is constituted through the politics of showing and withholding. Visibility is never neutral. To make something present onstage is already to make a decision about exposure, embodiment, and interpretation. Consent mechanics participate in that decision-making. A Veil, for instance, is not simply a prohibition. It is a dramaturgical choice about visibility, akin to deciding that an event belongs in implication or aftermath rather than explicit enactment. Similarly, a

calibration workshop does not merely list preferences. It establishes what kinds of presence and vulnerability the event can meaningfully sustain.

Rancière's insistence on the activity of the spectator also matters in modified form. In salon LARP, participants are not passive recipients but active co-makers. This means that consent cannot be framed only as something delivered from director to actor or organizer to player. It becomes distributed. Every player carries some share of responsibility for maintaining the event's ethical and aesthetic field. In this sense, consent mechanics are not only constraints but means of redistributing dramaturgical authority. They tell participants how they may shape the event together.

Lehmann's account of postdramatic theatre is helpful because participatory theatre often shifts emphasis away from stable dramatic illusion and toward presence, situation, and event structure. In salon LARP, the event is built through interactions among people who are simultaneously subject and object, actor and spectator. This makes regulation of intensity and distance central. Without such regulation, the event risks collapsing into incoherence or harm. Consent mechanics thus perform a postdramatic function: they help organize the event's field rather than merely regulating content from outside. (Routledge, *Postdramatic Theatre*)

Dramaturgically, one might say that consent shapes the performance's possibility space. It answers questions such as these: Can this scene become physically intimate, or must it remain verbal? Can grief be embodied through touch, or only through language and distance? Can horror be represented directly, or only signaled? Can confrontation intensify through public humiliation, or does the event require other modes of pressure? These are not administrative afterthoughts. They define genre, mood, pacing, and representational strategy. A larp whose consent architecture favors symbolic abstraction will feel different from one that supports explicit confrontation and intense physicality. The safety mechanics are therefore also aesthetic selectors.

Finally, there is the ethical dimension. To argue that consent is stagecraft is not to aestheticize harm or pretend ethics can be reduced to formal effect. Rather, it is to argue that ethical structuring and formal structuring are inseparable in participatory performance. A scene that players cannot ethically inhabit is also usually a scene the form cannot sustain aesthetically. Conversely, a scene made possible through careful calibration, negotiated limits, and interruption options may achieve a power unavailable in an unstructured environment because the participants can remain

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present enough to make it good. Ethics, in other words, is not what happens after art. It is one of the ways art is made inhabitable.

## **Taxonomy of Consent and Safety Mechanics**

A useful way to clarify the stagecraft argument is to develop a taxonomy of common consent and safety mechanics. These tools vary across communities and styles, but several have become especially influential in contemporary salon LARP discourse. They can be grouped not by moral seriousness but by theatrical function: boundary-setting, calibration, interruption, mediation, and aftercare.

Boundary-setting tools establish what belongs in the event and at what level of representation. Lines designate material that will not appear in play at all. Veils designate material that may exist in the fiction but will not be directly enacted or described in full. Both function like representational filters. They decide not merely what is prohibited but what aesthetic mode the event can occupy. A scene involving violence, sexuality, humiliation, or trauma will feel radically different depending on whether the relevant material is lined, veiled, stylized, or fully playable. In this sense, Lines and Veils are comparable to scenic decisions about what happens onstage, what happens offstage, and what remains implied. Though the terminology became especially visible through roleplaying communities, the underlying dramaturgical logic is immediately recognizable within theatre. (Nordic Larp, “Safety and Calibration Design Tools”)

Calibration tools shape expectation and emotional bandwidth before or during play. Workshops, pre-game discussions, tone talks, opt-in negotiation for touch or intimacy, and brief check-ins are all part of this category. Their function is not merely to prevent unpleasant surprise, though that matters. They establish the dramatic range available to the event. A group calibrated for restrained political intrigue will produce different scenes from a group calibrated for emotionally raw confrontation or high melodrama. Calibration therefore acts like rehearsal-room toning. It aligns not only safety but style.

Interruption tools include X-cards, cut and brake mechanics, verbal or gestural stop signals, tap-outs, and similar systems for halting, reducing, or redirecting an ongoing scene. These are perhaps the most visibly “mechanical” of consent devices, which is why they are often misunderstood as interruptions from outside the art. Yet in theatrical terms they behave like emergency directorial controls or adaptive stage

management. They permit a scene to be edited in real time without collapsing the larger event. Their presence shapes how players approach risk, because they know escalation can be revised rather than endured passively.

Mediation tools include safety teams, facilitators, designated listeners, sanctuary spaces, or counselors available during play. These resemble backstage support structures in conventional production, except that in LARP their existence often needs to be player-visible in order to function. Their theatrical role is infrastructural. They help hold the event's ethical container so that artistic intensity can remain playable.

Finally, aftercare and debrief tools help transition out of high-intensity play. These are often framed as post-event care rather than part of the performance, but they also shape the kinds of scenes players will dare to enter. Knowledge that reflection, decompression, or community support will exist afterward can widen the emotional and ethical range available during play. In that sense, aftercare is a temporal extension of stagecraft. It shapes not only aftermath but preconditions.

Seen together, these tools reveal a rich design language. They do not all do the same thing. Some narrow content, some widen courage, some regulate transition, and some make live revision possible. But all of them participate in the formal making of the event. They are not merely safety mechanisms. They are technologies of theatrical shaping.

## **Calibration as Rehearsal: Setting the Dramatic Range**

Calibration deserves special attention because it often performs the work that rehearsal and directorial alignment perform in conventional theatre. A rehearsal process does more than teach lines and blocking. It establishes tone, ensemble trust, acceptable risk, and the emotional vocabulary of the production. Players in salon LARP often lack a long rehearsal process, but they still need some equivalent means of discovering what kind of event they are entering together. Calibration serves that purpose.

Before play begins, a calibration conversation can answer questions that are deeply aesthetic even when they are phrased ethically. Is this event aiming for political coldness, romantic intensity, emotional realism, camp melodrama, ritual abstraction, or chamber-psychological pressure? How physically demonstrative will play be? Is confrontation likely to be formal or explosive? What kinds of vulnerability are

invited? To what degree will players lean into emotional realism versus stylization? The answers shape the event's dramatic range. They set the bandwidth within which improvised scenes can take place coherently.

This is why calibration should not be imagined as a bureaucratic checklist. It is a rehearsal of possibility. It teaches the players how to read one another and what the event will reward. It also reduces a certain kind of cognitive noise. When participants know the broad emotional and ethical range available, they can commit more fully inside it. They are less likely to waste energy trying to determine whether the room will support the intensity they are considering. This can actually increase dramatic boldness, a point repeatedly made in larp safety discourse that frames care and trust as conditions for bravery rather than as brakes on play. (Nordic Larp, "Creating a Culture of Trust"; Nordic Larp, "The Brave Space")

Calibration also functions as collective dramaturgical alignment. In theatre, two actors may need to decide whether a confrontation scene reads as bitter restraint or escalating volatility. In salon LARP, the same question may need to be answered at community scale. If one player imagines the event as emotionally maximal while another imagines it as verbally elegant and distanced, their scenes may fail not because either is doing something "wrong," but because the aesthetic frame was never aligned. Calibration prevents that by establishing a shared horizon of performative possibility.

There is, of course, a limit. Over-calibration can become overdetermination if it leaves no room for emergent surprise. Yet this is no argument against calibration as such. It is an argument for calibration as stagecraft rather than script. Good calibration sets range without dictating outcome. It does for participatory theatre what good rehearsal culture does for ensemble work: it makes a field of trust and expectation in which intensity can happen with form.

## **Boundaries as Scenic Design**

If calibration sets the emotional range of an event, boundaries such as Lines and Veils shape its representational architecture. These tools are often discussed as content-management devices, but from a theatrical point of view they behave like scenic design. They decide what is visible, where action occurs, and what kinds of implication become necessary.

A Line is an absolute exclusion. Something lined will not appear in the event. A Veil permits the material to exist but moves it away from direct enactment, usually into implication, summary, blackout, or aftermath. These distinctions matter aesthetically. Offstage violence in tragedy, stylized death in opera, and fade-to-black intimacy in film all rely on analogous representational choices. The decision not to show is rarely equivalent to the decision not to mean. In fact, what is unseen often gains symbolic density precisely because it is withheld.

In salon LARP, Lines and Veils therefore shape the event's visual and emotional geography. They establish where the "camera" of play can go, even though there is no literal camera. A game with veiled sexuality, lined sexual violence, and openly playable political betrayal will have a different scenic texture from a game that permits frank erotic play but veils self-harm and public humiliation. These are not merely moral differences. They are differences in theatrical world-building. They determine which emotional energies become foreground and which must be translated into indirect forms.

This indirectness can be artistically generative. A veiled scene often requires players to rely on language, gesture, aftermath, or symbolic substitution. That can produce richer theatricality than direct enactment would. It can intensify imagination, sharpen tone, and preserve player agency simultaneously. As in theatre more broadly, the offstage is not absence. It is a designed space of implication.

Seen this way, boundaries are not the opposite of performance freedom. They are compositional edges. Scenic design does not oppress the actor because it decides that a wall exists or a doorway leads elsewhere. It gives shape to action. Consent boundaries do something similar. They tell the event what rooms it has and what rooms it does not. They define the representational topography within which participants improvise.

## **Interruption Mechanics as Directorial Control**

Interruption tools such as the X-card, tap-out, cut, brake, or similar systems are often the most contested because they are the most visibly interventionist. They seem to "break" the scene. Yet from a stagecraft perspective, they function less as ruptures from outside than as forms of emergency directorial control built into the performance itself.

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In conventional theatre, if a scene goes wrong in rehearsal, the director stops it, adjusts pacing, tone, gesture, or language, and starts again. In live performance, stage management may halt action in cases of real danger. Salon LARP cannot rely on a single outside director continuously monitoring all scenes. Interruption mechanics distribute some of that directorial authority to the participants. They allow those inside the action to signal that the current trajectory is no longer playable and needs revision.

The artistic significance of this is often underestimated. A scene that cannot be interrupted, redirected, or reduced may not actually be a stronger scene. It may simply be a less governable one. Interruption mechanics let players preserve the larger event by editing local excess. A cut can preserve trust. A brake can lower the emotional or physical intensity without destroying the scene's dramatic purpose. A tap-out can allow a player to leave while the fiction continues. These are all forms of live composition.

This means interruption is part of pacing. It shapes when scenes crest, stall, or transform. It can also create aesthetic clarity by preventing the event from sliding into registers it cannot sustain. What looks from outside like a break in immersion may from inside be the restoration of the event's proper form. The analogy to directing is therefore more exact than casual rhetoric suggests. A cut, in these circumstances, is often a dramaturgical intervention.

## **Representational Distance and Aesthetic Mediation**

One of the most important things consent mechanics regulate is representational distance. Participatory theatre can place players very close to material emotionally, physically, and psychologically. But distance is not the enemy of intensity. It is one of its key modulators. Consent systems help decide whether content is approached through realism, stylization, symbolism, humor, ritual, or summary.

A salon LARP with strong direct-physical calibration and few representational veils may support high immediacy. Another with more abstract or symbolic norms may produce greater interpretive distance while still allowing significant emotional force. Neither is inherently superior. What matters is the alignment between method, player capacity, and intended aesthetic effect. Consent mechanics help make that alignment possible.

Representational distance also intersects with audience relation inside participatory theatre. Since players are both performers and witnesses, the distance at which content is represented changes not only personal comfort but collective legibility. A heavily abstracted scene may allow broad participation in interpretation. A highly realistic one may intensify local experience while narrowing who can remain close. Consent stagecraft therefore shapes the social distribution of attention as well as the mode of enactment.

In this sense, safety tools are mediating technologies. They do not merely stop content. They convert content into particular theatrical forms. They answer the question: at what distance can this event be held so that it becomes meaningful rather than merely overwhelming?

## **Intensity Management and Emotional Pacing**

Theatrical intensity is never simply a matter of “more.” It depends on pacing, contrast, escalation, release, and recurrence. Consent mechanics are central to this in salon LARP because they help players and organizers regulate how quickly and how far scenes intensify. Without such regulation, high-emotion play may become monotonous, chaotic, or unsustainable. With it, intensity can be shaped into arc.

Calibration creates the broad range. Boundaries create the topography. Interruption creates revision capacity. Check-ins and live negotiation create micro-adjustments. Together, these tools form an intensity-management system. Players can lean harder into emotional confrontation when they know there are means to modulate or step back if needed. This often leads not to weaker scenes but to stronger ones, because intensity can be pursued deliberately rather than fearfully.

The relation to music and lighting is useful here. A score shapes emotional movement not only by building volume but by controlling texture and contrast. Lighting can intensify by narrowing focus or soften by widening it. Consent tools do analogous work in participatory performance. They govern the emotional brightness and proximity of the scene. They help determine whether the event can sustain one more escalation or whether it needs stillness, distance, or indirection.

This is one reason safety discourse that speaks only of prevention misses something essential. Consent mechanics do not simply prevent bad outcomes. They compose dramatic energy. They are part of the event’s rhythm.

## **Ethical Possibility and Scene Sustainability**

Some scenes are not sustainable without ethical structure. This is perhaps the clearest way to understand consent as stagecraft. There are emotional, physical, sexual, violent, and psychologically demanding scenes that players may wish to explore artistically. Without procedures for boundary-setting, calibration, interruption, and support, many such scenes become either impossible or recklessly coercive. The result is not artistic freedom but artistic narrowing, because the range of material participants can meaningfully enter contracts to portray becomes smaller.

Ethical possibility therefore precedes scene possibility. This does not mean every desired scene should be playable or that all difficult content becomes justified by procedure. It means that where ethically sustainable structures exist, the performance can go places it otherwise could not. Safety becomes not the enemy of boldness but one of its preconditions. This argument appears repeatedly in Nordic larp discourse, where safety and trust are described as enabling players to be brave enough to lean into difficult material. (Nordic Larp, “Playing Safe?”; Nordic Larp, “The Brave Space”)

Scene sustainability also involves repetition over time. A one-off intense moment may be achievable through sheer adrenaline, but a whole event requires that participants remain available to one another. Consent mechanics therefore support not only the individual scene but the ecology of the event. They allow players to continue being usable to the fiction and to each other. In that sense, sustainability is both ethical and dramaturgical. It protects the ensemble’s ability to keep making meaning.

## **Player Agency and Co-Directorship**

Participatory theatre blurs not only performer and audience but also performer and director. Players often shape scene focus, pacing, entry, exit, thematic emphasis, and levels of intensity from within the event. Consent mechanics formalize this co-directorial role. They give participants tools not only to act but to steer the performance’s conditions.

This redistribution of control is one of the strongest reasons to understand consent as stagecraft. If a participant can signal for a scene to slow, abstract, redirect, or stop, they are not merely defending themselves. They are exercising a kind of directorial

authority over form. In many salon LARPs this authority is shared and reciprocal. Everyone may have access to some level of control. That changes the politics of performance. It weakens the fantasy that aesthetic coherence belongs only to the designer or organizer and affirms that those inside the scene help compose it.

This does not mean direction becomes chaos. Co-directorship works only because shared tools provide legible signals and because community norms support their use. But when it works, it creates a particularly rich form of collaborative theatre. The scene is built not only through dialogue and gesture but through collectively recognized methods of adjustment. The participants become custodians of intensity and representation, not just instruments of them.

## **Aesthetic Consequences: What Kind of Theatre Emerges**

Different consent architectures produce different theatrical aesthetics. A salon LARP with light-touch safety and strong realism assumptions may generate rawer, riskier, more physically immediate scenes, but also narrower participant availability and potentially more uneven trust. A salon LARP with robust calibration, explicit veils, and distributed interruption mechanics may generate a more openly mediated event in which symbolism, negotiated pacing, and collaborative intensity are foregrounded. These are not simply safety differences. They are differences in theatrical style.

One can therefore speak of consent poetics. Some events create the aesthetics of daring restraint; others create stylized chamber pressure; others create careful emotional maximalism. The form of care built into the event shapes the form of art that results. This is one reason blanket claims that safety “weakens” theatre are analytically empty. They fail to specify what kind of theatre is desired and what kind of participants are meant to be able to inhabit it. Consent mechanics do not remove aesthetics. They select and scaffold them.

This selection also affects audience experience inside the game. Since all players witness one another, the visible use of safety tools can contribute to the performance’s overall texture. In some events, those tools recede and the effect is smooth. In others, their visibility becomes part of the aesthetic — an acknowledged feature of a highly mediated, self-aware form. Neither is inherently superior. The key point is that the consent system helps decide which aesthetic world emerges.

## **Critiques and Tensions**

There are real tensions in treating consent as stagecraft, and they should not be ignored. One common critique is that visible safety mechanics “break immersion.” This critique often mistakes one kind of immersion for the only kind. A scene may lose the illusion of seamless diegesis when a check-in occurs, but it may preserve a deeper form of participatory commitment by keeping players present and trusting. The alternative is not always stronger immersion; it may be private withdrawal or unspoken distress.

Another tension concerns over-regulation. A heavily proceduralized event can become hesitant or bureaucratic if every interaction requires explicit negotiation at a level that destroys spontaneity. This is a real design problem. But it is not an argument against consent mechanics so much as an argument for better aesthetic integration and more appropriate tool choice. Stagecraft can be clumsy. That does not mean lighting, choreography, or set design are anti-theatrical.

There is also the issue of uneven use. Not all players feel equally empowered to activate mechanics. Some may fear seeming difficult or “ruining” a scene. This means a consent architecture is only as strong as the culture surrounding it. If the community stigmatizes use, the formal tool may exist while the practical stagecraft fails. This is why consent as stagecraft must be understood not only technically but socially. It requires rehearsal, normalization, and respect.

## **Pedagogical and Design Implications**

If consent mechanics are stagecraft, then they should be taught and designed as such. Organizers should not present them merely as emergency add-ons explained apologetically before “the real game.” They should be framed as part of how the event works artistically. Players should understand what aesthetic worlds particular tools support, how representational distance is being set, and what kinds of scenes are likely to flourish under the given calibration.

For theatre pedagogy, this has broader implications. Students of performance can benefit from recognizing that safety and consent are not enemies of form but techniques of form. Stage combat already enjoys this recognition. Intimacy choreography increasingly does as well. Participatory theatre training should extend

the same conceptual respect to calibration, boundaries, and interruption systems. They are compositional tools.

For LARP design, the implication is equally practical. One should ask not only “what safety tools are included?” but “what aesthetic work do they do?” Do they support a chamber-psychological event, a gothic melodrama, a ritual abstraction, a politically brittle ensemble piece? Do they widen or narrow the event’s emotional arc? Do they encourage bravery, caution, symbolism, or realism? Once these questions are asked, consent design becomes inseparable from dramaturgy.

## **Conclusion: Ethics as Form**

The central argument of this essay has been that consent and safety mechanics in salon LARP are best understood not as external protections but as forms of stagecraft. They shape what can be shown, implied, interrupted, intensified, or ethically sustained. They regulate emotional bandwidth, representational distance, and participant availability. They distribute directorial authority, support scene sustainability, and help determine the aesthetic character of the event itself.

This claim does not collapse ethics into aesthetics or suggest that all good intentions automatically produce good art. Rather, it insists that in participatory theatre the two are structurally intertwined. Because the players are the medium, because the audience and the performers are the same bodies, and because risk is embodied rather than abstract, ethical design becomes part of formal design. The scene that cannot be consented to cannot be staged in any meaningful sense. The scene made playable through calibration, boundaries, and live revision may become not only safer but artistically stronger because the participants can remain present enough to make it real.

Seen this way, consent is not what happens after the art has been imagined. It is one of the ways art becomes materially possible. Lines and Veils become scenic choices. Calibration becomes rehearsal. Interruption becomes direction. Aftercare becomes temporal architecture. What emerges is not theatre constrained by ethics, but theatre whose ethics are among the means by which it takes form.

Participatory theatre has often been praised for dissolving the boundary between stage and audience. Salon LARP shows that once this boundary dissolves, stagecraft must expand as well. It can no longer be limited to lights, sets, props, and choreography in the conventional sense. It must also include the techniques by

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which players govern approach, distance, intensity, and risk together. To call consent stagecraft is therefore not to flatter safety work with artistic language. It is to describe, with precision, the role it already plays in making participatory performance possible.

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## **Ivara Reed**

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# **Everybody Is Performing: Roleplay, Improvisation, and the Semi-Theatrical Nature of Adult Salon LARPs**

**Brian David Phillips**

## **Abstract**

This essay argues that adult salon LARPs and murder mystery parties are best understood as hybrid performance forms rather than as imperfect versions of game, theatre, or social gathering. Their apparent awkwardness across categories is not a weakness but a defining feature. Players continually move among acting, roleplaying, social improvisation, strategic decision-making, and self-conscious social display, often within the same scene. The essay examines how embodiment, presence, and costume make character legible as a social surface, while the collapse of audience and performer into the same body creates a distributed form of spectatorship. It also explores structured improvisation, productive meta-play, genre awareness, and the tension between immersion and theatricality, arguing that these are not opposing forces but interacting modes of participation. Adult themes such as seduction, shame, status anxiety, and cultivated sophistication intensify this semi-theatrical quality. The essay concludes that salon LARP's distinctive aesthetic power lies precisely in its mixed identity as shared live performance.

Keywords: hybrid performance, salon LARP, roleplay and improvisation, embodied presence, meta-play and genre awareness, audience-performer collapse

## **Introduction: What Kind of Thing Is a Salon LARP?**

Adult salon LARPs, murder mystery parties, and interactive-dramatic parlor games are notoriously difficult to classify without sounding either evasive or faintly apologetic. They are called games, yet they do not behave like board games, sport, or even many roleplaying games with clear turn structures and codified victory conditions. They are called theatre, yet they usually lack a fixed script, a separated

audience, a raised stage, and performers whose labor is distinct from that of those watching. They are called social events or parties, yet few parties require one to arrive as a suspicious widow, a ruined industrialist, a blackmailed secretary, or a predatory aristocrat with a forged invitation and a morally unstable alibi. These forms sit awkwardly among categories and are frequently described through analogies rather than definitions. One says they are “a bit like theatre,” “sort of a game,” “like a party but with roles,” or “improv with secrets.” That instability is often treated as a nuisance, a sign that the medium is immature or difficult to theorize cleanly. In fact, the instability is one of the medium’s most revealing characteristics. The awkwardness is not a flaw. It is the form.

The central difficulty is that adult salon LARPs make participants do several things at once. A player may be embodying a fictional character, pursuing a concrete objective, improvising responses to unforeseen developments, admiring the elegance of another participant’s performance, managing their own social presence in the room, and consciously helping shape the dramatic experience for everyone else, all within the same minute. In a single exchange, the participant can be actor, game player, improviser, spectator, collaborator, guest, and self-aware social being. This is not confusion in the pejorative sense. It is layered practice. The participant is neither wholly “in character” in the naive sense of full disappearance into fiction, nor simply detached and strategic, nor merely presenting a rehearsed persona for others to observe. What takes place is a shifting negotiation among modes.

That negotiation becomes especially visible in adult salon LARP because adult-oriented scenarios tend to intensify status display, flirtation, secrecy, betrayal, and verbal finesse. Players are not just representing fictional people; they are often performing sophistication, poise, control, danger, wit, seductiveness, or fragility before one another. A murder mystery in a drawing room is already a theatre of social surfaces. The player who steps into such a form does not only “play a character.” They also manage how that character is seen and how they themselves are seen performing that character. The room is full of reciprocal observation. One watches while being watched, performs while interpreting, judges while improvising.

This essay argues that adult salon LARPs and interactive-drama murder mysteries operate as hybrid performances in which players continuously negotiate among character embodiment, improvisational narration, game-like objective pursuit, and self-conscious social display. Their unstable position between game, theatre, and

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social gathering should not be repaired by forcing them into one category or another. That unstable position is one of their constitutive aesthetic conditions. The collapse of audience and performer into the same body, the friction between immersion and theatricality, and the constant presence of meta-awareness are not unfortunate contaminants of some purer practice. They are central to what the medium does well.

To make this case, the discussion proceeds through a series of linked claims. It first defines the murder mystery salon LARP as a hybrid practice, emphasizing that its identity depends on overlapping traditions rather than singular lineage. It then distinguishes acting, roleplaying, and social improvisation as related but distinct modes of performance, all of which are active inside salon LARP. From there, it turns to embodiment and presence, since the medium is built on live social surfaces as much as on text or intention. It examines the collapse of audience and performer, showing that players are always also spectators of one another. It then explores the nature of improvisation in this context, arguing that salon LARP is not spontaneous emptiness but structured emergence. Later sections address meta-play and genre awareness, the productive tension between immersion and theatricality, the importance of the party or gathering frame, and the ways adult themes heighten self-conscious performance. The conclusion returns to the central proposition: what makes adult salon LARP aesthetically distinctive is not that it hovers indecisively between game and theatre, but that it turns that hover into a dynamic mode of shared performance.

## **Defining the Form: Murder Mystery, Salon LARP, and Interactive Drama as Hybrid Practice**

The first task is definitional, though definition here must remain hospitable to ambiguity. Murder mystery parties, salon or parlorLARPs, and interactive-drama scenarios form an overlapping cluster rather than a perfectly unified genre. Some commercial murder mystery kits lean heavily toward puzzle solving and social entertainment. Their characters may be thin, their scenes structured in rounds, and their pleasures closer to comedic deduction than to serious dramatic exploration. At the other end of the spectrum lie interactive-drama salonLARPs that emphasize character, motive, social tension, and emotional consequence over neat clue management. Between those poles are many hybrids. Yet despite this range, the forms share a recognizable core. Participants enter a bounded fictional-social world, assume roles within it, and enact those roles in real time under conditions of incomplete information, interpersonal pressure, and emergent scene work.

The salon form is especially distinctive because it relies on spatial and social density rather than action sequence. Characters are usually gathered in a bounded environment and cannot simply disperse into endless landscape, dungeon corridors, or open-world wandering. They remain in one another's orbit. The setting is often explicitly social: dinner party, reception, country house weekend, family gathering, embassy cocktail, club meeting, funeral luncheon, engagement celebration, holiday dinner, artistic salon. This matters because the dramatic medium is conversation, visibility, and social maneuver rather than combat, travel, or procedural task completion. The room itself becomes a device. Who can be overheard, who can withdraw, who commands attention, who is socially central, who circulates, who is forced to remain and smile while concealing panic — these are all part of the structure.

If one looks at the formal ingredients of many adult salon LARPs, the hybridity becomes obvious. There are pre-authored characters, which suggests theatre or fiction. There are goals, secrets, and the possibility of success or failure, which suggests games. There is live scene generation without full scripting, which suggests improvisation. There is costuming, hosting, eating, mingling, and social ritual, which suggests party culture or social gathering. There is mutual observation and stylized display, which suggests performance. No single frame accounts for everything. A participant does not simply interpret a role as an actor would. Nor do they merely optimize within a ruleset. Nor do they merely converse socially. Instead, they move among these logics, often rapidly and without clean borders.

The term hybrid practice is useful precisely because it resists reduction. Hybrid does not mean weakly mixed or confused. It means constructed from multiple, partially incompatible modes that remain active together. The salon LARP participant must understand the character as a fictional person, the event as a game-like environment with consequences, the scene as a performative moment others are experiencing, and the gathering as a social occasion with etiquette and rhythm. The participant may need to strategize, emote, posture, entertain, and improvise simultaneously. That simultaneous pressure is not accidental. It is built into the medium's design.

Adult salon LARPs intensify this because adult themes often heighten self-consciousness. Seduction, status anxiety, betrayal, shame, emotional intimacy, and cultivated cruelty are not usually played in the same manner as “search the room for evidence” or “roll to persuade.” They draw attention to manner, tone, timing, surface, and social presentation. An adult player portraying a poised but collapsing

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hostess, an arrogant baron on the verge of bankruptcy, or a lover with too much to lose is not simply transmitting plot information. They are also offering others a style of presence, an interpretive surface, a social signal. The adult salon LARP therefore often becomes more theatrical not because it is scripted, but because the material itself invites and rewards stylized social performance.

It follows that analyses of the form should stop searching for the one tradition to which it really belongs. It belongs to several at once. It is not theatre diluted by amateur participation. It is not a game infected by vanity and costume. It is not merely a party with optional roleplay. It is a form in which these things coexist productively. To say that it is semi-theatrical is not to deny its game elements. To call it interactive drama is not to erase its social-event dimensions. To treat it as roleplay is not to ignore its performative display. The awkwardness of classification is not a temporary inconvenience awaiting better theory. It is a clue to the form's constitutive multiplicity.

## **Acting, Roleplaying, and Social Improvisation: Related but Distinct Modes of Performance**

When someone says, "I'm playing a character in a salon LARP," the statement sounds straightforward. In practice, it conceals several distinct activities that overlap without becoming identical. One participant may approach that task like acting, another like roleplaying, another like tactical social improvisation, and most players move among these modes without announcing the shift. Untangling them is useful, not because the essay seeks tidy disciplinary boundaries, but because the hybrid nature of the form is easier to understand when we see the distinct logics interacting inside it.

