

THE BOOK OF JUST A LITTLE LOVIN' (2013 DENMARK RUN)

DOCUMENTING A LARP PROJECT ABOUT DESIRE, FRIENDSHIP AND THE FEAR OF DEATH



The Book of Just a Little Lovin' (2013 Denmark Run)
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FOREWORD TO THE BOOK

by Casper Gronemann and Claus Raasted

“The best game design ever made for a larp.”

“Hotly debated in the Swedish press.”

“Mindblowing.”

These are some of the things that have been said about Hanne Grasmø and Tor Kjetil Edland's larp *Just a Little Lovin'* from 2011. It has been run three times now, and in three different countries.

Something like this deserves solid documentation, and while there were articles and pictures and talks about *JaLL*, there was no single collection of thoughts in one easily-accessible volume.

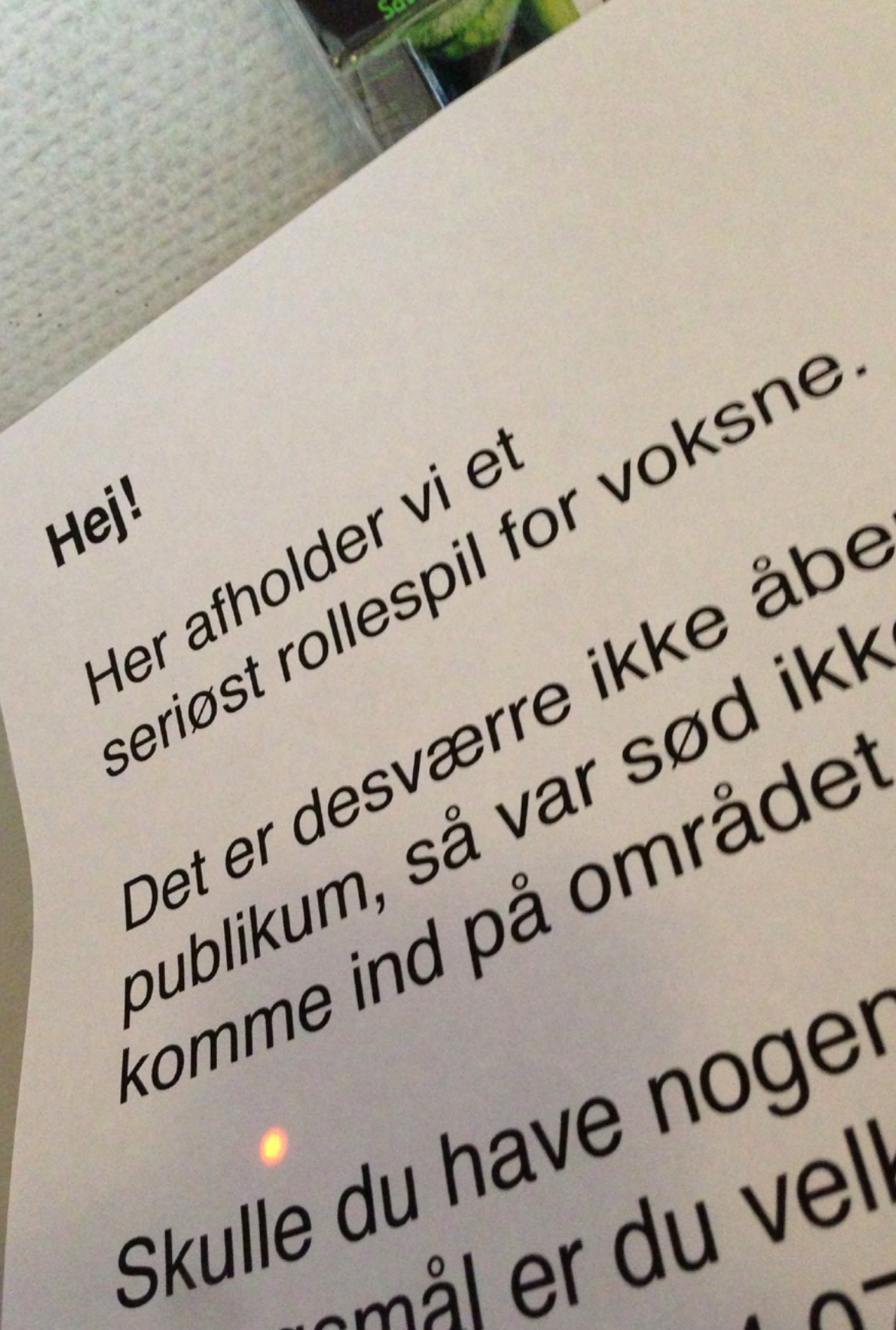
We wanted to rectify that, but were a little bit in doubt about how to go about it. Getting texts, pictures and permissions from the players of the two first *JaLL* runs (in Norway and Sweden) would not only have been a major headache for us as volunteer documenters, but it would also quite probably have made for a VERY thick book.

So we decided to do what Sarah Lynne Bowman and Claus had done when documenting *Mad About the Boy* (the 2012 U.S run) and focused on this run of the larp and its participants and organizers.

None of us have played *JaLL* (yet!), but we both think it's a very interesting larp and want to help spread the word - and that's why we decided early on in the process that we'd do this book, if the organizers would let us.

Luckily, they did. The result is the book here.
Thank you for reading. Thank you for caring.

Casper Gronemann & Claus Raasted
Copenhagen, September 2013



Hej!
Her afholder vi et
seriøst rollespil for voksne.
Det er desværre ikke åbent
for publikum, så var sød ikke
komme ind på området.
Skulle du have nogen
spørgsmål er du velkommen
til at kontakte os.



JUST A LITTLE EXPLAININ'

by Claus Raasted

First of all, *JaLL* is a 5-day larp experience for approx. 70 players about friendship, desire and the fear of death. It's been hyped and talked of as a larp about homosexuals, but even though quite a few of the characters have unusual sexualities, it's really an oversimplification to say that *Just a Little Lovin'* is a gay larp.

I haven't played *Just a Little Lovin'* (yet). But since this book aims at explaining the larp and the experiences people have had playing it, to people who "just weren't there, man!" like me, I'll use my newfound knowledge to describe it. What I'll do is try to run through the things that are special about the larp and which I - both as a documenter and organizer of larps - find interesting and intriguing.

IT'S A STORY ABOUT THE 80'S

The larp takes place during three consecutive 4th of July parties in 1982, 1983 and 1984. Present at these parties are two circles of people; one consists of members of the gay community around Greenwich Village and the other of cancer survivors and friends. These two groups intermingle and are connected in various ways, but they represent the two main groups of the larp.

And they know how to party!



IT HAS BRILLIANT GAME MECHANICS

Just a Little Lovin' has been called one of the best designed Nordic larps EVER by quite a few veterans of the scene. There's a powerful mechanic for dealing with how the spread of AIDS kills off characters, called "The Lottery of Death". There's a sex simulation technique using non-gendered phalluses and pre-negotiation so as to provide intense sex scenes while keeping emotional safety at a high level. There are workshops that bond the players together, and create feelings of "real friendships within days", as one player put it.

In short, *JaLL* has contributed to the larp toolbox with some powerful tools, and the heavy emotional impact the game has had on many (but not all) participants, is a testament to this. I won't go into details about how the meta-techniques work, but since the Lottery of Death is mentioned in several texts, I'd recommend giving Jakob Ponggård's article "The Deadly Lottery" a glance if you're curious.

IT'S BEEN RUN THREE TIMES NOW

JaLL was originally organized in Norway in 2011, by Hanne Grasmø and Tor Kjetil Edland, and featured an international player group. Since then, it's been run in 2012 in Sweden, and now in 2013 in Denmark. Everything that's needed to run the larp has been written down, and it's proven its worth as a re-runnable larp.

The last run (the one we're basing this book on) had a large group of French players, so maybe the next *JaLL* will be in France. One thing is almost certain - that the Danish 2013 run of *JaLL* won't be the last one held. And I for one, have regretted missing out on it for the last time. So if you - after you've leafed through this book - feel inspired and want to host a run of *JaLL*, don't just write the organizers and ask them if it's possible. Write me, too, so I can be there!

AND THE BAND
PLAYED ON
RANDY SHILTS



CHAPTER 1

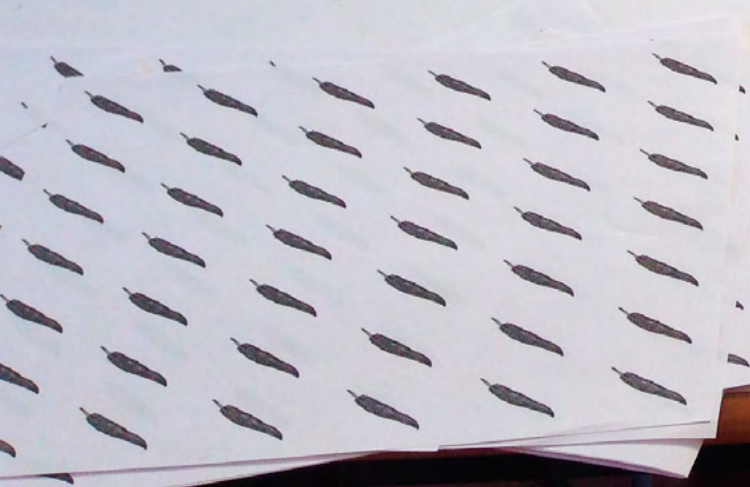
ORGANIZER THOUGHTS

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY



1. Lady Verona
Teach me Tiger
2. Too Sky - Urban
Renaissance
3. View to a Kill -
Urban Renaissance
4. Mary Lou
Don't Think Twice
5. Chantelle
6. The Queen of Manhattan
I will Survive



I LOVED IT, BUT...

by Helene Willer Piironen

About a year ago, I heard that a couple of people were planning to put up *Just a Little Lovin'* in Denmark. I loved the first run and had considered playing again in Sweden, but as the chance had passed me by, I just knew that I had to be part of this production. I haven't created any big games before, and the only big production I had been a part of was Knudepunkt 2011, so I didn't feel like I had any great skills to contribute with.

All I had was this strong wish to be part of this game one more time. Luckily for me, there was room for me in the organizing group, consisting of Flemming, who had played in Sweden, and Nynne whom I had played with in Norway the year before.

Having played the game before, I felt like I had at least some experience to contribute with in the process. It didn't take long for us to realize, that even though we had all played the same game, a lot of things differ from one production to another.

Of course there were the obvious changes that the organizers had made between first and second run, like content of workshops. They were quite easy to detect and consider in the new production. Then there were the obvious ones we didn't think about, like what the location provides, and how that affects our expectations. The second run had a real chapel for the funerals, while it took us several meetings before we realized that one of the producers talked about an actual chapel, and not just a space with a chapel function.

The hardest ones are still uncertain to me now. It's the differences in the feel of the game, the dynamics between players, which conflicts play out, and which characters needs support. Which of these are influenced by the production? The location, the workshop content, the workshop facilitators, even the personal energy surplus of each individual organizer? And what is out of our hands and totally in the hands of the players, their dynamics, playing style etc.?

...HOW WOULD I MAKE IT?

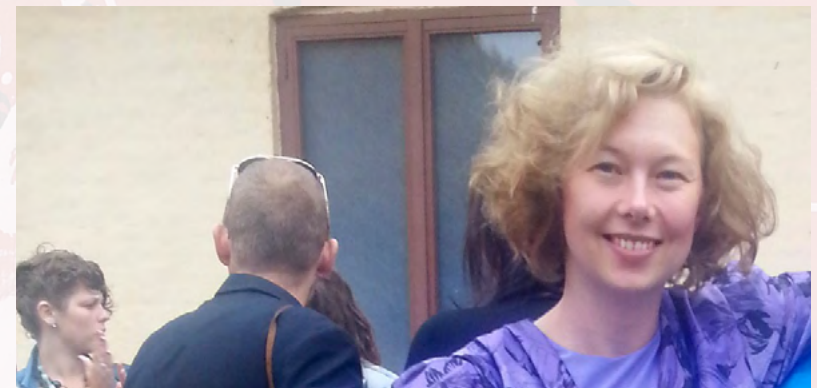
Maybe time will tell, but will we ever know for sure?

During this year's production, we have strived to consider as many aspects as possible.

We've had a lot of help during the production from Tor Kjetil, and even though he wasn't supposed to produce, I think a lot of things would have slipped our minds, if he hadn't been around to remind us of the invisible parts of the production. I still go through old documents from the earlier games and find things we haven't considered, but we have been doing our best to get a grip of it all.

As a first time organizer, it has been an enormous help to have two earlier productions to reflect our work in, and I'm sure I would not have been able to do the same quality of work, was I supposed to set up a completely fresh game, with the knowledge I had a year ago.

Still being afraid that I have been carried through this by the experience of others, I also hope I have carried my share. No matter what, I have learned a lot, and producing the game of somebody else has given me confidence and understanding in terms of production that I wouldn't have gained producing my own game as a first time experience.



JALL 2013 - THANK YOU

by Flemming Jacobsen

During Solmukohta 2012 I heard of a panel reflecting on a larp called *Just a Little Lovin'*, held in Norway the year before. I didn't really know much about the game at that point, but someone had told me it would be played in Sweden and I should try to learn about it.

I went to the panel discussion and was completely blown away. The participants' thoughts, tales and emotions were so strong that I quickly found myself in tears hearing about their wonderful reflections about the larp. One thing was clear. If hearing about the game gave me such a reaction, then I absolutely had to experience it first hand.

I spent the rest of Solmukohta pestering Petter Karlson (one of the organisers of the Swedish run in 2012) about whether they had a place for me. Luckily they did and a few months later I participated in a game that touched me deeply and opened my eyes for a more inclusive and loving queer world.

When I returned to Denmark I realized that this larp had to be played again. This time in Denmark. I wrote Hanne Grasmø and Tor Kjetil asking if they would find the idea interesting and after a nervous thirty hour wait they contacted me and said it was an awesome idea. Then Helene Piironen and Nynne Rasmussen got on the project, and we went into production.

I was afraid that the larp wouldn't appeal to Danish players. I was afraid that we'd be lacking players. I was afraid of many things. In the end, it turned out that I was dead wrong. The larp sold out almost immediately, and not only did we get many signups from Danish players, we also got twelve (12!) French players. And the thing I feared the most - that my Danish friends wouldn't look at this larp that blew me away last year and find it interesting - simply didn't happen. And in the end, what mattered the most to me was that *JaLL* has now been experienced by a new group. This larp had a profound effect on me, and I'm happy I got to spread the love.



JUST A LITTLE FEARIN'

by Nynne Søs Rasmussen

PRE-LARP THOUGHTS

To me, organizing a larp has always involved some amount of fear. I fear that players will leave in the middle of the larp because they hate it, I fear that they will yell at me at the after party, I fear that the logistics will be messed up; that there will not be food enough and that the van will break down. Most of all I fear being met with awkward silence after the larp, participants not meeting my gaze because they are disappointed about the larp.

I have never, ever been this full of fear before a larp. *Just a Little Lovin'* has been played and produced twice, and the larp has been a real blockbuster each time. The former players, which includes me, have praised the game design and the experience. And that's what terrifies me now, here a few weeks before the larp. Could we end up being the production team which fucks up this brilliant larp?

When we announced the Danish run of *Just a Little Lovin'* back in February 2013, the tickets sold out in less than 48 hours. The waiting lists were soon full and everything seemed peachy. Then the cancellations started coming in – and it seemed like they would never stop. I would estimate that more than 60% of the original sign-ups were ultimately replaced with people from the waiting list or people we convinced to go with a moment's notice, two weeks before game start. Clearly, something was wrong.

A lot of the cancellations seemed to be coming from Danish participants, and I began to worry that this larp wasn't a good match for the culture of Danish larp. In the context of Nordic larp, the Danes are sometimes made out to be the bad boys and girls of the scene. We are accused of being too fond of alcohol and possessing a very heterosexual and slightly male chauvinistic larp culture and lifestyle.



Mix that with a reputation for being overly fond of buffer weapons, action and humorist larps. I often find such accusations wrong and would normally defend Danish larp culture with tooth and nail. Even though I admit that alcohol plays a big part at most Danish larps and in our scene in general.

The cancellations started having me questioning myself and my defense of Danish larp though. Maybe a non-alcoholic larp about gay culture and alternative lifestyle, where you play out sex with oversized pink wooden phalluses, is a bit too much to stomach for the Average Joes and Janes of Danish Larp? Maybe AIDS/HIV and death are topics too serious to larp about for us?

I'm not sure that's the case, but I remember being so scared myself when I participated in the Norwegian run of the game. I was scared about not being able to use alcohol to find my courage. I was so afraid of the phalluses that I very consciously avoided trying the meta-technique out before the game.

I feared facing my own fears of dying or getting sick. Maybe some of the participants that canceled felt the same way I did back then? If they did, I can't blame them one single bit. Whatever their nationality, sexuality or relationship to alcohol might be.

Then again maybe all the cancellations have nothing to do with participants being afraid of the pink phalluses or the themes of the larp. Maybe we were just horrible at communication and will actually be the first producers to mess up this modern day classic of Nordic larp. Maybe I'm just trying to conjure up a vague excuse of cultural differences and Danish larp culture?

We have, of course, received cancellations from every kind of nationally, so maybe I'm just grasping at straws here.

I'm also very excited, hyped and confident about the project. It was such a great experience when I played the larp in Norway and I'm looking forward to passing that experience on to others and sharing it once again. I have trust in my co-organizers and in the amazing player group that has chosen not to cancel. Right now they are posting tons pictures of their costumes on Facebook and are hyped about the larp. But admittedly my mind is filled with Just a Little Fearin', here early in the morning, on my way to the larp...



POST-LARP THOUGHTS

Seldom have I been so happy to be completely mistaken. No one left in the middle of the larp, no one yelled at me during the after party, and the logistics that went wrong were fixed. Last but not least I wasn't met with awkward silence and fleeting glances, but with hugs, applause, war stories and love. Just so much love.

My conclusion must be this: no, we weren't the organizing team that fucked up *Just a Little Lovin'*. But it wasn't really our skills as organizers that made this work either; it was the players and the game design. The game design in this larp is brilliant. It creates love and empathy. The characters and relationships are so believable, sympathetic and very playable.

Having met these characters twice in different runs of the larp, I feel like they are old friends and feel so much love for them. The meta-techniques are challenging (and yes, I'm still a little bit afraid of the phalluses), but work so well with the themes and the setting and create great play. Hanne and Tor Kjetil should get all the credit in the world for that.

I'm so impressed with the players. They invested in the larp, their characters, the themes and in each other in a way that moved me deeply. They might have been as scared as me, but they overcame it and faced death, sex and love head on. I feel truly humbled to have been part of this experience.

Being an organizer and also playing a full-fledged character was very challenging at times, but the great advantage is that you create less of a barrier between players and organizers truly making the experience something we create together. I'm so thankful for that – it meant that I connected with the players and their experiences without being put on some kind of organizer pedestal.

I feel silly about worrying so much about whether the Danish larp culture would clash with the larp. I'm happy to be proven wrong. Of course we don't need alcohol and of course we can play out these themes. I have some naive hopes though; that this larp (and documenting it in this book) will open our eyes, not just here in Denmark, but everywhere in the world and show people that we can play on all sorts of themes.

Show people that we can use larp to create empathy and love for people with different backgrounds, stories, points of view and in this case sexualities – and not be so afraid to do it. I hope that this larp will have make permanent impact on us, making us think outside of the box, when we create larps.

The Danish players have already participated in Copenhagen Pride and in a demonstration against Russia suppressing LGBT rights. Some would have gone anyway, some might have, some wouldn't – but because we played this larp together, we went to these events together. And I believe that means something; at least it has moved my own perception of what you are able to use larps for. I hope to see more larps like this produced like this throughout out the world.

My ultimate conclusion is this: don't be so scared. There is really nothing to be afraid of...



RE-RUNNING & RE-RUNNING

by Petter Karlsson

The larp *Just a Little Lovin'* has a very special place in my heart, as I've helped organize it twice. I find the game extremely well-written - the characters work very well because the writers have given them social groups as well as starting relations, which create relevant bonds. Combined with a careful casting process, the planned workshops, which occur both before the game and during the act breaks, the whole thing welds beautifully together. This larp is not only engaging to play; it brings people closer to each other and to understanding the themes presented.

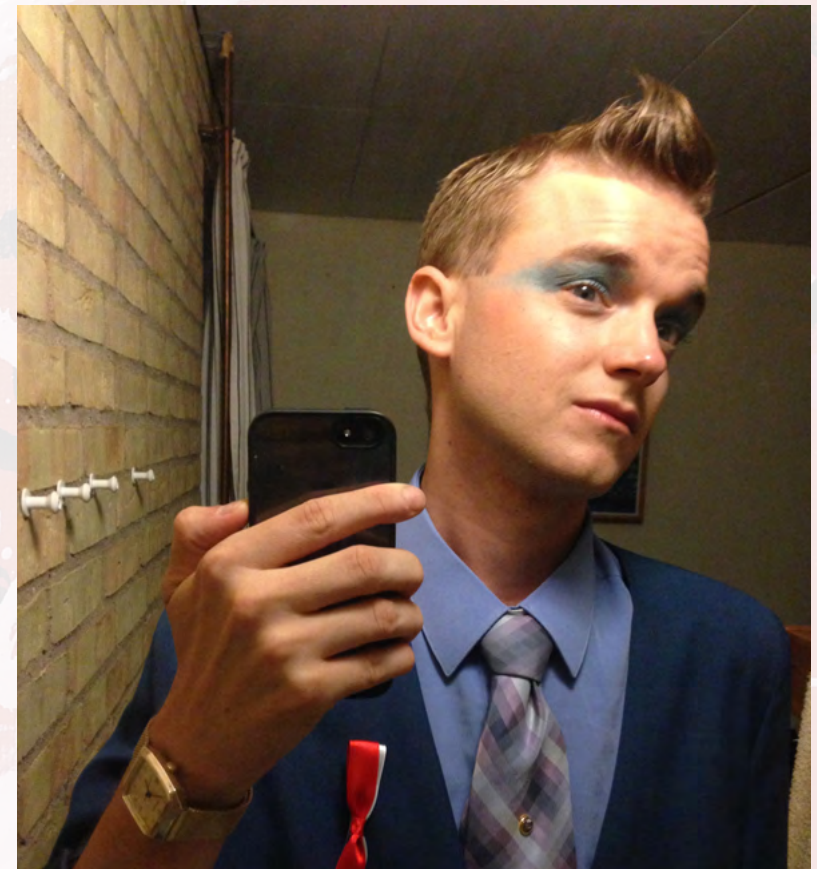
My journey with *JaLL* began when some of my friends attended the first run in 2011 and returned with strong memories and shared bonds. From the sidelines, I saw the game as an emotionally captivating and important larp that deserved to be run again. Bits soon fell in place and I produced it together with Miriam Lundqvist and Anna-Karin Linder through LajvVerkstaden in Sweden 2012.

Since I had not participated in the first run, I put my trust in the writers and Miriam, who had played it in 2011. Our group met, with and without the writers, in our Sweden and their Norway until in June 2012, we ran the larp on the beautiful island Gålö outside Stockholm. When the larp ended, I knew I wanted to be a part of it again if the chance arose.

The larp was emotional for me - my co-players and I shared a strong experience. I also learned much about the situation of gays and HIV-victims in the 80's, and the whole thing opened my mind to transgender people, alternative lifestyles and general queerness today. The larp was also extremely fun to both host and participate in. After the organizing team for the Danish run formed up, they asked if I would help run the game on location, and I gladly said yes.

If I could help out in any way, I felt I had to take the chance.

After helping to organize a second time, I have some ideas about what makes the game so great, and what improved from run to run. In the 2012 run, we introduced additional on-site workshops prior to the start of the larp. One issue in the first run was that the players had different ideas about the meta-techniques. The Phallus-method for playing out intimacy and sex, for example. Some people felt insecure about how to use the techniques and that often meant that they did not use them. Having everyone participate in the same workshops on-site seems to have fixed this issue.





In both 2012 & 2013, we sometimes held workshops with the whole ensemble, but we often split participants into smaller workshop-groups as needed, consisting of 10-15 players. We also used these same groups during the act breaks for debriefs and for debrief after the larp had ended. In 2012 I was the only organizer who participated all of the debriefs and after the larp. This enabled me to listen to players talk about how the larp was going and also let me check in on the state of some players.

Halfway through the larp, I felt strongly that organizer participation in the debriefs should be more common. In the 2013 run, every workshop group had an organizer with them for all meetings. This meant that the organizing team had a broad picture of what was happening in the larp.

As an added advantage, the participants no longer needed to facilitate their own debriefs; organizers took that role. It was very useful to know if a player wanted more direction for their story, or required some simple comfort, like a hug.

This also meant that during our twice-daily meetings in 2013, we knew a lot more about how the larp was going than we had in 2012, which enabled us to make good decisions for the game-mastering.

The 2012 and 2013 runs made use of debrief buddies. Organizers paired up participants, who made sure to say hello to each other, exchanged contact info and talked to each other on-site immediately after the larp and again about one or two weeks later. It was a small thing that made sure people were taking good care of one another.

What I liked most about the actual organizing of the 2013 run was that we had almost everything on script, and unlike the 2012 run, we gave a printed copy to every organizer. The script was very fleshed out, which made me feel extremely secure.

The script included information on how to run workshops before the game and during the act breaks, and on how to debrief players during and after the larp. Very often, larp organizing revolves around improvisation, but to get the processes working together in the right way, it's a great idea to have a solid plan. The more understandable and sensible the plan, the better.

We worked out some final changes to the script a few days before to the larp, and we did add a few things on the fly. In general, however, we quickly ended late-night organizer meetings with "We will do what the script says. No more changes." Instead of continuing debate we trusted the process and that worked well. The script was an invaluable resource and I urge every organizer to use it.

When it comes to practical matters, it is very interesting to think about how the organizing teams are formed. Miriam is a great planner, and for the 2012 run, she always made sure everything was in order and that we held meetings.

Although no one filled her shoes in an obvious way in 2013, I decided to be, at least somewhat, Dr. Structure. Having a nice and tidy place for the props, handouts, and scripts -- as well as duct-tape and other typical organizer-stuff -- saves both time and brain power.



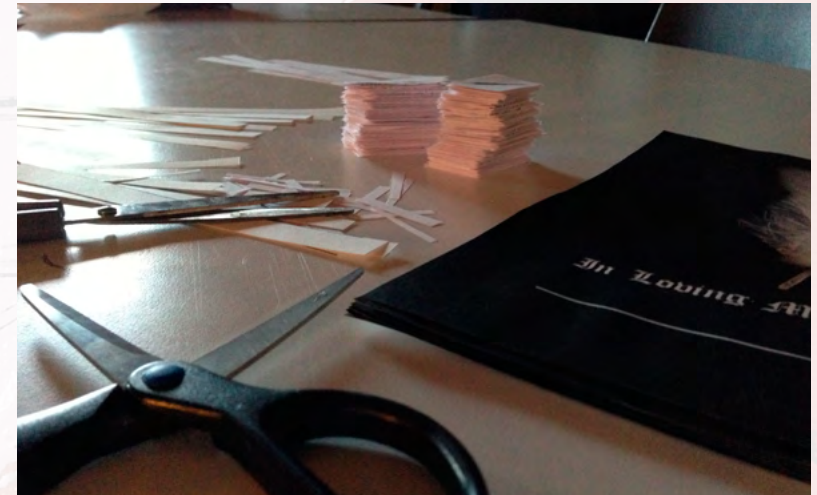
Another difference lies in how the group is joined. The Danish run in 2013 included writer Tor-Kjetil, but not Hanne. I had not worked with the Danish team of Flemming Jacobsen, Nynne Søs Rasmussen and Helene Willer Piironen, although I had worked several times with Morgan Jarl, who is from Sweden like me. Since we had never worked together before, the venture was a learning process. Still, we came together and made a great larp. I believe it to be necessary for organizers to keep an open mind and focus on their will to collaborate as well as on their continuing belief and trust in the vision of the larp.

One extremely important thing to understand about *Just a Little Lovin'* and other strong larps is that they can be very moving. Participants expose and challenge themselves, and become moved for numerous reasons playing with and around the three themes of friendship, desire and fear of death. It is the job of the organizers to help them feel safe while engaged and exploring within the experience.

We did this with several different mechanisms, including the debrief, to help people process their emotions. But we also need to keep a humble and caring attitude, which is as important for organizers as it is for players. For the 2012 run we included this in the vision text:

"The organizers shall make the participants feel safe enough to step outside their comfort zone, both as larpers and as human beings."

This is how and why both the runs I partook in worked, although I felt almost surprised how similar the two runs were in terms of how much they affected the participants, who felt strong emotions during and after the game, and showed an immense amount of care towards each other.



You can see the 2012 run's effects in the Swedish larp community after 2012 through, for example, the Facebook group Regnbågslajvare (Rainbow larpers). The group supports and seeks to raise discussion about LGBTQ issues both inside and outside the larp community, and it has held some of the best discussions I have seen on Facebook.

It persuaded several people to join the local Pride parade and speak up more about LGBTQ rights and HIV-issues. After the 2013 run, several participants of the larp chose to join the Pride parade in Copenhagen.

It was pretty awesome to fly this rocket to the moon once more. I see a fantastic larp with great potential that has given participants a great experience several times now. And it could definitely be done again -- maybe even better.

Petter Karlsson

Producer of Just a Little Lovin' 2012

On-site organizer and workshop facilitator Just a Little Lovin' 2013



THE POWER OF REPETITION

by Tor Kjetil Edland

All larps are about the co-creation of stories. Three runs of *Just a Little Lovin'* have shown us that it's possible to design a larp in a way that ensures a good chance of all participants in the larp experiencing the central themes of *desire*, *fear of death* and *friendship*, without sacrificing the high standard of participatory agency expected by most larpers.

In the three runs, character interpretations and the way individual stories and relationships unfolded, varied substantially. But no matter how different the individual stories and fates of the same characters became, all stories unfolded within, and reflected, the overall narrative of the larp.

To achieve this we used meta-techniques specifically designed for the themes of this larp, the most important being the lottery of death and the phallus method for simulating sex.

We also used scripted events that generally were part of all of the three acts.

SCRIPTED EVENTS

One effect of doing the same act several times at a larp is that by creating "traditions" in the fictional universe of the larp, it creates a sense of reality by the associations we get to traditions in "real" life. Additionally, players often feel more secure and have an easier time getting into just being and acting in the situation when she or he actually has done this particular thing before.

Examples of such events in *Just a Little Lovin'* include the raising of the American flag, singing along to a Dolly Parton version of Star Spangled Banner, and a dragshow/open mike held every night of the party. Two verses of the Star Spangled Banner are also read by Death in the funeral scene that ends each act.

One player afterwards talked about how the use of the national hymn in this way had resonated with him and how some of the underlying political themes of the larp came through strongly because of how the national anthem was used.

Doing performances in character can be a great way to make some character stories visible and show off personalities to a large part of the larp at once. We included the drag show/open mike to give players this opportunity, but also to give the players a look into the classic gay culture phenomena.

This is generally great fun in every act, but what we saw at this run that we also have seen before, is that these performances have the strongest effect in the last act. This is probably because the act focuses on friendship, but it is also the act where death is the most present. In the second act the fear of death takes centre stage, but in the third act, five characters have already died and many more knew that their characters probably would die within a few years at most.

Many of the acts on stage reflected this in different ways. One example was the character Jerrod, a young writer (played by Sofie Falk) who read a list of dedications to many of the other characters. It had been established in the meta scene at the end of Act 2 that Jerrod was infected and thus likely to soon be among the sick and dying. The characters didn't necessarily know this, but many of the players did. This of course influenced how the audience experienced this reading. As life affirming as the reading was, it could also be heard as the start of saying goodbye to people in the community.





META-TECHNIQUES

Death arrives in a meta-scene, played out at the end of every act, at 11 o'clock in the morning. Two characters played by the organizers (Morgan Jarl and Petter Karlsson in this run), embodying “cosmic funeral agents”, arrived at breakfast to host the Lottery of Death. The instructions were as follows: “Write your name on at least one ticket, and on a maximum of five, and put them in the hat.”

The number of tickets should be in accordance with how your character has put himself at risk of becoming infected. The first two times the meta-scene was played, the funeral agents picked out people, randomly drawn from the tickets in the hat. There were ten the first year and fifteen the second, but the lottery wasn't necessarily “lethal”. Chosen randomly, some of the ten ended up in the coffin in the year between the acts, while others got grave news from their doctor. As the very last scene of each act everyone went to the funeral site lead by Death played by one of the organizers (myself in this run) to say goodbye to those who had died.

Many of the participants told stories about different types of strong reactions they experienced when taking part in this scene. For many it was worse seeing your close friends being picked than being picked themselves. Some of those who played characters who were not picked in the lottery and who also didn't experience some of those closest to them being picked spoke afterwards of how, at first, they felt relieved that “someone else” was picked, but afterwards they were struck by guilt for these emotions.

For the last lottery we did things a bit differently. Everyone still put their tickets into the lottery, but now everyone went to the funeral site together to find out which of them would die in the coming year. This time some players spoke of how they felt that this last scene didn't work as well as the previous two act ending scenes.

This wasn't a comment that I had heard after the previous two runs and it lead me to think about how the geography or "architecture" of a venue for a larp can influence how well scenes work. This scene where everyone arrives at the funeral site together and only then finds out who has died works best, I think, if there is a short time between the "undertakers" giving this message to the characters and them arriving at the funeral site.

They also should arrive together and it should quickly be apparent to everyone who has died. The site we had this time for the funerals worked wonderfully for the first two act ending scenes. The funeral site was an outdoor amphitheater that was a ten minute walk from the house. In the previous act endings people had worried about specific characters that had been picked in the lottery, so it was good that the walk took some time.

But the more general feel of worrying for yourself induces a need for the walk to be resolved quicker so the scene doesn't lose momentum for some players. In addition, the narrow paths leading into the amphitheater made it impossible for everyone to arrive at the site at once and find out together at the same time who were the ones who died.

The feedback from the players on this will probably lead to some redesign on this particular scene in the script we will finalize for possible future runs of *Just a Little Lovin'*.

These types of reflections about how a larp script works when you do the same game in different locations, and how the physical environment affects the design of your game, is one of the most interesting aspects of doing the same game several times, scouting the location in advance and trying to figure out what effect it will have to put that in-game location in that particular spot in the location we will be using the next time.

One of the techniques *Just a Little Lovin'* has become a bit notorious for in the Nordic larp community is the way the game simulates sexual scenes. In this run, as in previous runs of *Just a Little Lovin'*, nearly every character had sexual encounters portraying a great variety of emotions and situations. We had a vision for a meta-technique for sexual play that would be visible, direct and which could easily portray gay sex and "anonymous" sex. '

The Phallus Method challenged our players, but at the same time helped the players feel safe about playing quite expressive sexual scenes. *Just a Little Lovin'* uses sexuality as an engine for a wide range of emotions, relations and rationalizations. Most people experience powerful feelings while having, or trying to have, erotic interaction. There are perhaps negative emotions like rejection, suppression, shame or loss of control, but also positive ones like true connection, holiness, strong friendship, and the feeling of being appreciated. We wanted the play on sex in this larp to show that, and not just be about superficial and humorous "slam bang".



The Phallus Method can shortly be described like this: Keep your clothes on (at least your underwear). Have a phallus ready. The phallus is gender-free, so everyone can use one; and it will simulate hetero and lesbian sex, as well as gay sex.

It symbolizes sexual initiative, not necessarily the dick of one of the characters. We had some phalluses made for the game that were wooden with bright 80's pink paint. This prop can be used in many different ways when playing out a scene.

We told the players that it was important to negotiate between them exactly how a scene should be played out, to achieve an experience that would be both safe and intense. As this was a story about HIV, one of the reasons we needed phalluses was to make it possible for the participants to easily portray whether they chose to use condom or not. This is, after all, a story of a sexually transmitted disease.

A very important part of The Phallus Method was having a monologue to end the scene. Every participant should say out loud, one by one, the thoughts running through their head at the end of the sexual act: how does (s)he feel now, how was the sexual interaction, etc.

They should describe something that felt especially good or bad. When all monologues were done, one went out of the meta-moment, and back into the regular flow of the game. One participant compared this method to *ars amandi*, a method developed by Swedish larpwright Emma Wieslander, that is often used to simulate sexual scenes in Nordic larps. This method involves touching hands and shoulders while looking each other in the eyes.

The player commented that in many ways *ars amandi* felt more sensual and erotic, while doing a scene with the phallus method felt more like watching a hot sex scene in a movie.



I believe that the pre-scene negotiation between players and the closing monologues are the most important aspects of this method. A lot of participants have told us that they were quite nervous about this aspect of the game before they arrived, but that the on-site workshops where we explained and tried out the method made it feel safe for them to jump into doing sex scenes when the game had started. Since we were portraying a scene where many characters had a lot of sex, it also meant that players didn't only have that one sex scene like is often the case in a larp where how "successful" that scene is can determine what you think of how sex was portrayed in that game.

In *Just a Little Lovin'* many characters had one or more sex scenes in each act. With experience and repetition of using the same techniques they were able to explore different types of scenes and moods they could portray with a method that, when first presented to people, often just sounds like a funny joke in the category of "weird stuff Nordic larps do."

But it all works. So keep on playin' and lovin' everyone.

- Tor Kjetil Edland



May God bless and keep you always

May your wishes all come true

May you always do for others

And let others do for you

May you build a ladder to the stars

And climb on every rung

And may you stay forever young

May you stay forever young

May you grow up to be righteous

May you grow up to be true

May you always know the truth
And see the lights surrounding you

May you always be courageous
Stand upright and be strong
And may you stay forever young
May you stay forever young

May your hands always be busy
May your feet always be swift
May you have a strong foundation
When the winds of changes shift
May your heart always be joyful
May your song always be sung
And may you stay forever young
May you stay forever young

Mary Lou, 1984
(Bob Dylan, 1971)



CHAPTER 2

PLAYER EXPERIENCES

A CUB IS WELCOMED

by Elin Nielsen

THE CUBBY HOLE AND FEMALE BONDING

This was my second experience with *Just a Little Lovin'*. I played Morgan. A quite mean, but charismatic social hub in The Cubby Hole, the lesbian scene, which is a fresh addition to the larp as of this run. I think it was a good design choice to add more lesbian characters, to create an independent social scene and a sense of belonging for those players.

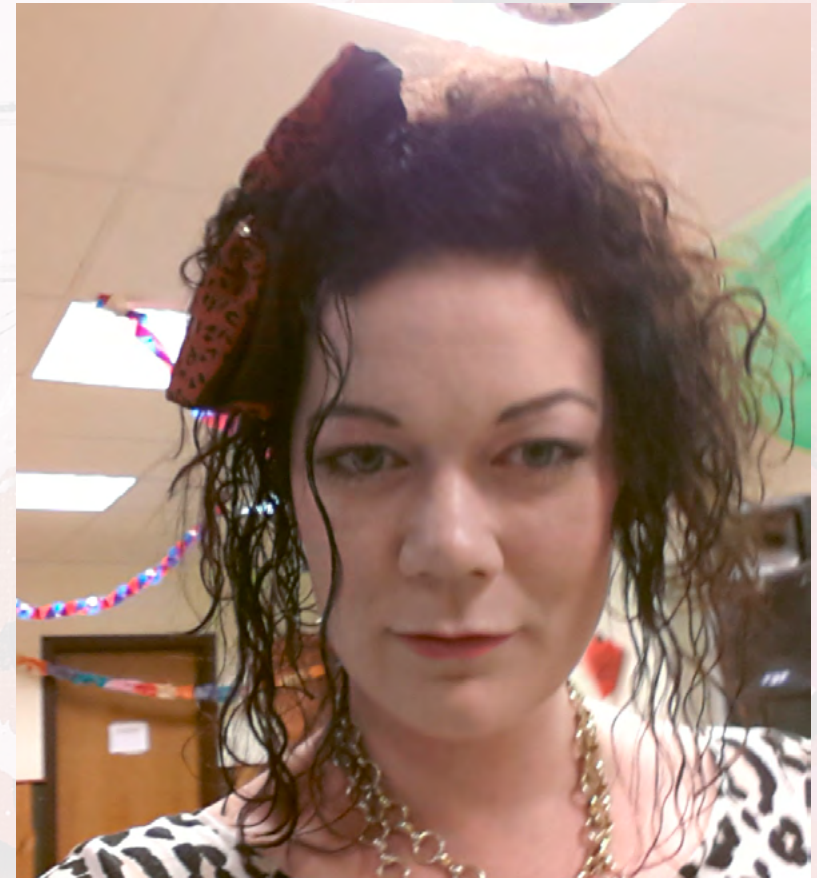
And it worked. Rarely, if ever, have I experienced a more realistic feeling of friendship in a larp. Some of the most memorable scenes were ones where we just sat around enjoying the safety of each other's company, having dinner, sharing a bottle of wine or emptying a bottle of vodka over light-hearted conversation early in the morning.

The feeling of community, and the notion that you always have some people to catch you if, and for my character's sake: when, you fall, created a great frame for our individual stories. Who was dating who differed a bit from year to year, as did the internal dynamic of the group, there were fights and unfaithfulness and break-ups, but the totally safe atmosphere and the feeling of belonging was prevalent throughout the game.

THE COMMUNITY BABY

In this run, the characters Charlotte and Kimberly actually had that baby they were planning at the start of the larp, which never happened in earlier runs. Fathered by Ruben and co-fathered by Andrew. Great decision by the players, cliché or not: The birth of little Achilles symbolized hope in this time of hopelessness, a spark in the dark times we were living.

This is illustrated well in one meta-scene: the christening.



It was an open meta-scene in the beginning of the '84 act. A few players that probably would have attended the christening of the community baby in The Metropolitan Community Church of New York missed the meta-scene for different reasons. But quite a few that didn't really have close relations to the families showed up. And I believe that was because of what the baby represented. All of our characters had been to funeral upon funeral in this church, and it was just refreshing and relieving to be there for something that was only positive and good.

Just before the start of the act, I was told by the Charlotte-player: "If you think Morgan is ready, I would love it if you could read a poem at the christening." So I wrote a poem to the child. Using the story, the love I have for my own, real life nephew, and a few clichés I thought would work.

The scene was touching, and oozed of people caught in horribly tragic situations clinging to this slice of hope and happiness. After a beautiful speech by the minister, and a sweet ritual, I read my poem:

To a young cub from an old cubby
Be like us, they will say
Be you, cub
Whomever that may be
For you are raised in acceptance

Follow, they will say
Find your own path, cub
Whatever that may be
For you know your desires

Do boys' stuff, they will say
Do your stuff, cub
whatever that may be
For your world is less judging

Nuclear family, they will say
You take no notice, cub
However they express it
For you are double lucky

...

Beware of old Morgan, they will say
Don't listen to them, cub
'Cause I've got your back

I am humbled by the fact that my poem moved so many people to tears and to emotional confessions post-larp. When I realized the impact, I felt ashamed that I'd actually put very little work into it.

But I'm convinced that we all worked together to create this moment of larp magic: the idea for the scene, the hope that little Achilles represented, the effort made by all the players, both parents, friends and spectators, as well as brilliant larp design that paves the way for scenes like this to take place.



A LETTER TO STEVEN

by Morgan Jarl

I was was an organizer on *Just a Little Lovin'* (2013). This piece deals with my letter to my character during the 2012 run of the larp.

Dear Steven,

You don't know me but we have shared the same body. When you had your heyday I was just a young child. I am part of the HIV-generation, so I have learned all about your struggles, all your trials and I got to reap the benefits of your victories. Life got better for all gay, lesbian, bi and transgender people all over the world.

Being from Sweden we got laws that are giving us most of the same rights as all else, except for some issues with sterilization of transsexuals that will be resolved soon. In America, some states have legalized marriage and adoption, and the whole nation has anti-discrimination laws. We still have our struggles; both domestic and abroad. Russia, NeoCons, religious fanatics of all kind, to mention a few.

On a more personal note. You are 70 years old when this reaches you, when I write it. Or you would be. I hope you survived, had a nice kid - about my age - [editorial note: and here I start crying while typing, even though I have read it 4 times and is using my brain for typing, the emotions overwhelm me] and that everything worked out for you. I wish I could meet you as the great old man you must have turned out to be. I will always carry you inside me; your wishes and passions, love and generosity. You have given me joy and a realization that some day my children will have a better place to raise their rainbow families in. The struggle goes on and so does life and love. I love you.

With all my Love.