Acting, in a theatrical sense, ordinarily involves the representation of a character for an audience. The actor interprets a role within some preexisting frame, whether scripted, devised, or partially improvised. Even in improvisational theatre, the actor is generally aware that the scene is being presented outward. The labor of acting includes embodiment, voice, gesture, timing, emotional shading, and the making-readable of character to spectators. Salon LARP borrows heavily from this vocabulary. Participants embody status through posture, grief through restraint, charm through tone, menace through stillness. They modulate voice, choose physical habits, perform entrances, and stage public moments such as confessions, accusations, or toasts. If one watches a skilled salon player command a room

through nothing more than a held silence and a coldly measured reply, one is certainly watching something that belongs to performance craft.

Yet salon LARP diverges from acting in several decisive ways. There is usually no stable external audience separated from the performers. The participant is not only showing the character; they are also deciding for the character in real time. They do not simply interpret a fixed arc but choose under conditions of uncertainty, secrecy, and consequence. An actor may ask, “How should this character speak here?” A salon LARP player must also ask, “What shall I do now, given what I know, fear, and want?” That additional dimension shifts the practice toward roleplaying.

Roleplaying emphasizes situated agency. The participant inhabits a perspective within a system of goals, constraints, and social meanings. The central question is not only how to portray the character but how to act as that character under emerging conditions. A roleplayer thinks in terms of motive, knowledge, strategy, ethics, and immediate choice. In tabletop roleplaying, this often becomes explicit: what does my character do, whom do they trust, what risk do they take? Salon LARP shares this strongly. A player with a secret affair, a crumbling inheritance, and a distrustful sibling is not merely representing an emotional state. They are making decisions about disclosure, alliance, denial, and performance. They inhabit a character through action under pressure.

Still, even roleplaying does not fully capture the medium. Salon LARP also demands social improvisation in a heightened form. This is neither simply acting nor simply role-based decision-making. It is the live management of conversational flow, timing, status exchange, wit, awkwardness, interruption, seduction, and public-private transitions. One might say that social improvisation is the art of functioning inside the room as it exists right now. It asks for responsiveness to human unpredictability. Another player corners you unexpectedly. Someone misreads your implication. A joke lands and alters the room’s energy. A silence becomes charged. A revelation made in private suddenly becomes public through tone alone. None of this is fully scriptable, and not all of it is reducible to game strategy. It is social craft.

The distinction matters because each mode privileges a different orientation. Acting tends toward representation and legibility. Roleplaying tends toward motive and enacted choice. Social improvisation tends toward adaptive live interaction and scene responsiveness. Salon LARP asks players to do all three. A player may heighten the visible qualities of a role as an actor would, make tactical and ethical decisions as a roleplayer would, and manage timing and relational energy as a

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skilled social improviser would. The medium's distinctive feel comes partly from the necessity of these concurrent competencies.

Different participants often emphasize different modes, which is one reason salon LARP can feel aesthetically heterogeneous. One player may relish theatrical flourish and public scene-craft, producing lines and gestures that are knowingly stageworthy. Another may play with great internal consistency and strategic seriousness, caring less about display than about believable decision. Another may operate almost entirely through social responsiveness, contributing deft conversation, subtle alignment shifts, and a keen sense of when to push or hold back. None of these is illegitimate. Indeed, part of the form's charm is that such approaches collide. The theatrical player gives the room public electricity. The role-focused player gives the fiction weight. The socially deft improviser keeps scenes alive and mobile.

This multiplicity can also generate misunderstanding. Players coming from theatre backgrounds may find some LARP performances under-presented or insufficiently shaped. Players from roleplaying backgrounds may find theatrical flourish artificial or strategically distracting. Socially fluent newcomers with no formal LARP or theatre training may do unexpectedly well because they understand the gathering as an environment of live relational improvisation. The medium's awkwardness here is instructive. It does not simply reward one inherited skill set. It recomposes them.

There is also a philosophical difference in what each mode imagines the self is doing. Acting often presumes a split between self and role that is worked through craft. Roleplaying often emphasizes temporary inhabitation of another perspective for the sake of choice and consequence. Social improvisation highlights that all interaction, even outside explicit fiction, involves performance and adaptation. Adult salon LARP sits at the intersection of these assumptions. The player is neither pretending to be a sealed fictional object nor merely extending their everyday self into costume. They are building a temporarily usable identity in a social field that is both fictional and real. That is why it feels simultaneously playful and exposed.

The most useful conclusion is not that salon LARP must be reclassified under one of these headings, but that it is a composite performance practice. It draws from acting without requiring professional theatre convention. It draws from roleplaying without becoming only strategy and identification. It draws from social improvisation without collapsing into ordinary party behavior. The participant is making a person, making choices, and making the room work. That layered labor is one of the form's defining strengths.

## **Embodiment and Presence: The Character as a Performed Social Surface**

Salon LARP is frequently discussed in terms of character sheets, secrets, motives, and relationships, all of which matter. But the medium does not live on paper. It lives in bodies moving through rooms. Embodiment is not an optional embellishment added by especially enthusiastic players. It is one of the principal means by which the form becomes legible and dramatically effective. Characters in adult salon LARP are not merely described. They are rendered as social surfaces through voice, posture, gesture, costume, stillness, pacing, and the management of presence.

Embodiment here differs from both conventional acting and ordinary social life, though it shares traits with each. Like acting, it involves self-conscious external choices. A player may decide that their aristocratic dowager never hurries, that their anxious solicitor smiles too quickly, that their resentful daughter speaks with brutal precision, or that their disgraced diplomat treats every chair as a temporary throne. These decisions shape how others perceive the character before a single secret is discussed. Like everyday social life, embodiment is responsive and situated. The player must adjust to what the room gives back: pressure, flirtation, ridicule, danger, sympathy, attention. This makes the body less a fixed presentation than a dynamic instrument.

Presence is especially important. Presence is difficult to define without sounding mystical, but in salon LARP it is best understood as the capacity to make a role socially consequential in the room. Presence may come through flamboyance, through stillness, through erotic charge, through comic brightness, through icy composure, or through visible fragility that draws attention like a fracture line in glass. A player with strong presence alters scenes simply by entering them. Others adjust, listen, react, or watch. This is not always a matter of loudness or charisma in the conventional sense. Sometimes the most commanding participant is the one who knows precisely when not to speak.

Character, in this medium, functions as a social surface available to interpretation. Others cannot read your thoughts; they read your performed exterior. They infer from dress, timing, eye contact, evasions, poise, and inconsistency. This means that character is always partly relational. You do not merely “have” a character internally. You offer others a visible, audible, socially textured version of that

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character, and they respond to it, misread it, desire it, fear it, or test it. That is why surfaces matter so much. The room thrives on them.

Costume and style are not trivial in this regard. They are semiotic tools. A severe black dress may suggest mourning, authority, or calculated restraint. A loosened collar may indicate recent intimacy, carelessness, or a performed disregard for propriety. Gloves, rings, perfume, a walking stick, immaculate tailoring, deliberately worn velvet, a spotless hostess apron, an heirloom brooch — these can all carry narrative and status information. They also contribute to tone. Adult salon LARP often depends on the pleasure of style, and style is not superficial when it helps stabilize the social world and make characters readable to one another.

Embodied choices also shape information flow. A player may lie successfully not because the clue structure supports them, but because their bodily poise sustains innocence. Another may become suspect because they perform anxiety badly, or because their role's visible arrogance invites projection. A carefully maintained surface can protect a secret; an unintended tremor can betray it. This is one reason embodiment should not be treated as mere garnish. It is part of the medium's epistemology. People know one another in salon LARP through performance.

Adult themes make this even more pronounced. Seduction, status anxiety, shame, cultivated elegance, brittle marriage, aristocratic contempt, exhausted grief, dangerous composure — these are embodied states as much as textual ones. A player portraying a woman whose marriage is socially secure and emotionally dead can make that situation legible through how she stands beside her husband and never once actually touches him. A ruined gentleman can communicate class panic through overperformance of ease. A blackmailer can seem most threatening when they handle every object in the room as though it already belongs to them. The body makes the contradiction visible.

It is tempting to imagine embodiment as the external packaging of a prior internal role. In practice, the relationship is more circular. The player's bodily decisions shape their own experience of the character as much as the other way around. One may discover arrogance by inhabiting stillness, or discover vulnerability by allowing the voice to tighten at unexpected moments. The body is not merely delivering character. It is helping produce it.

This is one reason adult salon LARP is usefully called semi-theatrical. The room becomes an environment of mutually readable surfaces. People perform masks, and

others perform reading them. A character's inner life matters, but only insofar as it becomes available through choices that can be interpreted by live others. The dramatic event takes place not inside the brief, but on and between bodies.

## **Audience and Performer in the Same Body: The Collapse of Spectatorship**

One of the most striking features of adult salon LARP is that the line between audience and performer collapses almost entirely. In conventional theatre, the distinction is structurally foundational. Actors perform; audience members watch. Even when the boundary is blurred through immersive or interactive theatre, the roles are still usually distinguishable at some level. Salon LARP works differently. Every participant watches while being watched, performs while interpreting, evaluates while contributing, and becomes part of the scene ecology in which others are also doing the same. The same body is actor and spectator at once.

This collapse matters because it changes what performance is for. A player in salon LARP is not simply trying to "be" the character in private. They are also aware that other players are reading, enjoying, resisting, admiring, distrusting, or delighting in their portrayal. Likewise, when they watch another participant, they do not do so from safe theatrical distance. They watch from inside the same fictional-social world. The audience response is embedded in action. A cold silence after a confession is both dramatic spectatorship and in-world social reaction. Laughter at a particularly cruel line is both enjoyment of performance and part of the room's diegetic behavior. Applause is rare; scandalized murmuring does the job.

Because players are also audience members, salon LARP can never be purely immersive in the strong sense of forgetting performance altogether. Even the most emotionally invested participant may simultaneously appreciate the elegance of another player's timing or recognize that a scene has become deliciously dramatic. This is not a defect. It is part of the pleasure. One may be furious as a character and at the same time think, as a participant, "That was beautifully done." Indeed, much of the medium's communal delight depends on such doubled awareness.

Reciprocal spectatorship also means that attention is active. Players are not seated in darkness consuming finished scenes. Their attention shapes the room. A circle forming around two arguing characters creates pressure. People lingering just within earshot produce a sense of publicness. Guests withdrawing in embarrassed silence

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can intensify a revelation. A room leaning in together becomes a kind of audience formation, but one fully inside the fiction. Scenes are therefore not only made by those speaking. They are co-constituted by those watching, listening, pretending not to listen, gossiping afterward, and allowing the moment to acquire social consequence.

This arrangement complicates the idea of authenticity. Because players know they are being witnessed by other players, scenes often include self-conscious display. A character may make a dramatic public accusation not only because it is strategically wise, but because the room is there and the room matters. A player may heighten a toast, a confession, or a withering insult because part of the pleasure lies in giving everyone something to experience together. The scene is both truthful to the fiction and knowingly theatrical. To call this “showing off” would be too dismissive; though, to be fair, showing off is occasionally part of the fun. More accurately, it is social dramaturgy. Players know that the room is part of the event and perform accordingly.

This collapse of spectatorship also produces a distinctive communal ethic. Because everyone will at some point be the focus of attention, there is often a tacit understanding that good play includes giving others scenes worth having. One does not only pursue one’s own character agenda. One also notices when another player has offered an opening, when a reveal needs witnesses, when a line should land, when a silence should be honored. In this sense the audience function inside salon LARP is also collaborative. The players make one another legible.

The pleasures of witnessing are real and central. Watching another participant be devastatingly polished, heartbreakingly transparent, hilariously vicious, or majestically doomed is one of the great joys of the form. The joy is intensified by proximity. There is no proscenium to protect you from implication. You are in the same room, perhaps in the same family, perhaps the next target. The scene belongs to you as audience and as inhabitant simultaneously. That double position gives salon LARP a distributed theatricality unlike either stage drama or ordinary social interaction.

There is also something democratizing, if one wishes to be charitable, or magnificently chaotic, if one prefers accuracy. Since everyone is both performer and audience, aesthetic judgment circulates horizontally. Players learn from one another, react to one another, and often calibrate in response to the room’s appetite for style, subtlety, cruelty, sincerity, camp, or melodrama. The room teaches itself how to

watch while it plays. This produces variation across events even within the same scenario. Different groups produce different performance ecologies because reciprocal spectatorship is part of the engine.

Rather than lamenting the impossibility of pure immersion, then, one should recognize that salon LARP offers a more complex model of presence. The participant is there as character, as observing intelligence, as social being, and as co-audience. That complexity is one reason the form feels alive in a special way. Every scene is both lived and watched from within. One is performing not at others alone, but with them and before them as they do the same. The audience has not disappeared. It has dispersed into the room.

## **Improvisation Without Emptiness: Structure, Constraint, and Emergent Scene Work**

Improvisation is often treated as though it were the absence of structure, a kind of performance vacuum in which people simply make things up until something happens. Salon LARP offers a more sophisticated model. It is undeniably improvised, yet the improvisation is never empty. It unfolds inside a field of role constraints, pre-authored tensions, secrets, status relations, genre expectations, timing, space, and event triggers. Players do invent in the moment, but they invent under pressure and with consequence. Improvisation here is not freedom from form. It is form in motion.

This matters because adult salon LARP is often misunderstood by outsiders and newcomers alike. Those from theatre backgrounds may expect something closer to open improvisational scene work and be surprised by the importance of secrecy, partial information, and strategic withholding. Those from game backgrounds may underestimate the degree to which style and responsiveness matter. Those from ordinary party culture may assume the event is simply social pretending with a thin premise. In fact, improvisation in this medium is structured in at least three ways: by character, by information, and by social environment.

Character structure means that a participant arrives already burdened, in the best sense, with motive, history, status, and pressure. They may need to preserve a marriage, secure an inheritance, conceal an affair, expose a rival, protect a child, or survive scandal. These are not generic suggestions to “have fun.” They are usable constraints that generate dramatic possibility. A player given such material is not

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asked to invent a personality from nothing. They are asked to enact a person whose choices matter within a designed field of tension.

Information structure is equally important. Players do not improvise with equal knowledge. Some know secrets others do not. Some misread. Some possess clues without understanding them. Some are trapped by what they cannot safely say. This asymmetry makes improvisation directional. Scenes emerge because information collides unevenly. A private confession, a public denial, a discovered letter, a rumor, a piece of gossip, a strategic lie — these propel interaction in ways that are not random. They create pressure points where improvisation becomes scene rather than chatter.

Social environment provides the third structure. The setting dictates available gestures, degrees of privacy, rules of approach, and expectations of decorum. An aristocratic dinner party produces different improvisational texture than a bohemian afterparty or a business retreat, even if all three involve a murder. In salon LARP, environment is not backdrop. It shapes what can be done, what seems legible, and how shame or spectacle functions. A player improvises within the etiquette and architecture of the room.

This makes salon LARP improvisation distinct from theatrical improv in the conventional sense. Improvised theatre often depends on overt collaborative scene-building, shared acceptance, and the momentum of audience-visible invention. Salon LARP, by contrast, distributes creation across multiple simultaneous scenes, many of which are partially adversarial or secretive. Players are not necessarily trying to build one coherent public narrative in the moment. They are pursuing motives, concealing truths, and shaping encounters whose significance may only become clear later. The resulting scene work can nonetheless be highly dramatic. It is simply dramatic through pressure and convergence rather than through overtly collaborative “yes, and” logic.

Emergent scene work is the crucial result. A hallway confrontation, a strained toast, an accidental overhearing, a sudden alliance by the drinks table, a private seduction, or a public accusation can feel intensely theatrical despite not being scripted because the structure made such moments likely without determining them exactly. They emerge from collision. A participant enters a scene with a need. Another enters with a secret. The room’s status order shapes who can speak first. A rumor has just shifted incentives. What happens is improvised, but it is not arbitrary. It is the event-form of prior design meeting present choice.

Constraint is what makes this possible. The naive fantasy of total freedom is often poor fuel for good drama. A player told merely to “be interesting” is condemned to invent stakes instead of playing them. A player who must maintain composure while hiding debt from a lover who may also be their blackmailer has much more useful material. Constraint sharpens improvisation because it creates meaningful pressure. One has something to protect, something to gain, something to risk, and something one cannot say without cost. Suddenly the room starts writing scenes on your behalf.

That is why the semi-theatrical quality of salon LARP often comes from the tension between preparation and surprise. Players arrive with enough structure to make performance legible and enough openness to make scenes unpredictable. They are not reciting. They are not flailing. They are composing within live conditions, and composition under pressure is one of the oldest theatrical arts there is.

## **Meta-Play, Genre Awareness, and the Intelligence of Performance**

No matter how earnestly some communities praise pure immersion, salon LARP players are often acutely aware of genre. They know they are in a murder mystery, a drawing-room melodrama, an inheritance scandal, a decadent country-house weekend, a noir cocktail intrigue, or a brittle family catastrophe with very good glassware. They also know what kinds of moments such genres promise: accusations, reversals, flirtations, private confessions, dangerous toasts, sudden alibis, scandalous revelations, and the delicious possibility that someone impeccably mannered is morally revolting. This awareness does not necessarily weaken the form. Often it is one of the ways the form becomes intelligent.

Meta-play can be defined as moments when participants use player knowledge, genre literacy, or awareness of dramatic structure within their choices. That can sound suspiciously like cheating if framed poorly, but the reality is more nuanced. A player may understand that the evening needs pressure and therefore decide not to bury an important clue forever. Another may recognize that a private revelation will have more impact if delayed until after dinner. Another may choose to lean into a trope — the brittle widow, the overcharming heir, the too-composed doctor — not because they have confused the game for parody, but because such tropes are useful theatrical tools. Genre awareness becomes part of the craft of contribution.

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The key distinction is between destructive and productive meta-play. Destructive meta-play collapses the fiction into external optimization or smug knowingness. It appears when players act only to “win,” cite genre from outside in a way that punctures atmosphere, or treat the scenario as a machine to be beaten rather than a dramatic field to be shaped. Productive meta-play, by contrast, uses awareness to strengthen scenes, pacing, and tone. It is the difference between cynically gaming the structure and knowingly helping the structure become more itself.

Adult salon LARP often benefits from players who understand genre because the form is built partly from stylized expectations. A participant who knows how drawing-room tension works may pace revelations elegantly. Someone familiar with melodrama may understand that a private confession can be saved for public consequence. Someone fluent in camp may heighten surface without destroying underlying stakes. Someone who understands that a murder mystery needs witnesses as well as secrets may bring others into a scene at exactly the right moment. None of this requires abandoning character. It requires holding character and form simultaneously.

This is especially visible in tones that mix sincerity and stylization. Many adult salon mysteries are neither solemnly realistic nor wholly comic. They operate in registers of wit, irony, menace, emotional excess, and polished performance. A player may know perfectly well that they are giving the room a marvelous line while also meaning it fully in character. Another may recognize that their role as the injured spouse is almost operatically delicious and still find genuine feeling inside it. The medium can sustain such doubleness because players are not only characters but co-makers of an aesthetic event.

Meta-play also interacts with ethics. Players often sense when an event is stagnating or when another participant has set up a possibility that deserves response. Choosing to engage, escalate, or expose in those circumstances may be partly motivated by a desire to serve the game as a shared performance. This does not make the choice false. It means that salon LARP players frequently operate with a dual awareness: what would this character plausibly do, and what would make this room more dramatically alive? The answers need not conflict. In good play, they often converge.

There is a risk, of course, that genre literacy becomes overly self-satisfied. A room full of people congratulating themselves on being deliciously arch can become tiresome with alarming speed. Yet this is not an argument against meta-awareness. It

is an argument for using it well. Productive meta-play remains tethered to consequence, relationship, and tone. It knows that camp without stakes is costume noise, while seriousness without any awareness of theatrical pleasure can become leaden. Salon LARP often works best when it can think with itself, enjoying its own artifice while still allowing that artifice to hurt.

This makes meta-play less a contamination of the form than one of its internal intelligences. Players are not always trying to disappear into fiction. Sometimes they are helping the fiction become more shapely, legible, or pleasurable. In a medium where everyone is also audience and collaborator, that intelligence is not merely tolerated. It is often necessary.

## **Immersion and Theatricality: False Opposites and Productive Tensions**

Few oppositions in roleplay discourse are more persistent or less helpful than the supposed battle between immersion and theatricality. Immersion is often imagined as deep identification with character and world, a state in which the fiction feels internally coherent and the player ceases to be distracted by overt performance. Theatricality, by contrast, is often imagined as display, stylization, audience awareness, and performative flourish. One is treated as authentic; the other as artificial. Salon LARP cheerfully refuses this neat division.

A participant can be deeply immersed in a character's fear, jealousy, or shame while delivering that emotion in a manner that is palpably theatrical. A public scene can feel stylized and genuine at once. A player can know very well that they are being watched and still experience the fictional stakes intensely. The medium's richness often comes from such simultaneity. The person who gives the room a magnificent, poised breakdown is not necessarily "less immersed" than the person who mutters in a corner with method sincerity. They may simply be operating in a mode that allows emotional investment and formal awareness to coexist.

Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that immersion is not singular. Psychological immersion refers to identification with the character's perspective or emotional life. Social immersion refers to the sense that the room functions convincingly as a world of relations and consequences. Aesthetic immersion refers to absorption in atmosphere, genre, language, costume, and setting. These forms of immersion can coexist differently with theatricality. A player may not feel psychologically merged

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with the character at all and yet be strongly immersed socially and aesthetically. Another may feel psychologically involved during private scenes and highly performative during public ones. The medium allows such shifting.

Theatricality also deserves a less pejorative definition. In salon LARP, theatricality may mean heightened gesture, cultivated public scenes, stylized speech, awareness of visibility, pleasure in display, or the deliberate shaping of moments for collective witness. None of these automatically weakens the fiction. In many cases they mirror it. The characters themselves are often performing within their worlds. Aristocrats perform rank. Hosts perform hospitality. Widows perform mourning. Lovers perform innocence. Families perform unity. The player's theatricality can therefore align with the character's own in-world self-presentation. The medium becomes meta-theatrical in the best sense: people performing people who are themselves performing social roles.

Private and public scenes frequently pull players between registers. A whispered confession in the library may invite intense psychological immersion. Minutes later, a dinner-table confrontation may demand sharp theatrical control, rhetorical timing, and awareness of the room as witness. Neither mode is more authentic. Both belong to the form. Indeed, one of salon LARP's chief pleasures lies in oscillation between intimate inwardness and socially staged display. The drawing room needs both the private murmur and the public toast that turns into an execution.

The immersion/theatricality opposition also fails because it misunderstands what many players are actually seeking. Some do want strong psychological identification. Others want elegant public performance, camp pleasure, strategic scene work, or mixed tone. Most move between these desires. Adult salon LARP is capacious enough to support them because it does not demand one purist ideal. A room can contain a player who loves subtle internal realism and another who revels in heightened melodrama, and the event can still thrive if the tonal world can hold both. This tonal breadth is not always easy to achieve, but when it works it gives the form remarkable elasticity.

Moreover, theatricality can deepen immersion by giving the social world stronger shape. A room full of underplayed, inwardly occupied participants may be psychologically earnest and dramatically dead. Public theatricality creates legibility. It tells the room what kind of world this is and what kinds of scenes are possible. A sharply delivered accusation can increase everyone's sense that the fictional society

is real and consequential precisely because it manifests its rules so clearly. One is immersed not in invisible interiority alone, but in the social theater of the setting.

The opposition also obscures the role of pleasure. Players often enjoy being theatrical. They like style, rhythm, sparkle, and form. They like receiving a room's attention and giving it. That enjoyment need not be superficial. Pleasure in performance can coexist with sincerity of investment. Indeed, adult salon LARP often depends on that coexistence. One may be genuinely moved and also knowingly glamorous, genuinely furious and also rhetorically precise, genuinely ashamed and also perfectly composed. That doubleness is not a failure to choose between artifice and truth. It is a mode of truth specific to socially theatrical forms.

Thus the best account is not that salon LARP must decide between immersion and theatricality, but that it stages their interaction. Participants move among types of presence as scenes require. They become inward and outward, subtle and heightened, psychologically engaged and aesthetically aware. The form's awkwardness is again its strength. It allows a public scene to be both lived and performed, and a private scene to be both emotionally direct and shaped by genre expectation. To demand that one of these modes dominate would be to flatten what is distinctive in the medium.

## **Social Gathering as Performance Frame: Party, Ritual, and Polite Display**

One reason salon LARP feels so unlike both traditional theatre and ordinary gaming is that it often takes place under the sign of a social gathering. The event is not simply a plot container; it is a party, dinner, reception, wake, anniversary, holiday, engagement, club meeting, or house weekend. This matters aesthetically as much as narratively. Real parties are already performance environments. People arrive, dress, circulate, present themselves, manage conversations, flirt selectively, perform ease, conceal boredom, read status, and negotiate who is entitled to what tone with whom. Salon LARP fictionalizes and intensifies these behaviors without replacing them. The gathering frame is therefore not decorative. It is one of the formal reasons the medium sits between game and theatre so productively.

A party is a ritualized social stage. There are expectations of politeness, hosts and guests, entrances and departures, drinks and courses, seating arrangements, corners for intimacy and rooms for public display. Even before a murder or secret is

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introduced, such a setting generates theatrical possibilities. A hostess can perform composure while privately unraveling. A guest can overstay a conversation to imply intimacy or dominance. Someone can be excluded by where they are placed, when they are greeted, or who is not introduced to them. Manners become mechanics.

This is especially important because adult salon LARP often depends on polite surfaces concealing live tension. A cutting insult delivered in raised voices may be effective, but a surgical remark delivered under the cover of perfect civility is often better suited to the form. The party frame makes layered performance natural. Characters can say one thing and mean another while still conforming outwardly to the event's rituals. The room, in turn, becomes highly readable. Who is being frozen out, who is monopolizing attention, who cannot leave their spouse's side, who is speaking too privately to someone they should not know so well — these are all visible because parties are already scenes of mutual observation.

Hospitality is particularly fertile. Hosts and hostesses perform welcome, abundance, calm, and control. When the fictional world is cracking, that performance becomes deliciously unstable. A hostess pouring wine with perfect grace while her family scandal unfolds is not simply managing plot. She is sustaining a theatrical fiction within the fiction. Guests likewise perform gratitude, deference, flirtatious appreciation, bored superiority, or strategic compliance. The social event is therefore a frame in which performance is expected even before any explicit roleplay begins. Salon LARP simply redirects that expectation toward fictional stakes.

It also matters that part of the pleasure is genuinely social. People dress up, arrive in company, eat, mingle, and are seen. This should not be dismissed as fluff surrounding the “real” game. Being seen is part of the medium. Adult salon LARP frequently invites a form of self-conscious elegance or decadence that would feel entirely at home in historical dance culture, amateur theatricals, or old-fashioned society events. One does not only investigate the murder. One also enters the room. The entrance matters. The dress matters. The confidence, awkwardness, allure, or severity with which one inhabits the gathering matters. This social pleasure helps explain why the form cannot be understood as game mechanics alone.

The gathering frame further clarifies why everyone is always performing twice. Players perform characters who are themselves performing party selves. A charming diplomat may be performing charm strategically. A respectable aunt may be performing respectability while blackmail trembles under the gloves. A young heir may be performing nonchalance to conceal panic. The social event structure gives

these nested performances a home. It says, in effect, that performance is already the etiquette of the room. Fiction simply deepens it.

Thus the “party” aspect of salon LARP is not a side dish. It is one of the reasons the form feels like a semi-theatrical ritual rather than a game session in formalwear. The room is a gathering, and gatherings are already stages for polite display, selective revelation, and social narration. Adult salon LARP exploits this beautifully. The party is not where the game happens. It is one of the things the game is.

## **Adult Themes, Self-Conscious Display, and the Performance of Sophistication**

Adult salon LARP introduces another layer of complexity because adult themes often intensify the self-consciousness of performance. Seduction, blackmail, shame, betrayal, class panic, marital breakdown, cultivated cruelty, emotional restraint, and scandal are not typically played with the same bodily and rhetorical innocence as simpler social motives. They invite style. Participants in such games are often not merely portraying adults; they are performing sophistication, danger, elegance, decadence, worldliness, or wounded composure before one another. This can make the medium feel especially theatrical, but not in a superficial sense. The performance of sophistication becomes part of the dramatic material.

This is not identical to polish in the empty sense. Anyone can wear a satin dress and say “darling” like a threat. The more interesting phenomenon is that adult themes tend to require mixed registers of control and exposure. A player may embody a character who must remain graceful while everything personal is collapsing. Another may portray flirtation that is both strategic and emotionally real. Another may manage class superiority as a social mask that the room slowly sees through. In each case, the participant is not only delivering plot. They are staging forms of adulthood that are themselves highly performative.

The result is often a peculiar pleasure in social style. A devastatingly timed insult, a perfectly poised lie, a brittle laugh after an accusation, a toast that functions as seduction and warning at once — these moments work partly because the players appreciate them as forms of performance. Adult salon LARP is full of characters who, in-world, already know how to act in society. Hosts, lovers, politicians, aristocrats, patrons, socialites, wounded spouses, scandalized priests, dangerous artists — these are people for whom self-presentation is part of survival. The

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player's own self-conscious display can therefore mirror the character's. To perform sophistication is not to step outside the role. It is often to enter it.

This can generate striking tonal mixtures. A scene may be sincerely painful and deliciously stylish at once. A revelation of infidelity may produce genuine emotional force while also satisfying every melodramatic appetite in the room. A blackmail exchange may be morally ugly and socially elegant. A player may be moved by the character's loss and pleased by the form of the scene. Such mixtures are not signs that the players are taking nothing seriously. They are signs that the medium allows aesthetic pleasure and emotional consequence to coexist.

There is, however, a risk of confusing sophistication with surface polish alone. Adult salon LARP becomes shallow when it performs worldliness without consequence. Elegant costumes, cutting remarks, and expensive-looking gestures can create atmosphere, but they do not guarantee depth. Dramatic maturity appears when the performed sophistication becomes vulnerable to contradiction. The poised duchess panics. The charming rake cannot sustain charm under genuine accusation. The immaculate widow is forced into honesty. The social climber overperforms ease because the shame of exposure is unbearable. In other words, sophistication becomes dramatically useful when it is not just presented but pressured.

Adult themes heighten self-awareness partly because they expose the player's delight in style. This need not be treated as shameful. It is part of the form's pleasure economy. To relish elegance, decadence, menace, or wit is not to avoid seriousness. The danger arises only when style becomes untethered from relation and consequence. The strongest adult salonLARPs understand that sophistication is both mask and medium. It gives players a language for controlled display, and then the scenario tests what happens when display can no longer fully contain desire, panic, or resentment.

Thus self-conscious performance in adult salon LARP is not a cosmetic layer atop "real roleplay." It is often how the roleplay becomes legible and pleasurable. People are playing adults who know they are watched, judged, desired, envied, and remembered. Performing under those conditions is not incidental. It is the whole social weather of the room.

## **Conclusion: The Awkwardness Is the Form**

Adult salon LARPs and murder mystery parties resist neat classification because they are built from concurrent logics that do not collapse into one another. They are games, but not merely games. They are theatrical, but not simply theatre. They are social gatherings, but too structured and consequential to be ordinary sociality. They depend on role assumption, yet not on fixed scripts. They reward strategic thinking, yet not only strategic thinking. They invite immersion, yet thrive on display. They generate scenes, yet do so through distributed improvisation rather than centralized staging. The temptation to tidy these contradictions away has been strong, but it should be resisted. The awkwardness is not evidence that the form has failed to become something coherent. The awkwardness is the coherence.

The argument of this essay has been that adult salon LARP is best understood as a hybrid performance practice in which players continually negotiate among acting, roleplaying, social improvisation, spectatorship, and self-conscious display. These modes do not merely coexist abstractly. They shape what happens minute by minute. A participant embodies a role through posture and voice, makes decisions within a field of motives and consequences, responds socially to the real humans in the room, admires and interprets others' performances, and contributes to collective tone through genre-aware choices. The player is not one thing. They are several things at once, and the form depends on that simultaneity.

This becomes clear when one distinguishes acting, roleplaying, and social improvisation. Acting contributes techniques of legibility, embodiment, and presentation. Roleplaying contributes agency, motive, and enacted decision. Social improvisation contributes responsiveness, timing, and the live management of relational energy. Salon LARP borrows from all three without becoming reducible to any one. It is not amateur theatre with insufficient rehearsal. It is not a game interrupted by vanity. It is a composite practice whose demands are specific to its layered ontology.

Embodiment and presence make that ontology visible. Characters are not just psychological positions or written descriptions. They appear as social surfaces to be read, misread, desired, distrusted, and watched. Costume, gesture, stillness, and voice do not merely decorate; they help make the room function as a semi-theatrical world of interpretable signs. The same is true of the collapse of audience and performer. Players are never only one or the other. They are performing and

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witnessing simultaneously, and the pleasure of watching while participating is one of the medium's most defining sensations.

Improvisation in this context is not emptiness but structured emergence. Roles, secrets, space, motive, and status provide enough constraint to generate scenes without scripting them. This gives salon LARP its peculiar mixture of inevitability and surprise. Players feel that something is happening now, live and contingent, yet not random. Meta-play and genre awareness contribute further intelligence. Players often know what kind of event they are in and use that literacy to improve pacing, tone, and scene shape. Such awareness need not rupture the fiction. In a form where everyone is also audience and collaborator, it can be part of the craft.

Likewise, immersion and theatricality should not be treated as enemies. Salon LARP thrives on their interaction. One can be emotionally invested and publicly performative, intimate in one moment and exquisitely staged in the next. The social gathering frame intensifies this because parties, dinners, receptions, and family events are already settings of ritualized self-presentation. Adult themes heighten the effect further by making sophistication itself a performative resource. Desire, shame, blackmail, status panic, and cultivated poise all produce scenes in which players are not only inhabiting fiction but performing social surfaces before one another.

What salon LARP offers, then, is not pure identification, pure spectatorship, or pure play in any conventional sense. It offers a temporary performance ecology. A roomful of people becomes a shifting field in which everyone is making scenes, reading scenes, contributing to tone, and inhabiting roles that are at once fictional and socially actualized. The guests are characters. The characters are performers. The performers are audience. The audience is inside the fiction. It is an extraordinary arrangement precisely because it does not fit inherited categories.

To ask, finally, "What is this thing exactly?" is to ask the right question and then ruin it by expecting one answer. Salon LARP is exactly a hybrid. Exactly a collision. Exactly a mode in which acting, playing, watching, social maneuver, and theatrical self-presentation become the same event without ever becoming simple. Its borders are untidy because its pleasures are composite. It lets participants live a scene and stage it at once, savor a line while speaking it, admire another's performance while being implicated by it, and move between sincerity and stylization without having to choose a final allegiance. That is not confusion. That is craft.

The form's awkwardness, then, should be defended. It is what allows adult salon LARP to do something genuinely rare. It turns a roomful of guests into a reciprocal performance world where everyone is performing, everyone is watching, and the instability between those activities becomes the real dramatic event.

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# **Stanislavski in the Drawing Room? The Tripartite Consciousness of the Salon LARP Participant**

**Tamsin Cross**

## **Abstract**

This essay challenges the pervasive assumption that salon live-action role-playing (LARP) games represent the ultimate realization of pure, Stanislavskian psychological immersion. By deconstructing the physical, social, and mechanical constraints of the parlor LARP medium, this analysis demonstrates the cognitive impossibility of maintaining an unbroken state of fictional synthesis. Instead, the essay proposes the Tripartite Consciousness Model, arguing that skilled participants engage in a highly demanding, rapid oscillation among three distinct modes of engagement. First, players utilize interior motivation to anchor their performance in genuine emotional truth. Second, they employ theatrical presentation and Brechtian melodrama to clearly broadcast narrative intent to their unscripted peers. Third, they constantly apply social game logic to navigate abstract rulesets and secure strategic victory conditions. Through detailed phenomenological case studies of parlor mysteries and political intrigue scenarios, this paper reveals that interactive drama relies heavily on the psychological technique of “steering.” Ultimately, LARP immersion is redefined not as the total erasure of the self, but as a hyper-engaged flow state seamlessly orchestrating the actor, dramaturg, and gamer.

Keywords: Salon LARP, tripartite consciousness, psychological realism, theatrical presentation, game logic, steering

## **Introduction**

The gaslight flickers against the heavy velvet drapes of a meticulously appointed Victorian drawing room, casting long, trembling shadows across the faces of the assembled guests. In the center of the room, a player, adorned in authentic

nineteenth-century mourning attire, collapses onto a fainting couch. They are weeping openly, their shoulders heaving with the overwhelming weight of a fictional betrayal that has just been ruthlessly laid bare by a bitter rival. To the casual observer, or perhaps a documentary filmmaker capturing the event, this specific moment appears as the absolute pinnacle of theatrical immersion. It reads as a flawless execution of profound psychological realism, a breathtaking instance where the boundary separating the mundane player from the fictional character has entirely and permanently dissolved. Yet, a rigorous, phenomenological examination of this highly charged scenario reveals a much more complex, deeply fractured cognitive reality. Even as genuine, physiological tears track through their carefully applied stage makeup, the weeping player is simultaneously, and quite consciously, adjusting their physical posture to ensure that the primary antagonist — currently standing near the fireplace — has a clear, unobstructed view of their grief. Concurrently, deep within the rapid cognitive architecture of the player's mind, a complex mathematical calculation is taking place regarding exactly how this public display of extreme vulnerability alters their specific faction's hidden victory conditions before the scenario's impending temporal deadline. This singular, remarkably multifaceted moment perfectly encapsulates the central theoretical paradox of the modern interactive drama experience.

To navigate this paradox, one must first establish a firm understanding of the specific medium in question and the theoretical vocabularies used to dissect it. The salon role-playing game, frequently referred to in academic and player discourse as the parlor LARP or chamber LARP, is a highly specific subgenre of Live Action Role-Playing. Unlike expansive, weekend-long fantasy LARPs that take place across acres of sprawling woodland and rely heavily on simulated physical combat, the salon LARP is an intensely claustrophobic affair. It is typically strictly confined to a single room, a rented historic building, or a small suite of interconnected spaces. The mechanics of play in this environment are heavily, almost entirely, reliant on sustained interpersonal drama, the strategic trading of complex secrets, and rigorous, uninterrupted dialogue. The physical combat that defines other branches of the hobby is entirely abstracted or explicitly forbidden, forcing all conflict resolution into the realm of the social and the verbal.

Within this confined space, the dominant theoretical framework that players and designers historically reach for to describe their goals is psychological realism, heavily indebted to the revolutionary theatrical theories of Konstantin Stanislavski. Stanislavskian realism demands the relentless pursuit of emotional truth, the rigorous

application of the “Magic If” to bridge the gap between actor and character, and the meticulous construction of inner psychological justification for every physical action taken within the fictional space. In the context of LARP, this pursuit of Stanislavskian truth is most frequently articulated through the highly debated, almost mythic concept of pure immersion. Immersion, within the specific vernacular of role-playing communities, is posited as an idealized state of total psychological synthesis. It is described as a transcendent cognitive state where the player’s mundane consciousness is entirely subsumed by the fictional persona, resulting in a continuous, uninterrupted flow of genuine character emotion and uncalculated, organic reaction.

However, there is a pervasive, ongoing assumption deeply embedded in both the commercial marketing of these interactive dramas and the aspirational discourse of the players themselves that pure psychological realism and absolute immersion are the ultimate, achievable goals of the medium. Designers boast of scenarios that will completely transport participants to another era, while players frequently judge the qualitative success of their weekend entirely by how deeply and continuously they “became” their characters. This aspirational narrative, while romantically compelling, fundamentally ignores the rigid, inescapable constraints of the LARP medium itself. It fails to account for the physical reality of the play space, the unpredictability of co-authorship in a room full of unscripted actors, and the underlying mechanical frameworks that strictly govern the boundaries of the simulation. The drawing room, no matter how exquisitely decorated, is not merely a stage for pure psychological truth; it is a highly contested arena where multiple, often contradictory frameworks of engagement are constantly colliding.

Therefore, this essay argues that while salonLARPs intentionally and heavily invite Stanislavskian psychological realism through their setting and character design, participants absolutely do not exist in a sustained state of pure immersion. Instead, the skilled salon LARP participant engages in a fluid, highly demanding tripartite cognitive oscillation. They do not lose themselves entirely in the character; rather, they constantly and rapidly alternate among three distinct modes of engagement: interior motivation driven by psychological realism, theatrical presentation characterized by melodrama and intentional stylization, and social game logic dictated by strategic, ludic play. The player is simultaneously the Stanislavskian actor seeking emotional truth, the Brechtian director framing the scene for maximum dramatic impact, and the calculating board gamer managing abstract resources to secure a defined victory.

To fully explore and validate this tripartite model of consciousness, this essay will systematically unpack the layers of the parlor LARP experience. The investigation will begin by examining the undeniable allure of the drawing room setting, analyzing how the physical environment and character preparation explicitly encourage a Stanislavskian baseline of psychological realism. Following this, the essay will deconstruct the persistent myth of pure immersion, demonstrating the cognitive and physical impossibilities of maintaining a singular psychological state within an interactive, unscripted environment. The analysis will then pivot to explore the theatrical imperative, demonstrating how the unique peer-to-peer nature of LARP performance demands the conscious deployment of melodrama, tropes, and stylized presentation to clearly communicate narrative intent. The subsequent section will address the inescapable ludic reality of the medium, detailing how abstract game mechanics, resource management, and hidden victory conditions force the participant into a state of strategic, mathematical calculation. Having established these three distinct pillars, the essay will synthesize them into the tripartite consciousness model, illustrating how players utilize the technique of “steering” to rapidly code-switch between inner truth, outward performance, and strategic gameplay. Finally, practical case studies drawn from common salon LARP genres will be utilized to demonstrate this complex cognitive juggling act in real-time execution, proving that the true artistry of the participant lies not in losing themselves, but in mastering the simultaneous orchestration of these competing mindsets.

## **The Allure of the Drawing Room: The Stanislavskian Baseline**

The foundational architecture of the salon LARP is explicitly designed to function as an engine for psychological realism, creating an environment that heavily encourages participants to adopt a Stanislavskian approach to their fictional identities. This encouragement begins before a single word of in-character dialogue is ever spoken, rooting itself deeply in the physical realities of the chosen play space. The traditional parlor or drawing-room setting of these scenarios functions as a nearly perfect analogue to the naturalist theater box set pioneered in the late nineteenth century by dramatists such as Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov. In the naturalist theater, the stage is designed to perfectly replicate a specific, realistic domestic environment, complete with functional doors, solid furniture, and practical props, entirely eliminating the stylized, painted backdrops of earlier theatrical eras. The salon LARP takes this naturalist imperative to its absolute logical extreme.

In an outdoor, combat-oriented fantasy LARP, participants are frequently required to engage in massive acts of collective cognitive dissonance. They must actively pretend that a damp suburban campsite is actually a terrifying, magical forest, or that a combatant wearing sweatpants under a tabard is a heavily armored knight. The salon LARP, by stark contrast, seeks to entirely eliminate this imagined, heavily abstracted environment. The physical confines of the rented historic mansion, the carefully curated hotel suite, or the meticulously decorated living room usually match the fictional play space with near-perfect fidelity. When a character is instructed to search a mahogany desk for a hidden will, the player physically searches an actual mahogany desk. When a character pours a glass of sherry to steady their nerves, the player physically pours liquid from a crystal decanter. This high-fidelity environmental mapping significantly lowers the cognitive load required to simply believe in the space, freeing up immense mental resources that the player can then redirect entirely inward toward the cultivation of profound psychological realism. The drawing room becomes a sealed, perfectly controlled terrarium for human emotion, echoing the naturalist belief that human behavior is strictly determined by immediate environmental and social pressures.

This environmental realism is heavily reinforced by the extensive, text-heavy preparation demanded by modern salon LARP design, which frequently mirrors Konstantin Stanislavski's rigorous system of actor training. Central to Stanislavski's method is the concept of the "Magic If," a cognitive exercise where the actor asks themselves how they would genuinely behave if they were situated exactly within the character's specific, given circumstances. LARP character sheets are explicitly constructed to facilitate this exact psychological bridging. Unlike the character sheets of early tabletop role-playing games, which were largely comprised of numerical statistics denoting physical strength or combat prowess, the modern salon LARP character sheet is an exhaustive psychological dossier. These documents, often running to ten or more pages of dense prose, provide incredibly detailed backstories, outlining deep-seated childhood traumas, complex webs of interpersonal resentments, unrequited loves, and highly specific, often contradictory philosophical motivations.

By providing this overwhelming density of psychological given circumstances, the game designer explicitly invites the player to utilize the Magic If. The player is not asked merely to perform a set of actions; they are demanded to internally justify those actions based on the provided trauma and history. If the character sheet dictates that the protagonist harbors a deep, secret terror of abandonment stemming

from an early betrayal, the player is expected to internalize that terror, allowing it to organically color their interactions, their vocal timbre, and their physical posture when confronted with the threat of isolation during the game. The character sheet functions as a highly specific psychological blueprint, demanding that the participant construct a fully realized, internally consistent human consciousness before the scenario even commences.

This pursuit of internal consistency inevitably leads to one of the most celebrated, and occasionally perilous, phenomena within the interactive drama community: the concept of emotional bleed. Coined within the Nordic LARP tradition by theorists such as Sarah Lynne Bowman and Jaakko Stenros, bleed refers to the highly permeable cognitive boundary between the player and the character. Bleed occurs when the genuine, mundane emotions of the player bleed into the fictional persona, or conversely, when the manufactured, highly dramatic emotions of the fictional persona bleed out into the real-world psychology of the player. Within the context of the salon LARP, bleed is frequently utilized as a deliberate, highly effective technique for achieving Stanislavskian realism.

This process closely mirrors Stanislavski's early, controversial concept of "emotion memory" or affective memory, where an actor recalls a specific, traumatic or joyful event from their own life to trigger a genuine physiological and emotional response on stage, which is then mapped onto the fictional scene. A LARP participant, tasked with portraying a character enduring the agonizing grief of a sudden bereavement, may consciously or unconsciously draw upon their own real-world experiences of loss to generate authentic tears, a trembling voice, and a genuinely heavy heart. The fictional stimulus — a piece of paper indicating that a fictional spouse has been murdered — is undeniably fake, but the physiological and emotional responses generated by the player utilizing their own psychological architecture are undeniably, biologically real. This synthesis of fictional circumstance and genuine emotional output represents the absolute zenith of the Stanislavskian ideal within the role-playing space, creating moments of devastating, breathtaking authenticity that participants often remember vividly for years.

The intense prioritization of this specific mode of psychological realism is not merely a stylistic preference; it is deeply tied to the cultural prestige and historical development of the LARP medium itself. For decades, live-action role-playing struggled with a pervasive cultural stigma, frequently dismissed by outsiders as a frivolous, fundamentally childish activity focused entirely on hitting people with

foam swords or rolling dice to determine abstract outcomes. In response to this stigma, significant segments of the LARP community, particularly those drawn to the salon and parlor formats, actively elevated psychological realism and deep immersion as the absolute “highest” and most mature forms of play. This cultural shift represented a deliberate, intellectualized reaction against the gamist, combat-heavy origins of the hobby. By aligning their activities with the respected traditions of literary naturalism, avant-garde theater, and intense psychological exploration, participants and designers legitimized their hobby as a profound, transformative artistic medium. Consequently, the pursuit of Stanislavskian truth in the drawing room became not just a method of playing a game, but a powerful marker of artistic seriousness, dedicating the community to the relentless, exhausting pursuit of the perfect, unbroken illusion of an alternate human consciousness.

## **The Myth of Pure Immersion: Limits of the Psychological Model**

Despite the intense allure of the drawing room and the explicit structural invitations to engage in Stanislavskian psychological realism, the concept of “pure immersion” remains a highly problematic and ultimately mythological construct within the critical discourse of live-action role-playing. To understand the profound limitations of the psychological model, one must first rigorously define and subsequently deconstruct the concept of immersion itself. Within the vanguard of Nordic LARP theory, scholars such as J. Tuomas Harviainen and Markus Montola have dedicated significant academic inquiry to mapping the boundaries of the immersive state. Immersion is frequently defined within these circles as the temporary, localized phenomenon where the player’s consciousness and the character’s consciousness become functionally indistinguishable, resulting in a state where the player forgets their external reality and experiences the fictional world as immediate, unmediated truth. However, even the most ardent proponents of this theoretical model concede that 100% continuous immersion is a cognitive and physiological impossibility. The human brain cannot entirely sever its connection to the primary physical reality of the play space. Intrusive physiological imperatives — such as fatigue, hunger, thermal discomfort, or the pressing need to use the restroom — constantly puncture the delicate membrane of the fictional illusion. Furthermore, the physical constraints of the real world, such as the actual dimensions of a rented room or the undeniable presence of modern fire exits and electrical outlets, require the player to maintain a persistent, low-level cognitive awareness of their actual surroundings to navigate the

space safely. Therefore, immersion cannot be understood as a sustained, unbroken psychological state; rather, it is highly episodic, existing in fleeting, precarious micro-moments that are inevitably and repeatedly shattered by the undeniable demands of mundane reality.

Beyond the unavoidable intrusions of the physical world, the very utility of the fictional character undermines the concept of pure, unalloyed immersion. Participants do not simply vanish into their characters; rather, they actively and consciously utilize the character construct as a robust psychological shield, a phenomenon widely theorized in role-playing studies as the “alibi” of the character. The alibi functions as a socially and cognitively agreed-upon mechanism that grants the player permission to engage in extreme, transgressive, or highly emotional social behaviors safely, insulated from the real-world consequences those behaviors would normally incur. In the mundane world, screaming at a peer, aggressively blackmailing an acquaintance, or sobbing uncontrollably on the floor of a drawing room would result in severe social ostracization or immediate psychological intervention. However, under the protective alibi of the fictional persona, these exact same actions become not only permissible but actively celebrated as “good play.” The crucial theoretical point here is that the effective utilization of the alibi absolutely requires a maintained cognitive distance between the player and the character. If the player were purely and totally immersed — if they literally believed they were the target of blackmail or the victim of a catastrophic betrayal — the resulting psychological trauma would be genuine and devastating. The safety of the LARP medium relies entirely on the player’s persistent, conscious awareness that the trauma belongs to the character, not the self. This fundamental separation allows the player to safely orchestrate and enjoy the suffering of their fictional counterpart, a dynamic that is completely irreconcilable with the concept of pure, Stanislavskian psychological synthesis.

This necessary cognitive separation is further exacerbated by the chaotic, deeply unpredictable nature of the interactive medium itself. In traditional, text-based theater, the Stanislavskian actor relies heavily on the absolute certainty of the script. Because the actor knows exactly what is going to happen, what every other character is going to say, and precisely how the scene will conclude, they can dedicate their entire cognitive capacity to cultivating their inner psychological truth and exploring the nuanced “how” and “why” of their performance. The salon LARP, conversely, operates under the terrifying paradigm of the unscripted interactor. The participant is thrust into an environment populated by dozens of other autonomous, unpredictable

agents, all of whom are simultaneously pursuing their own hidden agendas, misinterpreting social cues, and improvising dialogue in real-time. This structural chaos forces continuous, jarring cognitive breaks from pure internal realism. When an opposing player suddenly and unexpectedly reveals a devastating plot twist, physically produces a forged document, or initiates a sudden, unscripted shouting match, the targeted participant cannot simply react from a place of pure, pre-programmed character psychology. They must first process the new stimulus as a player: rapidly analyzing the implications of this new information on the overarching narrative, evaluating the safety and boundaries of the physical interaction, and calculating a response that makes dramatic sense within the established fiction. Only after this rapid, out-of-character cognitive processing is complete can the player translate their response back through the filter of the character's psychology. This constant requirement to instantly process and adapt to chaotic external stimuli ensures that the player's consciousness remains highly active, vigilant, and fundamentally separate from the character they are portraying.

To fully articulate this dual state of consciousness, we must apply Erving Goffman's seminal framework of frame analysis to the live-action role-playing environment. Goffman posits that human experience is organized by "frames," which are cognitive structures that define the specific reality of a given situation and dictate the appropriate modes of behavior within it. In a salon LARP, the participant is continuously suspended between two distinct, concurrent frameworks: the primary framework of the physical, social reality (a group of adults playing a game in a rented room) and the secondary, keyed framework of the play reality (a group of Victorian aristocrats navigating a deadly political crisis). Goffman's theory dictates that the individual is always, inextricably bound to the primary framework; the play frame is merely a temporary overlay that fundamentally depends on the primary frame for its existence. Therefore, the LARP participant is always simultaneously aware of the "play frame" and the "social frame." When a player hands another player a prop letter, they are simultaneously executing an action within the fiction (transferring a deadly secret) and executing an action within the social reality (safely handing a piece of paper to a friend without violating their physical boundaries). This persistent, unavoidable double consciousness — the constant, simultaneous awareness of both the mundane reality and the fictional overlay — serves as the final, absolute refutation of the myth of pure immersion. The player is never truly lost in the drawing room; they are always, at some level, acutely aware that they are standing on a stage of their own collective making.

## **The Theatrical Imperative: Melodrama, Stylization, and Performance**

Having deconstructed the illusion of continuous psychological immersion, we must now examine the second critical mode of the tripartite consciousness: the theatrical imperative. While salon LARPs differ from traditional theater in their lack of a script and their emphasis on interactivity, they remain, at their core, a deeply performative medium. However, the nature of this performance is fundamentally altered by the unique architecture of the audience. In a conventional theatrical production, the actors perform for a passive, unseen audience situated in the darkened expanse of the auditorium. The proscenium arch cleanly divides the observers from the observed. In the salon LARP, this division is completely eradicated. The medium is entirely defined by its peer-to-peer performance structure; there is no external audience. The participants perform exclusively for each other, existing simultaneously as the actors generating the narrative and the audience consuming it. This 360-degree, fully integrated performance environment forces a necessary departure from pure, subtle internal realism into the realm of external projection and intentional theatricality. A player cultivating a beautifully nuanced, deeply internalized psychological state of quiet despair is contributing absolutely nothing to the collective experience if that despair is completely illegible to the other participants in the room. To successfully participate in the collaborative creation of the narrative, the player must actively externalize their inner life, transforming private psychological truth into public, observable performance.

This absolute necessity for public legibility inevitably drives the salon LARP away from the subtle nuances of literary naturalism and directly toward the mechanics of melodrama. In the context of a four-hour interactive drama, time is a severely limited and highly contested resource. There is simply not enough time for characters to engage in the slow, realistic development of relationships, the gradual uncovering of deep-seated neuroses, or the subtle, unspoken communication of shifting loyalties. To drive the plot forward and ensure that critical information is successfully transmitted across the chaotic environment of the drawing room, players must consciously deploy heightened, stylized emotional states. Melodrama, therefore, functions not as a failure of acting ability, but as a highly sophisticated, necessary mechanical tool. Sweeping physical gestures, dramatic, gasping reactions to sudden news, loud, public accusations across the parlor, and the theatrical swoon are all employed to clearly and efficiently broadcast plot developments to the

surrounding room. If a player discovers that their drink has been poisoned, dying quietly and realistically in the corner of a sofa serves only to isolate their narrative. Dying loudly, dramatically clutching their throat, and collapsing into the center of the room, conversely, immediately alerts the entire “audience” of co-players to the presence of a murderer, instantly generating new plot hooks and driving the collective narrative forward. The skilled LARP participant understands that their performance must be “read” by people who are actively distracted by their own goals, and they intentionally modulate their output — sacrificing subtle realism for melodramatic clarity — to ensure their story is heard.

This conscious modulation of performance requires a specific psychological detachment that aligns much more closely with Bertolt Brecht’s theories of epic theater than with Stanislavski’s psychological realism. Brecht famously advocated for the *Verfremdungseffekt*, or the alienation effect, wherein the actor deliberately prevents the audience (and themselves) from fully identifying with the character, ensuring that the performance remains an object of critical observation rather than mere emotional consumption. In the salon LARP, players frequently and intentionally engage in a form of applied Brechtian awareness. They consciously break their own psychological realism, alienating themselves from the character’s internal survival instincts, in order to “show” the character to the room rather than simply “be” the character. The most profound manifestation of this Brechtian approach in the modern LARP community is the widely celebrated practice of “playing to lose.” A player operating under pure Stanislavskian immersion, deeply identifying with their character’s psychological truth, would logically fight tooth and nail for their character’s survival, prosperity, and happiness. However, a player operating under Brechtian theatrical awareness understands that tragedy is often vastly more aesthetically pleasing and narratively compelling than unbroken success. Therefore, the player will consciously, stylizedly, and deliberately steer their character toward a dramatic, tragic downfall — walking into an obvious trap, confessing to a crime they could have easily hidden, or dramatically sacrificing themselves for a doomed cause. This choice represents a total victory of external theatrical presentation over internal psychological motivation, prioritizing the aesthetic enjoyment of the collective group over the simulated survival instinct of the individual persona.

To further facilitate this rapid, highly legible style of collaborative performance, participants and designers rely heavily on the deployment of easily recognizable tropes and established cultural archetypes. In a room filled with forty unscripted

actors attempting to establish a cohesive narrative within a matter of hours, there is little room for profound, unprecedented psychological originality. Instead, players instinctively adopt deeply ingrained cultural templates: the Dashing Rogue, the Weeping Widow, the Machiavellian Politician, the Naive Heir, or the Stoic Bodyguard. These tropes function as vital cognitive shortcuts, allowing players to immediately understand their interpersonal dynamics and established power structures without the need for hours of slow, naturalistic exposition. When a player wearing a heavy leather coat and a scowl enters the drawing room, the other participants instantly and correctly read the “dangerous outsider” archetype, allowing them to instantly calibrate their own theatrical responses — feigning fear, demonstrating disdain, or attempting seduction — based on that rapid assessment. While critics of the medium might dismiss these archetypes as evidence of shallow characterization, they are, in fact, an essential functional component of the theatrical imperative. They provide a shared, universally understood vocabulary of behavior that enables a group of strangers to instantly bypass the awkwardness of initial introductions and dive directly into the creation of high-stakes, collaborative drama, prioritizing the speed and legibility of the performance over the intricate depths of pure psychological realism.