Yours eternally, Morgan Jarl

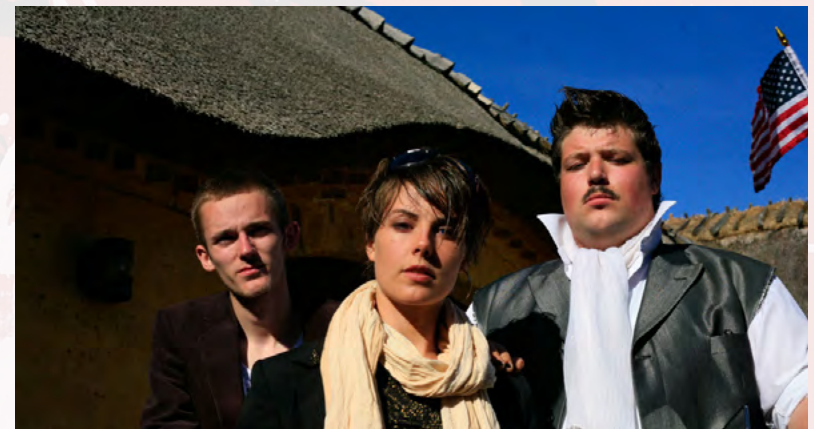
Ps. Please be safe.

As you might have seen in my letter to Steven, I feel so proud to belong to two subcultures that combine in such a lovely way, celebrating the people who go before us. I think of the fantastic people in the gay – and alternative community of the early 80s we just played and how they have influenced where we are at today.

I am myself an extra-dad of a wonderful 19 month old child, have a lovely rainbow family unfortunately spread out over half of Sweden and beyond, and live my life with loads of love and sexual relationships that are diverse. I envy Steven and the others that they have their family in one place, that they live together.

At the same time I am so thankful of the real people who lived those lives, how they have made it possible for us, living 30 years later, to form the kind of families that we wish for. They planted a seed that we are harvesting the fruits from - let us make them proud by replanting some of seeds from the harvest so that our children can harvest even greater fruits.

In the 2013 game I was the preacher at a baptism of a child in 1984 - a child with 2 mums and 2 dads, and a couple of godparents, a brother and sister. With several of the players there, a good portion of the Greenish Village was there.



My baptism speech went something like this:

"It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. In today's society we are all separated into small nuclear families, lonely in raising our young. This family standing in front of us to baptize their child into this congregation under God is a role model for us all, for this nation. They show that we can still be a village to raise our children, with two mums and two dads, with godparents as devoted as these. A modern day village for us to learn from. This child will have a village in these people, and in The Village surrounding us today."

The possibility of being a queer relationship anarchist came directly out of that movement. I hope my children can enjoy a society with a more accepting norm where they get to form the relationships they wish for in a manner they find suitable to their persons.

I was so thankful to have Anna-Karin Linder Krauklis and Daniel Linder Krauklis to cook dinner for and watch Buffy with the evening after the larp - and a place in your home, in our family.

Just as I am happy for my loved ones; my friends and my lovers; and my children Daga and Livia Morgan Lo. I wish for you the best the future can hold. I also offer my hand and home to all of you out there if you ever need the help.

Let us spread Love and Respect.
Too you all and beyond.



A LIFE-CHANGING LARP

by Jakob Ponsgaard

In the following, I will try to describe and reflect on the events and choices that made this a life-changing larp for me.

After intense workshopping and feeling really safe with my character, I decided to tap into the theme of the first act: desire, by playing out the 'badassness' of Steven as a sexual person. The Dark Room was his canvas, and he made beautiful art with the bodies of his slaves, bringing both the Cruisers and other people into a close relation around him.

The establishing of him as a strong character was, for me, very important, to be able to play his downfall later on. Steven felt powerful and deeply connected to a small group of characters, especially Andrew (Simon Steen Hansen) and Steven's nephew, Bret (Maja Toft Løvbakke).

Especially the relation to Bret proved to be a very powerful bond, and a relation which, despite it being nothing like my relation to my own father, caught me by surprise, and was the heaviest bleed in this game for me. The story with my own father is complex, but it's a story of longing and rejection, a story of an illusion of fatherhood, a story of cancer, and of not getting to express the need for love. All these themes were in play in Steven-Bret relationship.

Having decided on a heavy experience I took it all in, and left very little of the emotions with my character alone. I used a cognitive method of actively replacing my own behavioral and thought patterns with Steven's to really get into his mind.

I also decided to make a rule: "when a hand offers to pull you up one step on the ladder, Steven will step down, away from the hand" –even if this would only be an introvert action.

My first emotional breakdown was the next morning in the lottery of death. After having experienced this breakdown I became insecure about my methods being too tough.

The first sharing circle during the act-break workshops was nice and relieving. I felt safe and warm inside after a great talk with the wonderful people – the level of trust was amazing – so I decided to stay on the destructive path and go further down the ladder.

I added a self-blame element to Steven, and decided to up the ante on his closest relations, by forcing myself into having a higher degree of real emotions in all his many sex scenes and thereby adding either a love or shame element from all of them. At the same time I added a layer of toughness to Steven, and let an emotional instability shine through, to make him appear more dangerous in some situations.

Steven's new path took him on a journey towards his breaking point. In the second act, almost all my play was introvert, and Steven began to realize that the Cruisers Club needed a tight knit feeling of togetherness more than ever, but instead, they had never been further apart.



So he took it upon himself to try to straighten up their game – of course just making things a lot worse. So without playing himself into a corner he managed to play out all the wrong and impulsive behavior - all out of deep love – one step at the time. People around him were dying, and his relations to his closest friends grew stronger and stronger, while he slowly choked them with over-fatherly love.

By removing Steven in this way, I managed to isolate a lot of pain in one single relation: The most complex of them all, his relationship with the nephew Bret. This would later come in handy for my bleeding process. The following morning, I had my second emotional breakdown, during the lottery of Death. Among the randomly chosen, Bret, Steven, and Steven's ex (and only realistic possibility of love) Andrew were all picked. This was the point of no return for Steven.

I had Steven hanging over the edge, but I remained in control until Steven got diagnosed with cancer as a consequence of the lottery. Then I found myself latching on to him, as we fell deep into old emotions, over which I had no control. Sobbing and with a feeling of deep, agonizing depression, I couldn't let him go until a while after the song signaling the end of the act had ended.



Luckily for me and a couple of other heavy bleeders, the act break debriefing circle again managed to keep a level of trust, in which there was room for these kinds of emotions. We cried and cried and cried. And the level of safety enabled me to continue honoring the rules of Steven on our joint venture into the depths of my old emotional scars.

In the third act, I chose to play the cancer aggressively and gave him but a month to live. It was now clear to me: I needed to really feel this thing, this level of emotion I hadn't felt since my early teenage years. This weird connection to my own life placed me emotionally in the eyes of my dead father – A man who could never get himself to act, who could never reach out to his own son. He died of stomach cancer, rejecting every letter or phone call from me, or my mother.

The third act was for me going to be about exploring a possible version of the feelings of a dying father-figure who failed in life – and do this through Steven's destructive way of caring too much. But I had to do this in order to do this without denying myself access to my deepest and darkest feelings by putting up too many defensive barriers. Instead, I wanted to trust the safety net of the larp, which had proved amazingly effective until then. So, with this setup, the last act, for me, became about playing Steven all the way down.

Not in a furious, destructive manner, but in a sad and apathetic manner. Stripped of hope, the intention of doing good for the few he loved would prove a huge failure, and remove him further from them. All while his body would slowly give up. This was planned roughly as a travel through my interpretation of the feelings my father must have experienced.

Steven had thrown away most of his tough image, favoring relations and friendships, trying to tie up loose ends and make sure his beloved would be alright after his inevitable death.

The Book of Just a Little Lovin' (2013 Denmark Run)

Steven managed to ruin everything, and on top of that; *JaLL* ended with the death of the two people who Steven had trusted to take care of his nephew, Bret.

Bret was the one person who really meant the world to Steven, and on his deathbed he saw Bret's future become as hopeless as his own.

Playing Steven in this way was very hard for me, but it enabled me to reach emotions, which I hadn't been able to reach for more than a decade. I mean, I like to be moved and deeply, emotionally involved in larps, but *JaLL* would be the larp to actually be a functioning catalyst for the skeletons in my own closet. I have experienced bleed before, but never had an emotional overflow in such a manner that it would re-prioritize, and change my life. *JaLL* did.

And the important thing here is not my subjective, messy rant about my experience and my emotional rollercoaster, no. The important thing to notice is, that I did not feel unsafe at one single point. I have never played, nor heard of a larp with a game-design with this level of psychological safety.

This larp reestablished my trust in psychological safety as a game design tool. I will not believe for one second that the intensity, and impact of this larp would've been anywhere near this level, without this element having so much focus. People felt safe, and therefore invested everything they had.

The love and sympathy felt for the characters and the immense amount of empathy that this game was a catalyst for, was incomparable to anything else I've experienced. I am now finally convinced that this art form WILL change the world, if we, the humble performers of it, will use its power for reflection and understanding.

It changed me anyways.



A TASTE OF THE OTHER SIDE

by Maja Toft Løvbakke

Just a Little Lovin' was a unique experience for me, on many levels. Not just because of the intensity playing in a setting containing a fatal illness, as well as the feelings and relations associated with that. *Just a Little Lovin'* was my first experience with gender bending, and it made me experience feelings and situations I never guessed I would.

When I signed up, I knew from previous runs and the people who played them that “gays just have more fun”, or at least that they were more promiscuous and, in the context of HIV, played a more dangerous game. I wanted to have this intense experience of maybe, maybe not, dying or watching other people die, to be close and relevant. So I signed up asking to play a guy – hopefully a gay guy.

And I got what I wanted.

INTRODUCING BRET

I played the 18-year-old Bret who had just moved to New York, hungry for the city life; its glamour and its people. What my Bret experienced was a life story, and I am not going to talk about the three years of his life that defined him for whatever metaphysical life he now has in the thoughts of myself and others'. Instead I want to tell you about what I experienced.

I played in the midst of a group of guys I didn't know at all or had only had faint knowledge about – all playing gays and promiscuous. From the start, we had a really close sexual relationship with each other, and with it came a will to protect and keep each other close, while giving each other space. This group was my main frame for some of the strongest feelings the game gave me.

I experienced love, jealousy, wishing to die and the strongest feeling: the wish to live. But most of all I had a taste of the strongest friendship I have ever experienced: a brotherhood. Whether something you're only able to experience between men as man, I don't know. But I hope it is possible to find that kind of group friendship in my own life somehow.

I have tried to find the difference in what made the brotherhood so much stronger than my normal friendship relations. There is, of course, the group mentality, which I tend to try to avoid in real life, when it seems to have impacts on my personal stands and points of view. I have, all my life, been told stories of how people do stupid things under peer pressure, in order to be accepted.

That they (the “trouble makers”) search for a brotherhood or its like to adopt a feeling of belonging. I thought I understood, and yet I did not. The security of always knowing someone has your back, that they will always take your side in the end and the freedom of knowing they like you for who you are. It's too complicated for me to explain half of it and yet I haven't grasped a quarter of it. So the group mentality was probably a part of what I now feel is missing from my own friendships.

Another fact impacting the brotherhood feel, was that it never had anything to do with the relationships in between the individual characters. It was always about the general love for each other. It was not even about attraction, though sex was what bound the guys together in the first place. It was an “unconditional friendship” as I experienced it. And though I long to have a “brotherhood” like the one Bret had in *Just a Little Lovin'*, it still frightens me.

In the end, I don't think there was anything I and Bret wouldn't do for the brotherhood – though Bret seemed to be a wiser man and not let that get in the way of his own happiness.



I DIDN'T SEE THE WOMEN

Another surprising experience as a result of gender bending was that the women in general were blurred from Bret's and my own vision. During the game I only saw the men. Unless a woman talked directly to me, they didn't really exist; and even then they didn't have his full attention. There was an exception in one particular woman who had a motherly/big sister role to Bret, but that was the exception that makes the rule. I am still fascinated that you can play tricks on your brain like that: to only see as the character sees.

The weirdest experience and the one I have thought the most about after, was coming out of the game. I had brought heels with me since I wagered I might need help feeling womanly again. I quietly and quickly got out of character after the game thanks to the organizer's methods, so dressing up in skirt and heels wasn't as ritualistic as I had hoped in terms of "putting me back on." What I experienced when I came back down from my room, in skirt and heels, was that the world changed - as soon as the first guy looked at me and I realized I was a girl.

Suddenly I got shy, felt the need to cover myself and couldn't find out how to smile at him. Suddenly I felt like an object. I got more self-aware than I can ever remember being, because of the contrast. And when the guys from the brotherhood looked at me, I felt alienated and became painfully aware that the brotherhood wasn't there anymore.

They didn't recognize me. And I ran through my memories of being the girl who identified as "being one of the guys," and realizing no matter how much I had ever felt respected by the guys and felt a part of their gang, I never was one of them.

And I never will be.

EYES WIDE OPEN

I didn't know how to act around guys after the game and at the after party. I was imitating everything I would do at a party, but it somehow felt wrong. I didn't feel like getting drunk, scared of what might happen if I got out of control. Dancing felt like courting and not just fun, as it normally feels like. And I got nervous when talking to people, afraid to hit on them when I talked, instead of letting the conversation follow its natural course.

Much of this insecurity is natural at post game events; partying with people you don't really know, but want to know. But the overly self-aware sensation of my gender, and seeing it through "fresh eyes," is an experience that politically has made me aware of how much culture effects our view on gender. If you really want to know about the culture differentiating gender the way it does today, I can advise gender bending in an intense larp. As in every other situation (living in the 80's, being gay, living with disease), you can study it hard, but you always get a better look from inside.



BECOMING MADISON..

by Søren Ebbehøj

I played the freshly written character Madison, or “Maddie”, who worked in the diner. Madison was 17 when the game started and had left home where no one really took care of him. He gravitated towards Pepper’s Diner and the gay community in Christopher Street, as he was himself gay, though he had yet to realize it.

Madison was a young, naive and generally happy-go-lucky guy. He loved all the nice people in the diner and he flirted extensively with everyone without really realizing what was going on. From A to Z your stereotypical young diner waitress in a male version.

BECOMING MADISON

In order to play the character successfully, as I am 193cm tall and 29 years old, I started quite rigorously changing my appearance to obtain that “twink” feel: I shaved my arms, hands, legs, chest, belly, shoulders and face and went dieting for a month to reduce my body fat percentage. Both of the above, in order to appear young. I also went for tight-fitting, short t-shirts showing some belly, ridiculously skinny jeans, and tried to overall dress a bit childishly. Large amounts of bubble gum kept in a fanny pack completed the accessories.



..AND LETTING GO AGAIN

As for the body language, I wanted to really make a difference from my usually quite relaxed, but self-confident, physical expression. Working with my co-players in the diner, I set up a few guiding principles to build every other gesture and stance on:

I would have to make my body look as small as possible at all times, as if my character was slightly uncomfortable with the real size of his body. My elbows should never leave the sides of my torso even if my hands did. This turned clapping, carrying stuff, hugging etc. into very expressive gestures.

My knees should touch when physically possible and my feet should always “stay on the same tile on the floor.” This rule gave me some very distinct “girly” sitting poses, a very shy way of standing, and a certain way of dancing, making it impossible not to “work those hips.”

Finally, I made sure to walk as if on a line or catwalk, and wriggle my hips whenever I was walking or dancing. All in all these quite simple rules made it possible for me to extrapolate everything else, to the point of varying the expressions to appear more or less self-confident even if the character was inherently insecure.

For speech, I drew a lot of inspiration from American college girls and waitresses, trying always to be happy and open when engaging with people. One of my main challenges turned out to be never turning angry or aggressive, which I had deliberately removed from the character, as I tend to always go there with other characters.

The way to handle this was to play the character quite absentmindedly and extremely insecurely; always asking for confirmation instead of plain out stating things. This way I could play embarrassed or sad; or simply not understand, when stuff went wrong or people were being mean.

BEING MADISON

During the game, my preparations turned out to pay off, almost at once. I tend to drift a bit, start thinking of other things, during periods of low-intensity play such as working in the diner. Sometimes that results in me losing some of the traits of the character, such as common phrases and gestures.

But the very distinct physical expression of Madison demanded of me that I kept up the act whenever anyone could see me. This ended up helping a lot with keeping me in character, even in periods without interactions with other players.

Being the only virgin character in the game, and with the large focus on sex, Madison received a huge amount of sexual attention from the get-go. Also, because of the shy and naive expression, lots of characters felt the need to be protective and nice towards Madison.

This meant that the character quite quickly formed micro-relations with most other characters in the game, and everyone seemed to know who Madison was. I didn't have a lot of meaningful interactions except with a handful of players, but Madison got a lot of attention as a sexual object of desire, and kind of a mascot of the community. In a way, I started feeling like a very good extra in everyone else's games (in a good way, that is).

The sheer objectification was something I had thought a bit about beforehand, and of course it was an integral part of the basic character design: the diner waitress, but I don't think I had quite expected the scale and impact of it.

Now, this is probably trivial for about half of the readers, but being viewed as an object like that was a weird experience.

On the one hand, the hungry look on people's faces, the ass-grabbing, the comments, and especially the fact that no one seemed to acknowledge Madison for who he was but rather what he was and how he looked was highly uncomfortable.

On the other hand, the sheer amount of (mostly) positive attention was extremely affirming and, frankly, quite addictive, especially when that was the only thing you could get. Thus, I realized, during the game, that I started playing along: I sought out the fast confirmation; I danced more expressively and I started flirting with everyone, always longing for the next compliment or smile.

And even when people got a bit too hands-on during breakfast service in the diner, or when people got a bit too close on the dance floor, I just wiggled my way out of it, instead of telling people off.



LETTING GO OF MADISON

Getting out of character after the game was a rough experience for me: first of all, letting go of my signature cap and placing it in the circle along with personal items from all the other characters was difficult, and I experienced something akin to a panic attack for fear or loss at letting Madison go. This passed, of course, but left a very physical feeling of not belonging in my own body.

Stuff like this is something we construct in our own heads in the blink of an eye, but I had the feeling of a very physical struggle of getting Madison out of my system and regaining control of my own body. I started feeling like working out, and so in a break in the debriefing sessions after the game, I fought the unease by doing a short workout. This helped a lot, because I got to move my body in ways that have become very familiar to me and got that post-workout, endorphin-rich, tired feeling in my limbs.



But for the rest of the day and a few days after, I was still extremely self-conscious and very aware of not behaving or moving like Madison. For example, feeling comfortable on the dance floor took a long time during the after-party, but I got there in the end.

This is not that weird, I guess, as it is quite easy growing accustomed to new gestures and ways of expression, but it felt quite tough, maybe because of the extend of my “transformation.” At least I feel very good about the hair on my arms finally growing back out as I am writing this.

The weirdest thing about letting Madison go, and finding myself after the game, however, was related to the attention, and the way people see me. At the after-party I felt the consequences of having close relations to only a very small amount of characters. As the attention and constant acknowledgment, superficial as it was, which Madison received all the time was completely gone, I started feeling quite lonely. I was surprised at how addictive the role of the objectified individual could be, but also how alienating and lonely it could feel.

All in all, I think that is one of the most important experiences for me. To have been in that position, if only for a short while and in a positive, loving environment. To have been the object, the one no one really took seriously, and realizing, as I wrote the letter to Madison after the game, that that is what I do to people in the real world.

Of course I knew – on an intellectual level – that is how it must be to be the new, hot girl (in the larping community for example). But trying it, being in those skinny jeans, and on that dance floor, that was different. Realizing the duplicity: the discomfort and the addiction. That is something quite different.

COMING FULL CIRCLE

by Oskar Gunnarsson

My name is Oskar, and this is my second run as a gay man in the game, the story, the life of *Just a Little Lovin'*. I was part of the first game in 2011 in Oslo and was originally meant to play in the second run in 2012, though real life events interfered with that.

So some might wonder why play *Just a Little Lovin'*, such an emotionally powerful experience, a second time. Why diffuse the first experience and more importantly, why put yourself to a second round 'on the rack'..?

In many ways my first run of this most important of larps was very much an empowering and eye-opening experience for me, both as a person and a political entity. I am, myself, part of the Scene of today, although in so many respects I really am not. I'll come back to that.

SIMON

Simon is and will be what I see myself as in this game, he is me, was me, will be me. Dear God, at the same time I he isn't. I am not going to go too far into the who and the how of him here, as he is referenced by other players and characters in a way that will be confusing and perhaps not linear with the reading experience for you as a reader.

This man was what I call an Atlas-character, a man who could carry his world, his friends, his universe on his shoulders. Or perhaps a Sisyphus, rolling rocks up a mountain. In my hands, he turned into a Sisyphus who outran the rock as it tumbled down the mountainside. A Sisyphus watching how this rock, this disease, smashed his reality.

AIDS is often described as a monstrous disease. I would argue it is not. AIDS is an ugly disease but it is not monstrous, though it does show how monstrous we as humans can be to each other. Even to the ones we love the most.



As Simon, I learned so many ugly aspects of my own list of priorities, as they were channelled through the mind of Simon, I learnt things about myself that I never really wanted to know and yet I now cherish and carry with me. Knowing that this knowledge makes me into a better man, partner and friend.



SINCLAIR

When I got the opportunity to play *Just a Little Lovin'* a second time, in Denmark, 2013, I talked with several of the former players from the 2011 run who almost talked me out of doing this again. And yet to me, it was something inevitable. The unjustly good fate of Simon as I had been him, still gave me, Oskar, some intense bouts of survivor's guilt. A guilt I felt I could only process by leaving Simon behind me by experiencing this again, as someone else. If you can ever replace a notion like that? Oh, the naivety of my emotional reasoning.

Sinclair shares a lot of his problems with problems from my own, real life. Although not the same actual issues, the themes were very much the same. It didn't help that he borrowed heavily from my own wardrobe in this overlapping part of our stories. Back to Sinclair, he was a rising new star within the congressional ranks of the Democratic party. He was aiming for his own chair in the fall-election of 1982, the traditional chair of his family, based on conservative family values. A family just like the one Sinclair had, except Sinclair was gay and also evolving into a transvestite.

I had requested Sinclair as a role as I had perceived an emotionally complex yet ultimately good man in the role. Oh the woe of my misconception. Sinclair was perhaps not the petty and mean nature of Simon, but instead a devious achiever caught in the restraints of his own sexuality. Part embracing, part rebuking his own self. The biggest challenge was his position as a family man and a father. Not being one myself, this was one of the greatest facets that I put a lot of work into 'researching'.

I felt that the family outside the group that we would be within the larp, could create an empowering, yet at the same time, problematic presence. Something I would return to even as Sinclair passed on. As Simon, I had experienced the decision-making and life of what I, as Oskar, would've dared to classify as 'high-risk behavior', before participating in the larp.