## **The Ludic Reality: Strategic Play and Game Logic**

While the drawing room actively invites deep psychological exploration and the peer-to-peer performance environment absolutely necessitates stylized, theatrical presentation, there remains a third, inescapable foundational pillar of the salon LARP experience: the fundamental reality that it is, unequivocally, a game. To comprehensively understand the cognitive state of the participant, one must rigorously apply established role-playing game (RPG) theory to the interactive drama space. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, RPG theorists developed the GNS Theory, which categorizes player engagement into three distinct modes: Gamism, Narrativism, and Simulationism. While the Stanislavskian pursuit of inner truth aligns closely with Simulationism, and the Brechtian desire for a compelling story aligns with Narrativism, the undeniable presence of Gamism within the salon LARP cannot be ignored or marginalized. The interactive drama is inextricably bound by rigid rulesets, defined mechanical systems, and the ultimate, often arbitrary authority of the Game Master (GM) or facilitator. These mechanics exist entirely outside the psychological reality of the fictional character. When a participant is forced to temporarily pause a heated, emotionally devastating in-character argument to consult a physical rulebook, draw a randomized playing card to determine the outcome of a

contested action, or wait for a facilitator to adjudicate a complex mechanical dispute, their consciousness is violently ripped from the realm of pure Stanislavskian immersion. They are forced to engage with the underlying mathematical and logical architecture of the simulation. This engagement requires a highly specific, analytical cognitive posture that is completely antithetical to the organic flow of unmediated human emotion, proving that the player must constantly maintain a vigilant awareness of the rules that govern their fictional existence.

This analytical cognitive posture becomes glaringly apparent when examining the pervasive mechanics of resource management and structured victory conditions. In an effort to provide structure and momentum to the unscripted narrative, modern salon LARP designers frequently implement complex, abstract mechanical systems. A participant's character sheet might dictate that they possess three "action points" to spend over the course of the four-hour event, or they might begin the game holding a hand of physical "item cards" representing poisons, forged documents, or hidden wealth. Furthermore, they are almost universally assigned specific, highly structured "victory conditions" — such as acquiring a certain amount of fictional currency, ensuring the political ruin of a specific rival, or successfully escaping the drawing room with a stolen artifact. The introduction of these highly gamified elements fundamentally shifts the participant's mindset from that of an actor exploring psychological truth to that of a competitive board gamer calculating optimal pathways to success. When a player realizes they only have one hour remaining to achieve their secret objective, their internal monologue abruptly shifts from a Stanislavskian exploration of their character's underlying childhood trauma to a frantic, mathematical calculation of risk versus reward. They must strategically evaluate which of the other participants holds the necessary resources, calculate the mechanical cost of engaging them in a contested action, and determine the most efficient route to mechanically secure their victory condition before the temporal deadline. This ruthless, abstract strategic planning occupies a massive portion of the player's cognitive bandwidth, running concurrently and constantly beneath the surface of their theatrical performance.

The profound cognitive dissonance generated by these underlying game mechanics is most acutely felt when confronting the epistemology of secrets, a structural hallmark of the salon LARP. Many chamber LARPs, particularly those adhering to the classic murder mystery or political conspiracy genres, are intricately constructed around the hoarding, discovering, and leveraging of hidden information. In these scenarios, the ludic objective of the player frequently and violently clashes with the

established psychological motivation of the character. Consider a scenario where a player knows, purely through out-of-character metagaming or an understanding of the game's structural design, that they absolutely must locate a physical clue card hidden somewhere in the room to solve the mystery and achieve their mechanical victory condition. However, according to the exhaustive, Stanislavskian backstory provided on their character sheet, their fictional persona is a deeply pious, intensely respectful clergyman who possesses absolutely no logical or psychological justification for spontaneously ransacking the host's private writing desk. This creates a profound state of cognitive dissonance. The player wants to win the game, but the character has no reason to execute the actions required for victory. To resolve this tension, the player must invent a fabricated, often highly contrived internal justification — perhaps deciding that the clergyman is suddenly overcome by a bout of divine, righteous suspicion — in order to execute the ludic necessity of searching the desk while maintaining a thin veneer of narrative consistency. This constant, exhausting mental gymnastics — manufacturing retroactive psychological motivations to justify purely strategic, game-driven actions — is a defining characteristic of the parlor LARP experience, proving that the game logic frequently dictates the narrative, rather than the narrative organically generating the action.

The dominance of this ludic reality frequently manifests in the controversial but undeniable practices of social engineering and metagaming. Metagaming occurs when a participant utilizes out-of-character knowledge or real-world social dynamics to achieve an in-game advantage, a practice that completely shatters the illusion of pure Stanislavskian immersion. Because the salon LARP relies entirely on interpersonal negotiation, the real-world charisma, physical presence, and pre-existing friendships of the players inevitably bleed into the fictional power dynamics of the drawing room. A player attempting to mechanically secure a vital alliance is not merely relying on the fictional persuasive abilities written on their character sheet; they are actively leveraging their real-world social capital. They may intentionally target a participant they know from outside the game, utilizing their real-world friendship to secure a fictional favor, or they may exploit a known loophole in the game's written ruleset to trap an opponent in an inescapable mechanical corner. In these highly competitive moments, the participant abandons the pursuit of emotional truth entirely, treating the other players not as complex fictional entities to be engaged with dramatically, but as mechanical obstacles to be outmaneuvered or resources to be ruthlessly exploited. The drawing room ceases to be a stage for naturalistic human drama and transforms completely into a complex,

multi-layered puzzle box where strategic dominance, mechanical manipulation, and social engineering are the primary tools for achieving success.

## **The Tripartite Synthesis: Code-Switching and Steering**

Having systematically isolated and examined the three distinct modes of engagement — the Stanislavskian pursuit of interior psychological truth, the Brechtian necessity of outward theatrical presentation, and the ludic reality of strategic game logic — we must now synthesize these elements to understand how they operate concurrently within the mind of the participant. The mechanism that allows a player to navigate the gaping chasms between these contradictory frameworks is articulated in Nordic LARP theory as the concept of “steering.” First formally defined by scholar Markus Montola, steering is the psychological process by which a player subtly, often invisibly, directs their character’s actions to fulfill out-of-character goals or desires, all while maintaining the outward illusion of consistent, organic character motivation. Steering is the invisible bridge between the player and the persona. When a player actively decides to have their character walk across the drawing room to interact with a specific participant because that participant is a real-world friend they wish to play with, or because that participant holds a mechanical item card they desperately need to win, they are steering. The character is entirely unaware of the real-world friendship or the abstract item card; the character simply feels a sudden, inexplicable urge to strike up a conversation by the fireplace. Steering is the ultimate proof that the player’s consciousness is never subsumed by the character. The player is always hovering slightly above the fiction, acting as an invisible puppet master, continuously steering the character through the chaotic environment to satisfy the intersecting demands of the narrative, the performance, and the game.

This concept of steering leads directly to the core theoretical proposition of this essay: the Tripartite Consciousness Model. The highly skilled salon LARP participant does not strive to completely eliminate their mundane consciousness in a doomed pursuit of pure, unbroken psychological immersion. Nor do they exclusively favor one mode of play over the others, as relying solely on game logic produces a sterile, robotic experience, while relying solely on melodrama produces a shallow, cartoonish farce. Instead, the masterful player functions as a highly agile cognitive juggler, existing in a state of rapid, continuous oscillation among the three established modes. Mode One, Interior Motivation, is the Stanislavskian engine; it is the player searching for emotional truth, grounding their reactions in the character’s constructed trauma, and generating authentic psychological depth. Mode Two,

Theatrical Presentation, is the director's lens; it is the player actively formatting that inner truth into a highly legible, stylized performance designed to clearly communicate narrative intent to the surrounding peers. Mode Three, Social Game Logic, is the strategist's calculus; it is the player constantly evaluating the underlying rules, managing abstract resources, and steering the character toward specific victory conditions. The true artistry of the interactive drama participant lies in the simultaneous orchestration of these three distinct modes, seamlessly weaving them together to create a compelling, coherent, and mechanically successful presence within the fictional world.

To truly grasp the phenomenal cognitive agility required to sustain this tripartite consciousness, one must perform a detailed phenomenological analysis of the micro-transitions that occur minute-to-minute during active play. Consider a highly charged scenario: Player A's character is suddenly and viciously insulted by a bitter rival in the center of the drawing room. In the span of perhaps three seconds, Player A must execute a flawless sequence of cognitive code-switching. First, they engage Mode One (Interior Motivation), instantly filtering the insult through their character's specific insecurities and experiencing a genuine, physiologically real sting of humiliation or rage, effectively achieving a micro-moment of Stanislavskian bleed. Second, almost instantaneously, they engage Mode Two (Theatrical Presentation). Recognizing that quietly internalizing this rage serves no narrative purpose, they consciously amplify the reaction, producing a sharp, highly stylized, and perfectly audible gasp, taking a deliberate, staggering step backward to ensure the entire room registers the profound gravity of the offense. Finally, while still physically performing this stylized shock, they engage Mode Three (Social Game Logic). They scan the room, noticing that the distraction caused by their public humiliation has drawn the GM's attention and caused an opposing faction member to look away from a vital prop table. Recognizing a fleeting strategic advantage, Player A utilizes the cover of their theatrical swoon to subtly shift their positioning, preparing to steal a critical item card the moment the scene escalates further. In this brief, mundane interaction, the player has seamlessly cycled through pure emotion, calculated performance, and ruthless strategy without ever breaking the overarching illusion of the play frame.

This continuous, exhausting process of cognitive code-switching necessitates a radical redefinition of the term "immersion" as it is utilized within the interactive drama community. If immersion is no longer understood as the total, impossible erasure of the player-self into a fictional identity, it must be reimagined as a highly

specialized manifestation of the psychological “Flow” state, a concept famously articulated by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Flow is defined as an optimal state of consciousness where an individual is completely absorbed in an activity, characterized by a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity. In the context of the salon LARP, immersion is not the loss of the mind; it is the hyper-engagement of the mind. It is the exhilarating, frictionless Flow state achieved when a player is successfully and simultaneously managing the interior truth, the outward presentation, and the underlying game logic without feeling overwhelmed or paralyzed by the cognitive load. When a participant reports having experienced a deeply “immersive” LARP, they are not actually claiming they briefly believed they were a Victorian aristocrat. Rather, they are describing the sublime, deeply satisfying psychological sensation of successfully multitasking across all three modes of the tripartite consciousness, achieving a perfect, harmonious synthesis of the Stanislavskian actor, the Brechtian director, and the competitive ludologist living concurrently within their own mind.

## **Case Studies: The Tripartite Model in Practice**

To transition this theoretical framework from the realm of abstract academic postulation into the concrete, observable reality of interactive drama, we must subject the Tripartite Consciousness Model to rigorous phenomenological analysis through specific, highly detailed case studies. By meticulously dissecting the minute-to-minute cognitive and physical actions of players navigating established, ubiquitous salon LARP genres, the fluid, necessary oscillation among interior psychological truth, outward theatrical presentation, and strategic game logic becomes undeniably visible. These case studies will not merely summarize the plots of fictional games; rather, they will act as cognitive autopsies, freezing critical moments of high-stakes interaction to reveal the complex, three-tiered mental architecture supporting the player’s performance.

### **Case Study 1: The Parlor Murder Mystery**

The classic parlor murder mystery stands as the most culturally recognizable and structurally rigid iteration of the salon LARP medium. Rooted heavily in the literary traditions of Agatha Christie and Arthur Conan Doyle, these scenarios are explicitly designed around a central epistemological void: the identity of the murderer. For this analysis, we will observe a participant, whom we shall designate as Player X, portraying the character of the Grieving Widow. The scenario dictates that the

wealthy patriarch of the family has just been discovered poisoned in his study, and the drawing room is now locked until the authorities arrive in exactly two hours. Player X's character sheet provides a dense, Stanislavskian psychological profile: the Widow genuinely loved her husband in their youth, but suffered through decades of his quiet, suffocating emotional abuse, resulting in a fractured psyche characterized by profound grief inextricably tangled with an overwhelming, guilty sense of relief. Furthermore, the character sheet contains a critical, mechanical secret: the Widow is not the murderer, but she is currently carrying a forged amendment to the will in her velvet reticule, a prop she must physically plant in the library to secure her financial future.

In the immediate aftermath of the body's discovery, Player X actively engages Mode One: Interior Motivation. Drawing heavily upon the techniques of emotion memory, the player attempts to genuinely process the complex, contradictory psychological cocktail of shock, mourning, and liberated relief demanded by the character's backstory. They focus their internal monologue on the imagined years of fictional abuse, allowing a genuine, physiological heaviness to settle into their chest and genuine tears to prick at the corners of their eyes. This is the pursuit of pure, Stanislavskian truth; the player is attempting to feel exactly what the Widow would feel in this horrific moment. However, this purely internal state is entirely insufficient for the demands of the interactive medium. The other participants in the room — the suspicious siblings, the calculating lawyer, the observant detective — are actively scanning the environment for behavioral anomalies. If Player X simply sits quietly in a corner experiencing internal, invisible grief, they contribute nothing to the narrative and invite immediate, overwhelming suspicion.

Consequently, Player X must instantly layer Mode Two: Theatrical Presentation over their internal psychological state. The subtle, quiet reality of their inner grief must be consciously amplified, stylized, and projected outward for public consumption. Player X produces a black lace handkerchief, raising it to their face with a deliberate, trembling gesture that is significantly more pronounced than a naturalistic reaction would dictate. They intentionally pitch their voice to a fragile, breathy register, ensuring that their soft, theatrical sobs are perfectly audible over the ambient murmur of the drawing room. When the amateur detective aggressively questions them about their whereabouts during the hour of the murder, Player X does not simply answer realistically; they execute a highly stylized, melodramatic performance of offended Victorian sensibilities, clutching their pearls and staggering slightly backward to physically manifest their shock at the accusation. This

Brechtian, highly legible performance serves a dual purpose: it explicitly communicates the character's emotional state to the "audience" of peers, and it actively shields the character from immediate suspicion by fulfilling the established cultural trope of the fragile, innocent mourner.

Yet, simultaneously operating beneath the tears and the theatrical swoons is the relentless, calculating engine of Mode Three: Social Game Logic. Even as Player X wept openly and defended their honor, they were acutely, constantly aware of the ticking clock measuring the two hours until the game's conclusion. The player knows they must execute a highly specific mechanical action — planting the forged will — to achieve their defined victory condition. This ludic imperative forces a completely different cognitive posture. While physically performing the role of the devastated widow, Player X is strategically mapping the physical space of the drawing room, tracking the sightlines of the other players, and monitoring the location of the Game Master. They calculate that the library is currently occupied by the rival sibling, making an immediate attempt to plant the document mechanically impossible. Therefore, Player X utilizes the technique of steering. They consciously direct their theatrical grief toward the lawyer character, intentionally creating a loud, melodramatic distraction on the opposite side of the room. This public, highly emotional confrontation (Mode Two) is fueled by the character's genuine, internal resentment of the lawyer (Mode One), but it is entirely orchestrated and executed for the explicit, strategic purpose of drawing the rival sibling out of the library (Mode Three). When the sibling steps out to observe the commotion, Player X seamlessly drops the theatrical sobbing for a fraction of a second, utilizes their real-world spatial awareness to slip unnoticed into the library, mechanically deposits the prop card in the designated location, and instantly resumes their weeping as they re-enter the main parlor. In this singular sequence, the player has flawlessly orchestrated a symphony of inner truth, outer projection, and ruthless game mechanics, proving that the parlor mystery is never solved through pure immersion, but through masterful cognitive multitasking.

## **Case Study 2: The Vampire and the Architecture of Political Intrigue**

To further validate the universality of this tripartite model across different thematic variations of the medium, we must examine a scenario that fundamentally alters the nature of the characters and the mechanics of resolution: the Gothic, political intrigue LARP, heavily influenced by systems such as *Vampire: The Masquerade*. In these specific salon environments, players portray immortal, predatory creatures

confined to a “Court” or “Elysium” where physical violence is strictly prohibited by supernatural law, forcing all conflict into the realm of intense, high-stakes political maneuvering. For this analysis, we observe Player Y, portraying an ancient, aristocratic vampire of a deeply manipulative lineage. The character sheet dictates a psychology burdened by centuries of crushing ennui, a terrifyingly alien moral compass, and a tragic, burning obsession with a specific mortal servant whom they are forbidden to transform. Mechanically, the game utilizes a complex, abstracted economy of “Boon” cards — representing debts and favors owed — and a system of “Status” tokens that strictly dictate voting power within the Court’s rigid hierarchy.

Player Y’s engagement with Mode One: Interior Motivation is profoundly demanding, requiring them to constantly simulate an entirely non-human, immortal consciousness. To achieve this Stanislavskian baseline, the player focuses intently on the concept of eternal stagnation, cultivating an internal sensation of deep, cold detachment from the petty, fleeting concerns of the younger vampires buzzing around the room. When conversing, Player Y internally anchors their reactions in the tragic memory of their forbidden mortal romance, allowing a genuine sense of profound, isolating loneliness to bleed into their performance. This internal emotional architecture prevents the character from devolving into a cartoonish, mustache-twirling villain, grounding the monster in a recognizable, albeit terrifying, emotional reality.

However, the peer-to-peer performance environment of the vampire Court demands an extreme, highly codified execution of Mode Two: Theatrical Presentation. Because physical combat is forbidden, the threat of violence must be entirely sublimated into physical posture, stylized movement, and the aggressive domination of physical space. Player Y cannot simply feel ancient and dangerous; they must undeniably look and act ancient and dangerous. To achieve this, the player adopts a highly controlled, unnerving physicality. They consciously eliminate all fidgeting and unnecessary movement from their body, moving across the room with a slow, deliberate, predatory grace. They intentionally maintain unblinking eye contact for uncomfortably long durations, violating normal social proxemics to physically intimidate their conversation partners. They pitch their voice to a smooth, hypnotic cadence, ensuring that even a casual request for a glass of synthetic blood sounds like a veiled, terrifying threat. This performance is entirely Brechtian in its self-awareness; Player Y is consciously manipulating their real-world physical presence to broadcast the abstract concept of supernatural terror to the surrounding

participants, utilizing the tropes of the Gothic seducer to clearly establish their position within the social hierarchy.

Beneath this terrifying, stylized facade, however, operates the frantic, mathematical calculus of Mode Three: Social Game Logic. The overarching narrative of the evening centers on an impending vote to elect a new leader of the Court, a position Player Y's character desperately desires. To win this election, Player Y requires exactly seven Status tokens, but they currently possess only four. The entire slow, predatory performance is essentially a theatrical smokescreen obscuring a relentless, strategic board game. As Player Y glides across the room, staring unblinkingly into the eyes of a younger vampire, they are not merely exploring the psychological dynamics of predator and prey; they are actively calculating a complex mechanical trade. The player knows the younger vampire holds a major Boon card owed by a powerful elder. Player Y engages in a terrifying, in-character monologue about the heavy burdens of immortality (Mode One and Two), but the actual, functional purpose of the conversation is to offer two minor Boon cards and one Status token in exchange for the major Boon card (Mode Three).

The cognitive juggling required in this moment is astounding. If Player Y breaks character to bluntly negotiate the mechanical trade, they shatter the immersive atmosphere of the Court and likely alienate their scene partner. Conversely, if they rely entirely on atmospheric, in-character threats without clearly communicating the exact mechanical exchange of the physical cards, the transaction fails to register within the game's ruleset, leaving them short of the necessary votes. Therefore, Player Y must seamlessly weave the game logic into the theatrical presentation. They utilize steering to frame the mechanical trade as an ancient, ritualistic offering, physically sliding the required prop cards across the table with terrifying, stylized grace while maintaining the internal, psychological weight of their character's ancient arrogance. The ultimate victory of the character in the political arena is not achieved because the player successfully believed they were a vampire; it is achieved because the player successfully utilized the theatrical performance of a vampire to flawlessly execute an optimal, highly calculated mathematical strategy within the game's resource economy.

## **Conclusion**

The persistent, romanticized narrative that the salon LARP is the ultimate, unfettered realization of pure Stanislavskian psychological realism is a compelling myth, but it

is one that fundamentally fails to survive rigorous academic scrutiny. The physical reality of the rented drawing room, the chaotic unpredictability of dozens of unscripted co-authors, and the rigid, inescapable boundaries of the underlying game mechanics absolutely preclude the possibility of a sustained, unbroken state of pure immersion. To view the interactive drama participant merely as an actor attempting to completely lose themselves within a fictional identity is to profoundly misunderstand the unique, multifaceted cognitive demands of the medium itself.

Through the systematic deconstruction of the parlor LARP experience, this essay has demonstrated that the participant must operate within a highly complex, fluid, and fiercely demanding Tripartite Consciousness. The allure of the detailed character sheet and the meticulously decorated set undeniably establishes a necessary baseline of Mode One: Interior Motivation. The player must actively pursue emotional truth, utilizing the Magic If and the potent mechanics of emotional bleed to anchor their fictional actions in genuine, psychological reality. However, because LARP is uniquely a medium without an external audience, this private, internal truth is entirely insufficient. It must be immediately and continuously translated through Mode Two: Theatrical Presentation. The player must become a Brechtian director of their own performance, intentionally deploying heightened melodrama, recognizable cultural archetypes, and stylized physical actions to clearly, efficiently broadcast their narrative intent to the chaotic room of their peers. Finally, both the psychology and the performance are strictly governed by Mode Three: Social Game Logic. The participant can never entirely forget that they are engaged in a structured game, requiring them to constantly monitor abstract rulesets, ruthlessly manage physical resources, and mathematically calculate optimal pathways to achieve defined victory conditions.

The true art of the salon LARP participant, therefore, does not lie in the total erasure of the self, nor does it lie in the impossible pursuit of a singular, pure psychological state. Instead, it lies in the masterful, exhausting, and exhilarating simultaneous orchestration of these three competing mindsets. The technique of steering provides the invisible, cognitive connective tissue, allowing the player to rapidly code-switch between the actor searching for truth, the dramaturg staging the scene, and the gamer calculating the win. When this complex cognitive juggling act is executed flawlessly, the result is not the loss of the mind, but the hyper-engagement of it — a profound state of psychological Flow where the friction between reality, performance, and game completely dissolves. The salon LARP stands as a wholly unique, profoundly challenging performing art precisely because it demands that the

participant be the Stanislavskian subject, the Brechtian object, and the strategic ludologist all at once, proving definitively that the most compelling dramas in the drawing room are authored not by pure belief, but by the brilliant, frantic multitasking of the human mind.

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## **Tamsin Cross**

Tamsin Cross writes on acting theory, selfhood, and the layered awareness of participants in intimate roleplay. Her work explores how players think as selves, characters, and performers all at once. She adores rehearsal rooms, annotated scripts, and old armchairs with tragic upholstery. She also keeps a terrifically judgmental cat who has attended enough writing sessions to deserve co-authorship on sheer principle.

# **The Mask and the Message: Parlor LARP, Persona Adoption, and the Lowering of the Affective Filter in Advanced EFL Classrooms**

**Marek Nocte**

## **Abstract**

This essay investigates the pedagogical efficacy of parlor Live Action Role-Playing (LARP) scenarios in overcoming Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) among advanced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Despite possessing extensive receptive knowledge, advanced students frequently exhibit a low Willingness to Communicate due to a paralyzing fear of negative evaluation, which dramatically raises Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter. To dismantle this barrier, the essay proposes the integration of chamber LARPs, where students adopt highly developed fictional personas within the epistemologically isolated "magic circle" of play. Drawing on theories from second language acquisition, sociology, and interactive drama, the analysis demonstrates that the psychological "alibi" of the character entirely decouples linguistic failure from the learner's real-world intellectual identity. This ego shielding, combined with the intense narrative urgency of the game, actively suppresses self-monitoring and induces linguistic flow. Consequently, students engage in unprecedented linguistic risk-taking, deploy complex L2 repair strategies, and safely experiment with advanced socio-pragmatic functions. Ultimately, carefully scaffolded interactive drama transforms anxious students into confident, spontaneous communicators.

**Keywords:** Parlor LARP, Affective Filter, Foreign Language Anxiety, Persona adoption, Willingness to Communicate, English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

## **Introduction**

The essay opens in a dimly lit, ornately decorated room acting as a temporary stand-in for a nineteenth-century Victorian parlor. At the center of this carefully fabricated reality stands an undergraduate student who, in the traditional English as a Foreign Language classroom, is chronically silent. Despite possessing advanced lexical knowledge and an intricate understanding of complex grammatical structures, this student rarely volunteers answers, actively avoids eye contact during open discussions, and exhibits the classic physical markers of severe language anxiety when called upon to speak. Yet, within the physical and psychological confines of this transformed room, the student is entirely unrecognizable. Dressed in a tailored waistcoat and speaking with aggressive, spontaneous fluency, the student is no longer a hesitant language learner but a formidable, high-status Victorian diplomat. They point an accusatory finger at a peer, launching into a complex, unscripted English debate regarding alleged treason, colonial resource allocation, and political betrayal. The grammatical imperfections and syntactical slips in their speech are entirely eclipsed by the sheer velocity of their delivery and the intense socio-pragmatic confidence they project. This sudden, explosive manifestation of linguistic competence is not a spontaneous miracle of language acquisition. Rather, it is the direct, observable result of a highly specific pedagogical intervention. The student is participating in a parlor Live Action Role-Playing scenario, and the fictional persona they have temporarily adopted has provided them with an impenetrable psychological shield.

This dramatic transformation highlights a pervasive paradox that plagues advanced English as a Foreign Language education at both the high school and undergraduate levels. Educators frequently encounter students who possess an extensive reservoir of receptive linguistic knowledge but fail spectacularly to translate that knowledge into spontaneous, productive output. These advanced learners can ace rigorous written examinations, flawlessly conjugate complex verb tenses, and comprehend high-level academic texts. However, when placed in situations requiring spontaneous target language production, they are paralyzed by an overwhelming psychological barrier. This barrier is recognized in applied linguistics as Foreign Language Anxiety, a specific phenomenon that severely depresses a learner's Willingness to Communicate. For young adults and late adolescents, the foreign language classroom is fraught with the constant, terrifying risk of intellectual and social humiliation. The fear of sounding unintelligent, of making a public grammatical error, or of losing face in front of peers creates a cognitive bottleneck.

As a result, the student's actual communicative competence remains entirely locked behind an emotional wall, inaccessible during the very moments when spontaneous interaction is most required.

To dismantle this psychological barrier, this essay proposes the integration of the parlor Live Action Role-Playing scenario into advanced English as a Foreign Language curricula. The parlor Live Action Role-Playing game, or chamber LARP, is an immersive, rule-bound interactive drama that is typically confined to a single physical space, such as a classroom, a rented hall, or a simulated drawing room. Unlike the sprawling, combat-oriented outdoor games often associated with the role-playing hobby, the parlor variant is heavily and almost exclusively reliant on sustained interpersonal communication, the negotiation of hidden objectives, and continuous, unbroken character embodiment. Participants are provided with exhaustively detailed character sheets containing complex backstories, secret motivations, and interwoven relational ties to the other characters in the room. Once the simulation begins, players must navigate a highly charged sociopolitical landscape, solving mysteries, negotiating treaties, or surviving crises, all while remaining entirely within the confines of their fictional personas. It is a crucible of spontaneous communication, requiring participants to listen dynamically, adapt instantly, and speak forcefully to achieve their narrative goals.

The core thesis of this comprehensive essay is that adopting a highly developed fictional persona within the culturally and psychologically isolated "magic circle" of a parlor Live Action Role-Playing scenario provides a robust, fail-safe psychological alibi for the English as a Foreign Language learner. This specialized alibi functions as a profound pedagogical tool that drastically lowers Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter, effectively mitigating the paralyzing fear of negative evaluation that dominates the traditional classroom. By fully decoupling the learner's fragile, real-world intellectual identity from the actions and utterances of the fictional character, the parlor scenario acts as a powerful catalyst for unprecedented linguistic risk-taking. It creates a highly unique affective environment where advanced learners feel liberated to experiment with complex sociopragmatic functions, push the boundaries of their active fluency, and engage in high-stakes communicative tasks without the lingering dread of personal failure. The character takes the risk, the character suffers the embarrassment of a mispronounced word, and the character bears the brunt of social rejection, leaving the student's ego completely unscathed while their linguistic apparatus reaps the massive benefits of sustained, spontaneous target language practice.

To thoroughly investigate and substantiate this thesis, this essay will proceed through a rigorous, multi-disciplinary roadmap, bridging the theories of second language acquisition, the sociology of play, and the pedagogy of interactive drama. The analysis will begin with an exhaustive literature review examining the affective dimension of second language acquisition, specifically focusing on the mechanics of the Affective Filter, the tripartite nature of Foreign Language Anxiety, and the variables influencing the Willingness to Communicate. Following this, the essay will explore the theoretical foundations of drama in education and live-action role-playing theory, interrogating the concepts of the magic circle, epistemological isolation, and the psychological defense mechanism known as the alibi. The subsequent theoretical framework will synthesize these disciplines, utilizing Erving Goffman's frame analysis and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory to explain how persona adoption alters the cognitive processing of language learners. The essay will then dissect the specific psychological mechanisms at play, dedicating extensive analysis to how the alibi shields the ego, reduces cognitive load, and transforms learners from passive respondents into active, risk-taking agents driven by narrative urgency. Furthermore, the discussion will pivot to the concrete socio-pragmatic developments facilitated by the parlor environment, illustrating how students navigate complex power dynamics and politeness strategies entirely in the target language. Finally, the essay will outline practical pedagogical design strategies for implementing these scenarios in advanced classrooms, while critically addressing the inherent limitations, challenges, and ethical considerations of utilizing intense psychological immersion as a language teaching tool.

## **Literature Review: The Affective Dimension of L2 Acquisition**

Any rigorous investigation into the psychological barriers hindering advanced language learners must begin with a critical re-examination of Stephen Krashen's foundational Affective Filter Hypothesis. Formulated as one of the five core components of Krashen's highly influential Monitor Model in the early nineteen-eighties, the Affective Filter Hypothesis posits that an individual's emotional state acts as an invisible, adjustable psychological filter that can either facilitate or completely impede the process of second language acquisition. According to Krashen (1982), a multitude of affective variables — most notably high anxiety, low self-confidence, and low motivation — conspire to raise this filter. When the affective filter is raised, it creates an impenetrable cognitive block. Even if the learner is surrounded by abundant, perfectly comprehensible input, and even if they possess the cognitive capacity to understand the vocabulary and grammar being

presented, the raised filter prevents that vital input from successfully reaching the brain's internal Language Acquisition Device. The input simply bounces off the emotional barrier, rendering the pedagogical effort entirely useless. Conversely, when a learner experiences high motivation, supreme self-confidence, and a virtually anxiety-free learning environment, the affective filter is significantly lowered. In this optimal state, comprehensible input flows freely into the cognitive processing centers, allowing true, subconscious language acquisition to occur. While Krashen's model has faced criticism for its somewhat metaphorical and neurologically imprecise definitions, the fundamental premise — that emotional distress severely disrupts linguistic processing and production — remains an undeniable, universally observed reality in language classrooms worldwide, serving as the necessary theoretical baseline for understanding the paralyzing silence of the advanced learner.

To move beyond the metaphorical construct of the filter and understand the specific, operational mechanics of this emotional distress, one must turn to the seminal work of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope. In their groundbreaking 1986 study, these researchers successfully isolated and quantified Foreign Language Anxiety as a distinct, specialized complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related specifically to classroom language learning, arising from the absolute uniqueness of the language learning process. They brilliantly deconstructed Foreign Language Anxiety into three interrelated, highly destructive components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and the fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to the profound discomfort and genuine physiological panic experienced by individuals when required to express their own thoughts or comprehend the thoughts of others in a language they have not fully mastered. It is the terror of the gap between what the mature mind wishes to articulate and what the limited second language tongue can actually produce. Test anxiety, while common in all academic disciplines, is uniquely magnified in the language classroom, where every single spoken utterance is frequently perceived by the student as an oral examination, constantly subject to immediate correction and grading by the instructor.

However, it is the third component — the fear of negative evaluation — that poses the most significant, paralyzing threat to advanced high school and undergraduate learners. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) define this as the pervasive apprehension regarding others' evaluations, the active avoidance of evaluative situations, and the overriding expectation that others will evaluate oneself negatively. For adolescents and young adults, identity formation and peer perception

are paramount psychological imperatives. These students have spent years painstakingly constructing a competent, intelligent, and socially adept persona in their native language. When forced to speak spontaneously in a foreign language, they are instantly stripped of their rhetorical sophistication, their nuanced humor, and their adult competence. They are reduced to communicating like children. The profound, terrifying risk of “losing face” — of appearing foolish, incompetent, or unintelligent in front of a room full of their peers — triggers a massive psychological defense mechanism. To avoid this unbearable negative evaluation, the student simply chooses silence. They withhold their participation, heavily monitoring their output to the point of complete paralysis, ensuring that they never make a mistake at the catastrophic cost of never developing spontaneous fluency.

This conscious choice to remain silent brings the analysis directly to the concept of Willingness to Communicate, a highly dynamic heuristic model comprehensively detailed by MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels in 1998. The Willingness to Communicate model shifted the applied linguistics paradigm by treating communication not merely as a cognitive trait, but as a situated, momentary volitional choice. MacIntyre et al. (1998) define Willingness to Communicate as the readiness to enter into discourse at a specific time with a specific person or persons, utilizing a second language. Their complex, multi-layered pyramid model demonstrates that a student’s momentary decision to actually open their mouth and speak is influenced by a massive web of interacting variables, ranging from stable personality traits and intergroup climate at the base, to highly volatile, situational variables at the apex. The most critical, immediate precursor to second language use in this model is state communicative self-confidence, which is intrinsically linked to the immediate, perceived level of anxiety in that specific moment. If the immediate situational anxiety spikes — perhaps because the teacher is hovering nearby with a grading rubric, or because the topic is highly personal and the student lacks the exact vocabulary to express themselves accurately — the state communicative self-confidence plummets, and the Willingness to Communicate drops to absolute zero. The student, despite possessing the necessary linguistic tools buried in their long-term memory, fundamentally refuses to utilize them.

When viewed through the harsh, illuminating lens of these affective theories, the glaring limitations of traditional Communicative Language Teaching methodologies become immediately and painfully obvious. For decades, the standard pedagogical tool for encouraging spontaneous output in the communicative classroom has been the traditional role-play exercise. Students are assigned mundane, highly scripted

identities and placed into predictable situational dialogues: ordering a meal at a restaurant, asking a police officer for directions to the train station, or returning a defective pair of shoes to a department store clerk. While these exercises are designed to simulate real-world communication, they fundamentally and catastrophically fail to address the affective barriers of the advanced learner. Traditional Communicative Language Teaching role-plays completely lack genuine stakes, narrative urgency, and psychological depth. Because the scenarios are entirely mundane and structurally transparent, the student's ego remains fully exposed to the scrutiny of the classroom. When a student mispronounces the word "spaghetti" while pretending to be a restaurant patron, everyone in the room knows that it is the student, not the imaginary patron, who has failed to grasp English phonetics. There is no protective barrier. The traditional role-play offers a thin, transparent veneer of fiction that does absolutely nothing to provide the deep identity shielding required to bypass severe Foreign Language Anxiety. To truly lower the affective filter, the pedagogy must abandon the shallow pretense of the textbook role-play and embrace a methodology that completely subsumes the learner's vulnerable ego within a highly structured, fiercely protected alternate reality.

## **Literature Review: Drama in Education and LARP Theory**

To construct a rigorous theoretical foundation for this pedagogical shift, one must examine the established efficacy of drama within educational contexts. The lineage of Drama in Education (DiE) stretches back decades, deeply rooted in the pioneering work of Dorothy Heathcote. Her "Mantle of the Expert" approach fundamentally shifted the classroom dynamic by placing students in fictional, high-status roles (e.g., scientists, historians, town planners) where they were suddenly required to solve complex problems and communicate with authority. This methodology established a crucial pedagogical truth: dramatic play naturally and forcefully elicits spontaneous language use. When a student is invested in a dramatic scenario, the primary focus of their cognitive effort shifts away from the self-conscious monitoring of linguistic forms and moves entirely toward the successful negotiation of meaning. The goal is no longer to speak perfectly; the goal is to win the argument, solve the puzzle, or save the fictional town. While traditional Drama in Education has long been utilized in language classrooms, it often relies heavily on theatrical performance, requiring students to act out scenes for an audience of their peers. For the highly anxious advanced learner, the prospect of theatrical performance can actually exacerbate the fear of negative evaluation, raising the affective filter rather than lowering it.

This is where the parlor Live Action Role-Playing scenario diverges from and improves upon traditional classroom drama. To understand this divergence, it is necessary to specifically define the parlor LARP, drawing heavily on the rigorous theoretical frameworks developed within the Nordic LARP tradition. The parlor LARP is entirely distinct from the sprawling, boffer-weapon combat games often associated with the hobby, and it is equally distinct from tabletop role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons*, which rely on verbal description and dice rolling. The parlor LARP is characterized by a commitment to the “360-degree illusion.” Within the designated physical play space, everything the participant sees, touches, and hears is considered part of the fictional world. There is no audience; every person in the room is an active participant. The focus is overwhelmingly on intense psychological immersion, complex moral dilemmas, and dense interpersonal webs. Because the physical space is constrained, the drama is generated entirely through continuous, unscripted conversation, making it an extraordinarily potent engine for spontaneous language production.

The psychological power of this enclosed environment can be best understood through Johan Huizinga’s seminal concept of the “Magic Circle.” Huizinga (1938) posits that all play occurs within a temporary, clearly demarcated world — both physical and psychological — that exists within the ordinary world, but where entirely special rules apply. When a group of students steps into the classroom that has been designated as the parlor LARP space, they cross the threshold of the magic circle. The mundane rules of the university or high school are temporarily suspended. The power dynamic between the teacher (who often acts merely as a silent facilitator during the game) and the student is dissolved. Most importantly, the standard rules of linguistic engagement are altered. In the mundane classroom, an English grammatical error is a failure to be corrected. Inside the magic circle, an English grammatical error is simply a quirk of the character’s speech, entirely irrelevant to the immediate goal of surviving the fictional crisis. The magic circle creates a state of epistemological isolation, where the outside world and its terrifying evaluative gaze simply cease to exist for the duration of the play.

Within this protective circle, the participant relies on a specific psychological defense mechanism theorized by Nordic LARP scholar Markus Montola: the concept of the “alibi.” The alibi is the fundamental, unspoken agreement among all participants that the actions, beliefs, and, crucially, the failures that occur within the game belong strictly and exclusively to the fictional character, not the mundane player. If a player acts foolishly, makes a disastrous diplomatic miscalculation, or

stutters through a tense negotiation, the alibi protects their real-world ego. They can simply shrug off the failure by stating, “That wasn’t me; that was the character.” This absolute decoupling of the self from the action is the specific mechanism that neutralizes the fear of negative evaluation.

However, the separation between player and character is rarely absolute. To fully utilize the LARP as a pedagogical tool, one must understand the complementary concepts of “steering” and “bleed.” Steering refers to the conscious, out-of-character decisions the player makes to guide their character toward specific narrative outcomes or to facilitate better play for others. Bleed, conversely, is the phenomenon where emotions and psychological states transfer across the boundary between player and character. If a character experiences a terrifying fictional betrayal, the player may feel genuine, physiological stress (bleed-out). If a player enters the game feeling real-world exhaustion, their character may act unusually lethargic (bleed-in). In the context of the EFL classroom, the pedagogical goal is to leverage the alibi to initiate communication, while allowing the genuine, spontaneous linguistic confidence generated by the character to slowly “bleed” back into the mundane reality of the student.

## **Theoretical Framework: The Intersection of Persona, Play, and Pedagogy**

To synthesize these distinct disciplines — affective linguistic theory and the sociology of immersive play — one must construct a robust theoretical framework explaining exactly how persona adoption alters the cognitive processing of the advanced language learner. This synthesis begins with the application of Erving Goffman’s sociological theories, specifically his work on frame analysis and the presentation of self in everyday life. Goffman (1959) argues that individuals are constantly engaged in a theatrical performance of identity, meticulously managing the impressions they make upon others to sustain a specific, desired social face. The advanced EFL learner, having achieved a high level of intellectual maturity in their native language, is fiercely protective of this intellectual self-presentation. They perceive their L2 incompetence as a direct, humiliating threat to their established adult identity. The parlor LARP fundamentally alters this dynamic by providing the student with a highly developed, alternate framework. By adopting the persona of a brilliant scientist, a ruthless tycoon, or a desperate revolutionary, the student is granted explicit permission to completely discard their fragile, vulnerable “L2 learner” identity. They assume the robust, high-status identity of the fictional

persona. The protective mask of the character acts as a psychological prosthesis, absorbing the social risk of linguistic imperfection and allowing the student to project authority and competence, even if their syntax occasionally falters.

When this robust persona is thrust into the high-stakes, rapidly evolving narrative of a parlor LARP, the intense cognitive engagement frequently pushes the learner into a psychological state defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as “Flow.”

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes flow as a state of optimal experience characterized by complete absorption in an activity, where the individual’s skill level perfectly matches the challenge at hand, resulting in a loss of self-consciousness and an altered perception of time. In the traditional EFL classroom, achieving flow during spontaneous output is nearly impossible because the student’s brain is constantly split between the task of meaning-making and the crippling, meta-cognitive task of self-monitoring for grammatical errors. The parlor LARP demands such a massive amount of working memory — balancing secret objectives, interpreting the hidden motives of other characters, and navigating the immediate narrative crisis — that the brain simply does not have the available bandwidth to sustain anxious self-monitoring. The self-consciousness that fuels the affective filter is temporarily suppressed in favor of urgent task completion. The student achieves a state of linguistic flow precisely because the immediate, fictional necessity of communication overwhelms the lingering, mundane fear of evaluation.

Furthermore, this state of flow occurs within a profoundly collaborative social environment, perfectly illustrating Lev Vygotsky’s concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defines the ZPD as the distance between a learner’s independent problem-solving ability and their potential development when guided by a more capable peer or adult. In a traditional classroom, the teacher usually acts as the sole authoritative interlocutor, which inherently reinforces the evaluative dynamic and raises anxiety. The parlor LARP, however, is a peer-to-peer ecosystem. Because the interactions are completely unscripted and highly interdependent, students are forced to constantly negotiate meaning with one another. If Student A (playing a detective) uses an obscure vocabulary word, Student B (playing a suspect) must utilize immediate, in-character clarification strategies to understand the accusation and formulate a defense. This creates a massive, continuous web of peer-to-peer scaffolding occurring entirely in the target language. The students pull each other through their respective Zones of Proximal Development in real-time, relying on the collaborative reality of the fiction rather

than the intimidating presence of an instructor to sustain the communicative momentum.

## **Mechanism 1: The Alibi of the Persona and the Shielding of the Ego**

Having established the theoretical architecture, it is necessary to rigorously dissect the specific, operational mechanisms through which the parlor LARP lowers the affective filter. The most potent of these mechanisms is the psychological alibi provided by the fictional persona, which functions primarily by completely decoupling linguistic failure from the student's actual intellectual identity. In the mundane reality of an advanced EFL classroom, a syntactic error or a failure to recall a specific vocabulary word during a debate is almost universally internalized by the student as a personal, intellectual failing. It is undeniable proof of their inadequacy. However, within the magic circle of the LARP, this entire paradigm is inverted. Because the student is deeply embodying a distinct persona, any linguistic stumbling is instantly and naturally attributed to the character's immediate circumstances, not the player's lack of knowledge. If a student stutters or struggles to find the correct English phrasing while accusing a rival of murder, that hesitation is read by the other participants as the character's profound stress, their overwhelming emotional devastation, or their desperate attempt to hide the truth. The linguistic error is instantly repurposed as compelling dramatic performance. The student's actual ego remains entirely protected behind this narrative interpretation, drastically reducing the catastrophic psychological cost normally associated with L2 mistakes.

This decoupling directly mitigates the fear of negative evaluation by fundamentally altering the social hierarchy of the room. As Horwitz et al. (1986) noted, the fear of losing face is heavily dependent on the presence of an evaluative audience — namely, the teacher and the peers. In a parlor LARP, however, the standard classroom dynamic of “teacher evaluates student” is entirely suspended. The instructor, if present in the room at all, is usually relegated to a non-evaluative facilitation role, existing outside the fiction. More importantly, the dynamic of “peers judge peer” is completely neutralized because everyone in the room is equally vulnerable, simultaneously performing a heightened, often ridiculous persona. When everyone is wearing a mask, the fear of standing out or appearing foolish vanishes. The evaluator is effectively removed from the magic circle. The student is no longer

speaking to a classmate who might judge their grammar; they are speaking to a fictional rival who is solely focused on the narrative implications of their words.

The psychological robustness of this alibi is heavily reinforced by what can be termed the “prosthetics of identity.” Parlor LARPs rely significantly on physical, tangible elements to differentiate the character from the player. These prosthetics include specialized costuming, specific physical props, prominent nametags bearing the character’s fictional title, and instructions to adopt altered physical postures or vocal registers. These physical elements serve a critical cognitive function. They act as constant, tactile anchors, continuously reminding the student’s brain that “I am not me.” The physical weight of a prop or the unfamiliar restriction of a costume piece serves as a continuous, somatic reinforcement of the alibi. As long as the student is wearing the nametag, they are granted explicit psychological permission to abandon their anxious learner identity and inhabit the confident fluency of the persona, effectively sustaining the lowered affective filter for the entire duration of the game.

Finally, the meticulously designed character sheet provided to the student acts as a crucial mechanism for reducing cognitive load, which is essential for facilitating advanced L2 production. In a standard spontaneous speaking task, an EFL learner must simultaneously manage two incredibly demanding cognitive processes: deciding *what* to say (generating ideas, formulating arguments) and figuring out *how* to say it (retrieving vocabulary, applying grammatical rules). For an anxious learner, this dual burden frequently results in a complete cognitive freeze. A parlor LARP character sheet effectively eliminates the first half of this burden. The document provides the student with pre-packaged, highly detailed opinions, deeply held secrets, and clear, immediate motivations. The student does not have to invent a political philosophy or a reason to be angry; it is explicitly written on the page before them. By entirely removing the cognitive burden of deciding *what* to say, the learner is freed to dedicate their entire working memory and cognitive bandwidth exclusively to the L2 processing of *how* to say it. This sudden availability of cognitive resources allows the advanced learner to access and utilize complex linguistic structures that would normally be inaccessible under the stress of simultaneous idea generation and translation.

## **Mechanism 2: Immersion, Agency, and Linguistic Risk-Taking**

Beyond the protective shielding of the ego, the parlor LARP functions as a profound engine for linguistic risk-taking by fundamentally altering the learner's sense of agency. In traditional EFL methodologies, students are almost exclusively positioned as passive respondents. They answer comprehension questions, fill in grammatical blanks, or recite pre-written dialogue. The motivation to communicate is entirely extrinsic, driven by the teacher's prompts and the looming specter of a grade. Parlor LARPs, conversely, thrust the student into the role of an active, desperate agent. Scenarios are meticulously designed around conflicting hidden objectives and structural information deficits. A student playing a corporate spy must convince a reluctant CEO to divulge a password before a rival faction does. This structural design creates a powerful, self-generated need to communicate. The student is no longer speaking because the teacher instructed them to; they are speaking because their character's survival or success depends entirely on their ability to extract information, forge alliances, and persuade others.

This intense, self-generated need leads to what can be termed the “narrative override.” As the scenario progresses and the fictional tension escalates — perhaps a literal ticking clock is introduced, or a dramatic accusation is leveled — the urgency of the narrative completely overrides the learner's residual fear of making a grammatical error. The prioritization of cognitive processes shifts radically. The desire to achieve the narrative goal (e.g., proving innocence) becomes paramount, while the desire for perfect accuracy becomes secondary. In this heightened state, fluency and meaning negotiation temporarily conquer the paralyzing obsession with form. The student will push their linguistic capabilities to the absolute limit, deploying whatever vocabulary and syntax they possess, regardless of perfection, to ensure their message is understood and their objective is achieved. The narrative imperative breaks the silence.

This narrative override directly translates into a massive increase in linguistic risk-taking, particularly concerning vocabulary acquisition and complex syntax. In a standard classroom, if a student only half-remembers a complex vocabulary word (e.g., “equivocate” or “clandestine”), they will almost certainly choose a simpler, safer synonym to avoid the risk of misuse and subsequent correction. Within the magic circle of the LARP, however, the risk calculus changes entirely. Because the student is embodying a highly educated or specialized persona, they feel a

compelling dramatic urge to use elevated language. They are significantly more likely to attempt to use advanced, recently learned, or “fuzzy” vocabulary to sound authentic to the character. If they use the word incorrectly, the error is seamlessly absorbed by the alibi — it becomes a quirk of the character’s background, a sign of their emotional distress, or simply a slip of the tongue by an eccentric aristocrat. However, if they use the word correctly and it achieves the desired narrative effect (e.g., successfully intimidating a rival), the student experiences a massive, visceral boost in L2 self-efficacy. This successful risk-taking, validated by the immediate reactions of their peers in the target language, provides a far more powerful cognitive reinforcement than a red checkmark on a vocabulary quiz.

Furthermore, this immersive environment forces a complete revolution in how students handle linguistic breakdowns. When a learner hits a linguistic roadblock in standard EFL conversation — when they forget a word or cannot construct a sentence — the default, highly ingrained response is to revert to their L1 (first language) or simply stop talking and wait for the teacher to supply the missing language. In a parlor LARP, reverting to the L1 is deeply discouraged, as it shatters the 360-degree illusion and breaks the game for everyone else in the room. Therefore, when a student inevitably encounters a gap in their L2 knowledge while in character, they are forced to employ L2 repair strategies. They must utilize circumlocution, paraphrasing, and active meaning negotiation to maintain the integrity of the fictional world. If a student playing a Victorian doctor forgets the word for “syringe,” they cannot break character to ask the teacher. They must frantically describe “the glass cylinder with the needle used to inject the medicine,” utilizing whatever L2 resources they possess to ensure the narrative continues uninterrupted. This forced reliance on L2 repair strategies builds immense communicative resilience, teaching the advanced learner how to survive and navigate spontaneous conversation even when their vocabulary fails them.

## **Socio-Pragmatic Development in the Parlor LARP Environment**

While the lowering of the affective filter and the increase in fluency are remarkable outcomes, the parlor LARP perhaps shines brightest in its capacity to facilitate profound socio-pragmatic development. Pragmatic competence — the ability to use language appropriately in diverse social contexts — is notoriously difficult to teach in the traditional EFL classroom. High school and undergraduate learners generally only practice two highly restrictive sociolinguistic registers: peer-to-peer informal

(speaking with classmates) and student-to-teacher respectful (speaking with the instructor). The traditional classroom simply cannot authentically replicate the vast array of social hierarchies and power dynamics required to master advanced L2 pragmatics. The parlor LARP obliterates this limitation. By assigning students diverse, often radically asymmetrical roles — an arrogant aristocrat demanding fealty, a desperate criminal pleading for clemency, an unfeeling AI issuing cold directives, or a manipulative politician offering a veiled bribe — the scenario forces learners to completely break out of the “student” register and inhabit entirely new sociolinguistic spaces.

Navigating these complex, fictional power dynamics allows students to safely practice high-stakes pragmatic functions that are entirely absent from standard curricula. Within the confines of the game, a student must learn how to issue a credible threat using conditional grammar, how to offer a subtle bribe using modal verbs of possibility, how to aggressively persuade a reluctant ally, and how to apologize for a grievous error without losing social status. Because these interactions occur between characters rather than students, the social risk of causing genuine offense is nullified. A student can practice the aggressive, dominant language of a ruthless interrogator without actually damaging their real-world relationship with the peer playing the suspect. The LARP provides a completely safe laboratory for testing the boundaries of L2 pragmatics, allowing learners to experiment with tone, register, and politeness strategies in ways that would be socially unacceptable or impossible in the mundane world.

This experimentation can be rigorously analyzed through the lens of Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson’s Politeness Theory (1987). Brown and Levinson posit that certain communicative acts — such as requests, demands, or accusations — are inherently “face-threatening acts” (FTAs) that damage the social face of the speaker or the listener. To mitigate this damage, speakers employ complex linguistic politeness strategies (e.g., negative politeness, off-record hints). In the advanced EFL classroom, students often struggle to grasp the nuances of L2 politeness, frequently sounding either overly blunt or unnecessarily obsequious. The parlor LARP, with its rigid fictional hierarchies, provides the perfect environment for mastering these strategies. A student playing a lowly servant who must accuse a high-ranking lord of theft cannot simply use direct, blunt language; the narrative reality demands that they employ elaborate negative politeness and indirect hedging to protect their character’s life. Conversely, the lord can utilize bald, on-record imperatives to dismiss the servant. By forcing students to continuously navigate

these face-threatening acts within the established fictional hierarchy, the LARP develops a deep, intuitive understanding of how English speakers use language to negotiate power, status, and social distance.

## **Pedagogical Design and Implementation for Advanced EFL**

To successfully harness the profound psychological and linguistic benefits of the parlor LARP, educators must approach scenario design and implementation with extreme pedagogical precision. The transition from a traditional classroom to an interactive drama cannot be abrupt; it requires meticulous scaffolding. When designing or adapting a scenario specifically for L2 learners, the primary constraint is the management of cognitive load. While the scenario must be complex enough to generate genuine narrative urgency, the underlying game mechanics (e.g., rules for combat, complex point systems, or convoluted economic trading) must be kept to an absolute minimum to avoid “rule bloat.” The cognitive bandwidth of the L2 learner is already heavily taxed by the demands of spontaneous language production and persona maintenance. If the learner must also hold complex, abstract mathematical game rules in their working memory, the affective filter will spike, and the student will freeze. The ideal EFL LARP relies almost entirely on “soft mechanics” — secrets, relationships, and conversational objectives — rather than complex rulesets, ensuring that the primary engine of the game is language itself.

The implementation of the LARP must be divided into three distinct, heavily structured phases, beginning with the Pre-Game Phase. This phase is entirely dedicated to scaffolding and preparation. It must include rigorous character creation workshops where students collaboratively build the psychological profiles of their personas, ensuring deep investment in the alibi. Crucially, this phase is where the instructor introduces the specialized lexical sets required for the specific scenario (e.g., the esoteric vocabulary of nineteenth-century diplomacy, the specific jargon of a sci-fi space station, or the formal legal terminology of a courtroom drama). By front-loading this vocabulary, the instructor equips the students with the necessary linguistic tools before they enter the high-stress environment of the game. Furthermore, this phase must establish robust, unambiguous safety mechanics. Because the LARP intentionally generates high emotional intensity and interpersonal conflict, students must be provided with tools to immediately halt the game if the fiction becomes genuinely distressing or overwhelming. The introduction of mechanisms like the “X-Card” (a physical card that allows a player to instantly veto uncomfortable content without explanation) or the use of “Cut” and “Brake” words

ensures that the psychological safety of the mundane student always supersedes the dramatic needs of the fictional narrative.

Following the active execution of the game, the Post-Game Phase is arguably the most critical pedagogical step in the entire process. This phase begins with “deroling,” a structured psychological decompression where students formally, physically, and vocally shed their fictional personas. This might involve removing costume pieces, stating their real names, and explicitly discussing the differences between themselves and their characters. Deroling is essential for managing emotional bleed, ensuring that the intense rivalries, manufactured anger, or fictional betrayals experienced during the game do not inadvertently damage real-world peer relationships. Once the students have safely returned to their mundane identities, the instructor facilitates a comprehensive, meta-linguistic debrief. This is where the actual language acquisition is solidified. Because the fear of negative evaluation was suspended during the game, students are remarkably open to discussing their linguistic performance. The instructor can guide the students to analyze their own spontaneous language use, highlighting successful negotiations, examining moments where communication broke down, and identifying areas where specific vocabulary or grammar structures were lacking. The debrief transforms the chaotic, intense experience of the LARP into structured, deeply resonant linguistic insight, allowing students to intellectually process the fluency they just experientially achieved.

## **Limitations, Challenges, and Ethical Considerations**

While the pedagogical potential of the parlor LARP is immense, any rigorous academic analysis must acknowledge the inherent limitations, significant challenges, and profound ethical considerations associated with utilizing intense psychological immersion as a teaching tool. The most pressing limitation is what can be termed the “over-arousal” problem. The affective filter is a delicate mechanism. While the alibi of the persona successfully lowers the filter by mitigating the fear of evaluation, the LARP environment itself — characterized by shouting, rapid argumentation, ticking clocks, and high-stakes fictional crises — can induce a state of massive physiological and cognitive over-arousal. If the scenario is too intense, the plot too convoluted, or the interpersonal conflict too aggressive, the sheer cognitive overload can cause the affective filter to violently spike. In this state, the student does not experience flow; they experience panic. Instead of being freed to communicate, the overwhelmed learner will completely shut down, retreating into silence to escape the sensory and linguistic bombardment. The educator must perfectly calibrate the

intensity of the scenario to challenge the students without pushing them over the precipice of cognitive overload.

Furthermore, the educator must address the significant challenge of performative resistance. Not all students are naturally inclined toward theatricality, public performance, or improvisational role-play. For highly introverted students, or those who find the concept of “acting” inherently embarrassing or juvenile, the introduction of a LARP can induce massive pre-game anxiety, entirely defeating the purpose of the intervention. To mitigate this resistance, the instructor cannot force immersion. Strategies must be employed to ease hesitant students into the magic circle. This can be achieved by carefully assigning low-stakes, observational characters (e.g., a silent archivist, a stoic bodyguard, or an impartial judge) that require minimal spontaneous output but still allow the student to exist within the immersive environment. By allowing resistant students to participate on the periphery of the drama, they can gradually acclimate to the altered social dynamics of the room, often naturally increasing their participation as they witness the psychological safety afforded by the alibi.

Finally, the use of immersive, emotionally resonant drama in an educational setting carries profound ethical responsibilities regarding psychological safety. When students are actively encouraged to embody characters dealing with betrayal, anger, desperation, or loss, the boundary between fictional distress and genuine, real-world trauma can become dangerously blurred, particularly among adolescent and young adult populations who may be dealing with unarticulated personal struggles. The educator must possess the emotional intelligence and pedagogical training to strictly distinguish between productive linguistic stress (the good anxiety that pushes a student to argue a point) and harmful emotional distress (the bad anxiety that triggers genuine psychological harm). The LARP must never be used as a tool for amateur psychological probing. The safety mechanics established in the pre-game phase must be rigorously enforced, and the educator must be prepared to immediately halt the simulation if any student exhibits signs of genuine, non-fictional distress, ensuring that the pursuit of linguistic fluency never compromises the fundamental well-being of the learner.

## **Conclusion**

The persistent, paralyzing silence of the advanced English as a Foreign Language learner is not a symptom of intellectual deficit or linguistic ignorance; it is the direct

result of a crushing affective burden. The traditional communicative classroom, with its transparent role-plays and constant, looming threat of negative evaluation, frequently exacerbates this burden, forcing the student's ego into a defensive posture that precludes the very spontaneous output the pedagogy seeks to cultivate. This essay has systematically demonstrated that the parlor Live Action Role-Playing scenario offers a radical, highly effective methodology for completely dismantling this psychological barrier. By inviting the student to step into the magic circle and adopt a fully realized fictional persona, the LARP provides an impenetrable psychological alibi. This alibi expertly shields the fragile learner ego, drastically lowers the affective filter, and transforms the terrifying prospect of spontaneous target language production into an exhilarating, high-stakes game of narrative survival.