Simon, as one of the few lucky ones, passed though his destructive lifestyle physically untouched. Sinclair was not as lucky. It was almost poetic. Sinclair was a closeted and very careful gay man, experiencing his joys and sexual practice was something that seldom happened and only in secluded company.

As a man among other men, it was also troubling how he stood together with his best friend Bruce, one foot firmly inside the camp of that particular type of homosexual man who create a hard line for himself, separating feminine and masculine gay men. At the same time, unlike Bruce, Sinclair wanted to be a tranny himself. Despite this, he valued himself highly compared to others of his kind.

The resemblance to the feminist struggle captivated within the character of Sinclair was almost a chapter to itself, one I did not get to explore however. After the first party, in spite of his subconscious carefulness, something born more out of a need for secrecy than a fear of getting sick, Sinclair caught illness. He and his closest friends, however, marched ever forward in their ambitious careers, but Sinclair was sick. Although gaining his seat in congress, Sinclair got caught in the bouts of a very mean pneumonia early in 1983. A pneumonia he would soon perish from.

THE FUNERAL - ON LYING IN A COFFIN

This was an extremely strange experience. Even if I, as a former participant, had seen this happen through the eyes of Simon, I was very much caught unawares with regards to how I would tackle the experience myself. As a player, I stay very much nearby the emotions and actions of the role I am lending my body to. I ride this new person to the end, if that makes sense.

I expected to be feeling the love and emotional ties as heavy as I had in-game. If not more, as I prepared to bury the role of one I had put so much work and toil into transforming to a living person. But upon arriving to the white box with my role's name in it – “In loving memory of Sinclair Everett” – Sinclair just disappeared. Poof!

Gone and done. It was a serene, and from my own personal viewpoint, beautiful experience to see how loved one can be, but it was more like me as a player watching the funeral of a friend, although I was only following it by listening to the cries, the wails and the sobs whilst sometimes feeling someone caress my cheek. It was more like an out of body experience, where I was, from a third-person audible point of view, looking at the funeral of my own body. Very strange. Where Sinclair disappeared to at that moment I have yet to discover.

ALLEN - AND COMING FULL CIRCLE

Allen was the role I ended up portraying for the remainder of the third run of the game. Inserting a new, improvised role into such a network of highly developed characters and personas without stepping on people's toes, was difficult. It was also difficult to make such a quick adjustment of behavior. I ended up turning several themes from within Sinclair upside-down and use the research I had done even though it would be a lot more on the fly.



Allen was an engaging character to present but in a lot of situations, I was very much in a state of theatrics, rather than completely engaged in who he was. The story we portrayed was still very engaging and looking at how much love the AIDS-sick pediatrician got, it was all very beautiful but an experience that has I later made me question myself. Wondering whether I was simply copping out from the trauma that was Sinclair. In such a way I think Allen was a bad idea as he became another amalgam of myself. Since I had the freedom of choosing this personality, Allen also ended up closer to myself as an emotional being, something that forced me into the corner where I approached people less as Allen, but more as Oskar playing Allen.

This made the experience less problematic in many ways but also a lot more troubling. “Was it me feeling this way or was it Allen?” If I have one tip to the writers, I would say that doing fixed roles as an alternative to the improvisational workshop would be something I would strongly consider. Some players might be ready to do this improvisational workshop, but I'm leaning towards the opinion that I wasn't. Though no fault of anyone else.

I will very much carry *Just a Little Lovin'* with me for the rest of my life. It is an engaging string of fates and lives, of lovable and detestable men, women, creatures and monsters (yes, monsters). Spun with elegance and care, making you feel engaged in their fates even as someone who wasn't even born when the last act plays out.

We cannot forget.



DAWN'S STORY..

by Anne Marie Stamnestrø

*Faces to faces, secret places, feel the chill
Night fall covers me, but you know the plans I'm making*

He's not like anyone else. An icon, not a real person. I don't even care that he's a man. He's above all that. Rosemary and I giggle like those girls I hated in school. I'm fourteen again. Autographs on the T-shirt. Shy smiles. 'You're sooo talented. We love you.' An arrogant flick of that hair. If I'd known then what would happen to him, I might have tried to overcome that stupid shyness, stolen that kiss I was thinking about.

But he was going to be around forever. Just starting out. Like all of us. Young, invincible. He's the symbol of everything that happened that night. The shots and the giggles with all our friends. The jealousy and bad decisions, the one night stands, the things we did just because we were young and so, so alive. Painting the salmon with Rosemary and Morgan and Dutch – my Salmon Creek family. They're all I have, and we're gonna be together forever. Anything can happen.



..TOLD THROUGH MUSIC

*Sometimes I feel I've got to run away, I got to get away
From the pain you drive into the heart of me
The love we share seems to go nowhere, and I've lost my light*

A year has passed. She broke up with me. We had almost five months. Probably a new record for the both of us. Five months of quarrels, misunderstandings. Five months of loving and fighting and making up. Five months of fire. Five months of her being mine. I know I do so much wrong, just 'cause I don't know how to love someone properly.

I know loving someone doesn't mean telling them what they think and how they should behave. But that's how I was brought up, and we repeat our parents' sins, no matter how much we hate them.

I'm possessive, I mark my territory like some stupid man, even though I know she hates it. I just can't help showing everyone she's mine, cause I'm so afraid of losing her.

And now I have. She doesn't want me any more. Maybe I'm not cut out to be in a relationship. Too fucked up. Might as well get drunk, get high, get stupid. Try to forget everything for a moment. Dancing like crazy. Floating on the tones of Urban Renaissance. Dutch is with me, sweet, wonderful Dutch who held me in his arms while I cried like a baby. I love him. We dance, and everything is great. They play their new song. I freeze, my drunken blood stops in my veins. Fuck.

It's about my relationship. About her and me. I run outside.

She's sitting by herself for once. Usually she's surrounded by people. The center of attention. Sitting opposite her, I know it's over. We both know it. For good this time. It's not like all those other times we got together and broke up and got together again. This is it.



Doesn't mean I'm capable of stopping myself from trying, though. Holding her hands, her familiar yet exciting hands that always do new things. Horrible resignations. The most desperate kiss in the world. Sorrow and love and fear and need in one kiss.

And it's over. The band plays in my head. Tainted love.

Weren't you the one who tried to break me with goodbye? Did you think I'd crumble? Did you think I'd lay down and die? Oh no, not I – I will survive

Everyone's jumping up and down, dancing for their lives. The room is throbbing. We shout the lyrics, defiantly. I look at her. Does she notice I'm singing directly to her? Dancing with someone else? For all my exuberant singing, the words hurt me.

I know they mean something else, something so much more important to so many others in this room. A way of letting everyone know: death will not get me. My conscience stings. I'm so selfish. My own love drama seems so insignificant in comparison. But is death really more significant than love?

I can't believe he's gone. I can't believe you're going. I can't believe this family must die...

Rosemary's going to India. Dutch, our roaming boy, is staying for once. So is Morgan. But she's moving anyway, out of my life. I'm going away, too, doesn't even matter where. Away from the pain. Something's gotta change.

I can't stay here and remain the same person. Thank goodness for Francis and Tony. And New Orleans. Don't know what I'd do without Francis. He and Tony have to survive. They must. I wish they would live more safely.

Yet I wouldn't change a thing about them.

Our Salmon Creek family breaking up. Changing. Me and Morgan splitting up, pulling Dutch and Rosemary between us like children of divorced parents. Morgan, Rosemary, Dutch. This is the most important thing in the world. My family. When people are dying around me, this is all I can think about. Please let me keep them. My friends. Still, I can't stay.





*But now it's just another show, you leave 'em laughing when you go
And if you care, don't let them know, don't give yourself away*

You have to continue. I pretend. Kiss anyone and everyone. The new girl. Someone in the diner whose name I've forgotten. Sleep with Evelyn. Just to show them all how little I care. How over her I am.

*The show must go on
Inside my heart is breaking, my make-up may be flaking but my
smile still stays on*

We stand in a circle and hold hands. The cubbies. Lift them high above us and sing. It's cheesy, but significant. We're strong together. Still friends, no matter what happens.

I get high with Rosemary. Write things on the painting. We paint a calculator and make Calculator Man draw the numbers. 'NO DAY BUT TODAY.' A daffodil. Everything is funny, and everything matters. The tiniest details. We laugh until we bend over. Pretend it's all like before. The show goes on.

*But now old friends are acting strange. They shake their heads,
they tell me that I've changed. But something's lost, and something's
gained in living every day*

She has changed more than anyone – reading poems, looking out for little Achilles. More changed than me, though we seem to have switched places in a way. I'm just pretending, and hoping that the pretend will seep through and become real. That I'll actually change, if I just pretend enough. It's necessary. If I let her see how little I've really changed, how much I still want her, it'll be the end.

I feel it, though. That I'm on the brink. Something's shifting inside me.

Joani reads something. I'm not even sure what, but it goes on forever and is way over my head. I look over at Morgan. I've hardly spoken to her all night, but we exchange looks, and we roll our eyes at each other. No matter how awful or childish it might be, that we're bonding over ridiculing someone else, at least we have this.

For a moment, I feel like everything's gonna be alright. We will manage to be friends again. Different, but alright. Mary Lou sings. Her voice is broken, fragile, but so beautiful. She can express the things the rest of us are too scared to say.

*May your hands always be busy, may your feet always be swift,
May you have a strong foundation when the winds of changes shift.*

We all change. It's been a whole year. Some people seem just the same, yet I know everyone's changed. How can we not? Being surrounded by death, and bravery, and heartbreak, and so much love. It feels like it might tear me to pieces. So much love. So much loss. I have a T-shirt full of the autographs of dead people.

Mr. T, our gracious and charismatic host. How can he not be here anymore? Chantelle, so alive. Chantelle who I fucked once. Hard to imagine now. Simon, the cocky synth player. Skye. Rain looks so small without them as he mourns his friends. He was supposed to have gone first. I'm pretty sure that's what he is thinking.

While I mourn them all, I'm selfish in my gratitude that all my closest are friends are safe. My family. But just because we haven't lost those closest to us, that doesn't mean we're not affected. Changed. I look at everyone who isn't as lucky as me, and I love them all.

*May your heart always be joyful
May your song always be sung*

Songs

A View to a Kill (Duran Duran)

Tainted Love (Soft Cell)

I Will Survive (Gloria Gaynor)

Halloween (Rent, Jonathan Larson)

The Show Must Go On (Queen)

Both Sides Now (Joni Mitchell)

Forever Young (Joan Baez)



FOREVER YOUNG

by Carolina Dahlberg

I knew from the start I wanted to play as a gay man at *Just a Little Lovin'*. That was the story I wanted to tell. I was cast as Skye, the androgynous, narcissistic singer of the new romantics band 'Urban Renaissance.'

To play the role of Skye was to dive into the surreal and fast-moving world of fame. As the lead singer and iconic front figure, Skye was the face and personality of Urban Renaissance – and he knew it. I'll admit I was on the verge of panic more than a few times before the larp. Everything about it was frightening and intriguing at the same time. I was extremely nervous.

Playing a person who only had relationships as a way of gaining recognition and adoration was a challenge. To portray the need for attention coupled with a party-all-night lifestyle, I made Skye's life into a cycle of attention seeking, drugs and sex. It made me feel terribly lonely, while I felt simultaneously exhilarated by the rush of fame and the adoration of others. I think the most frightening part of it was realizing that I, as a player, started feeling the same insatiable need for attention. In the end, it wasn't just an act – it became a very real feeling.

But this story wouldn't be interesting if there wasn't anything to lose for Skye – and of course there was. His older brother and fellow band member, Rain, was the only person he really cared for. When Rain got AIDS, it was the perfect, terrible turning point for Skye. There was only one coping strategy available to him: fuck the pain away and let the grief sink into an ocean of drugs.

While Skye was trying to cope with the impending loss of Rain, I also got the sense that he wasn't really afraid to die himself. He was afraid of being forgotten. I don't know how I could be so sure, but I knew Skye was going to die in the next lottery. I guess I was just so tired of all the shit in his life – and perhaps he was, too.



When Skye's name was called up in the lottery, Rain was holding my hand, eyes rigidly looking away like he couldn't bear to look at me, tears running down his cheek. I wanted to comfort him somehow, but couldn't. I felt more sorry for him than for myself; my pain was about to end, his had just begun.

Last time, it had been the other way around with Rain leaving the room, leaving me fearing I'd never see him again. My wonderful brother who had always been there for me and loved me like no other. And I loved him.

I saw Skye's life flash before my eyes. I felt his exhilaration on stage in front of thousands of fans, blinded by the lights and deafened by the roar of the masses. I saw his face in the mirror as he snorted cocaine just after the concert. I saw the sex scene in the toilet the night before, numbing the fear and grief. Camera flashes. Studio recordings. Nightclubs. Smoking weed and drinking beer. And in the end, I imagined seeing two young boys chasing each other over a meadow, laughing, innocent and happy. Rain and Skye.

When I saw the text 'In loving memory of Skye' in one of coffins, I wasn't afraid or even surprised. I lay down in my coffin and felt its cool, quiet comfort enfolding me. Two lids passed before my eyes. The third landed softly on my coffin. I closed my eyes. I was dead.

This was the saddest and most beautiful ending I could have wished for. Skye died February 5, 1984, 23 years old, as a world famous celebrity. But he was also a person who never got the chance to grow into a wholesome, happy individual.

However successful, rich or beautiful a person may seem, there's always another side to it. Skye didn't understand the difference between being loved and getting attention. Nor did he know how to care for the people that meant the most to him.

Still, he has all my love and compassion for being the messed-up and beautiful individual that he was. This young man's eventful life and premature death has affected me profoundly in ways I have yet to express in words. Rain and Skye will remain in my heart, always.



FOUR IMPRESSIONS

by Maria Ljung

THE PAINTING PROPOSAL

When I (Reginald) saw the painting I just couldn't stop crying. On the canvas there was a ring, and beside it the text "I love you more than words can describe, will you marry me? /<3 Jerrod."

Me and the person playing Jerrod had decided beforehand that Jerrod was going to propose, but not when, where, or how. Not even in which act. Earlier in the evening, we (Jerrod and Reginald) had had a fight which was later on played out beautifully in the darkroom with the help of some other characters.

The proposal came shortly after that. I had no idea how long the ring had been there. Was it since before the fight, or maybe only five minutes? I took the ring, shaking, and put it on my finger. Then I went looking for Jerrod, but he was nowhere to be found. When someone told me he was out front (the off-game area) I sat down in the yard, waiting. I looked down at the ring and up on the door, overstrained, restless, still with tears streaming down my face, to see if Jerrod would come back. Eventually I went out instead.

For the rest of the night I cried, happy tears, and showed the ring off to everybody I met. It was 1982, it was 4th of July, I was 22 years old and I had the perfect fiance.

SAFE IN THE DARKROOM

I (Maria) felt safe in the darkroom. I had had some very good scenes in there which made good memories, and I found it cozy. At the after-party I felt lost and alone for a long time but when I went to sleep I put my mattress in the darkroom and slept there. For some reason it just made sense to me.

SHARING NAIL POLISH

I (Maria) loved staying in the "transgender dorm." There was a special ambiance in there, and it was always off-game. In the act-breaks someone could be in the shower while someone else was taking a piss and yet another person was putting make-up on in front of the bathroom mirror. Someone would sleep, someone cry and some people be engaged in conversation.

I could go in there during play, tell someone I didn't know at all before the game about my confusing off-gam/in-game crush, take a deep breath and then go back in game. Everything was, and everyone were, permitted, fit in. We all borrowed stuff from each other, listened to each other. In the first break we got when the game was all over, I went there and borrowed some nail polish from Nicolai, who played Lola. I love nail polish, so it was a way for me to get back to being me. And as I put mine on, Nicolai took his off.

GAY PORN ACROBATICS

There was this scene, in the darkroom. I had gone there with Andrew, we had sex and afterwards I (Reginald) lingered. Andrew left. Two other people were sitting on the couch engaged in conversation. I sat down next to them, they didn't really take notice. There was a TV in the room showing gay porn.

Andrew and I just sat there, holding each other on the couch, silently watching gay porn for what seemed like a very long time. I remember thinking that off-game it was kind of awkward, but in-game it was really nice. Cozy and intense. Eventually they did something onscreen that seemed a bit acrobatic, and Reginald made a comment about it. Andrew said he was too old for that, and I realized that as Reginald I had no excuses. I was 23 years old, and a dancer. I got up from the couch. Luckily enough, yes, it was doable.



JUST A LITTLE DRAGGIN'

by Alex Uth

This was my first time playing *Just a Little Lovin'*, and it rocked my world. There's so much to talk about. I could tell you about the smooth and very well-selected game dynamics, or about the surprising experience of love and feelings of friendship with almost complete strangers. About my crew and Pepper's Diner, and sweet Filth of July, about the constant cocktalk and the crazy non-sex, about morning rituals and Chain milking the can of cream into a coffee, and the giggling and "Dick for table 2, please!" every goddamn morning.

I could write about the AIDS epidemic in the 80's and how this game gave me a connection back in time (one of those "But I was there!" kind of connections that really, really good immersion roleplay can give). I could tell you about the emotional roller-coasters, how hard and exhausting the game was to play (like a 3-day marathon, SO tired and smashed!). I could write about seeing my friends and loved ones die in a lethally quiet riptide of disease.

I could tell you that this is the first game ever where I experienced love and tenderness as a character, and the first game where there was so much love and trust and care afterward between the players. I could tell you about the dildo workshop and how the sex-scenes turned out to be really not that scary, even though they almost kept me from signing up. I could tell you about trying to be a gay man and feeling like I succeeded in sneak-peeking into another world for a little while.

But I want to tell you about the drag queen, that wonderful, sexy, heartless bitch, and how she got to me. I want to tell you about being a woman playing a man playing a woman that never was. I want to tell you about playing with a double mask. I played Daniel, a gay man and a drag queen (Lady Verona). Trying to portray a gay man was deeply fascinating and oddly liberating, but playing a drag queen was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me.



It truly and deeply rocked my world. I never anticipated just how fun it would turn out to be. How much freedom there is in being that guy in the dress. How much power there is. And how scary it is, and how addictive it turned out to be. Because it worked, and it was fucking magic.

That's the beauty of *Just a Little Lovin'*: that it includes and empowers like no other game I've played. Looking back, I think it has been the only game I've played so far where it really felt like the game (and the players) would support whatever I wanted to play out or experience. Want to genderbend? Fine. Want to genderbend AND be a gay man? Fine. Want to genderbend, be a gay man AND be a drag queen? Want to be on stage and feel like a star? Fine. We've got your back. Go wild. And wild it turned out to be.

I didn't know that when I was prepping for the game. I was so scared about falling through. The whole preparations phase was nearing obsession. I couldn't stop preparing, and it was approaching silly. I was on YouTube every night watching makeup guides, drag shows, gay movies, gay documentaries, 80's movies, 80's anything, while I waxed my eyebrows over and over, and tested how long the makeup would hold on for, and walked around with the wigs to test heat and comfort level and would they slip off if I turned my head like this.



It has to be the most technically challenging thing I have prepped for in a larp: portraying a man playing a woman. That meant dresses and heels. That meant changing how I normally walked in dresses and heels. How I moved. How I sat down and got up. How I would be when close to people, and when far away. How I talked. How I used my face, my hands, everything.

I have played a man before, but never a full flip. I didn't want to fuck it up. I was scared about letting the game down, the other players down, my own expectations down, the whole world down, but I was most scared about letting Daniel down. I so, so, so wanted him to shine. I wanted it to be a perfect performance, though I didn't realize it just then. I had to have a strong mask to feel secure.

In my mind, Daniel was a skinny and effeminate man. I'm neither slim, nor boyishly built. My hips were really in the way, and my legs decidedly look like female legs. I almost quit the game right there, until I decided to admit to it instead and go over the top, all the way down into crazy fake femme valley. I packed away my own booty, and donned huge fake breasts (flour in plastic bags; surprisingly comfortable, very moldable, very reliable, also cheap and bakeable) and hip padding. It didn't work.

I got overdone dresses and wigs so plastic-fantastic and shiny it's a wonder they didn't spontaneously self-ignite. It didn't work. I drowned my skin in cake makeup and put on false lashes. It didn't work. I painted my lips so big and wide it must have seemed like I had been hit with a toilet seat recently. Didn't work. I waxed my eyebrows and drew exaggerated seagull wings high on my forehead instead, and started showing teeth instead of smiling. Finally it worked. There he was. Lady Verona.

And then there were the drag shows. During the game I had the option of doing up to three stage shows (or none).



I opted for doing two (which left me hungry for a thousand more), and I wanted so much for it to work. I enlisted a friend to help me understand drag shows (so grateful, Monica). I studied movements.

Faces. Expressions. Poses. Looks. Hands.

Every day when I drove back and forth to work, I circulated the same two tracks over and over and over, while I lip-synched for my life (ife, ife, ife – see RuPaul's *DragRace*, you'll get the joke then). The weird stares from fellow drivers were extremely shameful, yet oddly liberating. If I was preparing a performance, well, nothing could be odd or shameful. The mask was already slipping into place.

In my mind, the drag queen is closely related to the clown and to the shaman. Their power lies in the forbidden, in being able to cross any barrier, to step through any door. In being forbidden, off limits, out there. In myths, the shaman has a mask and cloak to wear when she travels between worlds or has to enter the dark realms.

Here, the drag makeup was my mask, and the performance was my cloak and door-opener. It felt like there was no door closed to me in the game. The forbidden was suddenly open to me. I encountered no conversation that I didn't feel able to enter. No scene I didn't feel welcome in. Nothing I couldn't do. Nothing I couldn't say. Nothing was embarrassing or too much. I had power to act on my desires and emotions. Not getting enough attention? Step it up.

Go further. Go wilder. Do more shit, until attention is back on you. Not getting enough love? Demand it. Take it. Not getting enough fun? Go get it. Being bored? Sashay away. I cannot remember many moments where I wasn't playing with three or four people at the same time – fluttering, winking, moving, nudging, waving, blowing kisses, caressing, talking trash, flirting, coming on, getting off. I was on fucking fire. Ready to please, ready to play, ready to perform.



I was party, party, party, don't ever stop the party. It was an extremely forbidden, warped and pleasurable version of femininity to experience. I was somebody's crazy doll version. Daniel's doll. A precious, slutty, outrageous, fun doll. It was so safe, sitting behind double masks.