The synthesis of second language acquisition theory, the sociology of play, and the mechanics of interactive drama reveals a profound pedagogical truth: Willingness to Communicate, active fluency, and complex socio-pragmatic competence flourish when the learner's vulnerable identity is safely hidden behind the mask of a character. The parlor LARP fundamentally alters the cognitive landscape of the learner. It reduces the paralyzing cognitive load of idea generation, replaces the passive role of the student with the active agency of the protagonist, and utilizes the urgent necessity of narrative resolution to completely override the fear of grammatical imperfection. Within the crucible of the game, students negotiate meaning, deploy complex repair strategies, and navigate intricate power dynamics entirely in the target language, achieving a level of spontaneous, communicative flow that is virtually impossible to replicate in a standard textbook exercise.

The implementation of these immersive scenarios is not without its significant challenges, demanding meticulous scaffolding, precise calibration of cognitive load, and absolute dedication to the psychological safety of the participants. However, the transformative linguistic outcomes far outweigh the logistical hurdles. Therefore, it is imperative that applied linguists, SLA researchers, and progressive educators look beyond the stale, ineffective paradigms of traditional role-play. They must seriously investigate, rigorously study, and actively integrate the methodologies of interactive drama and parlor LARP into advanced communicative language teaching. By embracing the profound power of the mask, educators can finally unlock the vast, silent reservoirs of linguistic potential hidden within their most advanced students, allowing them to finally speak — not as anxious learners, but as fluent, confident masters of their own narratives.

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## Marek Nocte

Marek Nocte is an EFL specialist and performance pedagogue whose research explores persona adoption, anxiety reduction, and advanced oral production in immersive classroom scenarios. He is particularly interested in how role distance frees learners to speak more boldly. Outside teaching, he enjoys mask-making, late-night jazz, and badly translated instruction manuals, which he reads for amusement in a way that alarms normal people.

*Brian David Phillips*

# **HARD CHOICES**

**The Big Asteroid Interactive Drama Scenario**

**15-31 Players**

by

**Brian David Phillips, Ph.D.**

## **Characters**

01	F	Eliza Smith
02	F	Cyndi Smith
03	F	Assoc. Prof. June Thomas
04	F	Prof. Carol Smith
05	F	Private Samantha Jones
06	F	Lieutenant Maggie Katz
07	F	Colonel Beatrice Harris
08	F	General Tammie Wilson
09	F	Jennifer Harris
10	M	Pat Jones
11	M	Doctor Clyde Harris
12	M	Mark Mathews
13	F	Sergeant Wilma Rudolph
14	M	Jeff Samuels
15	M	Captain William Fritz
16	M	Gene Clean
17	F	Sandy Martin
18	F	Mandy Martin
19	F	Assoc. Prof. Rachel Wiggins

20	F	Prof. Louise Martin
21	F	Private Sally Law
22	F	Lieutenant Regina Schuster
23	F	Colonel Mary Carter
24	F	General Rose Patton
25	F	Ruth Carter
26	M	Billy Manson
27	M	Doctor Larry Carter
28	M	Fred MacDonald
29	F	Sergeant Betty Donner
30	M	Nathan Taylor
31	M	Captain Tom Rivera

Freeform theatre-style roleplaying games (often simply called "freeforms" or "live-action roleplaying games" that aren't focused on combat scenarios) are a type of live-action roleplaying where players take on the roles of specific characters and interact in a pre-defined setting or scenario. Unlike the more structured murder mystery games, which focus on solving a specific crime, freeform games can span a wide variety of genres and themes, from historical settings to futuristic space operas.

Here are some general features and aspects of these games:

1. Story and Characters: Before the game starts, the organizer or writer provides players with character sheets that describe their character's background, objectives, and relationships to other characters. Some freeforms allow for a degree of improvisation, letting players flesh out parts of their character's history or personality.

2. Objectives and Goals: Each character has their own objectives which they try to achieve during the course of the game. This can create interesting conflicts, alliances, and drama as objectives can often be at odds with each other.

*Brian David Phillips*

3. **Interaction and Roleplay:** Most of the gameplay revolves around players interacting with one another in character. There aren't usually game mechanics like dice or cards to determine outcomes. Instead, players negotiate, argue, form alliances, betray, love, and hate based on their characters' objectives and backgrounds.
4. **Duration:** These games can last anywhere from a couple of hours to an entire weekend. Some games have a set end-point while others are more open-ended.
5. **Props and Costumes:** Depending on the complexity and style of the game, players might use props or wear costumes appropriate for their character. This enhances the immersive experience.
6. **Moderators:** Some games have moderators or game masters who help steer the story, arbitrate disputes, and introduce new elements or twists to the narrative.
7. **Diverse Themes:** While murder mysteries focus on solving a crime, freeforms can touch on any theme or setting. Examples include political intrigue in a fantasy kingdom, survival in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, or tensions aboard a space station.
8. **Scalability:** Some freeforms are designed for small groups, while others can accommodate dozens or even hundreds of players.

If you're interested in trying out or creating a freeform roleplaying party game, there are many resources and communities online dedicated to this form of interactive storytelling. Whether you're looking for pre-written scenarios or advice on designing your own, the online roleplaying community can be a valuable resource.

## **Hard Choices: The Big Asteroid Interactive Drama Scenario**

### **Introduction: Parlor LARP Games**

Welcome to the world of Parlor Live Action Role Play (LARP). LARP is an interactive narrative experience where you, the participant, play a unique character

in a pre-defined scenario. Think of it as immersive theater where you are both the actor and the audience. Parlor LARP, specifically, is a subgenre of LARP that takes place in a more contained environment, often indoors and within a shorter timeframe, as compared to largerLARPs that might span entire weekends or outdoor locations.

## **Procedures:**

1. **Character Sheets:** Upon arrival, each participant will receive a character sheet. This sheet provides information about who you are, your motivations, connections to other characters, and any special abilities or knowledge you possess. Familiarize yourself with it and try to internalize your character's objectives and feelings.
2. **Props and Tokens:** In this game, tokens represent your ability to influence the final decision. Each player starts with a set number of tokens, but they can be exchanged, gifted, or perhaps even stolen. Think of them as bargaining chips, symbolic of power and decision-making.
3. **Engage with Others:** Interact with other players. Create alliances, negotiate, share information, or keep secrets. The choice is yours, but remember, only five of you can escape.
4. **Stay In-Character:** While it might be tempting to step out of your role, staying in character enhances the experience for everyone. If you need to step out for any reason, please find a discreet way to do so.
5. **Respect Boundaries:** WhileLARPs are immersive, always remember to respect the physical and emotional boundaries of other participants.
6. **Ending the Game:** The scenario culminates with a vote. Those with the most tokens will decide the fate of the group. Once the outcome is decided, take a moment to debrief and share experiences with fellow players.

## **Background:**

*Brian David Phillips*

The year is 2045. Advances in technology have allowed humanity to make incredible leaps, from colonizing Mars to unraveling the mysteries of our DNA. But with such progress comes risks. As nations battled for control over resources and power, tensions reached a boiling point, leading to a catastrophic nuclear war.

In the midst of this chaos, astronomers identified a massive asteroid on a collision course with Earth. This imminent threat, combined with the devastation of the war, left the planet on the brink of total destruction.

You are among a select group who have found refuge in an underground research facility, a place dedicated to cutting-edge scientific endeavors. One such endeavor is transdimensional travel, a risky and experimental venture that promises an escape to a new world: Eden.

As the last remnants of humanity, you face the most difficult choice: who gets to leave and who stays behind? With the weight of this decision, the underground facility has become a pressure cooker of tension, desperation, hope, and despair.

Prepare to make hard choices, for the fate of humanity rests in your hands.

## **Combat Guide: Rock-Paper-Scissors (RPS) Combat System**

### 1. Basic Combat Mechanics:

Combat in the game is conducted through the Rock-Paper-Scissors (RPS) mechanism.

To defeat an opponent, you must win the RPS game against them equal to once plus their Combat Bonus (CB). For instance, if your opponent has a CB of 2, you need to win three RPS games against them.

### 2. Life Points (LP) & Combat Bonus (CB):

The number of times you win an RPS game against an opponent equals the CB in terms of LP they lose. For instance, if an opponent's CB is 2 and you defeat them in RPS, they lose 2 LP.

If a player's LP reaches zero or below, they are rendered unconscious.

### 3. Unconscious Players:

Players who fall unconscious must wait five minutes before they regain one LP, which keeps them in the game.

It is against the rules to attack an unconscious player.

#### 4. Team or 'Gang' Combat:

Players can form teams or "gangs" to face an opponent or another gang.

A maximum of three players can be on one "side" or gang.

The Combat Bonuses of all the members of a gang are combined to determine the gang's total CB.

In addition to the sum of the CBs, the gang also gets one additional bonus for each player on their side. For example, if three players form a gang, and their combined CB is 5, the gang's total CB becomes 8 (5 from individual CBs + 3 for each member).

During a gang RPS match, one throw is made for each side. If one side's RPS throw wins, the Life Point penalties are deducted from every player on the losing side.

#### 5. Reminders & Tips:

Always be strategic when choosing to confront another player. Keep their CB and LP in mind.

Forming a gang can give a significant advantage, especially against strong players. However, the risk is that everyone on the losing side suffers.

Stay vigilant! Keep track of your LP and avoid being rendered unconscious, as this leaves you vulnerable for five minutes.

Remember: The aim is to strategize, cooperate, and outplay your opponents. Good luck

01

# Eliza Smith

## High School Student, Assistant to the Exodus Project

*“Anywhere but here, is where I want to be.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	15
<b>Blood Type:</b>	B

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	0

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	1
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**Costume:** A slightly oversized lab coat indicating she's borrowed it, casual high school attire like a T-shirt and jeans, sneakers, a student ID badge, and a backpack filled with schoolbooks and a diary.

**Brief Background:** Eliza, a curious and bright high school student, found herself in the underground research facility due to her ties with the Exodus Project. This initiative aimed to understand the transdimensional technology, which became humanity's last hope. Although young, her acute observational skills and adaptability made her a valuable asset to the team. Being at the heart of the apocalypse has only amplified her adventurous spirit with the quote: “Anywhere but here, is where I want to be.”

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Eliza is known to most in the facility as the bright-eyed high school student assisting some of the world's greatest minds on the Exodus Project. She's been seen running errands, fetching coffee, and occasionally even contributing to brainstorming sessions. Having grown up hearing tales of scientific marvels from her mother, Prof. Carol Smith, Eliza always had a knack for understanding complex theories.

Many are aware that her sister, Cyndi Smith, is an engineer trying to alter the asteroid's path. There's been talk about her resilience, having been forced into adulthood way too soon due to the circumstances. Her connection to Assoc. Prof. June Thomas is not a complete secret as they've been spotted sharing familial moments. Her enthusiasm and will to survive are evident, making her approachable

for alliances.

**PRIVATE INFORMATION:**

Eliza recently stumbled upon a confidential report that suggests the transdimensional travel might have some unintended side effects. It has made her a bit wary about the whole escape plan. Additionally, her mother's relationship with June Thomas has been a challenging adjustment for her. She sometimes resents June, seeing her as an intruder to her family unit. Deep down, she's scared of being left behind, especially since she's not a scientist or soldier, and fears her youth may make her expendable in the eyes of the others.

During her guard shifts, Samantha caught Eliza looking lost and distressed near one of the facility's labs. Their brief interaction was filled with a mix of curiosity and mutual understanding, hinting at the shared weight of their youth in such dire times. Eliza might have found out something unsettling about the project but you haven't yet locked down the answer.

**WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Cyndi Smith: Your sister has been under a lot of pressure lately. There are whispers that she might have made a breakthrough in her project to divert the asteroid's path, but it might be too late to implement.

June Thomas: Assoc. Prof. June Thomas, apart from her relationship with your mother, has been secretly working on an alternative escape plan. You overheard her talking about a potential "backdoor" in the transdimensional device.

Carol Smith: Your mother has been particularly close with General Tammie Wilson. They've had a few confidential meetings which you've found suspicious. You wonder if they're planning something that others aren't privy to.

02

## Cyndi Smith

### Graduate Student, Researcher on the Exodus Project

*“If anyone calls, tell them I’m on another planet.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	25
<b>Blood Type:</b>	A

<b>Life Points:</b>	20
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	0

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	2
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**Costume:** Practical researcher attire: a neatly fitted lab coat with her name badge, a pair of protective glasses often hanging around her neck, cargo pants with multiple pockets containing various tools, and sturdy boots.

**Brief Background:** Cyndi Smith, a promising graduate student, has dedicated her recent years to the Exodus Project. As Earth's doom became imminent, she shifted her focus to understanding and possibly diverting the asteroid's path. Known for her wit and dry humor, her catchphrase often lightens the mood: “If anyone calls, tell them I’m on another planet.”

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Cyndi has made a name for herself in the facility not just as Prof. Carol Smith's daughter but as a dedicated researcher in her own right. Her expertise has been crucial in several breakthroughs of the Exodus Project. Many have seen her tirelessly working long hours, making calculations, running simulations, and brainstorming solutions.

Her relationship with Mark Mathews, another researcher, is well-known. They're often seen grabbing a coffee together or discussing theories. Her protective nature towards her younger sister, Eliza, is evident. She's seen making sure Eliza has her safety gear on or checking on her during breaks. Cyndi's dedication to saving humanity, and especially her family, has gained her respect among peers.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

While her efforts on the Exodus Project are commendable, Cyndi secretly harbors guilt

over a miscalculation early in her research that might have delayed a potential solution to the asteroid problem. This error weighs heavily on her, especially with the current grim circumstances. Furthermore, Cyndi has found a series of encrypted messages on the facility's servers which suggest there might be a mole or saboteur among them. She's been trying to decode them without alerting anyone, fearing it could cause more panic. Carol is proud of Cyndi's dedication but is concerned about her involvement with Mark Mathews. She's noted them working together frequently, sometimes covertly, and fears what they might discover or attempt. Cyndi, ever the dedicated researcher, seems to have been digging deeper into the facility's mysteries. Cyndi might be onto a potential saboteur in their midst.

Mark has started to notice Cyndi's increasing distance. He's caught glimpses of secretive messages on her phone and has overheard her talking about "the mission." There are whispers that Cyndi might have made a breakthrough in her project to divert the asteroid's path, but it might be too late to implement.

#### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Eliza Smith:** You've noticed Eliza's wary looks towards the transdimensional device. You suspect she might have stumbled upon some information that she shouldn't have, possibly about its potential risks.

**June Thomas:** June has been somewhat distant lately. You've spotted her in hushed conversations with some of the military personnel. Something tells you she knows more about the facility's security than she lets on.

**Carol Smith:** Your mother has been stressfully going through old project files. You think she's trying to find alternative solutions or perhaps previous research that might help now.

**Mark Mathews:** Lately, Mark has been secretive, often locking himself in a lab. You suspect he's working on a side project or perhaps an alternative plan.

03

# June Thomas

## Associate Professor, Exodus Project

*“Her eyes could hold mine forever and I’d never mind.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	35
<b>Blood Type:</b>	O

<b>Life Points:</b>	20
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	0

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	3
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**Costume:** Smart casual attire suitable for both teaching and lab work: a blouse, blazer, tailored trousers, and loafers. Glasses perched on her nose, and a pendant that's a keepsake from a special day with Carol.

**Brief Background:** June Thomas, a seasoned academic, has been pivotal in laying the groundwork for the Exodus Project. Gifted with an analytical mind, she's been working on the complexities of transdimensional physics. But it's not just the quest for an escape that keeps her going; it's the love she shares with Carol Smith, as hinted by her quote, “Her eyes could hold mine forever and I’d never mind.”

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

June's reputation in the facility is impeccable. As an Associate Professor involved in the Exodus Project, her insights have been integral to the team's understanding of transdimensional dynamics. She's not only known for her expertise but also for her undeniable bond with the Smith family. Carol Smith and she share a deep connection, one that's apparent in their shared glances and whispered conversations. This connection extends to Carol's daughters, especially Eliza, with whom she tries to form a maternal bond.

Her collaboration with military personnel, especially General Tammie Wilson, is widely acknowledged. Their combined efforts represent the fusion of military might and scientific intellect, both crucial in these final hours.

### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

June harbors doubts about the feasibility of the transdimensional travel. She's come across discrepancies in the data that suggest the travel might not be as safe as they've been telling everyone. In addition, the emotional weight of her relationship with Carol sometimes takes a toll on her, especially in light of the impending doom. She fears that the time might come when she'll have to choose between her own survival and that of the ones she loves. June, has been secretly working on an alternative escape plan. She may have found a potential "backdoor" in the transdimensional device.

**WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Eliza Smith: Eliza's innocent curiosity reminds June of her younger self. However, June is worried that Eliza might have found out something unsettling about the project. She wants to shield the young girl from any more pain.

Cyndi Smith: Cyndi, ever the dedicated researcher, seems to have been digging deeper into the facility's mysteries. June suspects Cyndi might be onto a potential saboteur in their midst.

Carol Smith: Their bond is deep, yet June feels Carol might be hiding something. There've been moments when Carol seems distant, lost in thought, or overly engrossed in old project files.

Tammie Wilson: General Wilson, while an ally, has been holding secret meetings with a select few. June fears that a contingency plan, unknown to most, is in the works.

04

# Carol Smith

## Professor, Exodus Project Director

*“To touch another dimension, now that’s worth dying for.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	45
<b>Blood Type:</b>	AB

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	0

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	5
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**Costume:** Elegant, yet pragmatic attire befitting her leadership role: a deep blue or charcoal pencil skirt suit, heels, and a silk scarf. Wears a pin indicating her rank in the Exodus Project and a watch, a family heirloom.

**Brief Background:** Prof. Carol Smith leads the Exodus Project with an iron resolve. Balancing her family's safety and the responsibility of possibly saving humanity, she's always at the forefront, willing to take risks. As she often says, “To touch another dimension, now that’s worth dying for.”

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Under Prof. Smith's direction, the Exodus Project has taken leaps and bounds in its pursuit to find a safe haven for humanity. Known for her fierce determination and sharp intellect, Carol's reputation is that of a woman who would go to any length for the project's success. Her connection to June Thomas is an open secret in the facility, their bond evident to those around them. Being a mother to Cyndi and Eliza, she constantly worries about their safety while managing the mammoth task of spearheading the project.

Carol's interactions with the military, especially with General Tammie Wilson, are well-known. Together, they represent the alliance of scientific endeavor and tactical strategies.

### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Carol has uncovered evidence of another dimension, a realm which, if accessed correctly, could potentially save more than the five chosen individuals. Yet, the risks are tremendous and the ethical dilemma of choosing who to send haunts her. Further, Carol is painfully aware of some flawed components in the transdimensional device, a secret she carries heavily.

In a private conversation, Carol was discussing an anomaly within the transdimensional device. It sounds like a possible glitch or something that could jeopardize the entire Exodus Project.

Pat knows the Professor not just as a customer, but as a covert informant. He's aware that she's deeply entrenched in the Exodus Project. Through subtle hints and coded conversations, she has alluded to dimensions beyond comprehension.

Professor Smith has concerns about the project's "ethics."

Carol might have discovered an alternate method for survival, one that might not require the Exodus Project at all. Yet, the method remains untested and possibly dangerous.

The Professor and Beatrice shared a close bond during their academy days. Over the years, they've drifted apart.

Carol believes she has had a potential breakthrough that could save more than just five people.

Carol has been particularly close with General Tammie Wilson. They've had a few confidential meetings.

Carol has been stressfully going through old project files. She's frantically trying to find alternative solutions or perhaps previous research that might help now.

#### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Eliza Smith: Carol has noted Eliza's increasing anxiety and suspects her youngest might have discovered something unsettling about the project. This worries her

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deeply as she aims to shield both her daughters from harm.

Cyndi Smith: Carol is proud of Cyndi's dedication but is concerned about her involvement with Mark Mathews. She's noted them working together frequently, sometimes covertly, and fears what they might discover or attempt.

June Thomas: June, her rock, has been more distant lately. Carol suspects June might have uncovered some discrepancies in the project data and is uncertain about how to address it.

Tammie Wilson: While respecting the General's strategic acumen, Carol has caught wind of secret military meetings and contingency plans. She fears the military might override scientific decisions in the eleventh hour.

## 05

## Samantha Jones

### Private, Temporal Marine Corps

*“What am I doing here?”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	18
<b>Blood Type:</b>	B

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+5

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	2
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**Costume:** An olive-drab military jumpsuit tailored for combat readiness but reflecting Samantha's rookie status. The jumpsuit is adorned with a 'Temporal Marine Corps' patch and her private insignia. Paired with combat boots and a beret, her ensemble is finished with a utility belt containing pouches with hypothetical temporal tech gadgets.

**Brief Background:** Samantha Jones is one of the newest recruits in the Temporal Marine Corps, an elite group specially trained to handle the intricacies of time-based threats and anomalies. Her presence in such a pivotal mission is a testament to her raw potential.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Private Samantha Jones, barely out of her teens, found herself conscripted into a unit most people twice her age could only dream of. The Temporal Marine Corps, known for its stringent recruitment process, saw something exceptional in her. Despite her age, Samantha displays a maturity beyond her years. People often whisper about her quick reflexes and uncanny intuition, suggesting she might possess a latent talent in temporal perception.

Having been under General Tammie Wilson's wing has granted Samantha a rare perspective into the inner workings of the project. Their bond, a mix of mentorship and mutual respect, is evident to all in the facility.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

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Samantha's induction into the Temporal Marine Corps wasn't by choice. She was identified for her rare ability to sense temporal distortions – a skill neither she nor the Corps fully understands. Occasionally, she experiences fleeting visions, often of events just moments before they happen. These aren't always accurate and they terrify her. The weight of her potential, combined with the impending doom, often leaves her feeling overwhelmed. Maggie has seen the potential in Private Samantha. She recognizes the look of someone trying to bear an unseen weight, possibly a latent ability or secret.

#### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Tammie Wilson: The General confided in Samantha about potential "Plan B" strategies, though details remain vague. Samantha suspects that there might be an alternative to the Exodus Project which the General is considering.

Eliza Smith: During her guard shifts, Samantha caught Eliza looking lost and distressed near one of the facility's labs. Their brief interaction was filled with a mix of curiosity and mutual understanding, hinting at the shared weight of their youth in such dire times.

Carol Smith: Samantha overheard a conversation where Professor Smith mentioned concerns about the project's "ethics." The intensity in the professor's voice was palpable, making Samantha wonder what compromises are being made behind closed doors.

## 06

## Maggie Katz

### Lieutenant, Temporal Marine Corps

*"Meow."*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	28
<b>Blood Type:</b>	B

<b>Life Points:</b>	20
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+3

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	2
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**Costume:** Dark blue combat suit with silver temporal tech embedded in various spots, marking her higher rank within the Temporal Marine Corps. Several medals and commendations shine on her chest, and she carries a futuristic sidearm. Her look is completed with a pair of dark combat boots and mirrored aviator sunglasses.

**Brief Background:** A seasoned member of the Temporal Marine Corps, Lt. Maggie Katz is known for her unwavering dedication, fierce loyalty, and occasionally, her dry, almost feline sense of humor.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Lieutenant Maggie Katz is a name known to many within the facility, not just for her rank but also her reputation. Serving under General Tammie Wilson, Maggie has seen her fair share of temporal disturbances and has often been on the front line rectifying them. She's not one for long conversations, but when she speaks, people listen. Her call sign, "Feline," earned from her swift, cat-like reflexes and cunning tactics, is whispered with a mix of fear and admiration amongst the ranks. Her quip "Meow" has become her signature, often uttered after a successful mission or during an unexpected turn of events.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

While Maggie's dedication to duty is unquestionable, she harbors a deep-rooted guilt. During a temporal operation, a miscalculation resulted in the loss of her team, leaving her the sole survivor. She often second-guesses herself, wondering if there

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was something she could've done differently. This secret haunts her, and she fears the judgment of her peers should they ever find out about the failed mission.

**WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Tammie Wilson: The General has always shown a particular interest in Maggie, often assigning her the most crucial missions. Maggie suspects it's more than just trust in her abilities – perhaps the General knows something about the failed mission that Maggie doesn't.

Samantha Jones: Maggie has seen the potential in Private Samantha. She recognizes the look of someone trying to bear an unseen weight, possibly a latent ability or secret. She often wonders if Samantha has faced a similar challenge in her past.

Carol Smith: In a private conversation, Maggie overheard the Professor discussing an anomaly within the transdimensional device. Though she didn't catch all the details, it sounded like a possible glitch or something that could jeopardize the entire Exodus Project.

## 07

## Beatrice Harris

### Colonel, Temporal Marine Corps

*“Touch my kid and I’ll break you in half.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	38
<b>Blood Type:</b>	AB

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+2

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	4
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**Costume:** A tailored combat suit with red and gold temporal tech insignia, signifying her elite status in the Temporal Marine Corps. Her suit showcases several service ribbons and awards. Sturdy combat boots and a custom sidearm holster round out her attire, coupled with a stern, commanding presence.

**Brief Background:** Colonel Beatrice Harris is a formidable force within the Corps, not just for her combat skills, but also as a mother and wife. Balancing duty and family has always been a challenge, but Beatrice has managed it with unyielding determination.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Colonel Beatrice Harris is renowned for her steadfastness in the face of danger and her unwavering dedication to the Temporal Marine Corps. With over two decades of service, she has seen and rectified countless temporal disturbances. Her colleagues know her as strict but fair, always leading her troops from the front. Many a time, she's risked her life for the Corps, but nothing trumps the protective instinct she has for her family, especially her daughter, Jennifer. Any mention of threat to Jennifer sends Beatrice into a protective overdrive, and it's well-known that crossing her on this is a grave mistake.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Beatrice and Clyde have been facing marital challenges for some time now. While she has tried to keep this private, the stress of impending doomsday and the Exodus

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Project has made things more challenging. Clyde's involvement in a top-secret section of the project has also driven a wedge between them, with Beatrice suspecting he's withholding crucial information. Beatrice and Tammie have shared many battlefields and bear mutual respect. However, Tammie worries about Beatrice's emotional involvement with her family, fearing it might compromise the mission. She also knows Beatrice has marital struggles and wonders if it might affect her judgment. Because of her work, Beatrice has to have late-night calls and hushed conversations. She tries not to disturb her family when this happens. Lately, Beatrice's marriage has been strained.

#### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Carol Smith: The Professor and Beatrice shared a close bond during their academy days. Over the years, they've drifted apart, but Beatrice recalls Carol mentioning something about a potential breakthrough that could save more than just five people.

Tammie Wilson: The General and Beatrice have had their disagreements, particularly when it comes to mission tactics. Lately, Beatrice has felt Tammie acting more distant, possibly due to the stress of impending doomsday or maybe she's hiding something.

Jennifer Harris: Jennifer has always been her pride and joy. Lately, Beatrice has noticed Jennifer acting secretive, especially around certain members of the facility.

Clyde Harris: Clyde has become more evasive, especially when questioned about his work. Beatrice has overheard him talking in hushed tones about "another way out" but hasn't confronted him yet. She's worried he might be involved in something risky or unauthorized.

## 08

## Tammie Wilson

### General, Temporal Marine Corps

*“To serve, to protect, and to ensure survival.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	48
<b>Blood Type:</b>	O

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+1

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	6
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**Costume:** A polished, sleek black uniform with golden temporal tech insignia, signifying her highest rank in the Temporal Marine Corps. The uniform is adorned with numerous medals, awards, and the Corps emblem. A tactical belt, black combat boots, and an air of authority make her a prominent figure in any room.

**Brief Background:** General Tammie Wilson has overseen numerous missions within the Temporal Marine Corps, earning respect for her strategic prowess and leadership. Beneath the hardened exterior lies a compassionate heart dedicated to saving humanity from impending doom.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

General Tammie Wilson is the epitome of dedication and duty. Ascending the ranks through sheer determination and skill, she's known to prioritize the Corps and its objectives above all. Tammie has seen countless comrades fall in line of duty, instilling in her a sense of urgency to ensure the success of the Exodus Project. While her position often requires making difficult decisions, those under her command respect her deeply for always having the greater good in mind. Her collaboration with Professor Carol Smith is public knowledge, both striving for the survival of humanity.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Tammie has been struggling with a sense of guilt for some time now. The weight of deciding who gets to survive through the Exodus Project weighs heavily on her

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shoulders. Not all decisions have been purely strategic; some have been deeply personal. She knows not everyone will agree with her choices and that some, when they discover the truth, might see her in a different light.

General Wilson, has been holding secret meetings with a select few regarding a contingency plan, unknown to most, that is in the works. The General confided in Samantha about potential "Plan B" strategies, though details remain vague. Samantha suspects that there might be an alternative to the Exodus Project which the General is considering. The General has always shown a particular interest in Maggie, often assigning her the most crucial missions. Maggie suspects it's more than just trust in her abilities – perhaps the General knows something about the failed mission that Maggie doesn't.

While respecting the General's strategic acumen, Carol may have caught wind of secret military meetings and contingency plans. She may fear the military might override scientific decisions in the eleventh hour.

#### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Carol Smith: The collaboration with Carol has been both a blessing and a curse. Tammie knows that Carol might have discovered an alternate method for survival, one that might not require the Exodus Project at all. Yet, the method remains untested and possibly dangerous.

Beatrice Harris: Beatrice and Tammie have shared many battlefields and bear mutual respect. However, Tammie worries about Beatrice's emotional involvement with her family, fearing it might compromise the mission. She also knows about Beatrice's marital struggles and wonders if it might affect her judgment.

## 09

## Jennifer Harris

### High School Student, Cheerleader

*“En garde, thrust, parry, attack!”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	16
<b>Blood Type:</b>	A

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+5

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	1
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**Costume:** Jennifer usually sports the vibrant colors of her school's cheerleader uniform during school hours. The uniform is complete with sparkling pom-poms and school mascot symbols. Outside of school, she often dresses in fencing attire, hinting at her hidden talent and passion.

**Brief Background:** Jennifer is more than just a cheerleader; she's a competitive fencer. While she loves the spirit and camaraderie of cheerleading, the discipline and precision of fencing resonate with her deeply. This balance of athleticism and artistry defines Jennifer's dual nature.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Jennifer Harris is a popular figure in her high school, both as a top cheerleader and an academic achiever. The crowd loves her for her high-flying routines and infectious energy. Few, however, know about her penchant for fencing. Jennifer believes that fencing teaches her patience, precision, and strategy, things she finds missing in her chaotic teenage life. Having military parents has instilled discipline in her from a young age. However, it also means living in the shadow of their accomplishments and expectations.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Behind Jennifer's energetic demeanor lies a secret burden. She's been receiving mysterious letters from an unknown source. These letters hint at dangerous secrets regarding the Exodus Project and suggest that her family might be in grave danger.

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Jennifer is torn between dismissing them as pranks or delving deeper into this enigma.

**WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Beatrice Harris: Jennifer has always admired her mother's strength and dedication. But she has overheard hushed conversations between her parents that suggest not everything is as it seems with the Temporal Marine Corps and the Exodus Project.

Clyde Harris: Jennifer loves her father but has noticed him becoming distant lately. She suspects that he might be involved in something perilous, something related to the letters she's been receiving.

## 10

## Pat Jones

### Technician, Bob's Computer Repair

*"This does nooooooot compute!"*

<b>Sex:</b>	M
<b>Age:</b>	21
<b>Blood Type:</b>	B

<b>Life Points:</b>	20
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+2

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	1
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**Costume:** Pat typically wears a navy-blue jumpsuit covered in various patches that read "Bob's Computer Repair" and other tech-related jokes. Around his waist is a belt filled with tools of his trade – a mini flashlight, a multi-tool, and other necessary gadgets. Safety goggles usually hang around his neck, and a well-worn baseball cap, slightly askew, rests atop his head.

**Brief Background:** Pat was always the kid who would tinker with machines and gadgets. From the broken toaster to the school's computer lab, Pat was the go-to guy. His innate understanding of technology made him a natural fit at Bob's Computer Repair, where he's known as the best tech, always up for any challenge.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Pat Jones is not your ordinary technician. Since a young age, he showcased an uncanny knack for understanding machines, often fixing things that stumped other technicians. His workspace at Bob's Computer Repair is a mix of retro computers, modern gadgets, and even a few alien-looking contraptions. Friendly, albeit a bit quirky, Pat is always ready to crack a joke, even if it's at his expense. He's known Professor Carol Smith for years, often assisting her with computer-related issues. There are murmurs that Pat might be involved in more than just basic tech repair, but nobody has been able to pin anything concrete on him.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Beneath the surface of computer parts and tangled wires, Pat has been researching

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the boundaries of reality itself. His fascination began when he accidentally stumbled upon information about the Exodus Project while fixing a computer. Since then, he's been discreetly gathering more data, trying to piece together the true nature and potential of this secretive endeavor.

**WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Carol Smith: Pat knows the Professor not just as a customer, but as a covert informant. He's aware that she's deeply entrenched in the Exodus Project. Through subtle hints and coded conversations, she has alluded to dimensions beyond comprehension. Pat is curious to learn more, but he's also wary of getting too involved.

## 11

## Clyde Harris

### Doctor, Medical Services

*“Take seven aspirins and don’t call me in the morning.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	M
<b>Age:</b>	40
<b>Blood Type:</b>	O

<b>Life Points:</b>	18
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	0

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	2
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**Costume:** Clyde typically wears a white lab coat, which has a faint aroma of antiseptics. Beneath, he usually sports a collared shirt and tie, with sensible, polished shoes. On his coat's pocket, a name badge reads "Dr. Clyde Harris - Medical Services." A stethoscope is often wrapped around his neck, and he always carries a small leather bag containing essential medical tools.

**Brief Background:** As a doctor, Clyde is known for his exceptional diagnostic skills and dry sense of humor. Over the years, he has treated a myriad of cases, earning respect from his peers and trust from his patients.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Dr. Clyde Harris, known for his cynical yet humorous demeanor, is an expert in the medical field. Despite his jesting about overloading on aspirin, Clyde takes his job seriously, ensuring the health and well-being of all his patients. Married to Colonel Beatrice Harris, Clyde often finds himself at odds balancing his professional life with the unpredictable nature of being connected to the Temporal Marine Corps through his wife. While he may be a doctor first, Clyde's dedication to his family is unparalleled. His love for his wife and daughter, Jennifer, is evident in every decision he makes.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Though Clyde is renowned in the medical world, few know about his interest in experimental treatments and therapies. These aren't harmful or malicious but are on

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the cutting edge of medical science. He has a hidden lab where he experiments with unique treatments, driven by a secret hope to find cures for ailments deemed incurable. He sometimes tests these on himself, which might explain his occasional absent-mindedness or quirky behavior.

Clyde has become more evasive with his wife, especially when questioned about his work. She may have heard him talking in hushed tones about "another way out" but hasn't confronted him yet.

#### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Beatrice Harris: Clyde knows his wife has been acting suspiciously lately. Her late-night calls and hushed conversations have him concerned. While he trusts her, he wonders if there's more to her role than meets the eye.

Jennifer Harris: While he's always been proud of his daughter, Clyde has recently discovered Jennifer's fascination with fencing and combat. He suspects it might be an influence from Beatrice, but he's unsure how deep Jennifer's involvement might be in the world of combat.

## 12

## Mark Mathews

### Engineer, Datadata Computers

*“So, do I cut the red wire or the green one?”*

<b>Sex:</b>	M
<b>Age:</b>	30
<b>Blood Type:</b>	A

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	0

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	2
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**Costume:** Mark typically sports geek-chic attire, with rectangular glasses and a penchant for wearing tech-themed T-shirts. He always carries a backpack filled with computer tools, cables, and various gadgets. On his wrist, he wears a smartwatch that he tinkered with himself. Mark's shoes are practical and sturdy, perfect for both the lab and outdoor terrains.

**Brief Background:** A tech prodigy, Mark graduated top of his class from MIT. He is known for his innate ability to understand and troubleshoot even the most complex of computer systems. His job at Datadata Computers involves working on advanced computing projects that have significant societal implications.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Mark Mathews is a renowned engineer at Datadata Computers, recognized for his ability to think critically and creatively. With his lighthearted quips about cutting wires, he alleviates tense situations, a trait admired by his colleagues. Despite his seemingly always-connected world, Mark values genuine human connections, especially with his girlfriend, Cyndi. His association with General Tammie Wilson is well-known; they collaborated on a top-secret tech project, and their partnership has led to significant advancements in temporal tech.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Mark, being at the forefront of tech innovation, stumbled upon a blueprint for a device that could potentially manipulate time. He's been secretly working on this

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device in his private lab, understanding its vast implications. Mark fears that if this device falls into the wrong hands, it could disrupt the very fabric of space-time.

Lately, Mark has been secretive, often locking himself in a lab. He's working on a side project or perhaps an alternative plan.

#### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Tammie Wilson: Mark knows that the General has been under immense pressure, dealing with issues beyond the typical scope of the Marine Corps. He's also aware of a secret faction within the Corps that opposes some of Tammie's decisions.

Cyndi Smith: While deeply in love, Mark has started to notice Cyndi's increasing distance. He's caught glimpses of secretive messages on her phone and has overheard her talking about "the mission." This has left him concerned about her well-being and the nature of her involvement in whatever this "mission" might be.

## 13

## Wilma Rudolph

### Sergeant, Temporal Marine Corps

*“Nice to meet you, now go away.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	20
<b>Blood Type:</b>	O

<b>Life Points:</b>	20
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	3

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	2
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**Costume:** Wilma wears the standard-issue uniform of the Temporal Marine Corps, meticulously maintained and polished. A hardened expression is usually present on her face, accentuated by a scar running down her left cheek. She keeps her hair pulled back in a tight bun and wears combat boots that have seen many a mission. Around her neck, she has a silver pendant, its design hidden beneath her uniform.

**Brief Background:** Hailing from a lineage of soldiers, Wilma enlisted in the Temporal Marine Corps at a young age. She quickly rose through the ranks, owing to her prowess in combat and her strategic mind. Despite her achievements, she maintains a lone-wolf persona.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Wilma Rudolph is a force to be reckoned with in the Temporal Marine Corps. Known for her cold demeanor and exceptional combat skills, she's an enigma to most. Many speculate about her past, but few facts are known. The scar on her face is a testament to battles fought, but she never speaks of it. The Corps is her life, and she dedicates herself entirely to its cause. Her motto, “Nice to meet you, now go away,” reflects her distaste for idle chatter and her focus on duty.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Underneath her tough exterior, Wilma grapples with deep-seated loneliness. The pendant she wears is a memento from her twin sister, who was lost in a temporal mission gone awry. While Wilma projects strength, she's haunted by this loss and is

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on a personal quest to find answers about her sister's disappearance, even if it means bending the rules of time.

**WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Temporal Marine Corps: Whispers around the base suggest that certain missions are off the record, known only to the higher-ups. Some even speak of a secret chamber where temporal experiments are conducted, though Wilma hasn't seen it herself.

Unnamed Marine: During one of her solo recon missions, Wilma overheard a fellow marine talking about an "anomaly" they witnessed during a temporal jump. This marine seemed deeply disturbed and was transferred off-base soon after. Wilma has been trying to track them down for more details, believing it may be linked to her sister's disappearance.

## 14

## Jeff Samuels

### Unemployed Transient

*"I used to have a life but I've misplaced it."*

<b>Sex:</b>	M
<b>Age:</b>	24
<b>Blood Type:</b>	B

<b>Life Points:</b>	20
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+3

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	1
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**Costume:** Jeff's clothes are a hodgepodge of worn-out jackets, tattered jeans, and mismatched shoes, signifying his life on the streets. He sports an unkempt beard and a wild mane of hair that hasn't seen a comb in months. There's a rugged backpack that he carries everywhere, filled with the little he owns. Tied around his wrist, a seemingly out-of-place, sleek, silver bracelet.

**Brief Background:** Once a promising student with a bright future, Jeff's life took a downturn after a series of personal tragedies. He's since been wandering, taking things day by day and trying to find his place in the world.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Not much is known about Jeff Samuels, and he likes it that way. His presence on the base is odd, to say the least. He used to be a rising star in quantum physics before a tragedy struck, taking away his family and shattering his world. Overnight, he became a man of the streets, traveling from place to place, city to city, searching for a purpose. He's quiet, introspective, and seems to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders. Many see him as just a lost soul, but his sharp eyes and keen mind suggest there's more to him than meets the eye.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

The silver bracelet on Jeff's wrist is more than just a piece of jewelry. It's a remnant from his past, a highly advanced piece of tech that he's been safeguarding. This device has the power to interact with temporal anomalies, something Jeff discovered

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during his studies. He believes that with the right tools and knowledge, he can rectify the tragedy that befell his family, even if it means altering the very fabric of time.

#### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Temporal Marine Corps:** Jeff has overheard murmurs about the Corps meddling with the natural order of time, potentially putting the entire universe at risk. He's trying to gather more information, hoping their tech combined with his bracelet might provide the answers he seeks.

**Unnamed Marine:** In his travels, Jeff once shared a campfire with a distressed marine who confided in him about witnessing unnatural occurrences during a mission. The marine disappeared before dawn, leaving behind a cryptic note that read, "Trust no one at the base."

## 15

## William Fritz

### Captain, Temporal Marine Corps

*“All I want is a really good time.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	M
<b>Age:</b>	36
<b>Blood Type:</b>	AB

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+2

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	3
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**Costume:** Captain Fritz is almost always seen in his pristine Temporal Marine uniform, signifying his rank and dedication to the corps. The uniform is well-tailored, with various badges and commendations hinting at his illustrious career. He also wears a timepiece around his neck, not for telling time but for another, mysterious purpose.

**Brief Background:** William Fritz hails from a lineage of decorated officers in the Temporal Marine Corps. As a captain, he's seen his fair share of temporal anomalies and threats. He's known for his impeccable leadership skills, but also for his penchant to let loose when off-duty.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

William Fritz is the epitome of a seasoned captain: stern, disciplined, and fiercely loyal to the Corps. Having graduated top of his class from the Temporal Marine Academy, he quickly rose through the ranks, leading numerous successful missions across various timelines. However, beneath this disciplined exterior lies a man who craves excitement. When not on duty, Fritz is known to indulge in the pleasures of various timelines, from the roaring parties of the 1920s to the futuristic raves of the 31st century. His motto, "All I want is a really good time," isn't just a saying—it's a lifestyle.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

While Captain Fritz's party-hopping across timelines seems harmless, there's a

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deeper reason for his actions. He's been searching for his younger sister, who went missing in a temporal anomaly years ago. Every timeline he visits, every party he's at, he's secretly hoping to catch a glimpse of her or find a clue that might lead to her whereabouts. This personal mission is something he's kept hidden, even from his closest allies in the Corps.

#### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Temporal Marine Corps: Fritz is aware that there are factions within the Corps that do not agree with its current direction. Some believe the Corps should have more control over time, while others argue for less interference.

Unknown Officer: During one of his escapades, Fritz overheard an officer discussing a secret operation that aimed to harness the power of temporal anomalies for personal gain. Though he didn't see the officer's face, he recognized the voice but has yet to put a name to it.

## 16

# Gene Clean

## Complex Janitor

*“Rub a dub dub, scrub it and rub it and make it all shiny.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	M
<b>Age:</b>	22
<b>Blood Type:</b>	B

<b>Life Points:</b>	20
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+3

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	1
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**Costume:** Gene dons a white jumpsuit with blue patches signifying his role in the complex. He has various pockets containing cleaning tools and supplies. A big mop is his go-to weapon and tool, and he often has headphones on, playing music as he cleans.

**Brief Background:** Gene's upbringing is a mystery to most. He found his way to the Temporal Marine Corps base seeking employment and quickly made himself indispensable. His uncanny ability to remove any stain or mess has earned him respect, if not the company of others.

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Gene Clean, despite being the youngest janitor the complex has ever seen, has made a mark with his impeccable cleaning skills. There isn't a stain too stubborn or a mess too grand that Gene can't tackle. He has a peculiar attachment to his mop, which he fondly calls "Moppy". Gene is seen bobbing his head to music as he goes about his work, making even the most mundane tasks look lively. While his role might seem insignificant to some, those in the know understand that a clean base is a functional base, and Gene ensures everything is in tip-top shape.

### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

The truth about Gene is far more intriguing than his surface persona suggests. He's actually from the future and came back in time for reasons he's yet to fully comprehend. His knowledge about advanced cleaning technologies and techniques

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comes from his future timeline. Gene has fleeting memories of a mission or purpose he needs to fulfill, but they remain elusive, like fragments of a forgotten dream.

**WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Temporal Anomalies: Gene once overheard a conversation about the base being a hotspot for temporal anomalies, which he suspects might be the reason he's here.

Unknown Officer's Shoe Size: Gene has cleaned a specific pair of shoes in the officers' locker room that do not belong to any known personnel on the base. The shoes always carry a unique, unidentifiable stain, which returns no matter how many times he cleans it.

## 17

**Sandy Martin****High School Student, Assistant to the Exodus Project***"Anywhere but here, is where I want to be."*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	17
<b>Blood Type:</b>	A

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	0

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	1
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**Costume:** Sandy often dresses in casual jeans, a t-shirt with science or space-themed graphics, and a lab coat that's slightly too big, indicating it might belong to an adult. She also carries a tablet computer filled with project notes and sketches.

**Brief Background:** The youngest assistant ever appointed to the Exodus Project, Sandy is both a high school genius and a teenager looking to escape the confines of her chaotic home life.

**PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:**

Sandy Martin is a prodigy, and her involvement with the Exodus Project is evidence of her unmatched intellect. However, her professional life overshadows the chaos of her personal one. While she's constantly surrounded by the wonders of science and the excitement of the project, Sandy's home is fractured by secrets, tension, and emotions. This dichotomy gives her a unique perspective, balancing between her youthful yearnings for normalcy and her advanced, mature understanding of temporal science. Though she puts on a brave face, the weight of her family dynamics, combined with the pressures of the project, makes her wish she could be "anywhere but here."

**PRIVATE INFORMATION:**

Though Sandy respects her mother, Louise, the revelation of her affair with Rachel Wiggins has made her home situation incredibly uncomfortable. Sandy secretly resents Rachel, not because of her relationship with her mother, but because it feels

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like Rachel is replacing Mandy, her sister, in Louise's affections. While trying to navigate these troubled waters, she's also recently started to feel out of place in time, experiencing episodes where she feels detached from the present, like a traveler lost between moments. Sandy is aware that her mom, Louise, is particularly vulnerable right now and that she might be susceptible to manipulation or pressure. Louise has hinted at regrets and a desire to correct past mistakes, potentially with the Exodus Project's technology.

Sandy knows that Mandy, her sister, has been feeling left out and struggles with feelings of inferiority due to Sandy's success in the Exodus Project. This has strained their once-close bond. Rachel has caught Mandy's watchful and occasionally suspicious glances, making her wonder if Mandy has any doubts about her intentions with both the Exodus Project and her relationship with Louise.

#### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Mandy's Struggles:** Sandy knows that Mandy, her sister, has been feeling left out and struggles with feelings of inferiority due to Sandy's success in the Exodus Project. This has strained their once-close bond.

**Rachel's Motivations:** Rachel Wiggins often sneaks confidential conversations at home with unknown individuals. Sandy has caught snippets of these, hinting that Rachel might have ulterior motives related to the Exodus Project.

**Louise's Vulnerability:** Sandy is aware that her mom, Louise, is particularly vulnerable right now and that she might be susceptible to manipulation or pressure. Louise has hinted at regrets and a desire to correct past mistakes, potentially with the Exodus Project's technology.

## 18

**Mandy Martin****Graduate Student, Researcher on the Exodus Project***“If anyone calls, tell them I’m on another planet.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	27
<b>Blood Type:</b>	B

<b>Life Points:</b>	20
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	0

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	2
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**Costume:** Mandy is dressed in practical clothing suitable for lab work: slacks, a button-up shirt, and a lab coat adorned with a nametag. Around her neck, she wears a pendant—a gift from Fred.

**Brief Background:** Mandy is a bright researcher, passionate about her work on the Exodus Project. However, personal life complexities have recently taken a toll on her focus and enthusiasm for the project.

**PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:**

Mandy has always been the reliable one in the family—organized, ambitious, and driven. When she was appointed as a researcher for the Exodus Project, it felt like all her hard work had finally paid off. However, the familial dynamics have been overshadowed by her mother's romantic choices and her younger sister's precocious involvement in the same project. Mandy often feels like she's competing for recognition in both her professional and personal life. Despite this, she remains determined and passionate about her research, often jokingly saying she'd be happier on another planet away from the drama.

**PRIVATE INFORMATION:**

Mandy feels overshadowed by her sister Sandy's prodigious accomplishments and struggles with feelings of inadequacy. She's also privately conflicted about her mother's relationship with Rachel, feeling betrayed and hurt by the secrecy around it. Moreover, she's been having issues with her boyfriend, Fred MacDonald. While he's

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supportive on the surface, she suspects he's using her for access to the Exodus Project's technology and insights.

Sandy is aware that her mom, Louise, is particularly vulnerable right now and that she might be susceptible to manipulation or pressure. Louise has hinted at regrets and a desire to correct past mistakes, potentially with the Exodus Project's technology.

### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Sandy's Discomfort:** Mandy knows that Sandy feels out of place at home due to Louise's relationship with Rachel. She senses Sandy's occasional distance and detachment, suspecting her younger sister may be dealing with more than she lets on.

**Rachel's Secrecy:** While she has no concrete proof, Mandy has observed that Rachel often hides her phone when she's around and frequently takes secretive calls, hinting at potential ulterior motives related to the project.

**Fred's Intentions:** Mandy has overheard hushed conversations between Fred and some unknown individuals discussing some technical aspects of the Exodus Project. It's made her suspicious about whether he's genuinely interested in her or primarily the work she's involved in.

**Louise's Hopes:** Mandy knows that her mother sees the Exodus Project as a potential way to correct some past mistakes. Louise has subtly hinted at wanting to use the project for personal reasons.

## 19

## Rachel Wiggins

### Assistant Professor, Exodus Project

*“Her eyes could hold mine forever and I’d never mind.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	37
<b>Blood Type:</b>	AB

<b>Life Points:</b>	20
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	0

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	2
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**Costume:** Rachel is clad in a formal pantsuit with a blouse. Her attire mirrors her academic standing, and she wears glasses that she often fidgets with when she's deep in thought. A small pin on her lapel symbolizes her dedication to the Exodus Project.

**Brief Background:** A brilliant academic mind, Rachel has dedicated her life to her work. Her passion for the Exodus Project is only rivaled by her love for Louise. She navigates the challenges of her personal life, all the while committed to groundbreaking research.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Rachel has been a trailblazer in her field, consistently challenging norms and breaking barriers. Her involvement in the Exodus Project is seen as the culmination of a stellar academic career. She's respected by her peers, both for her intellect and her teaching methods. The presence of the Martin family in her life, however, adds a layer of complexity. With Louise as her secret lover and her daughters as colleagues, Rachel often feels the strain of balancing personal and professional boundaries. Despite it all, she remains fiercely committed to her work and dreams of creating a lasting legacy through the Exodus Project.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Rachel harbors deep-seated fears about her relationship with Louise becoming public knowledge. Not just because of the potential professional implications, but more so because of the threat it could pose to the bond she's trying to forge with

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Mandy and Sandy. Rachel also has a contentious history with Lt. General Rose Patton from their college days, which adds an extra layer of tension to their current professional relationship.

Rachel Wiggins often sneaks confidential conversations at home with unknown individuals. Family members may have caught snippets of these, hinting that Rachel might have ulterior motives related to the Exodus Project. Rachel often hides her phone when others are around and frequently takes secretive calls, hinting at potential ulterior motives related to the project.

### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Louise's Struggles:** Rachel is well aware of the challenges Louise faces in balancing her love for Rachel with her responsibilities as a mother. She knows Louise is worried about the impact of their relationship on Sandy and Mandy.

**Mandy's Suspicions:** Rachel has caught Mandy's watchful and occasionally suspicious glances, making her wonder if Mandy has any doubts about her intentions with both the Exodus Project and her relationship with Louise.

**Sandy's Feelings:** Rachel has sensed that Sandy feels alienated and out of place at home, especially after accidentally overhearing a heartfelt conversation between the sisters.

**Rose Patton's Disdain:** Rachel knows that Rose hasn't forgotten their college days and still holds some sort of grudge against her. She's cautious when dealing with Rose and tries to avoid being alone with her, sensing a latent animosity that could compromise the Exodus Project.

## 20

**Louise Martin****Assoc. Professor, Exodus Project Director***“To touch another dimension, now that’s worth dying for.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	47
<b>Blood Type:</b>	O

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	0

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	3
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**Costume:** Draped in a sophisticated blazer and skirt ensemble, Louise exudes authority and charisma. The emblem of the Exodus Project is pinned to her lapel, and she wears her hair up in a professional bun. Her glasses rest on a chain around her neck, often pulled up for reading or emphasizing a point.

**Brief Background:** Louise is a beacon in her field, guiding the Exodus Project with a clear vision. As a mother and a lover, she constantly balances her professional and personal lives, sometimes walking a tightrope between the two.

**PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:**

Louise's name is synonymous with the Exodus Project. Her relentless ambition has propelled the initiative forward, making significant breakthroughs in the quest to touch other dimensions. Her passion isn't merely academic—it's personal. The project's potential to redefine existence fascinates her. As a mother, Louise has tried to nurture Mandy and Sandy, providing them with opportunities to shine. While she's shared many of her professional triumphs with Mandy, she's been equally concerned about Sandy's feelings of detachment.

**PRIVATE INFORMATION:**

Beyond the corridors of academia, Louise secretly harbors a deep love for Rachel Wiggins. Their relationship, though fulfilling, brings with it the weight of secrecy. Louise worries about the impact on her daughters if the relationship were to be discovered, especially given Mandy's direct involvement with the Exodus Project.

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There's also a past incident involving Lt. General Rose Patton—a professional disagreement that escalated into a personal rift, the details of which Louise prefers to bury. Louise has lately been having occasional bouts of ill health and has concerns about the potential implications for the project. In her capacity as a nurse, Mary once treated Louise Martin for a minor injury and noticed signs of a more serious, undisclosed health condition. She respects patient confidentiality but is genuinely concerned about Louise's well-being. Having worked on Louise's computers, Billy has come across some intriguing files, hinting at projects much more complex than ordinary academic work. He's found diagrams that resemble advanced machinery and coded software. Rachel is well aware of the challenges Louise faces in balancing her love for Rachel with her responsibilities as a mother. She knows Louise is worried about the impact of their relationship on In his profession, Larry occasionally comes across medical records and notes. He's aware of an injury Louise Martin had several years ago, something that doesn't match any regular accident. It's more consistent with a high-energy physics incident, but it's none of his business, so he hasn't probed.

#### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Rachel's Concerns:** Louise is acutely aware of Rachel's apprehensions about their relationship. She knows Rachel's caught between their love and the potential ramifications if their secret becomes public.

**Mandy's Involvement:** She's proud of Mandy's contributions to the Exodus Project but also senses her elder daughter's curiosity and perhaps suspicions about her relationship with Rachel.

**Sandy's Alienation:** Louise is painfully aware of Sandy's feelings of being out of place. The gap between them has been widening, and she's desperate to bridge it.

**Rose Patton's Animosity:** Louise recalls the incident from years ago with Rose. She's always on edge around the Lt. General, knowing their past is far from water under the bridge.

## 21

## Sally Law

### Private, Temporal Marine Corps

*“What am I doing here?”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	20
<b>Blood Type:</b>	AB

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+5

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	2
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**Costume:** Wearing the standardized Temporal Marine Corps uniform, Sally's appearance is crisp and immaculate. Her attire is accented by her numerous medals of accomplishment, each one telling a story of her extraordinary combat skills. A fresh-faced recruit, her eyes reveal a mixture of determination, confusion, and innocence.

**Brief Background:** Sally is the poster child for Temporal Marine excellence, demonstrating combat capabilities well beyond her years. However, her ascent in the ranks has been sudden, and not without its fair share of questions.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

A prodigious new recruit in the Temporal Marine Corps, Sally's prowess in combat has quickly made her a name among her peers. Many find her skills hard to believe for someone so young. Friendly, open-hearted, and sometimes naive, Sally is often caught off guard by the politics and hidden agendas of military life. Her simple question, "What am I doing here?" reflects her internal struggle to find her place and purpose within the Corps. Lt. General Rose Patton has taken a special interest in her, guiding and mentoring Sally, which has further fueled whispers among the ranks.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Before joining the Temporal Marines, Sally experienced a life-altering incident—a mysterious event that she can't fully remember, but which she believes might have led to her exceptional combat abilities. Haunted by fragmented memories, she's

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hesitant to seek answers, fearing what truths may emerge. All she recalls is a strange symbol and whispers in a language she can't understand. This uncharted part of her past makes her question her true identity and purpose in the Corps.

Within the Marine Corps, rumors circulate about a new recruit with uncanny abilities. Sally Law's swift rise has not gone unnoticed, some may believe there's more to Sally's story than meets the eye.

### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Rose Patton's Investment:** Sally senses a deeper reason behind the Lt. General's mentorship. While grateful for the guidance, she can't shake the feeling that Rose knows more about her past than she lets on. There are moments, fleeting glances, and half-spoken sentences, which make Sally think Rose is privy to the secret of her forgotten event.

**Temporal Marine Corps Whispers:** Sally overhears fellow marines discussing the Exodus Project, Louise Martin, and possible military applications of their research. While not entirely sure of the implications, she's aware that the project is of significant interest to the higher-ups, including Rose Patton.

## 22

## Regina Schuster

### Lieutenant, Temporal Marine Corps

*"Meow."*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	30
<b>Blood Type:</b>	AB

<b>Life Points:</b>	20
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+3

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	2
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**Costume:** Regina's uniform bears the marks of a well-decorated lieutenant, with the occasional unexpected twist, such as a cat-shaped pin attached discreetly to her lapel. Her dark hair is often tied up in a tight bun, but a few stray hairs always manage to break free, symbolizing her controlled yet unpredictable nature.

**Brief Background:** With a reputation for being both playful and fierce, Regina's quirky "Meow" catchphrase is both a nod to her affinity for cats and a metaphorical statement on her ability to pounce at the right moment.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Regina Schuster is a figure of juxtaposition within the Temporal Marine Corps; she's known for her disciplined approach to her duties but also for her unpredictable and playful side. Her catchphrase, "Meow," frequently lightens the mood but also serves as a reminder that she can be as stealthy and lethal as a cat. Regina's rapport with her subordinates is excellent, often taking under her wing those who show promise. The Lt. General, Rose Patton, has a particular trust in Regina, assigning her to delicate missions, relying on her unique mix of seriousness and whimsy to achieve objectives.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Regina harbors a deep-rooted skepticism about the true intentions of the Exodus Project. Through undisclosed means, she's come across classified documents suggesting that the project's ambitions might extend beyond simple exploration.