And the attention. Oh, the attention. I felt loved. Adored. Immensely interesting and fun. That's the cold part about the drag queen, or at least the part that made me feel oddly alone, disconnected and horrible while playing the game: The constant and ever present performance. Everything ceased to be anything else than performance. Primarily performance to get attention, sweet, sweet attention. Daniel had to have it, and I had to have it.

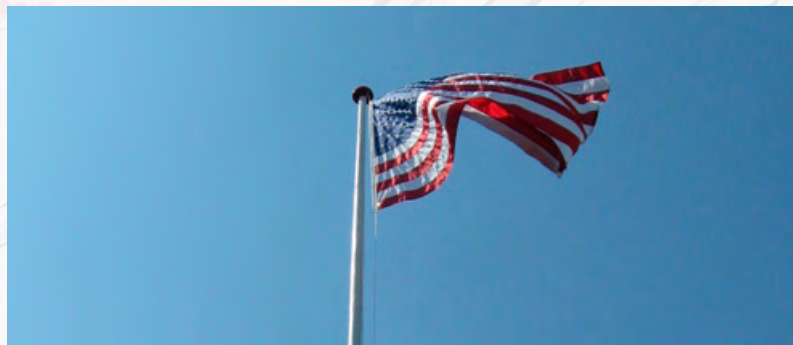
Everything seemed to revolve about it. But that's also the beautiful and very honest thing about drag queens: the attention whoring is out in the open. They are not shy about what they want, or why they want it. They gladly admit to it. And they laugh at it – at your reactions, at themselves, at the need, at the silliness and the messy reality, at the whole thing. It's just a guy in a dress, honey. On the second day I truly started feeling like an actor, like a star, like a performer.



I felt professional. It took roughly two hours to put on the full face and costume for Lady Verona, and I realized that I loved every second of it. The first day was chaos and panic and where did I put the goddamn powder and why are my eyebrows peeling and oh my god the eyeliner is dripping down my cheek. But then I started to get the routine down. Put things in sensible places. Know the process. And then the backstage feeling came.

We slept in dormitories (rooms), and I shared a room with some of the other performing characters (and incidentally the genderbender players). It gave a wonderful experience of gearing up to be on stage for whatever purpose – people prepping, gearing up, putting makeup on, some rehearsing songs. It was the same sense of being a professional at nights, when the performer characters were hanging out backstage and waiting to go on stage.

When the game ended and I came home, it wouldn't stop. The performance would not leave me. I wanted to be a drag queen. I wanted to go on stage. I wanted to perform. I wanted it all back, the sweet, sweet attention, the freedom, the fun. There is no stronger drug than attention. It's the pretty looking twin brother of crack cocaine, and you can never, ever have enough, once you've tasted it in full. There is no single point where you go "I've had enough. I'm good. You can go shower somebody else in attention, thank you."



None. Worse yet, the hunger just grows and grows. I empathize with fading rock stars, with public figures, with reality stars and actors desperately chasing the next applause. I remember at one point standing on the top of the stairs leading out to the in-game courtyard, and people's heads turning like lamps. The sensation of their attention, of their (imagined) love and interest like a golden wave. I remember the one time in my own life where I felt the same thing, on Roskilde Orange stage, where I got trapped on stage doing roadie stuff while the first band went on.

70.000+ people roared and put their hands in the air. It was a golden tsunami flooding the stage, drowning everything out. I remember thinking it must be hard to live without it, once you've got it.

Crazy stuff happened after the game. Wonderful stuff. Daniel and Lady Verona gave me many midnight gifts and secret things. For a while the mask stayed on, but then it faded away and left me to my own devices again. I feel shame writing this. I don't know if that was how Daniel was perceived at all. Maybe the performance wasn't that great. Maybe it wasn't that cool. Maybe I was just a girl in a dress, pretending to be a guy in bad makeup. I can't separate things when looking back. I feel ashamed for putting so much energy into thinking about it. I'm ashamed of having desired it. Experienced it.

It's the coming down part. The hangovers. The "I'm sorry" stage. I don't know why I'm sorry. Maybe it doesn't matter one bit. But that is what it did to me, what she did to me, that wonderful, sexy, heartless bitch. Performance. She hooked me and dumped me.

I'm still going to do one more drag show. A real one, out there in the world. Not for Daniel. For me. For what I might be able to do, outside the safe zone of roleplaying.

To see if the mask was ever really mine.

MY ARMS WERE TOO FEW

by Karete Meland

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH NICK

My journey with Nick started July 29th 2013. I remember reading through my character. Once. Twice. I went to bed, and when I woke up, I read it again. I started thinking about how I was going to portray my character: born with unrecognized, unclear gender characteristics, raised as a woman, but identifying as a homosexual man. Doing hormone treatment, but postponing surgery, a man who had just decided to start introducing himself as Nick, not Nadja.

I had absolutely *no idea* where to start, where to find him and his way of life, his innermost goals, and I felt really confused about stuff like what clothes I should wear and whether I should cut my hair or not. I worried about my body language, my posture, my facial expressions, the way I danced, the tone of my voice and the sound of my laughter.

Slowly, I realized that I was probably not alone in feeling uncertainty about these things. Nick was probably also worried about how he would be seen by the others at the party, just like I was. I realized how vulnerable it made me feel, and at the same time it dawned on me that I had to explore this together with Nick; I wasn't going to plan everything. You probably need to know that I usually plan stuff, *all the time*, and letting some of it go was indeed an intimidating, but also very humbling, experience.

While searching for, exploring, and slowly getting to know Nick, I remember being frustrated, feeling a constant need to compartmentalize him and his way of life. I desperately wanted to understand him, but one strategy of doing so involved trying to force him into a box with a label that didn't fit him at all. Why? Why this innate drive to do this, instead of loving him for being a bit in-between and un-boxable?

I remember 1982, the party where he was trying to be all Nick. The party where Bret hugged him in the kitchen, and, in all his beautiful, youthful innocence, exclaimed "oh wow, you have boobs!" Nick didn't know how to respond at all, and Bret solved it by smiling, tossing his hair from one side to the other, and moving on. "It's okay!"

This made an enormous impact on Nick, because he was totally immersed in the fright of what would happen if people didn't desire him, didn't want to explore him. And right there, he had 30 seconds with someone who didn't mind, didn't think he was weird. It felt like a tiny, but significant, revelation, and gave him just the right amount of courage to climb through a window with Fernando later that night – and it all went from there.





I remember seeing Nick as an analyst, an intellectual, always wanting a clear-cut answer. But every year, during Mr. T's parties, he found himself forced to face something that couldn't give him the answer or reasons he wanted to have. He experienced this overwhelming drive to explore, which both intrigued him but at the same time made him feel defenseless.

He didn't know how to analyze his relationships and connections, and thus he tried to reach out in order for people to tell him what to do, how to react in his close relations to friends and lovers. Most people told him to continue doing whatever he felt like doing, which didn't make anything easier at that time. And so, trying to make his relationships more tangible, he tried forcing his emotions and loves into separate categories.

He boxed them, just like I did and realized that I hated doing when working with Nick. It happened so fast! I would've thought that I would manage to keep him from doing it, but the world and its relations proved to be too much and the questions/people/emotions he faced again and again were too overwhelmingly hard to evaluate.

Also, the boxes he made up kept interacting with each other, sometimes even in a violent manner. This was quite painful and tough, but seen in a long-term perspective I also think it made Nick realize how insufficient and unfair such a separation of people actually was, both for himself and others. At one point, Walter said: "Nick, you're in love with two people; it's *that simple!*" – which, unfortunately, was so frustratingly untrue. It was not simple at all.

To top it all off, Fernando embodied the feeling Nick had of hurting people even though he only wanted to love them, when he said: "I'm afraid that you are going to kill me." Nick had just told him that he was infected with HIV, and the intolerable pain embedded in the possibility of hurting someone he desired that much, eventually made him part with Fernando.

His words still haunt some distant part of me. They hit me so fast and so incredibly hard, and needed almost no consideration or deliberation before they settled firmly at the back of Nick's head.

I remember 1984, where it became so blatantly clear that some of the people around Nick were crashing, while others were moving into spaces where he questioned if he had the courage to follow or not. I remember this incredibly clear shift in perception and attention that happened some time during that last night.

I mostly have a really hard time separating the different scenes from that party from each other. I remember dancing, fighting, crying, laughing – but it feels like it all happened at the same time. It is all just an entanglement of arms, legs, faces and emotions.

But at some point, something changed; and waking up the last morning felt profoundly different from the night before. I think Nick stopped beating himself up about the fact that he couldn't just stop it all and freeze at some fixed point in time, I think he started to take it all in, everything that surrounded him.



He stopped analyzing, stopped trying to understand why everything happened the way it did, and that was when, paradoxically, everything started to become increasingly clear-cut.

It was brutally honest, seeing the two figures approaching the door for the very last time. By then, we all knew what they came for. I can still feel the thickness of the air, the distinct, salt-like taste of it. I remember every hand I held onto, and every hand I wanted to hold. I remember the desperate sniffles that spread through the room at an increasing speed as the two came closer.

Nick was in two places at the same time: he was so *scared*, but still so focused on trying not to file it in a box. I also think that it was my way of dealing with a scene that had become increasingly difficult for me as a player, and right then and there I just wanted to get it over with.

We all knew who they were and what their function was, but really, *why*? Why couldn't someone just bolt the door shut? Why couldn't they see that we didn't want them there? That we just wanted to be left alone, for once, in our desperate search for ourselves and each other? I wanted to free myself from my seat, and I wanted to hold the hands of the ones that I cared so deeply about, protecting them – but I couldn't. They were too many, and my arms were too few.

I felt insufficient, like I wasn't even enabling Nick to touch all the people he wanted to touch. In my fear, I clung to Nick, and Nick became my rock during the last hour of *Just a Little Lovin'*. We had both worked on finding him and figuring him out, and at the end of it all, he was apparent enough to me to provide a space that was safe enough for the both of us.

“How many people are you supposed to witness breaking, when you tell them?”

“The pain in their eyes, reflecting in my very being.”

“I am the source of their pain.”

“This is for Nick.”

“There's someone crying outside my window.”

- an excerpt from Nick's diary



MY STUPID MOMENTS

by JC

I'm staring through my tears and through the wall.
Through the wall...

I know it doesn't make sense, but I need to see him so bad!
I want to tell Ike I love him, that it was all a big mistake,
that I never should have tried to punish him for fucking up our
relationship. But I can't, because Stephen is standing there and he
threatened to kill me moments before...

I'm standing in the shower, listening to the water flow down the
drain. I don't know what it is with the drains here in Denmark,
but the water falls a long way before hitting the bottom of the pipe,
making that sound.

I just woke up, I'm in character, and yesterday night I fucked up
my new relationship. It was supposed to be perfect, sweet revenge
against Ike, exactly one year later.

But everything's fucked this morning.
And then it hits me, why I'm listening to the water.
It's the sound of my life, going down the drain....

The flag is going up.
We're all singing, and it surprises me every time,
how singing this anthem about battles past moves me.
It's stupid, I've hardly ever sung this before, the lyrics are weird,
and I should be concentrating on getting my character right, but
wow, this is powerful!

Morgan is dancing to "I need a hero".
It's impressive to see someone move like that up close.
But I'm really listening to the music.
I love that song, that voice.
And I start to cry.
Is it the lyrics, the general mood, am I just tired?

I feel stupid crying at this moment.
There's no story here that I can see,
and the moment is actually pretty upbeat compared to the rest of the
show. But I don't care, I can't help it, the tears just flow...

Oh fuck, this is the moment I've been dreading.
Helene holds up the dildo and says: "OK, so now it's your turn.
Do a sex scene with your workshop-buddy."
I feel awkward and clumsy, but if I don't do this now,
I might as well go back to France right now.
I turn towards the other two, trying not to look like an idiot. And
then Tommie says: "So how about I fuck you, and you suck him?".
Well, here goes...

Alright, time to say goodbye one last time.
I go around, then walk up to Helene and hug her.
"Thanks for everything, it was an incredible experience!"
We talk a bit about how there might be a run in France.
Before finally parting I feel I need to tell her how not many people in
my life have heard what I said during debrief.
I start my sentence, but have to stop because otherwise I'll start
crying again. This is going to be hard...

We've reached the Danish border, and I'm still dancing behind
the steering-wheel. Man, this 80's music is even better than I
remembered it! "Do you wanna funk - Won't you tell me now?!"

No way, he's a trans?!
But he's such great guy!
Boy, do I feel stupid now...

OK, this looks really stupid.
I'm going in only because I don't want to miss out on any of the cool
Nordic stuff.



How on earth is this going to help me get out of character?
About halfway through, I start giggling.
CARWASH!!!

My watch is on backwards.
I must have had it on like that for an hour now.
I haven't worn a watch in sooooo long.

I'm not going to die.
These people are going to disappear forever, they're my very closest
friends, and I'm not even listening to their names.
Every name said out loud by my poor, loveable brother sounds like
"Not Ruben!" I don't even feel guilty, I'm just glad I'm alive!

Man...

I don't know how to say this.
"It was... an incredible human experience", is the best I can come up
with. It's a stupid thing to say, really. How am I going to communicate
to my friends how great the larp was? I'd like to describe the feelings,
the stories, the reality of it all, but it just doesn't come out the way I
mean it. I feel like they feel I'm exaggerating, if that even makes sense.
Hmm..."

Cheers,
JC



RELIEF AND GUILT

by Jeanita Hatlestrand

ACT 1

The lottery of death. Two men in black suits say they need 10 people to follow them. They look sad and say that we are too young. They start talking about a threat we don't know about yet. How the virus is spreading and no one knows how or what it is. We all put in tickets in the lottery no one wants to win. 1-5 tickets according to the risk you exposed yourself to. I put 4 tickets in the hat. I can feel heartbeats rising. I look around at the others, and now they feel closer to me. All of them. How am I supposed to take this?

Pepper is called to read out the names of the ones that must follow Death. This loving man, the man that loves and respect everyone present. He is the man they picked to send into Death's waiting arms. Names. Gasps. Sinclair. He stands up. I want to make him sit down again. He has to walk out with the others.

The fear. Waiting in the diner not knowing what will happen. All I can think is not him, not him. Do not take him. We wait in silence. Fear. We walk, and it feels so far. There is still silence and I can see people grouping up in twos and threes, hugging and holding hands. Apparently I am the only person walking alone. And at this point I know that I am walking here, alone, because this is what I get for treating everybody else like toys.



One of the very few people that I truly cared about and treated well might be taken away. I'm sad. Humble. Just when I am about to realize how alone I am I can feel an arm on my shoulder. It's Katherine. She doesn't speak. Just an arm to hold me. The rush of hope. I have an anchor. It might not be too late.

The coffins. There are two. Looking down in the first one seeing that it is not his yellow shirt. Don't notice who it is. It's not him. Can't bring myself to care who it is, I just need to rush over to the next one.

It's him. It can't be him. Don't want to believe it. Sit down. Put the flower on his chest. I get up, can't watch the white box anymore. All I can do is sit there. I think I am hugging Katherine. The bells ring.

ACT 2

The men in the black suits seem stressed this time. Rushing things in a sort of aggressive way. Again they speak of the threat and get my undivided attention. I am very much in this. Bruce and I are the same at this point. It is just a collective "me."

Pepper's cracked voice. Julian's name is the first no be called. My heart sinks. The horror and guilt grabs a hold of me. "He is going to die, and it's because of me. I might as well have killed him myself." More names. Then my name. Standing up, feeling comforted by the fact that I can hear people gasp. Someone out there might be hoping that it's not going to be me. The fear hits me. Is this the day I die? It does not strike me for a second that I'm in no real danger.

Standing there I am concerned about showing some dignity. I can't hide the fact that I'm scared, I don't need to. But I need to face this with dignity.

We walk. I know what the people now waiting at the diner are going through. I send them a thought. I don't know most of my fellow lottery winners and I don't much care to now. I am trying to meet Julian's eyes. He doesn't look at me. I need to tell him with my eyes how sorry I am. How guilty I feel that he has to go through this.

Getting more and more desperate I suddenly realize how selfish that is. That his meeting with death is not about me. I will have to deal with the fact that I feel all of this rather than putting it all on him. Again I am all alone. It feels right. You always die alone. I am so scared of dying. This is the first time I have ever faced fear of death. I seek out the only other person that I know. Terrence. We stand next to each other and just wait. Our arms resting on the other.

We are walking up to the coffins. Five names. Not mine. Not mine. Not mine. Terrence. Shouldn't I react to this? Not mine. Not mine. Relief. I am not dying. Julian is not dying. I didn't kill anyone. We have to go to the doctor. He tells me I have herpes and can't be cured. Whatever. Doesn't seem too important at the moment.

I am not going to die today. We wait some more, and I see the ones that came back from the coffins. Now I know who dies. The ones that waited at the diner arrive. I seek out my friends. Feel their relief, receive hugs.

I know what name is going to shock all of them. The one no one would believe would die. The host can't die. Still, he just did. This is the proof that no one is safe. I know how selfish I am not to feel much for the others. I know what kind of a person it makes me.

Every little sign that someone is glad to see me alive gets drawn in and I cling onto it. I need it now. It makes me feel appreciated even though I don't deserve it. Still; who wouldn't feel relief? I walk with my friends to the white boxes knowing who will be lying in them, knowing how I should feel about it. I lay my flowers down taking in the gasps and crying of those close to the dead. I try to feel sad, but all I can manage to feel is the relief and the guilt. The bells rings.

ACT 3

I am already numbed when the undertakers arrive. To me they look like illness itself. This time I throw five tickets in the hat. Simon, my (Bruce's) boyfriend, has AIDS. Bruce has herpes, even though he does not know it. The risk of catching it is greater. I am scared while I put the ticket in and I feel the urge to deny Simon the action of putting his in. Simon gets extra tickets, Lola gets extra tickets. I hate it. I get none. I hold Simon's hand, but I feel only partly present. It's harder to make an impression on me now. I have to cling to the character a little to be able to keep him with me.



There is no Pepper to read the names this time. We all follow Death. It feels like an anti-climax. We are too many, and I am starting to think and feel more meta. The character and the feeling of this being real is slipping. I try to feel more. More scared or sad but it's all a big mix and I am feeling emotionally exhausted. We are queuing up to see who goes in the boxes. When I get there I see Jerrod's name.

The person I secretly admired. The one I used to want, but who felt like more and more impossible to get, too pure. I hate seeing his name there. I feel for his boyfriend Reginald while he is almost lying in the coffin crying over Jerrod's body. Then Kim's name. My fake fiancée. I really cared for her, but I can't really take it in. Simon.

The boyfriend. At that point, I don't even realize who the others are. It's not me. Not Lola. I don't do flowers. I am barely at the coffins. Can't take it in. Can't lie crying over my dead boyfriend like Jerrod. I try to choose between friends. Which one to end the game with. I hug Lola for a while, then find Katherine. Sit with her for a while and get back to Lola. The one stable member of my core group.

It feels right. I let him hold me while I just quietly cry feeling safe in those arms. I have no idea at this point what I am crying for. The larp ending? Myself? The characters that died? Bruce's grief and loss? Real people that I lost? I feel some disappointment at not being able to take in the death of three people that was important to my character in very different ways. I want this to make an impact on me but there is no more room for it. Or maybe I am no longer in character enough to really feel it. I expected a different end I guess.

The bells ring for the final time.



THE LOTTERY OF DEATH

by Sarah Piyanah Cederstrand

IMAGE, LOTTERY OF DEATH '84

A pile of hands on the table. Kohana on the bottom, solid and steady – caring. Joani on top, lovingly soothing, spreading the light of love. Somehow they still manage to touch each other, even with all these people in between. The sick and dying loved ones; Allen, Beatrice, even Holly seems to have an idea of the severity of the moment. Among the others somewhere in the middle is Kim's strong and reliable hand, reaching out to all of them keeping them together.

Around the hands the people are scattered, everyone touching someone, nobody looking, waiting for the lottery, knowing that they will lose loved ones, only letting go to write their names and entering the lottery, then back to the comfort of each other.

Walking to the funeral, getting ready, holding hands. Thinking they are prepared – ready for the loss or ready to die, ready to support each other through the grief.

- and then, in the end, death is a lottery and they were totally unprepared

- and the world just fell apart

STANDING BY THE COFFINS IN '82

The feeling of pure relief and joy that it was not Tomaz but somebody else who died. And the immediate feeling of guilt for feeling like that.

I can not remember who did die, that was of no importance to me or Joani. That my friend who had been called in the lottery had escaped death was all that mattered.

STANDING BY THE COFFINS IN '83

Feeling the devastating amount of sorrow and loss by Mr. T's death. The feeling that it is not only a person, but the spirit of the whole group that has died. The impossible in trying to heal and absorb this sorrow to lighten the burden of those left behind. The massive feeling of compassion for those still alive - those left behind.

STANDING BY KIM'S COFFIN IN '84

The feeling of pure hate for Allen and Bearice (even while they try to comfort Joani) for being alive when Kim is dead. Thinking:

“What are you doing here? It should be you not her in that coffin!”





THE PARTY OF 84, LAST DANCE OF THE EVENING: GOLD, BY SPANDAU BALLET

Joani has just taken part in a wild collective dance to I Will Survive, now she is a bit on the side of the dance floor watching people dance in twos and trees and groups and she is dancing slowly on the edge, just feeling the love of this group, the strength of this love, knowing that:

“Yes, we are indestructible. Individuals might die, but this community and our love will survive, and in this love, those who die will live on.”

For me, Sarah, this was extremely strong. The feeling of love and compassion , but also an explanation of why some groups are so strong and why I (and so many people) long to be part of a group or community.

THE MORNING IN '84 LAST HALF HOUR BEFORE ACT BREAK AND THE LOTTERY OF DEATH

The realization for Joani that “this is why I am allowed to live” when the minister tells her how bad it would be if she died, because she helps so many. Her conclusion to his words, that her purpose is to help people through this. That is what she owes for her being alive and HIV negative. And the realization for me the player, that Joani suffers an enormous amount of survivors guilt, and how that explains a lot about how she keeps on being this “to good to be true” person.



THE PIANO STOPS

by Arthur Swindells

Walking towards the coffins, I wished I could have been in the front. Following even a few people seemed to me a kind of cowardice. What a strange worry, the prospect of being a coward, in the face of death.

Lying in the coffin, I dry my face with the tissue I put in my pocket two hours before, knowing I was about to attend a funeral, knowing based on the one I attended a year earlier it would likely affect me more strongly than I anticipated. That I would almost certainly need to cry. That holding back the tears – keeping the feeling somewhere in my body – could cause me great harm.

The tissue is small and easily concealed in my palm while my hands are crossed over my chest. I can't hear the others, two on either side of me, only the piano. The steadily repeated cadence repeats, over and over, that odd rising major passage disappearing again so quickly, the sound doing nothing to distract from the pressure behind my eyes, the chill on my skin. I can't see the sky; it's raining slightly, and there's a marquee set up over the coffins.

Just a vague pale grey above, the white band at the top of the coffin and then black satin on every edge of my vision. I keep my eyes open. How much longer will I be able to?

The officiant explains in an even tone how things will proceed. Some of us may have some hope, some life, left. The coffin lids will pass over, but may descend. I don't need to tell you what that descent, closure of the coffin, means, do I? The rest is left open.

My right sandal has slipped. This occupies my mind to a larger extent than you might expect, reminds me of the time when I was five and greatly delayed a wedding organized for me and a friend by our older sisters. One wears appropriate shoes on momentous occasions and at five years old I couldn't see myself as a proper groom in running shoes. The outcome of this incident is lost to me now.

Were the shoes actually of any importance whatsoever? Still, here I lie with a skewed sandal, wondering how I'll look if I die, wondering if I'll be a comical corpse. This, of course, is preposterous. There are no comical corpses. A cramp in my right calf. Shoulders ever tighter. A lid moves smoothly into view carried by the two undertakers. It pauses, hovering a few inches above the top of the coffin, I blink a few times, a mix of tiny tears and darkness. I consciously keep breathing, slowly, as my ribs tense slightly (those bones which define volume on a skeleton, encompassing the void left by the vanished heart).



It moves away to my left, but no relaxation follows its departure. Incrementally the screws are tightened, letting me linger in the ever-heightened awareness of my own sensations. Awareness that will sooner or later end quite suddenly, as the idea of a slow death now seems faintly ridiculous. The lid returns from the left, pauses again, and continues away. My breaths are shorter, despite my efforts to keep them even. The cramp has gone. I don't know when that happened.

The lid returns from the right, pauses. And descends. It is dark, though there are cracks of light around the lid, still. I am still cold. But only as cold as a young corpse, not like someone who's been dead a long time. Will that be strange for the mourners (will any of them actually touch me)? I'm not as claustrophobic as I could be. I wonder why. Is it because I'm dead, and that sensation is no longer relevant? Perhaps it is because in death, space is no longer a constraint?

I'm still in the coffin, my sandal has still slipped, my ribs and shoulder muscles are tighter than I can remember them ever being, my breaths are shorter still than moments ago, the tears slowly creep from my eyes off of the edges of my face. I'm also everywhere else, at once. It's not an out-of-body experience – I'm still very much in my body. But more than that: I'm the surface air warmed by my cooling, I'm the coffin itself, I'm the undertakers standing vigil, I'm the logs set into the side of the hill in semi-circles on which soon the mourners will perch and cry, and I'm those mourners too, the voids between them, the marquees, the rain, yes, certainly the rain.

Then, the bells. I dry my eyes one last time. I think maybe the tears have stopped. I'll make them. The lid is lifted, I close my eyes, brightness returns through my lids. The bells are louder now. Someone adjusts my hands, places the paper bearing my name on my chest. Then, piano replaces the bells, Chopin's funeral march again.

The feeling of being everywhere has dissipated, but the interior in which I now exist ('reside' would hardly be correct) seems infinite. Bone and flowing blood and forcibly relaxed muscles to unknown depth. I hold myself still, and the effort feels inadequate in the face of the feelings over which I have only the slightest control as they move between the hairs on my left arm, the tendons in my right knee, my lungs, and everywhere else in me. I keep holding still. And longer still.

The mourners arrive at last to do their mourning. There are a lot of them. The commotion is subdued but substantial. Some of them come close. I recognize the voice behind a moan, but otherwise they are, largely, not differentiable. Flowers are placed on my chest. The heaviest flowers in the world, pressing down on my ribs already bearing untold weight.

Someone slips something made of cloth under my arm. The mourners withdraw to their seats. I can still hear crying, from several directions. Each sob of theirs feels like a twitch in my side, my eyelid, goosebumps on the back of my neck. The officiant names the three of us who have died and reads a poem. The piano stops. The service is concluded.



THE STORY OF RICHARD...

by Anders Lyng Ebbenhøj (with help from Jonas Trier-Knudsen)

I was part of Pepper's Diner, the in-game kitchen crew. A lot of our preparations and energy had gone into the food and designing a diner that would honor the vibe in the game. Thus, I had not at all anticipated the emotional impact this game would have on me - as well as the parallels that would be drawn to my own life.

Part of the reason that *Just a Little Lovin'* affected me so deeply, and part of what makes it such a great game in general, is the way in which we the players (or I, at least) almost unknowingly created actual, strong connections to the beautiful and tough life stories of the characters. The game is, in essence, all about love.

In the wake of the game, I had no problems breaking the attachment to my character, Richard. What did stay with me, though, was his story. The story of a happily married man, who lost it all. A story about climbing back up, struggling to rebuild and there - a few inches from the top - losing it all over again.

It is not an analogy to my own life. I have never experienced tragedies of that magnitude. But I, as most, have had to deal with at least some of the same hardships: disease among loved ones, death in the family etc. As such, portraying the story of Dick showed me something about going through rough patches in life.

One of the defining moments of my game, was a black box scene with the character Pepper, Dick's boss and, eventually, very close friend. The following is my attempt to put it in writing, so that I might remember it in detail, and other might benefit from reading it.

It is not the complete scene, but I believe the essence of the experience is maintained.

...TWICE FALLEN



CANCER DESTROYS EVERYTHING

1985. Dick is sitting alone at a diner table, late at night. Through a monologue he explains what he has gone through the last few years, seeing only the bad things that have happened. The voice of Pepper, with the ability to see the bright side, asks him questions.

"Just take it from the beginning, man. Tell me how it started."

"It was about six years ago. 1979 I think. Thomas had just taken his first steps. He fell and scraped his knee. He was clumsy that way. It had just rained. That was the last time I saw him."

"What had happened?"



"The cancer came. Cancer destroys everything. It gnaws away at your soul, leaving nothing but a bleak version of your former self. I had gone through surgery. Tubes and all. They said it looked fine. That I was coming around. It wasn't fine. Not knowing whether it would come back, the exhaustion from the chemo. The way you start looking at the world through a frosted window."

"I needed to get away. I started drinking, partying - slinging myself into orbit around a bleak moon. The drugs came. I lost control. Christine couldn't stand it anymore. She only had so much love and care to give. And Thomas and Katherine. She took them. Left. I understand that know."

"Heh. I remember sitting there, watching her drive away with the kids. The only thing I could think about, was..."

"Was what?"

"Was when the fucking car would turn around the corner, so I could put the rubber band around my arm."

"But you got up, right? There were still people being kind to you."

"There was - Pepper. My guardian angel. He took me in, gave me a job, got me cleaned up. He sent me in the right direction, man. There was this point where things actually started working out for me. I stayed clean, I reconnected with my former girlfriend Diane. I started moving on. But then. Then it all went bad again."

"How?"

"It was the year AIDS came to New York City. It tore us up. I still remember the look on Diane's face when she told me. She died eleven months after. 27 years old."

THIS IS NOT MY BOOK..

by Sofie Falk

My name is Sofie, but for three days, my name was Jerrod. I was a gay man living in the start 80's, in an environment full of passion, love and lust, threatened by HIV and AIDS. A disease Jerrod died of in '85.

Jerrod was a sensitive and creative creature, who, most of all, was scared. Scared of losing and scared of the unknown disease killing people around him. And finally, when he was diagnosed HIV-positive, he felt a sudden peace and instantly came to terms with his destiny: that he would die.

When that happened, he got inspired and started writing about his friends, family, surroundings. Before the last chapters, in 1984, he wrote the following dedication on napkins, which he recited at his last 4th of July party.



..IT'S OURS

"I took my first steps into writing my book, when I saw the balloons sent up to the honour of Sorento and Sinclair. Ever since, I have been thinking and thinking about who I should dedicate it to. And today I realized why I wrote it and for who.

Here it goes, the dedication:

Lola: *The beaming facets of the diamond will keep on shining, if only because of the light that you bring with you.*

Jimmy: *My co-squatter and my fighting friend. Your sword is your pen, and you keep striking with a clean cut, every time.*

Madison: *That sweet, sweet ass of yours. You're a tease without comparison and you keep me 'in the game.' Along with Dutch and Richard in the diner, you manage to serve us with an amazing kindness and warmth.*

Pepper: *For being there. You're always willing lend me an ear. Taking care of those who don't have much.*

Mary Lou: *For singing out your soul on the stage.*

Nick: *Because you are one of the bravest men I'll ever meet.*

Holly: *That rainbow colored aura of yours always brings a smile to my face.*

Eli: *My friend. My best man. And yes, if I weren't happily married, I would do you.*

Reginald: *My safe harbor. My muse. I love you more than words. You are the most beautiful view a man can wake up to. Something I want to do for the rest of my life.*



Trevor: *You're a solid rock. Keeping me up, when I'm freaking out. Joking with me, so I get calm.*

Francis: *Through your elegant and almost supernatural dancing moves, you take over every single dance floor. You've kept me up for several nights, causing my butt to ache, as if I've been fucked for days without a break.*

Abner: *For encouragement and mentoring.*

Steven: *My first (and certainly not last) evening in the darkest room of all – and an unknown corner in my mind.*

Walter: *Always aware of others. Questioning. Caring. Honouring the personal love.*

Chain: *Your eyes, scanning every room for new potential victims. Intimidating and always with a glimpse of flirtatiousness.*

Rain: *For staying strong. Being true to yourself. Being brave and keeping up, despite whatever. For being a true inspiration.*

Skye: *For having a name that rhymes a lot of stuff. I'll just say, though I know you'd think of it as being cheesy: Dear Skye, promise me, that you'll try to fly high. Rock that heaven.*

And Mr. T: *The legendary Mr. T. The link between us all. And for that I am forever and eternally grateful.*

Those of you who haven't been mentioned by name; it doesn't mean that you have been forgotten, trust me, because you haven't. I lied before when I said that Reginald was my only muse. Because he's not – all of you are. The beauty and love in this room is so strong that it almost hurts my heart. Let us remember that love, the good things. Instead of dwelling by bad memories, let's keep the good ones alive.

If I should die here and now, I wouldn't fear. Because I've never felt as complete as in your presence. Now I want you to listen carefully.

Because I might get hit by a car tomorrow. And I might die from AIDS someday. But until that very day, I'll live my life fully, every second of the day and every day of the year, until Death comes and takes me away.

This is not my book – it's ours. It's a tribute to us and those who are not with us anymore. It's our story – our legacy.

I love you all. Thank you.

These were not just Jerrod's thoughts and feelings towards his friends. They were also my thoughts and feelings towards these people (and those characters) and that atmosphere. It woke an empathy in me that probably will stick to me throughout my life - something I am in awe of and something I am very thankful for.

Xoxo,
Sofie

WALKING A MILE IN HIS SHOES

by Kristoffer Thureø

The first time *JaLL* was run, I didn't really understand the game. The second time around I understood it, but I couldn't find a reason to play it. What I was missing was a hook into the game that gave me a reason to explore the life of a person when AIDS came to New York in 1982.

My mother's best friend is an HIV positive gay man. I will call him L in this article. From the stories that he and my mother told me, I know that L was 27 years old in 1982, working as a DJ at the largest gay club in Copenhagen, doing a lot of drugs and having a lot of sex.

He is one of the funniest and most outrageous people I know, always being the center of attention and being a party onto himself. On the other hand, he is also one of the most narrow-sighted people I know, never wanting to talk about what feelings lie beneath his actions. When I was younger I didn't understand why he was like that, but the older I got, the more I could see that it might be a defense mechanism built to protect him from something.

The hook I found for *JaLL* was to walk three years in the shoes of L to try to understand what he was protecting himself from. When you wish to portray someone real in a fictional story that is not under your control, you have to rely a lot on luck. And luck was indeed on my side. When I signed up for the game, I asked to play a gay man that was flirting and at the center of the party. What I got was Chain, a character that in many ways have the same behavioral patterns as L.



OR: FUCKING THE PAIN AWAY

"Realism is for wimps. Chain wants to become filthy rich, find the one true love and fuck all the rich, famous and beautiful men in New York, all at the same time.

5 defining characteristics:

Loud, Short attention span, Optimistic, Craves attention, Tough-skinned"

- from the character "Chain"

When I told my mother about the game, my wish to portray L and the character of Chain, she smiled and said that it sounded like the game designers had made a character for exactly that purpose. She also told me more about L being HIV positive.

She told me that while his friends started to die in the start of the 80's, L was afraid and waited until the end of the 80's before he took the test. He was tested positive, not knowing for how long he had been that, and how many he had infected. This part of L shook me, and became the focus of my portrait. Why would you wait? And how would you feel about yourself not daring to get tested, while people died around you? Here, luck would help me play that story out as well.

The three years of playing Chain was a very big experience. I asked the other players to treat me as a sex object and I played as promiscuous as I could, flirting with everyone all the time. This meant that a lot of the story of Chain was told through sex scenes.

The first year was a blur of fun parties, drugs and sex with old and new friends. I managed to have a lot of fun while still telling the story about a self destructive young man with a bad relationship to reality. At the second year this story escalated. With the fear of sickness and death being a central part of the game, I ended up not being able to connect to people in other ways than taking drugs with them or having sex.



I realized, while having sex with yet another person in the toilet, that Chain was fucking the pain away. He was also, in his own way, trying to stabilize reality and keeping things like the used to be, by partying and fucking for everyone that couldn't do it anymore themselves.

After the game I talked to my mother about this dynamic, and she said that she could recognize L in it, and that she believed that he wasn't the only one doing this at the time.

Chain was never drawn at the 'Lottery of Death,' even if he was one of the characters having the greatest chance of getting chosen. At every lottery one or more of his friends was chosen and especially at the morning of 1983, where his three best friends, his father figure and the love of his life was taken. He was by far the most self destructive of all of them. So why wasn't he chosen? The injustice of this and the severity of the situation, combined with the notion of this happening to L in reality, hit me extremely hard and I cried like I haven't cried in many years.

At the beginning of the third act it was possible to take the test, to see if the character was infected. Chain didn't go. He lied to the people close to him, about having taken the test and being negative. In all his self destruction and fearlessness he was the most afraid and self preserving man I have ever met. He would rather die by living life full on, than live knowing that he was dying. He would never accept that things could change and that he was, in reality, mortal. He was not a bad man, he was just afraid. Maybe it was the same for L. I might never know for real. But it gave me a first person experience of one reason behind this behavior.

The hook into *Just a Little Lovin'*, playing a portrait of a real person has been an amazing experience. It has also been tough and has taken a lot of time debriefing and landing afterward.

The Book of Just a Little Lovin' (2013 Denmark Run)

In a beautiful combination of chance and storytelling I ended up walking three years in the shoes of a man, that was very close to L. The experience I had, was not just connected to unknown, yet very real, people in New York in 1980's, but was connected to a person I know very well.

I have talked a lot with my mother about the experience afterward and she was very moved by the game and the experience I had. But I am not going to tell him. L is still living a hard life where he is connecting to people through sex and trying to drink himself to death. If he is anything close to Chain, he has been in denial since the 80's and is not interested in realizing the impact of how he chose to live his life.

His friends have been trying to talk to him for years about it, and none have succeeded. My idea is that he would either be hurt and angry with me for doing this, or I would actually connect to him in a way that no one has done before. I don't think I could take the responsibility for doing that.

And in the end. It was not for him I did it. It was so I could get a better understanding of why he had lived his life the way he did. I think I got it, and it touched me deeply.



For Nick

I was at school, when the incident happened. A terrible silence settled over the classroom, caressing us with its delicate ropey regime.

Tightening around our necks, tightening, tightening. My teacher was a mastodon of a woman, a creature of silk and marble. All claws and beak. All screech and moan.

I still see her mouth open like a perfect O, frozen in mid-scream, a dead stream of lies spilling out like confetti on a mardi-gras parade.

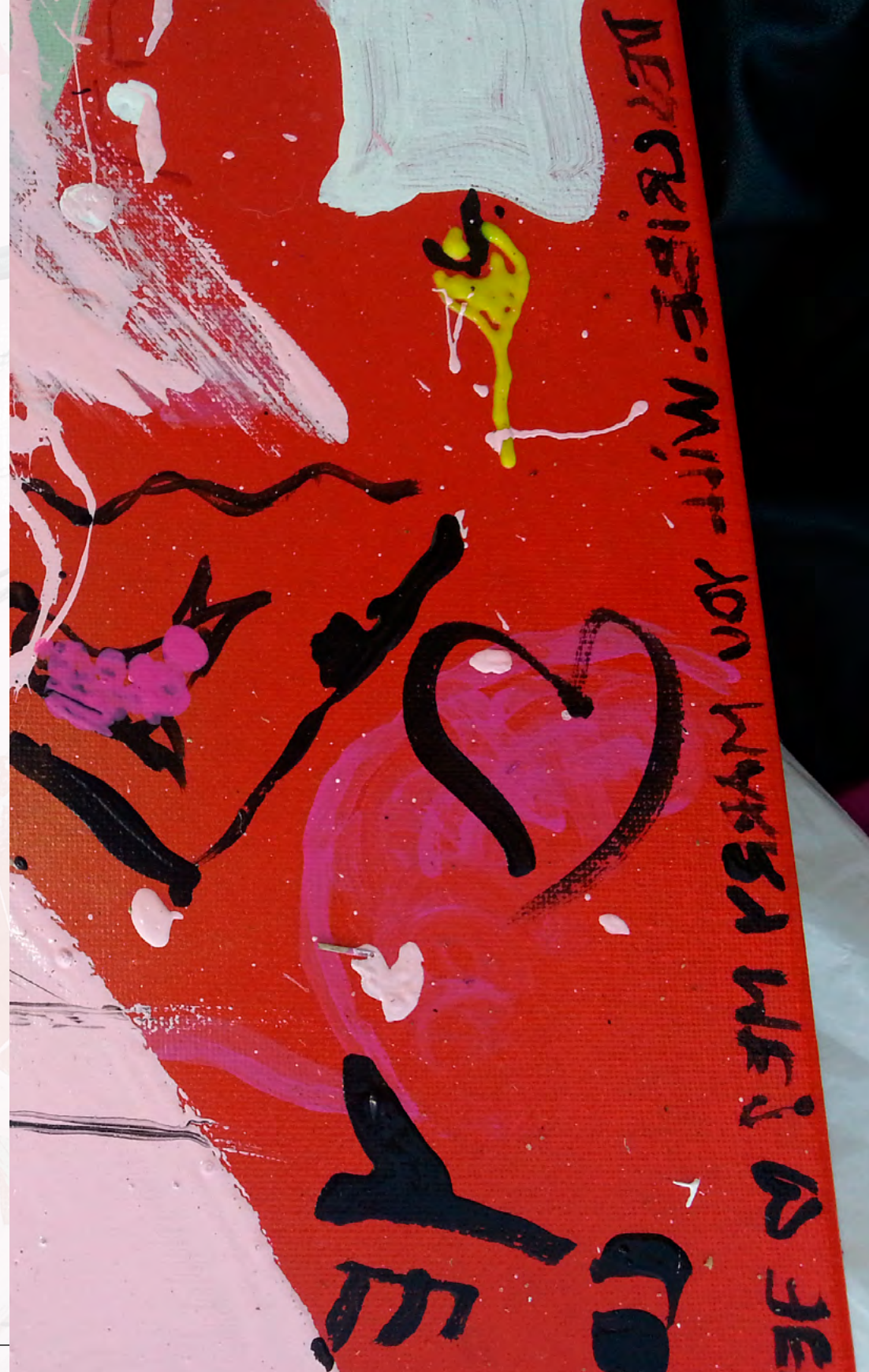
The spear had struck her right in her Christian rebirth and all of a sudden the hunters filled the room, leaping silently from desk to desk, their bare feet leaving bloody toe prints for the investigators.

My math report changed just like that from an implement of unlearning to a sacrament of emptiness, a hollow tale of defiance holding its fist up to an uncaring enemy. In brave agony the hunters, skin like ebony, pried her loose from the floor, lifted her up high, and carried her to the sacrificial mound.

The bonfire was already eating out the sky, its flaking dyke lips peeling away from the sharp teeth giving us a clear view of its fiery insides. The offering was generous, humble a gentle defeat. And when she was finally set free, her scream tore away from her and impaled the heavens.

The blood from that orgy soaked the ground in a dark deluge and it is said, that a lake formed. It is said, that in that lake creatures sleep, dreaming a new dawn to bathe the world in its new light.

This is for Nick





CHAPTER 3
PLAYER ANALYSIS

ALMOST FAMOUS

by Carolina Dahlberg

This is a text about how *Just a Little Lovin'* created fake celebrities, why it worked and what impact it had on the game

It might seem a bit off-topic, talking about establishing fake celebrities, since it doesn't tie directly into the main themes of *Just a Little Lovin'*. It was, however, one of the aspects of the game that had the strongest impact on my experience, and it amplified the theme by showing how HIV/AIDS hit everybody – high or low status didn't matter, everybody was equally vulnerable and equally affected by it.

Before the game, people who were cast as celebrity characters were asked to, as in my case, decide on one or more songs that were our 'great hits' during the larp. We were also told that, if we wanted to, there would be an opportunity to perform on stage during the larp. The performances would all be done by playback, so we weren't required to sing or play instruments. There were, however, players that played instruments and sang for real, but that was optional.

My group shared single covers for their hits in '82 and '83 in the Facebook group for the larp, at the same time giving a briefing about the band, their media image and what people might think of them. Several people who played celebrities also posted photos of themselves as their characters in full outfit and make-up.

Neither photos, covers or any other official information was a requirement from the organizers, but it had the affect, I realized, that it sent a message to the other players: *I want you to objectify my character*. During the workshop before the larp, the organizers presented the famous characters. At the same time, they also played part of the song or songs that people would recognize as associated to that character's or band's great hit, in case there was one. In general, the organizers took great care in ensuring that people had a good idea of what was going on in the world, and what people knew about the celebrities that were present.

Something that also helped to give a sense of famous versus non-famous people was that the venue had a designated stage area with a backstage area behind it. During the evening shows, the famous characters that were performing would hang out behind the stage either waiting for their turn, or just chilling out after they had performed. This created a clear distinction between the crowd and the celebrities, even if it was just a temporary situation.