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Torn between duty and morality, she wrestles with the choice of whether to disclose her suspicions or investigate further on her own. Her affinity for cats isn't just a quirk; it's a connection to a cherished pet that disappeared mysteriously in a temporal experiment gone awry.

#### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Rose Patton's Secrets:** Regina's close working relationship with Rose means she's been privy to some confidential missions and concerns. While Rose hasn't explicitly shared everything, Regina suspects that the Lt. General might be personally invested in the Exodus Project's success for reasons beyond military advantage.

**Temporal Gossip:** Within the Marine Corps, rumors circulate about a new recruit with uncanny abilities. Sally Law's swift rise has not gone unnoticed, and Regina is among those who believe there's more to Sally's story than meets the eye.

## 23

## Mary Carter

### Nurse, Medical Services

*"Touch my kid and I'll break you in half."*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	35
<b>Blood Type:</b>	O

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+2

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	2
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**Costume:** Mary wears a white medical uniform, impeccably clean but showing signs of wear. Around her neck hangs a locket containing pictures of her husband and daughter. Her hair is usually pulled back tightly, revealing a determined face with crow's feet indicating many sleepless nights.

**Brief Background:** Mary is a fiercely protective mother and a dedicated nurse, unafraid to stand up to anyone threatening the wellbeing of her patients or family.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Having spent over a decade in the medical field, Mary Carter's reputation is that of a competent and caring nurse. Her colleagues know her to be passionate about her work and fiercely protective of her patients, especially the young ones. To her, the hospital is a second home. She often speaks of her daughter, Ruth, and their shared dreams for the future. Mary's reputation for being unyielding when it comes to threats is well-known; her motto, "Touch my kid and I'll break you in half," isn't taken lightly by those who've seen her in action, especially during medical emergencies.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Underneath her strong exterior, Mary grapples with the trauma of a near-death experience involving her daughter, Ruth, where she had to use her medical skills to save her life. The event left emotional scars, deepening her protective instincts. Moreover, her marriage to Larry Carter is strained. Despite the love they shared, the

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pressure of their respective jobs, combined with past traumas, has created an emotional chasm between them, one they're desperately trying to bridge.

### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Louise Martin's Health:** In her capacity as a nurse, Mary once treated Louise Martin for a minor injury and noticed signs of a more serious, undisclosed health condition. She respects patient confidentiality but is genuinely concerned about Louise's well-being.

**Rose Patton's Leadership:** Mary respects Lt. General Rose Patton but is aware that Patton's leadership decisions haven't always been popular within the ranks. Whispers of dissent sometimes reach her ears in the medical bay, but she remains neutral, focused on her duties.

**Larry's Secrets:** Though Mary knows her husband, Larry, is hiding something, she's yet to discover the truth. She's overheard snippets of his mysterious conversations, enough to make her curious, but not enough to understand the context.

## 24

**Rose Patton****Lieutenant General, Temporal Marine Corps***“To serve, to protect, and to ensure survival.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	50
<b>Blood Type:</b>	A

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+1

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	4
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**Costume:** Rose dons a sharp, meticulously maintained military uniform adorned with numerous commendations and ribbons. Her silver hair is cropped short, giving her a stern appearance. Around her neck, she wears a pendant, a family heirloom signifying the Patton legacy within the military.

**Brief Background:** A dedicated and veteran soldier, Rose Patton has ascended the ranks through grit, strategy, and an unwavering sense of duty. Her life revolves around serving the Corps, and she expects nothing less than absolute commitment from her subordinates.

**PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:**

Lieutenant General Rose Patton is a legend within the Temporal Marine Corps. Known for her strategic brilliance and leadership qualities, she has led numerous successful operations throughout her career. Her commitment to the Corps and its overarching mission is unwavering, often to the detriment of personal relationships. Many view her as the embodiment of duty, though some accuse her of being cold or distant. Her connection with Louise Martin and Mary Carter is an exception, demonstrating her capacity for close, personal bonds. The Patton legacy, with several generations serving in the military, weighs heavily on her, driving her to uphold the family's esteemed reputation at any cost.

**PRIVATE INFORMATION:**

Behind the steel facade, Rose battles a deeply personal trauma: she lost her son in a

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failed temporal operation. The mission, which she personally oversaw, has haunted her since, intensifying her commitment to the Corps. This loss is something she rarely speaks of, suppressing the pain to maintain her authoritative presence. Her friendship with Mary Carter blossomed during this dark time, as Mary, a nurse, was among the few who witnessed her vulnerability and provided emotional support.

Nathan once saw the Lieutenant General in a restricted area. It was only a fleeting moment. Why was he there?

Rachel knows that Rose hasn't forgotten their college days and still holds some sort of grudge against her. She's cautious when dealing with Rose and tries to avoid being alone with her, sensing a latent animosity that could compromise the Exodus Project.

Sally senses a deeper reason behind the Lt. General's mentorship. There are moments, fleeting glances, and half-spoken sentences, which may make Sally think Rose is privy to the secret of her forgotten event.

Patton's leadership decisions haven't always been popular within the ranks. Whispers of dissent sometimes reach her ears.

Regina's close working relationship with Rose means she's been privy to some confidential missions and concerns. While Rose hasn't explicitly shared everything, Regina might suspect that the Lt. General might be personally invested in the Exodus Project's success for reasons beyond military advantage.

## **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Louise Martin's Determination:** Rose deeply respects Louise Martin, aware that the Associate Professor possesses knowledge vital to the success of the Exodus Project. However, she's also noted Louise's occasional bouts of ill health and has concerns about the potential implications for the project.

**Mary Carter's Strength:** Having seen Mary Carter's fierce dedication to her medical duties and having leaned on her for emotional support, Rose knows of the nurse's protective nature, especially concerning her daughter. Yet, Rose has also caught wind of a rift between Mary and her husband, Larry.

Unrest in the Corps: Being the top officer, Rose is privy to whispers of dissent among the ranks. There are those who question her decisions, especially those surrounding temporal operations. She keeps tabs on these murmurs, wary of potential mutiny or subversive elements within the Corps.

25

**Ruth Carter**  
**High School Student, Gymnast**

*“En garde, thrust, parry, attack!”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	14
<b>Blood Type:</b>	B

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+4

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	1
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**Costume:** Ruth typically wears athletic gear that allows for easy movement. This includes fitted leggings, a tank top, and sneakers. Her hair is usually pulled back into a tight ponytail, and she carries a small gym bag containing her fencing equipment and gymnastics essentials.

**Brief Background:** Ruth is an energetic teenager with a passion for gymnastics. Her agile nature and discipline from her gymnastics training have also made her a formidable fencer. Her parents, Mary and Larry, always encouraged her in these pursuits, although their relationship has become strained recently.

**PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:**

Ruth Carter is not just any high school student; she's a prodigious gymnast with dreams of competing at a national level. Her agility and discipline have translated seamlessly to fencing, where she's earned accolades and admiration from her peers. With her mother as a nurse and her father in an undisclosed profession, Ruth grew up surrounded by strong, dedicated role models. They've always supported her endeavors, attending every competition and cheering her on. However, lately, there has been a palpable tension at home. Ruth channels her frustrations and confusions into her sports, using the gym as an escape from the brewing storm at home.

**PRIVATE INFORMATION:**

While she might seem upbeat and focused on the outside, Ruth is grappling with her parents' increasingly evident marital struggles. The late-night arguments, the distant

dinners, and the cold silence have not gone unnoticed. She's overheard snippets of their disputes, many centered around "choices" and "priorities." But she's yet to confront them, fearing the reality she might have to face. Additionally, Ruth has begun questioning her father Larry's occupation, having discovered some peculiar gadgets in his room.

**WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Mary Carter's Dedication:** Ruth deeply admires her mother's commitment to her nursing profession. However, she's also noticed her mother's growing friendship with Lt. General Rose Patton, which sometimes seems to take precedence over family.

**Larry Carter's Secrets:** While she knows her father works in a significant role, she's found some odd devices hidden in his study. Ruth has also caught him having hushed phone conversations at odd hours, further piquing her curiosity about his true line of work.

**Hints of Family Discord:** Ruth has observed her mother and father's growing detachment. While the exact reasons remain elusive, she's picked up on mentions of "responsibilities" and "choices," indicating that there's more at play than just typical marital woes.

26

## Billy Manson

### Technician, Bob's Computer Repair

*"This does nooooooot compute!"*

<b>Sex:</b>	M
<b>Age:</b>	21
<b>Blood Type:</b>	AB

<b>Life Points:</b>	20
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	+1

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	1
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**Costume:** Billy is most comfortable in his usual work attire: a blue mechanic-style jumpsuit with the name "Billy" embroidered on the chest, paired with worn-in sneakers. His pockets are always stuffed with various small tech tools, cables, and occasionally a candy wrapper or two. He wears rectangular glasses which he often pushes up his nose with a smudged finger, and a baseball cap that says "Bob's Repair."

**Brief Background:** Billy Manson, a genius when it comes to tech, started his career early by dismantling household electronics and reassembling them. His talent was recognized by Bob, the owner of a local computer repair shop, and he was promptly hired. He is now the go-to guy for all computer-related problems in the area.

#### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Billy Manson is something of a local legend. From the age of 12, he's been the wizard that people come to when their tech goes awry. While others of his age went out to parties and dates, Billy was soldering circuit boards, coding software, and solving complex tech problems. Bob's Computer Repair, a once-struggling shop, saw its fortunes turn around dramatically after hiring Billy. He's a quirky individual with a peculiar sense of humor, often referencing tech jargon in everyday conversations. A regular customer of his is Louise Martin, an associate professor with whom he shares intriguing conversations about technology's potential.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Beneath his tech-savvy exterior, Billy harbors a fascination for time travel theories and temporal mechanics. He's even tried building his own time machine prototype in his basement, though with no success (yet). This obsession stems from a deep-seated regret: a desire to go back and prevent a childhood accident that claimed the life of his younger sister.

### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Louise Martin's Projects:** Having worked on Louise's computers, Billy has come across some intriguing files, hinting at projects much more complex than ordinary academic work. He's found diagrams that resemble advanced machinery and coded software that he hasn't been able to decipher. While he's never pried, his curiosity about her work is definitely piqued.

**Local Rumors:** Billy often overhears conversations from customers at the repair shop. Lately, there have been whispers about some secret project involving the military and a select group of academics. The specifics elude him, but the chatter has been persistent.

27

# Larry Carter

## Doctor, Medical Services

*“Take seven aspirins and don’t call me in the morning.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	M
<b>Age:</b>	50
<b>Blood Type:</b>	AB

<b>Life Points:</b>	18
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	0

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	2
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**Costume:** Larry dresses professionally yet practically. He typically dons a well-fitted white lab coat over a crisp shirt and tie, coupled with dark trousers. A stethoscope can often be found draped around his neck, and he carries a black medical bag with him containing essential tools and medications. His silver hair is neatly combed, and a pair of reading glasses rests on the bridge of his nose.

**Brief Background:** Dr. Larry Carter has dedicated three decades to the medical field. Known for his dry wit and no-nonsense attitude, he is, however, profoundly compassionate and has saved countless lives over the years. He deeply values family and has been the anchor for his wife and daughter through thick and thin.

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

With a reputation for being one of the best doctors in the region, Larry Carter has always been driven by a commitment to heal and help. He's seen all sorts of medical cases and has witnessed the human spirit's resilience firsthand. A firm believer in tough love, he often dispenses his medical advice with a side of humor, which sometimes earns him the label of being "sarcastic" or "wry." Outside the hospital, Larry is known to be a doting father and a loving husband. He often shares tales of his daughter's gymnastic accomplishments and how proud he is of her.

### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Larry has always felt the pressure of being the family's rock. But what many don't know is that he's been dealing with a growing sense of fatigue and occasional

memory lapses. He has run a series of tests on himself in secret, fearing early-onset Alzheimer's or another neurological issue. It's a burden he carries silently, not wanting to worry Mary or Ruth.

**WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Medical Files:** In his profession, Larry occasionally comes across medical records and notes. He's aware of an injury Louise Martin had several years ago, something that doesn't match any regular accident. It's more consistent with a high-energy physics incident, but it's none of his business, so he hasn't probed.

**Local Gossip:** While not one for gossip, Larry has overheard nurses and other staff members whisper about certain individuals from the Exodus Project coming in for peculiar tests and evaluations. The specifics are unclear, but it's evident that the project isn't just academic in nature.

28

# Fred MacDonald

## Investigative Journalist

*“I’d like to ask you a bunch of questions.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	M
<b>Age:</b>	24
<b>Blood Type:</b>	B

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	0

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	1
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**Costume:** Fred dresses in casual attire that's versatile for various situations - a plaid shirt paired with jeans, a lightweight jacket filled with pockets for his notebooks, pens, and a small camera. He sports a pair of worn-in sneakers, ideal for running after leads or stories. A messenger bag slung over his shoulder contains his laptop and other essential reporting tools. His brown hair is slightly tousled, and he always seems to have an alert look, scanning his surroundings for the next big scoop.

**Brief Background:** Fred MacDonald, an ambitious young journalist, has arrived on base to report on the innovative work of the Exodus Project. While he may not know anyone personally, he's a professional at making connections and sniffing out stories.

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Fred is a recent journalism graduate who landed his dream job with a renowned news outlet. Known for his insatiable curiosity and tenacity, he's made a name for himself by covering some breakthrough science stories. While some see his age as a sign of inexperience, Fred views it as an asset, allowing him to bring fresh perspectives to old narratives. Although he doesn't know anyone at the base, he's excellent at networking, and it won't be long before he's got a few insiders feeding him information.

### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Fred's true intentions at the base aren't just to report on the Exodus Project. He's also investigating a lead about possible time manipulation experiments being conducted

without proper oversight. He believes this could be his ticket to a significant journalism award, so he's extremely cautious about who he trusts with this information. His determination, though admirable, has sometimes led him into precarious situations in the past.

Mandy has overheard hushed conversations between Fred and some unknown individuals discussing some technical aspects of the Exodus Project. While going through public records, Fred stumbled upon a brief mention of the Temporal Marine Corps, an elite unit that deals with high-risk, unconventional missions. The specifics are vague, but it's a lead he's eager to follow.

#### **WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Unfamiliar Faces:** Being new to the base, Fred is at a unique vantage point. He's observed several individuals, like Louise Martin, in close conversations with military personnel, hinting at collaborations deeper than just academic.

**Research Notes:** While going through public records, Fred stumbled upon a brief mention of the Temporal Marine Corps, an elite unit that deals with high-risk, unconventional missions. The specifics are vague, but it's a lead he's eager to follow.

**Whispers:** Despite not knowing anyone, Fred has a knack for overhearing snippets of conversations. He's picked up murmurs about the Lt. General, Rose Patton, holding secret meetings late into the night, a thread he's keen to pull at.

29

# Betty Donner

## Sergeant, Military Intelligence Analyst

*“That doesn’t make sense.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	F
<b>Age:</b>	28
<b>Blood Type:</b>	B

<b>Life Points:</b>	20
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	5

**Costume:** Betty wears a crisp military uniform, indicating her rank with the appropriate insignias. The uniform is dark green, adorned with a few medals she earned during her service. She has a serious demeanor, her brown hair pulled back into a tight bun. Her boots are always polished, and she has a small pair of reading glasses she uses when analyzing data or reports.

**Brief Background:** Betty Donner's reputation as one of the top intelligence analysts precedes her. Recently transferred to the base, she is tasked with ensuring the security of sensitive data and assessing threats.

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Sergeant Betty Donner has served in the military for nearly a decade, specializing in data analysis and intelligence. Throughout her career, she has successfully predicted and prevented numerous potential security breaches, making her an invaluable asset to any unit. Though she might not be familiar with the personal lives of those on the base, her analytical skills make her exceptionally adept at piecing together even the most obscure information. Betty is known for her meticulous nature, often working late into the night to ensure nothing is overlooked. Many respect her, while some are wary of her scrutinizing gaze.

### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Behind her stoic facade, Betty grapples with the pressure of her role. She's seen the cost of overlooked information firsthand, resulting in the loss of comrades during a mission gone wrong early in her career. This event haunts her, fueling her

determination to prevent any future incidents. She's sought therapy for this trauma but has kept it a secret, fearing it might be seen as a sign of weakness in the military world.

**WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**Transfers and Arrivals:** Betty's recent transfer means she has access to some personnel files. She's noted an unusual number of transfers and new arrivals, like journalist Fred MacDonald, which strikes her as atypical for such a base.

**Rumored Projects:** Though not directly involved, Betty's heard whispers of the Exodus Project and its potential implications. The secrecy surrounding it has piqued her analytical interest.

**Observations:** Betty has observed Rose Patton, the Lt. General, holding seemingly clandestine meetings with various personnel. It's unclear what they discuss, but Betty's instincts tell her it's of significance.

30

# Nathan Taylor

## Electrical Engineer

*“Never cut the red wire.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	M
<b>Age:</b>	20
<b>Blood Type:</b>	A

<b>Life Points:</b>	15
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	0

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	1
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**Costume:** Nathan dons a utility belt, a blue hard hat, and safety goggles. He wears a high-vis vest over a plain white tee and cargo pants, giving off the aura of someone who's always ready for hands-on work.

**Brief Background:** Born into a family of engineers, Nathan has a natural knack for understanding complex systems. He recently got a short-term contract to work on the base's electrical units. Although he's young, his skills are undeniably top-notch.

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Nathan Taylor is a tech-savvy individual from a neighboring town. Growing up, he'd always been fascinated by the intricate dance of circuits and wires. By age 15, he was fixing electrical systems in his neighborhood. After pursuing a degree in Electrical Engineering, Nathan was over the moon when he got a chance to work at the base, even if just for a short while. He considers it an excellent opportunity to get hands-on experience on bigger, more complicated systems. Many are aware of his presence on the base as the "young prodigy" handling some of the critical electrical issues.

### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Beneath the facade of a simple engineer, Nathan has a personal motive. His older brother once worked at the base and disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Nathan has always believed that something went wrong, and his brother's disappearance is connected to the base's secrets. While working, he's discreetly

trying to gather any information that could shed light on what happened to his brother.

**WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

Unknown Signals: Nathan has noticed some electrical anomalies that shouldn't exist in the circuits he's been working on. He suspects someone with high-level technical expertise, possibly like Fred MacDonald, might be behind it.

Military Movements: Working late one night, Nathan overheard Sergeant Betty Donner discussing some security protocols. He wasn't close enough to get the full context, but he's sure that the base's security measures are more than just routine.

General Rose Patton: Nathan once saw the Lieutenant General in a restricted area. It was only a fleeting moment, but he's convinced she knows more about the base's mysteries than she lets on.

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# Tom Rivera

## Captain, Strategic Analyst

*“Make mistakes early so you have time to correct for them.”*

<b>Sex:</b>	M
<b>Age:</b>	30
<b>Blood Type:</b>	B

<b>Life Points:</b>	20
<b>Combat Bonus:</b>	3

<b>Voting Tokens:</b>	2
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**Costume:** Captain Rivera wears the standard military uniform with the captain's insignia prominently displayed on his shoulder. His boots are always polished, and he has a firm, commanding presence, complete with a military cap that shades his eyes slightly.

**Brief Background:** Hailing from a military family, Tom was destined to wear the uniform. He climbed the ranks quickly due to his strategic mind and ability to analyze situations rapidly. His latest posting at this unfamiliar base, however, is a unique challenge he didn't anticipate.

### PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND PUBLIC INFORMATION:

Captain Tom Rivera, fresh from a high-profile assignment in international waters, has been recently transferred to this base, making him unfamiliar with its personnel and routines. His reputation as a brilliant strategist precedes him, known for handling delicate situations with precision. This assignment puzzles many; why would such a high-performing officer be moved to a seemingly less significant location? Nonetheless, Tom's focus remains unwavering: to understand the base, its operations, and to serve with the utmost dedication. His commendable record speaks volumes about his dedication to duty.

### PRIVATE INFORMATION:

Tom's transfer wasn't a routine shuffle. He's here on a confidential mission ordered by the highest echelons of military command. Rumors of irregularities and possible

security breaches at the base reached headquarters, and Tom's assignment is to discreetly investigate these issues without raising alarm. He must tread carefully, gather information, and report directly to his superiors without being detected.

**WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT OTHERS:**

**High Tech Intricacies:** Tom has come across schematics and plans that point to advanced technology being used on the base. He's unsure of its purpose but suspects a technician, perhaps someone like Billy Manson, might be involved.

**Medical Concerns:** Captain Rivera overheard a conversation between Doctor Larry Carter and Nurse Mary Carter about some unusual medical occurrences on the base. This has further ignited his suspicions.

**Young Engineer:** Nathan Taylor's presence on the base as a contractor doesn't escape Tom's notice. The young engineer's frequent access to various parts of the base, especially sensitive zones, has piqued Rivera's interest. He wonders if Nathan's presence is just a coincidence or if there's more to the story.

## **Journal of Interactive Literature and Drama**

### **A Multi-Discipline Peer-Reviewed Journal of Immersive Narrative Experiences**

## **Call for Papers**

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The *Journal of Interactive Literature and Drama* (ISSN 1994-1250) is an online peer-reviewed journal on immersive narrative experiences such as scenario-based interactive drama freeform live action roleplaying games, virtual reality, and other immersive literatures, providing a forum for serious discussion of virtual reality, LARP, narrative constructs, live roleplaying game theory, design, and practice. Two to three issues per volume are published annually. The journal provides a forum for the discussion of any of the various scenario-based theatre-style live action roleplaying games, freeforms, interactive dramas, virtual reality experiences, immersive theatre, and invites contributions in all areas of immersive literature, theory, design, and practice for educational, entertainment, and recreational roleplay. Formal and informal essays, articles, papers, and critical reviews are also welcome.

This is a peer-reviewed journal that may include formal papers and informal essays for and by the roleplaying community from a wide variety of disciplines. The focus is general enough so that authors should feel comfortable submitting material of either a formal or informal nature within a rather generous range of contexts, albeit all submissions are subjected to a blind peer-review and should be appropriate to a serious and thoughtful discussion -- we encourage articles, essays, and formal papers on all manner of immersive narrative, live roleplaying, freeform, interactive drama, and virtual reality topics. Discussions of related immersive narrative, ludology, techniques, and good solid critical book and roleplay scenario or event reviews are quite welcome as well. As this is a multi-disciplinary journal, material related to a wide range of immersive experiences, scenario-based learning, social psychology,

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Guidelines for Submission*

critical theory, performance studies, popular culture, design, virtual reality creation, and more as they intersect with immersive interactive drama and virtual realities are also welcome. Pure design pieces related to experience creation, scenario construction, and review are also encouraged. Each issue will typically showcase one to three longform or four to six shortform interactive drama freeform live action roleplaying scenarios; creative scenario submissions of this type are very sought after. Scenarios for submission should include a section of self-reflective critical thought and formal designer's notes that discuss issues related to the creation of the piece as well as a formal section which reviews the author's performance experiences with the scenario. Designer's notes are also encouraged.

As an international journal, the language of publication is English. Submissions are accepted throughout the year.

Submissions are vetted by the submissions editor and assigned to editorial board members for blind peer review. Hardcopy submissions are not accepted.

E-mail submissions are accepted at [director@interactivedramas.info](mailto:director@interactivedramas.info).

Include a cover page with your submission containing Your Name, Qualifications and Rank, Institutional Affiliation, Address, Email, Telephone, and a copy of the abstract for the submission. Please also attach a brief author's biography of 75-200 words to be included in the contributor's notes section of the published journal. The text of your submission should not have any identifying features.

The journal is published online at <http://www.interactivedramas.info/journal.htm>.

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Immersive Narrative Experiences**

**Notes for Contributors**

Electronic submissions should be sent to:

Submissions Editor,

Journal of Interactive Literature and Drama  
E-mail submissions are accepted at [director@interactivedramas.info](mailto:director@interactivedramas.info).

The *Journal of Interactive Literature and Drama* (ISSN 1994-1250) is a peer-reviewed journal which publishes one volume per year, with one to three issues per volume (depending upon the number of accepted submissions - we do not have a set schedule or quota for publication). Both Microsoft Word (6.0 or above, Windows format) and txt files are acceptable. Once received, manuscripts will be sent to reviewers immediately.

1. Manuscripts submitted to the Journal of Interactive Literature and Drama should follow the style sheet of the current MLA Handbook as appropriate. Scenario submissions may use informal formatting conventions as long as they stay within the guidelines here.
2. If your submission has notes, please use footnotes, not endnotes.
3. The font used is Times New Roman (12pt) – creative pieces, such as scenarios, may use other font sizes but should stay within the same font type. If you use a special font that is non-system, you must include a copy of the font file with your submission. ***Please do not use columns in your piece.***
4. Use a separate sheet to include your name, title, affiliated institution, and contact information (email) as well as a brief author's biography of 75-200 words to be included in the contributor's notes.
5. Include a brief summary or abstract of the submission. 100-150 words.
6. You may not use illustrations or photographs in your submission.
7. Please note that this journal evaluates submissions on an Accept or Not-Accept basis and does not have a provisional revision option. You will receive a notice of Acceptance or Rejection for publication in a timely manner and will not typically receive any comments regarding the piece from the reviewers.

Publishers wishing their books, products, or other materials reviewed may send hard or soft review copies to the editor's address above and a reviewer will be assigned.

The journal is published online at <http://www.interactivedramas.info>.

Questions regarding the journal can be addressed to [brian@briandavidphillips.com](mailto:brian@briandavidphillips.com).

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## **Journal of Interactive Literature and Drama**

### **A Multi-Discipline Peer-Reviewed Journal of Immersive Narrative Experiences**

#### **Notes for Reviewers**

The editors and the entire editorial board of the *Journal of Interactive Literature and Drama* (ISSN 1994-1250) gratefully acknowledge your support for the journal. Your involvement is crucial to the journal's success. Your suggestions and contributions are always welcome.

If you deem it inappropriate for you to review this particular article, please kindly inform the editors and return the materials as soon as possible. We take pride in providing authors with quality reviews as well as informing them promptly the status of their submissions. We would appreciate it very much if you could return your final review notification to the editors *within three weeks* of receiving the materials. Please use e-mail for journal correspondence.

In addition to general considerations, please take the following points into account:

- Significance and contribution
- Originality
- Soundness of research, methodology, and/or argumentation
- Logical coherence of its organization
- Relevance and appropriateness of contribution (within a wide scope)
- Flow and clarity of the language
- Completeness

Creative pieces, such as full-length or mini scenarios, should be judged more loosely in terms of rigor but must be considered positive contributions:

- Significance and contribution

Originality  
Completeness in content and thought  
Designer's Notes  
All necessary instructions  
Other scenario-based considerations

Scenarios should be clear and complete with an appropriate introduction that spells out the appropriate age and context for performance as well as how many players of what genders. A cast list should be included. Persons reading the scenario should be able to print it off and run the interactive drama scenario as is with a full and complete understanding of everything that is required, including special rules or special events.

Please place the article in one of these two categories:

1. Accept for Publication
2. Reject

For submissions you mark as *Reject*, you may choose to write some brief comments to the author in regard to what the weaknesses of the piece are and how they might improve it, but you are not required in any way to do so. Most reviewers do not leave comments, but they are welcome if you choose to write them. Do keep in mind that our vetting system does not require detailed review and we do not have a revision policy for submissions so at no time are you obligated to provide detailed comments. Our editorial decisions for publication are based solely upon your recommendation of *Accept for Publication* or *Rejection*.

Each submission is vetted by two reviewers in a blind peer process so that reviewers are never aware of the identity of the author of any piece they are asked to judge. If both reviewers give a judgment of accept for publication, the piece is accepted. If one accepts while the other rejects, the piece is rejected. If both reviewers reject, then the piece is rejected. Reviewers need only provide their own judgment of the piece, they are not provided with notification of the final result for any particular piece. Your active and confidential participation in this process is appreciated.

Members of the Editorial Board of this journal are respected scholars who work within the specialties of the publication. As such, they are welcome to submit their own work for consideration. In the case of an editor or member of the editorial board submitting a piece for consideration, the blind review process is safeguarded. In the event a submissions editor has a piece up for review, the editor hands off duties for

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assigning reviewers to another member of the board who ensures the blind review process and confidentiality is maintained.

Once you have finished with a piece, please send your review decision and any comments immediately to the submissions editor in the shortform format provided when assigned the piece to [director@interactivedramas.info](mailto:director@interactivedramas.info) as the editor will compile results and notify contributors. The editor will also prepare new open submissions for vetting and review and send them to reviewers as they come in.

The duties of Submissions Editor of the journal are shifted periodically with a different member of the Editorial Board taking on the responsibilities so address correspondence to the position rather than a particular member.

Thank you once again. We look forward to receiving your comments soon.

Submissions Editor,  
Journal of Interactive Literature and Drama  
Submissions E-mail: [director@interactivedramas.info](mailto:director@interactivedramas.info)  
Journal Webpage: <http://www.interactivedramas.info/journal.htm>

Questions regarding the journal can be addressed to [director@interactivedramas.info](mailto:director@interactivedramas.info).



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