When on stage, people played up famous characters as if they had really been music stars, strippers or drag queens. I don't want to belittle the performances done during the larp: several players spent both time and energy rehearsing beforehand. But the fact remained that no player was required to deliver the level of quality that might have been expected had it been a real concert or performance. We were still just playing the performers/crowd relationship and everybody played his or her part in it.

Having played one of the characters that was played up as a rock star and a celebrity, I couldn't help feeling guilty about how much attention I needed to be able to manage. But even if that was the case, I also realized that the celebrities were both player characters and at the same time *objectified* as props of the setting. Props to be used as sex symbols, gossip subjects or idols.

I felt that the celebrities represented a kind of love that was impersonal and fleeting, creating a contrast to the relationships and deep connections between other characters. They added believability to the illusion the organizers wanted to create and the similarities with real world stories of famous people dying from HIV/AIDS were easy to relate to during the game.

The celebrities became a kind of powerless royalty, struggling to keep up appearances as their world fell apart.

EXPERIENCING FEELINGS...

by Vincent Choupaut

Just a Little Lovin' is a larp built around three 4th of July parties. Each party has, more or less, the same schedule, the same guests, and they are held in 1982, 1983 and 1984 respectively. An interesting part of the game is to see how the same party can be so different when all superficial attributes of it are similar each year.

There are, of course, some differences between the acts. Namely because a few people die during the course of the game and others are infected with HIV. However, these differences are not enough to explain why the three parties felt so different during the game. The brilliant idea of the designers is to associate a main theme with each act. Players thus focus on *desire* during the first act, the *fear of death* the next year, and finally on *friendship* during the last act.

The repetition of the party, with the help of these meta-instructions, is a good way to experience really different feelings, with a high contrast between the three acts. These themes make sense because every character has a story in which (s)he will successively experience these feelings. *Just a Little Lovin'* is a narrativist game, where the players are encouraged by the organizers to create their own story. The three different themes make for good supporting structures to guide the players to do that, but the designers also used other tools.

There are several workshops before the game and between the acts to help the players think about the development of their character and how they could live out an interesting story. Another part of the players' preparation is to think about what they want to experience during the next act, and ask the other players to help them to do that.

For example, during the third act, my character was just finishing a rehab for drugs, and I asked the other players to tempt him, because I wanted to experience this feeling and see where it could take my character's story.

...AND STORYTELLING

Contrary to larps where players just react to events, and where the story of everyone is thought out before the game by the designers, in *Just a Little Lovin'*, players have to be really active in the construction of their own story. Fortunately, they are given tools to do it.

There are those I described before, of course, but also the meta-technique of the blackbox. The blackbox is a space where the players can play scenes that don't take place during the present time of the game. A scene might be a scene in the past of the characters, a possible future, or sometimes an abstract scene; a dream or whatever the players can imagine.

The blackbox is a very useful tool to build a story when the players think that they can't do all the scenes they want during the time of the game. The possibilities of the blackbox are many, and I think that it requires several games with a blackbox before one is able to utilize its entire potential.

Fortunately, during *Just a Little Lovin'*, players with more experience with this tool could initiate scenes for the others, and help them think about the scenes, which was quite interesting. The only slight drawback is that on this run, there were only two blackboxes, one of them very far from the rest of the game, and that was definitely not enough for 70 people.



LIFE OF A COMMUNITY

Every character lives his/her own story, but the larp itself tells the story of a community where an epidemic is spreading. At the beginning of the game, the lifestyle of these people is still uninhibited, and the epidemic spreads mostly through sex. So the designers had to find a technique to simulate sex scenes and their importance in this game.

They chose a meta-technique for playing out a sex scene with a phallic prop. The prop symbolizes sexual assertiveness and penetrative sex in one form or another. The players can use the prop in many ways to simulate the sex scene, and the scene ends with monologues where the participants speak out their characters inner thoughts.

I have to confess that I was far from convinced when I first heard of this meta-technique. Even after the workshop before the larp where we tried to do such scenes, I was afraid that these sex scenes might appear ridiculous during actual play, and I was afraid I would feel completely out of the game during them. But I was actually wrong. Using these props allow the players to do scenes which look like real ones and to simulate many ways to have sex.

In that kind of community, with a lot of sex, it's a good way to do it easily for the players, and to be sure that the others know precisely what is happening when they see a sex scene behind a door during the party. Players are also forced to adapt the way they have sex to their partners and to the context, so the scenes can be really significant for their own story.



The notion of community is not just a word in *Just a Little Lovin'*. Every character belongs at the same time to a core group (about 3 to 5 people) and a social circle (about 8 to 10 people). Between each act, players are encouraged to think about their development and eventually change their core group or social circle. It is a way to build many bridges and interactions between all the characters. In many larps, I don't really like these bridges which are often artificial. In this case, however, it worked as a way to build a global community, but it is above all a brilliant way to deal with death.

Indeed, during the larp, some of the characters will die of AIDS. Building a new character in the middle of the game is certainly not an easy experience, and people who experienced that could probably speak about it to a more detailed extend than me. Only a few characters will be infected and die, because otherwise the game wouldn't be manageable.

The designers made a really good choice to deal with disease and death. At the end of each act, there is a meta-scene called the 'Lottery of Death,' which is probably the most intense scene of the game for everyone. The risk to be infected exists for all the characters, and the randomness of the scene is really heavy. Every character could be picked up of course, but above all, because of all the links between the characters, everyone will know someone who will be picked up. And that's why this scene is so strong, and why everyone feels belonging to this community. The community is then reinforced during the larp, because of the recurrence of the party and the similar trials that the characters can share. This feeling is really stronger at the end of the game, and Friendship is a relevant theme for the last year. Playing *Just a Little Lovin'* was a real pleasure, and I think that this game is a good example of a larp with a lot of transparency, which succeeds to keep many unknown outcomes thanks to its clever game mechanics. Every run of the larp allows living new stories. Every run of the larp arouses emotions, whatever happens.

GENDERBENDING AT JALL

by Jeanita Hatlestrand

When I heard about this larp, I knew instantly that I wanted to enter it as a gay man. I wanted to tell myself that story, but in addition I wanted a challenge with the character itself. When I got the character-description I realized that I got just what I asked for.

A major challenge. I read through it several times trying to find something, anything, I could like about Bruce. I found it difficult, at first. I liked the character as just that, a character. But he was not someone I would like as a person. Not someone that I would ever consider being friends with.

So, how was I to prepare myself? Should I focus on getting to grips with playing a different gender, or grasping a persona which I found disagreeable? As a gay woman, I think I have an understanding of being someone who is not straight. But I have no idea what it feels like to be a man in the American society in the 80s, I have no idea what it feels like to be in an environment where I have to (or feel like I have to) hide who I am.

I have played a man several times before, and suddenly I found that it would be different in some way. Why? As a gay person myself, I should know that I view myself as a perfectly ordinary woman, genderwise that is. So where did this idea come from that portraying a man should be different, just because he likes other men? It was an uncomfortable, this meeting with my own prejudice. So I decided to leave the genderthing out of it for a bit, concentrating instead on what made my character the person that he was.

My life is very different from his. We share very few values, and I can relate to very little of his everyday life. A lot of the character was also build around the modern male role. I decided to go into that. My character was sort of like the American dream gone wrong. He was an extremely successful stock broker, and morally bankrupt enough to have little barriers in terms of what he would allow himself to do.

I was made of money, I was successful. I deserved this. Opportunities multiply as they are seized. I have no empathy with the people that didn't grasp the chance to fulfill their dream. Bruce sickened me. On top of it all he was in the closet. I felt he was a cowardly asshole, and I searched desperately for something to like about him, or even simply understand.

I found two things in the end. The fact that he worked for everything that he got. Of course he had no control anymore, rolling himself in money, champagne, sex and drugs. Sounded pretty empty to me. Then there was the shame. Not that I like shame. But being a man, and being into men, having to hide who you are, dating women, pretty much leading a double life. That is shame. Every woman I have ever met knows what shame is. At some point in our lives, we have felt it, or it has been put upon us in some way. This may go for men as well, but not being one, I have no idea.

When we got to the venue, there was a workshop for all the genderbenders. Mostly basic body-language, but it worked like more than that to me. That's when I found him. Somewhere hidden in the gestures he sprang to life.



When the game started I sort of lost him again. I felt completely like a man. I was (and I would never have believed it would happen) into other men. That part was in no way a challenge. The gestures, so different from my own, just carried me through it.

The “me” gave way to Bruce by virtue of my own transmutation of actions. Ironic really. Then it struck me how right I was about his life feeling so empty. So I threw myself into it with the champagne, drugs, random sex with men I couldn't even remember the names of. And it felt emptier by the minute.

For me, the character turned out completely different than I would ever have guessed. Before the larp I thought about what I would like to happen to him, and it did. Still, he turned out completely different than I would ever have guessed.

In the first act during the lottery of death, he got a strong reality-check, and he changed. But he changed on his terms. He really wanted to let people in, but had no idea how to do it. He failed horribly.

In the lottery of the second act, I got a reality check myself. I let my character have some of it. When Act 3 came around, he tried to let people in again, but his walls were too high and I met myself. It was scary. I met myself in someone I despised from the start. I knew this game would throw me out of my comfort-zone. I knew it would shake me, but I was not prepared for it to show me that much about who I am or who I want to be.

This larp gave me more empathy. It made me... not like, but understand someone that I despised from the bottom of my heart. It forced me to try and understand something I have very little understanding of; staying in the closet. It made me happy and thankful for so much that I have always taken for granted.

Like the simple ability to say “I care about you” to my friends. And it gave me a little understanding about what makes some people lack that ability. Being a ganderbender or being into the opposite gender was not the challenge of this larp. It was all the stuff you didn't expect to experience. The little things.



HIV, LOVE, SHOULDER PADS...

by Josefin Westborg

*Editor's Note: This text was written in the late summer of 2012 by Josefin Westborg after having played the second installment of **Just a Little Lovin'**. We included it because we felt it fitted in.*

I was asked with writing a participatory text about the larp *Just a Little Lovin'* set in Stockholm in early June 2012. I thought about it, but I'm not done processing it. I can't explain the whole larp to myself, let alone to someone else. A large part of me is still there. I've got bleed all over and I can't let go.

This bleed thing. What is it really? And how does it manifest itself? I would explain bleed as a phenomenon that occurs when feelings of self "bleed over" into your character or the other way around. In short, if I'm pissed off, my character may also be angry so that I can use my personal anger in the larp in a, hopefully, constructive way. But it can be difficult.

THIS IS MY STORY

Just a Little Lovin' was something I saw as a challenge. A larp about the HIV and AIDS epidemic hitting New York in the 80's. About lust, friendship and fear of death. I was scared before the larp and there were many things I did not know how I would manage. For one, this thing about playing a male character. Could I do it? How would I do it? Could I get others to believe that I was a man? Could I get myself to believe it? I also thought it would be hard to play on sex.

I think it usually becomes uncomfortable or silly. There was a lot of pretend sex during the larp, but that was not what turned out to be the hardest part, and neither was playing a man. It was everything else. To deal with the emotions that came up. When you have played madly in love with someone for three days, with a person who is stunning and you love one another unconditionally.

... AND BLEED

About the feeling when the person you love so freaking much suddenly dies and disappears and you get bleed effects because a lot of memories from when your real-life best friend and your real-life father died bubbles up. About emptiness and longing. About not being able to stay in your self-centered character because your own experiences are bleeding in.

When you suddenly stop playing and the person you loved doesn't exist. It's someone else standing there. Someone you don't know. Someone you have all of these built up emotions for. How the hell do you handle that?





When you start to get to know the person and realize that you actually like the person even more than their character, even though the character was totally amazing. When you project all the emotions from the larp onto that person and it just bleeds over in all directions.

When you realize that it's not just yourself who lost someone off game, but the person my bleed is directed towards bleeds as much for a lost sister. The bond created between us in that situation. The fear of losing each other that suddenly arise. And then when you realize that you live 500 km from each other...

After that experience, I understood that I had to say something about how I felt. What came out was: "Hi, my name is Josefin off game. Right now I have a disturbingly strong need to be close to you. I think it will pass pretty soon, but if I sit near you or come over and hug you during the evening you will know why."

My experience is that in order to experience bleed (from my character to me) I have to be playing with someone that makes me feel completely safe. To dare to reveal strong emotions require trust in the other person. For my part, it becomes strongest when I do not know the person that well from before. I don't know if this is something that's universal.

The ideal situation is one where I have a vague notion about the other player as a person but still don't have a strong feeling for his/her personality because that can easily overshadow the character. But there are also times, as on *Just a Little Lovin'*, where it occurs with someone who is completely unknown to me. That is when it gets so difficult afterwards. There are several ways to deal with bleed and other strong emotions that can occur during a larp. Some things are on the organizers' level and some on a personal level.

The concept of a “debrief buddy” is an easy way for organizers to provide opportunities for participants to work with what emerged during the larp. A “debrief buddy” simply means that everyone gets a person that they have the responsibility to contact and talk to two weeks after the larp. Having debrief sessions on site and talking through how you feel afterwards is also a good tool to use.

Another technique that can help is to make a symbolic gesture to leave your character behind. For example, hand over a piece of clothing that has been associated with the character or to jointly envision how you look in a mirror and seeing your character in the mirror. Then you slowly walk away from the mirror, leaving the character behind.

On a personal level, it may be more difficult. Personally, I feel that physical touch helps me. It makes me think of the lyrics from a song by Universal Poplab. “This touch is just a way to make sure you are real.” That is just how it feels. I can’t really decide what is what, or rather, who’s who, just as the larp ends. But staying close feels easier and the separation anxiety becomes less difficult to handle. I think that a lot of times, these things lead to people getting into new relationships after larps or simply taking it a bit far physically. Because right there and then, the emotions feel real and eternal and above all, very strong.

That’s when you’re glad that you have done this before. I know it’s a phase. That it’ll pass. That I can feel the difference between the bleed and the “real” grief/love etc. I know it can develop into a close and good friendship or just disappear.

Or, in some cases, it might actually turn into love. But I know that I have to find myself before I can settle into those emotions, so that I know that they are mine and not my character’s emotions.

The experience we have shared has been so incredibly strong. We share something that can’t be described. But I also know that the real world is right there and is coming back to haunt me. The only question is how long it takes before I accept it. When I stop dreaming about people who have been so important to me, even though they don’t really exist. For me it’s not over yet and I don’t really want to let go even if I have people I love and that love me even in the real world. I want to hang around a little while and experience *Just a Little Lovin’*.



HOW I RELATED TO JIMMY...

by Jorgo Larsen

Being an active and curious intellectually inclined larper makes me reflect a lot on emotions. Being a confused and insecure intellectually inclined man in a very complex world tends to often distance me from emotions. When I feel something strongly, the thought often occurs to me that maybe I feel the emotion because I somehow find that it is expected of me. Usually total chaos follows this thought.

Do I really feel this, or do I somehow synthesize an emotional response in my own brain? Is it a genuine feeling or some sort of cognitive feedback? What is emotion anyway? Is it thought that follows some sort of cultural pattern or is it purely biological mechanisms, coldly adjusting hormonal levels in my body? Does the expectation of emotion create the emotion or does the emotion make me invent a pattern that explains it and lends it meaning?

The reflections loop in on themselves and stupidity ensues. For me, participating in an emotionally heavy larp has been a very frustrating and very clarifying experience at the same time.

I need to write something about a character and how to build it. It's funny that the saying "it builds character" is taken so literally in the roleplaying experience. We actually do that. And, at least for me, the process is very mechanical. That is, until a certain point in the process, where, if it is done right, something strange happens and the character comes to life. I will come to that.



...AND HOW HE RELATED TO ME

First off, it is all about easily identifiable traits such as clothing, what kind of music the character enjoys, significant events in life, world views and so forth. It is an engineering feat driven purely by intellect and creativity. And at some point, like some Frankensteinian awakening, the character slowly opens its eyes and starts looking back at you. It can be very dramatic and it can be subtle, like a spirit summoned and slowly congealing out of the muck of your subconsciousness. For me, it was more like the latter.

My character in *Just a Little Lovin'* – Jimmy – was stubborn, shy and slow to appear. I started building him by deciding on his taste in music and for a couple of weeks, I listened to a lot of Velvet Underground – especially Heroin, which became something of a theme song for him. I also gave him Joy Division and Judas Priest. Still he was just a picture in my mind. Then I started to email the people in my core group and we agreed on bits and pieces of their shared history.

Still I was thinking about a stranger, I had never met and didn't know. Something slowly started to happen while I went shopping for him. Looking at myself in the dressing room mirror trying on impossibly tight jeans, impossible ugly shirts and uncomfortably comfortable leather vests, he started to stir. Somewhere at the back of my mind, something moved. I shaved my beard leaving only the mustache and he flickered ghostly on and off like a vague shadow behind my reflection, when I looked in the mirror.

When the game started, I knew all kinds of things about him, but I still hadn't met him. I went in game with only second-hand knowledge and no real grasp on him. It was very daunting, like diving into the water without knowing if I could swim or how deep it was. I can't say when exactly he came to life, but it happened just after the game had begun. Maybe speaking his first sentences or just letting him walk around a bit finally woke him fully up.

The stirring, the moving, the rummaging about – it's hard to describe, but when he finally appeared, it was as if I was sharing the experience with a full-fledged person, whose every action and thought I was mirroring. Like my shadow had come to life and pushed me in the background.

I have now been an active roleplayer for more than 20 years and I consider myself somewhat experienced. I think I handle the various ways of playing my co-players up well and know how to take or share the spotlight.

Given the right circumstances I can simulate emotions in play to help create a dramatic or emotionally charged mood. Still I wasn't prepared for the impact *JaLL* would have on me. I would like to speculate a bit on what facilitated the experience, what was different from other larp experiences, what elements made this stand out.

First of all I want to point out, that *Just a Little Lovin'* doesn't revolutionize larping in its fundamental design. The different stages are more or less the same as they have been since the early eighties, I think. For purposes of this article, I define these stages in consecutive order as: a research phase, a character generation phase, a transition to game ritual, a game phase, a transition back to reality ritual and some sort of post-game reflection.

I think every roleplayer has been doing some variation of this since the first game was set up by the first game master. Even *Just a Little Lovin'*'s meta-techniques have been done before as flashbacks or mechanics to handle character development or philosophical standpoint.

I am going to pin out three points, where I think the larp stood out: the narrative frame, the themes and the choice of meta-techniques.



Setting up a larp about AIDS in the eighties would be a hard sell, if that was it. But it wasn't. It was a story about a bunch of people, most of whom were close friends, relatives or at least sympathetic to each other, going to a party where they felt really safe to celebrate their way of life. That made it OK to deal with the heavy themes. The overall mood was safe and secure and hopeful. It was also a frame where it was easy to set yourself up emotionally.

Going to a party in an atmosphere of hope made it easy to play scenes where you expect to be betrayed, let down, hurt etc later in the game. And having foreseen those scenes, made them easier to immerse yourself into and easier to deal with afterward.

An example from the game was a scene from the first act, where my character and his three closest friends coincidentally met by an open window and overcome by their feelings of immortality and overwhelming love for each other made a vow to meet up at the same window the next year and each year after that.

"We will always be here," I remember one of them said. Privately the players all shivered at the thought of the characters standing there the year after, one or two fewer. We really set ourselves up there.



As a curiosity it turned out that we all survived and we repeated the vow in all three acts, but the expectation of not surviving made the scenes very significant and memorable.

The three acts of *Just a Little Lovin'* were themed as desire, fear of death and friendship. Overall, I would say the whole larp were centered on the themes of love, sex and death. Other themes could probably be identified as well. What is common for the themes is that they are very fundamental and easy to relate to. In the overall positive atmosphere of the narrative, they were also very accessible for exploration. *Just a Little Lovin'* is all in all very close to home.

The AIDS epidemic in the eighties has had a great influence in how we conduct ourselves sexually today. Also sex and love or the absence of it is something everyone can relate to and which plays a center role for many other derived issues – almost to the point of becoming invisible. In the game, sex became so casual that in many scenes, it became the play around the sex that became significant or defining for my character.

My character had an unexplainable fear of drag queens. He just couldn't stand them and didn't know why. During a harrowing group sex scene in the darkroom involving a gay man in drag, he realized how much the man resembled him and slowly the fear dissolved, which also greatly influenced many of his issues with women.

The main thing to say about the meta-techniques is that I didn't use them much, but if they hadn't been there, I would have needed them. They were a big part of making the game safe to play. The only technique, that I consistently used, was the phallic object. Aside from making sex scenes safer to play, the phallic object technique also literally gave the players something to hold onto, that wasn't genitalia. It gave us something concrete to handle.

Thus it not only shielded us from acts, which could be potentially harmful for us off-game, the technique also enhanced and enriched our game. Receiving blow-jobs with cocaine-sprinkled cocks would probably not have been thought about without the phallic objects as a prop, as was the case with many other specialized sexual acts done during the game.

An interesting side effect of the phallic object was that it focused attention much more on the physical act of sex. Not at the cost of the emotional part, but as opposed to only being an emotional and mental performance. Doing sex scenes became for me much about finding the right position, focusing on what was pleasurable for Jimmy's partner, being needy about him getting his needs fulfilled, not accidentally breaking furniture, having fun, proving himself etc... much like real sex can be. A physical spectacle, like a dance, where you negotiate and coordinate and navigate and crave to satisfy a physical need.

I have, to people that haven't played the game, described *Just a Little Lovin'* as the most significant isolated event of my life. Yes, my marriage and the birth of my children were of course more significant by far, but those events aren't isolated – they are still ongoing. This larp was closer to the perfect experience design, than anything I've ever been involved in before.

The framing was safe, the themes made it easy to relate to, the mechanics helped me to have a very physical experience of being my character and all this made Jimmy come to life in a powerful and unexpected way. I had a very real notion of having a relationship with him. I wanted him to pull through and he struggled with how to express himself through me. In the debrief workshop after the end of the game, we wrote a letter to our character as a way of saying goodbye. Here I wrote: "I regret that I often let you down."



The Book of Just a Little Lovin' (2013 Denmark Run)

I had the very present experience of stepping in the background and having the job of helping Jimmy live for a while. Sometimes I would fail at this and I could feel his disappointment in me. At other times we would succeed together and we shared feelings of joy and exhilaration. There is no doubt in my mind, that I created Jimmy. Also I know that Jimmy started to create himself after he was born. At the same time I see Jimmy, and all the other characters, as a product of the players' combined efforts and the very special community we formed together.

I can't really say that this larp has changed me fundamentally or drastically, but in some ways it has changed me. Maybe over time the effect will turn out to be fundamental as it mixes with influences from other events and reflections on them. Most of all I carry with me a realization about myself that has come from my reactions after the game. The mixed feelings of deep sorrow, fear and pain, that my character felt in-game and the joy that I felt over it.

Not so much over him being down, but over myself feeling something strongly together with a bunch of other people. It has struck me how common and invisible the state of loneliness is for me. After the game, I had a deep yearning for just being close to my co-players. I just want to be close to these people, but I also want to want it. For me, being emotional is like an addiction. It's an escape from the loneliness.

This realization might have a real impact on my life in the years to come. It's an incentive to focus more on being with the people around me and focusing more on that and less on, what I'm achieving with them or if I am actually accomplishing anything. Writing this I also realize that it resonates beautifully with one of the political messages of the larp: the one about queer equality and the free expression of love for all. Never mind who you love and how you love them, as long as you do. It's just a little lovin'. Share it.



JUST A SMALL MINORITY..

by Sebastian Svegaard

In the following, I will attempt write about two things: The experience of playing a game with strong LGBT+ themes as a member of said group, and the impact of this game on players of any gender and sexual orientation after the game has ended. This includes a look at the potentially problematic case of being 'tourists' in a past that is not our own. It is my opinion that these questions are strongly interwoven, and as such I will not examine them one by one, but rather look at them together.

I decided to play *Just a Little Lovin'*, when it was was first staged in Norway in 2011. One of the things that convinced me that this was the right time to come out of my self-imposed larp exile was the line "How gay is this larp?" on the game website FAQ ("Frequently Asked Questions", ed.).

Although I should mention that the answer to the question was even more convincing than the simple truth of them asking it, the very fact that they did was notable. In my perspective, it signaled creators who were aware of this not being a theme that larpers, even Nordic-style ones, were accustomed to, and that it was important to them that everyone understood the weight of the themes in the game.



..PLAYING (AS) A QUEER

As I proceeded to the sign-up, I saw things that made me feel included and safe. Questions about wishes for your character's gender and sexual orientation were well worded, for instance. This was clearly a game designed to be open and inclusive to gender and sexuality minorities. At the time, I'd never seen anything like it, and I was stoked.

As queer role players, we are used to being mostly invisible, our sexual orientation or gender identity reduced to flavour-giving tokens in most instances, or as substitutes for personality or plot, though we've seen positive change in later years.

I use queer and non-heteronormative as near synonyms in the present text, and LGBT+ as a term to denote a slightly narrower subset. These categories are not fixed, but fluid and should be read as intended that way. Still, a few things gave me reason to pause, and though I signed up, these were still present in the back of my mind. They also surfaced again as I signed up to play the game a second time when it ran in Denmark this year (2013) – as documented by the present book.

Could we, as non-US, mainly non-LGBT, people play this game in a way that was respectful and meaningful, and without resorting to shorthand stereotypes? The larp might be gay, but could the players do it justice? Could we avoid exoticism in our portrayal of the characters? Was there a point to this aside from our own enjoyment? If no, then would it be all right to play it?

I am aware that the questions are posed bluntly; that is intentional. Going in, I viewed these risks as very real possibilities, though some were lessened the second time around. Not because I thought anyone involved in this game ever intended to trivialise or ridicule the experiences of people with HIV/AIDS – or queer people in general – but because portraying minorities, is always very tricky.



Given that larping is playing, were we going too far? Can we go where books, plays, and films have gone without overstepping boundaries and doing something actually offensive?

I am aware that this problem is linked to the “Is larp art?” question, which is however outside the scope of this article. Suffice to say that as far as I am concerned, any art form has an impact, and while all art and expression should be allowed, not all is respectful.

Those aren't easy questions to pose – and even harder to answer. There's also the hidden elephant in there: the insider/outsider perspective. Because while I wrote ‘we’ above – in recognition that larp is a collectively shaped format and everyone is a part in creating the experience – what I really meant was ‘you’; an unspecified majority of non-queer players.

As most people will recognise, there's a difference in portraying your own “people” and someone else, especially when we're talking about real people. This wasn't a case of a group of people invented for the purpose. We were playing people who could have lived and were creating a story inspired by real events. Also, there is no doubt in my mind that the experience of playing this game is a different experience based on the player's sexual orientation or identification with non-heteronormativity.

As little as I believe in any ‘them and us’ kind of worldview, a person's lived experiences influence what they put into and take away from a game. So while *Just a Little Lovin'* for me is a chance to play out a part of history that I feel a personal connection to, albeit through historical links rather than own experience, it is a chance for others to visit this history, my/our history, as guests. Perhaps an experience more akin to one I would have in a game set in, say, 1980's Spain: culturally similar, yet with significant differences, and something I have no claims to.

No matter how deep the immersion, a game will never give the straight, non-queer players the experience of everyday life as non-heteronormative, just as I'd never know what it was like to be Spanish. Not least because the game isn't a staging of regular life; it's about a party, once a year, a very special occasion, and there's a majority of queer characters in the game to boot. This is very far from the lived experience of actual queer people.

Moreover, not all the players get to leave the fiction again and go back to majority life where who they are or love isn't a cause for discrimination. This is why I use the perhaps harsh and rough division into ‘you’ and ‘us’, despite my own belief that there are no sharp divides, only blurred areas. At the end of the day, we are, sadly, not all as equal as we ought to be.

All off-game life aside, I've had my doubts about the game put to shame each time. *Just a Little Lovin'* and everyone involved with it did something – or some things – that I had never anticipated. First of all, throughout two iterations of this game, I've never once experienced anyone trivialise or make light of the themes, nor have I seen any character that appeared to be a stereotype – neither as it was written nor as it was played. I have a good deal of admiration for everyone who have played this game, and not any less for the creators who wrote characters who are real people, flawed and imperfect and so utterly relatable.

Several people mentioned after the game in Denmark, that something special happened to all of us. While we can never know what it was really like to live the life of a queer person in New York in the 1980's, to face the plague of AIDS, we can still relate strongly to the experience.



We developed a great deal of empathy with and compassion for the people who did live those lives. Perhaps this is why it seems that all the players came out of this game with a need to act, to reach out to people in real-life versions of what we had a vague taste of, and at least try to do something. The empathy generated by this game created solidarity. This was, for instance, expressed by the group of players who took part in Copenhagen Pride two weeks after the Danish run of the game, most of them for the first time in their life.

Walking in that parade with them, I felt doubly proud – to be there, out in the open, and with this amazing group of people, who absolutely belonged there. The love and solidarity was still present and was finding an expression that reaches into off-game life. Thus, there is now evidence that this game can create allies. That is a truly valuable thing. Walking a few days in the shoes of queer people can accomplish what all the politics, friendships and attempts at reaching out can't always do. While I'm not saying this game is some grand solution to all the problems LGBT+ persons face – far from it – even a small contribution like this matters.

As a queer man it's been a pleasure and privilege to see people I knew and people I didn't know come together to create, and live, lives like these, with so much love and care and respect for the stories behind them. Playing something that's essentially 'based on a true story' perhaps adds to the weight we feel as players after the experience.

Given the way the game has been played and the effect it has on those involved, I, at least, do not believe that it's a question of "faking exoticness" or tourism. If nothing else, this great sense of empathy and love, one we share and then attempt to use for something worthy of the people whose lives we borrowed, makes this game entirely justified. The changes it creates may be small, and there's no way of knowing if they are lasting, but I believe in them and I believe in us, all of us, queer or not.

LESSONS AND LEARNING

by Brigitte Beauzamy

Just a Little Lovin' is an amazing larp which yields outstanding pedagogical results. Despite the authors' insistence that the game is not designed to be fully historically accurate, there is a very strong historical element in it. Players come out of it with a dramatically improved knowledge of the topics at the core of the larp: gay and lesbian cultures in the 1980s; the beginnings of the AIDS epidemic and scientific research on AIDS and HIV; political responses to the lack of public policies tackling the spread of the disease.

Not only did *JaLL* help me better grasp a topic, I was not very familiar with – the history of New York City gay men in the 1980s, it also opened a window to other, even less mainstream, cultural histories: lesbian history, and the one of alternative sexualities such as swingers. The material provided by the authors and the organizers was engaging and easy to read, which helped players nurture their curiosities for these themes.

A variety of sources – including fiction and nonfiction, music, films – were listed for us to better prepare, and players helped one another finding additional material prior to the larp.

In this sense, *JaLL* helps building a community based on the sharing and telling of history. This is not a community of historians – although probably some of us are. It is not about sharing resources, but about sharing stories. Before, during and after the game, we told each other our stories. That is how we were connected to the theme of the larp.

There are many different ways to be connected to this particular history: identifying as LGBT, knowing people who are HIV +, working with AIDS or AIDS patients, knowing AIDS activists, having been transfused with blood in the 1980s...

FROM JUST A LITTLE LOVIN'

By helping us problematize this personal connection to the main themes of *JaLL*, we reach an understanding of why what appeared to be a very singular and – let's face it – gloomy piece of history, the holocaust of New York gay men in the 1980s through the spread of the AIDS epidemic, is truly a universal history to which we are all connected one way or another.

What may have been – for me – the most informative and transformative aspect of *JaLL* is, however, not about learning through other people's narratives. *JaLL* helped me understand how this story unfolded not only by placing me in a situation in which I read and discussed more about it, but by enabling me to live it for myself and to experience – first-hand – the constraints of the moment's situation.

I played a lesbian character, which meant that my personal risk of being infected with HIV was very low. People were scared, sick and dying around me, but it only really became my own problem when I was criticized by some fellow lesbians for not jumping on the bandwagon of AIDS-related charity work. There was a strong level of awareness of AIDS issues amongst us lesbians and bi women and many characters opted for becoming full time AIDS activists – a manifestation of solidarity and sisterhood more than an imperative motivated by the sense of one's upcoming death, as was prevalent amongst gay activists.

Certainly, this turning of comparatively safe women into carers is worth thinking about in gender terms! Watching this pattern unfold was truly fascinating and clearly justified the organizers' decision to include more lesbian characters. Far from being cut off from the AIDS-focused main plot, they helped shedding a sometimes cruel light on the disconnect between gay and lesbian cultures at the turn of the 1980s, and how AIDS contributed to a complete transformation of LGBT cultures later on.



ME, MYSELF AND BEATRICE

by Anna Emilie Groth

After attending *Just a Little Lovin'* I had the feeling that I was not alone, going back to Aarhus. I played the character Beatrice, who was a part of the Saratoga Friends. Somehow not only the emotional experience from the larp, but also the character that I had played, was traveling with me back home.

First I was kind of embarrassed about it – I consider myself an intelligent and mentally stable person, so why couldn't I separate the fictional character from myself? Why was it so hard, and kind of forced, to talk about the character in third person, when really she felt like a big part of me? In the following I will attempt to explain this strange mixed personality through the way I experienced shifts between different layers of my personality through out *Just a Little Lovin'*.

My original inspiration comes from Michael Eigtved, a Danish associate professor at the University of Copenhagen, of the department of Theatre Research. He who wrote an article in *Peripeti* no. 11, a Danish journal for dramaturges, about the role, the player and the person. His points of view have been an inspiration for this article, and made me think about some interesting aspects of my experience with *Just a Little Lovin'*.

According to Eigtved, we are in all kinds of events with theatrical strategies, as a larp. Both personas, players and roles at the same time, and the connection between these different levels of our personality, creates our overall communication in a larp situation. Therefore, the three levels will communicate different features of us.

The person level consists of facts about a given person – meaning the physical appearance of the person and the person's history and individual personality. On the player level, our appearance to other people are regulated.

There is a great deal of unconscious signals that we are not aware of, and there are conscious performative instruments that can be used to appear in a specific manner, as the ones we use to create a role for *Just a Little Lovin'*. The interaction between the person and player level results in a target based role, thereby forming the role level.

This interaction is, of course, ongoing during the larp and coloured by the conventions for the situations and thereby also by the different goals for the three acts: Act 1; desire, Act 2; fear and Act 3; friendship. I will, in the following, try to describe how I view the interaction between the three levels of the larper at *Just a Little Lovin'* as having a huge impact on the experience. It is meant as an analytic inspired thought experiment – nothing more.



THE BATHROOM BREAK

During the first act I developed a good friendship, larping with Sigrid, who played the role of Chantelle. Beatrice and her had been friends since they were early teens, and a spontaneous ritual between the two of us started. We went to the bathroom together, always the same one, and took some coke, refreshed our makeup, gossiped about boys, sex and feelings.

In this time we were both in a grey area between our roles, Beatrice and Chantelle, and just our persons, Anna and Sigrid, but without breaking the fiction. Somehow this alteration of our roles according to our personas became a kind of energizer for our larping, and for me it made my character more diverse and empathic, as if she became more realistic.

At the same time we used our references as having a good relationship outside the larp to inspire the in-game fictional relationship. Later on in the end of the second act, during which we had very little in-game contract, Chantelle died. The bathroom breaks were really what made the tears run down my cheeks, or at least it was those in-game memories that went through my mind at that moment.

THE UNPOPULAR KID

Even though we had been prepared for the second act to be evolving around being alone and the fear and ignorance of HIV, I found myself standing in the middle of the yard at one point late in the evening feeling extremely alone, not as Beatrice, but as myself. During the second act I, as a player, felt a big frustration of not being able to connect though my role to the other characters. Most of the time I was mentally off-game, making me feel like I was doing a bad job of fulfilling my role, and therefore I kept re-evaluating the conscious choices I made as a player.



Beatrice must have seemed a bit confused and indecisive to the other players, at least she did to me. This all escalated until every possible option to connect in the game to anybody has, well, failed. There I was, standing as myself surrounded by people talking, laughing and most of all connecting – or so it felt at the time. The loneliness of the role had smitten me on both the personal and player level, and I felt like I had failed the larp, that I didn't get it. But in retrospect I didn't fail, the feeling of rejection and not belonging was just the result of all my play that day, which had all built up this feeling of loneliness.

This realization came to me the next morning after the funeral scene during the transition time while the song 'Just a Little Lovin' was playing. The combination of feeling like I wasn't able to choose the suitable character for any situation, because it didn't exist within the fiction, as well as the loneliness, had actually spawned confusion within my own orientation in the three layers in my personality. In the end, this made the experience of the second act very strong and overwhelming. I cried a lot during the debriefing afterward, and some of the tears were definitely of relief of not having to feel so lonely anymore.

ALONE AND TRAPPED IN THE CHARACTER

Between the second and third act I “won” the ‘Lottery of Death’ and got the message that Beatrice had cancer again, and I decided that it was terminal, which started my third act as a person living on lent time.

My fascination with the connection between the person, the actor and the role actually began in a situation in the end of the third act, where I confused the different levels. In the last act with the theme friendship, I at one time found myself wandering around alone in the garden looking at the big tree standing in the middle, and feeling a connection to Beatrice’s childhood, simply through the memory created earlier in the first act.

The feeling of fear of dying was overwhelming and it was mixed with a feeling of not wanting to lose my friends. This was Beatrice’s life and friends, but it affected me as a person so profound, that to be able to let it go and go off-game I had to find a Danish friend to talk to about anything else but the larp.

The very essential emotional themes of the larp, as loneliness in the second act, made it easy to react based on how I, as a person, would react in a specific situation. This especially became clear in relation to handling death, and my reaction became intuitive and directly connected to my own personal emotional reaction patterns. Therefore, it was hard to go out of character even being alone and in the off-game area.



MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL

Due to my cancer in the third act, I crafted a physical transformation that fit the role I was going to play. This included a scarf around my head making the impression that all my hair was gone and putting on makeup making me look very sick. In the course of the night, relative to my emotional state described above, I started avoiding mirrors. At first it was an unconscious reaction, but it became more and more active, and at one point I forced myself to look into the mirror. In combination with the emotional trip during this act, my physical appearance became very convincing.

Even though I had made some very conscious decisions on how to play the role, and some of those decisions made my role and my person seem very far apart, at the end, when I looked in the mirror, the distance was not that great.

In that moment looking at myself in the mirror alone, my feelings were hard to describe even now a month later. I think the closest words would be fragile and humble.

GOING HOME

Attending *Just a Little Lovin'* was nothing like I imagined, because it was so much more. Beatrice traveled with me home to Aarhus, and the most difficult part of having her affect my life so profoundly was a derived effect of sleeping in game. It made me dream as her in some weeks after the larp, waking up and being confused about where I was.

I don't know exactly why, but my subconscious was definitely affected and had trouble letting go of the character, of the role I played. This is best described in a message I wrote in *Just a Little Lovin'*'s Facebook group on August 14:

The Book of Just a Little Lovin' (2013 Denmark Run)



"I'm overall okay, of course I miss you guys like crazy, but I'm really excited to have experienced this amazing event with you. There is just one thing: during the night, while I'm sleeping, my conscience somehow mixes up where I am, and every morning I wake up confused about where I am and who I'm suppose to be... It is kind of freaking me out..."

The experience have also giving me a kind of post-larp sensation that has resulted in a heightening of my emotional awareness and most of all an enormous empathy for the ones who had to go through getting HIV in the 80's, and the ones still coping with facing death in all its shapes and sizes.

I also changed the way I chose to play the different roles in my everyday life, and maybe try to be more including, also if it is just to the bus driver on the way to work. *Just a Little Lovin'* managed to change the way I self-portrait, and hopefully in its three runs others have had the same experience. To me, that makes *Just a Little Lovin'* a piece of art, contributing to an alteration in the way we think.



PLAYER/CHARACTER DIVIDE

by Søren Ebbehøj

My Character at *Just a Little Lovin'* was called Madison, or Maddie for short. He was this young, naive, happy-go-lucky guy who, at the beginning of the game, had not yet realized that he was gay, even if everyone else had no doubts at all. Since I was to work in the diner during the game, I got to – more or less – write the character myself, and I modeled him over that stereotypical innocent diner waitress flirting with everyone without quite realizing what is going on. This, I figured, would make for easy interactions with the other players when I was working, and would be a lot of fun.

I chose the Madison character based on my own uncertainties around the game: from the very first time, I heard about the game, it sounded immensely cool, but I had a series of reservations related to playing a homosexual character. I kept telling myself it had nothing to do with me being uncomfortable or with my own insecurities, and I still believe this to be true. But I genuinely had no idea of how to relate to a gay character, as I have no close friends who are openly gay. Also I was not feeling very confident with the mechanic employed for simulating sex in the game.



Just a Little Lovin' has been lauded by many as one of the best Nordic larps ever designed. This fact combined with the strong LGBTQ rights and feminist movements in the Scandinavian countries and especially in the Nordic larping community based around the yearly Nodal Point conferences, created a lot of peer pressure on people like me, to play the game.

I am in no way blaming the game, or any organization for this. At times, however, opting out of this particular game – based on discomfort or otherwise – stopped being a real option. If you were to avoid the stigma of being labeled a hetero normative, homophobic prick who was, by the way, a sad existence for not being comfortable with your own sexuality, you simply had to sign up. It felt like no excuse or reason for not wanting to participate was acceptable.

Unless you admitted to being afraid that either your sexuality or social status would be compromised beyond recovery, that is. Frankly, this kind of open peer pressure and shaming created a lot of bad vibes around the game for me, and made the part about homosexuality seem even more daunting. If I am to be critical about the game in this regard, I would say it has (had) a severe branding problem.

The extremely one-sided focus on the gay scene and the themes relevant to the homosexual community (in the communication and discussions on the game, that is) turned out to be not only problematic for the balance between the factions in the game, but also, I would suggest, scares a lot of people from participating as described above.

But anyway. I had decided not to play the game, until I got the opportunity to play in the diner crew. Since the group included three of my best friends, and as the work gave us an alibi for keeping the game at an arm's length if we needed it, I decided to go for it anyway.

And then I set about wondering what my part in a game about gay men in the 80's would be. Now, if I was to play this game, I decided, I would have to do it right. I didn't want to play a straight character, but perhaps I could find a way of easing into the whole being gay and having sex thing.

It occurred to me that a story about a young man coming out seemed perfect for this. I could start the game with the firm belief that the character was straight, even if not quite there yet in his life, still being a virgin and all. And then gradually the character would realize, admit it to himself, come out, have sex for the first time, and maybe even fall in love and so on. And I would get the chance of learning everything together with my character as we went along. Perfect.

Also, this grand coming of age story, I felt, would form a nice, positive development compared to the tragedies that would unfold all around. The game, being split in three acts with a full year in-between, was perfectly suited for stories focusing on long-term character development. This was clear for many characters in the game, and the coming of age story of Madison was no exception.

As Madison worked in the diner, he was exposed to the other characters quite early in the game, and people quickly took him in and made him kind of a mascot of the whole thing. I guess the one-dimensionality of the character, made it easy for others to play along, and I was played up a lot by the other players.

The story of Madison is probably not that interesting for others, but in short he found out he was gay, he had his sexual debut, got a lapdance on stage by a famous stripper and had a threesome in a bathroom. So the development turned out as planned, despite a few bumps in the road: the scare of AIDS, of losing his best friend and the sorrow of people dying, Madison came out quite OK.

WRAPPING UP THE STORY

Finishing the game, Madison was fully out of the closet, and exploring his sexuality. Furthermore, he had started feeling more confident, and he was still working in the diner. Thus, the story turned out, as expected, to wrap up into a very positive story. I felt, somehow, that this was a very suitable place to leave Madison and let him get on with the rest of his life. I felt grateful for having shared these very important years, and also that he was now through the most difficult parts of his life, and didn't need my help any more.



This way of looking at the player/character divide is fairly new to me, but I think there are certain things about this particular game worth mentioning in this regard:

First of all, the long-term development of the characters meant that we, as players, got to know them through very different situations, moods and defining moments of their lives. And somehow they became much more real. Also the de-roling and debriefing workshops after the game tried to emphasize the player/character divide. Not necessarily by fictionalizing the characters but simply by establishing them as individual entities separate from the players. This was done through a series of exercises of which two seemed the most important to me.



The first of these consisted of the players gathered in a circle immediately after the game, taking off part of their costume or an accessory, representing the character, and placing it in a pile on the ground, thus ritually dropping that character and leaving it. The other one included writing a letter from the player to the character.

Secondly, a recurring theme in most stories I have heard from fellow players, is that the stories are somehow wrapped up nicely. Not that they end happily (some do, but in accordance with the theme of the game, most do not), but there are precious few open endings and almost no meaningless tragedies, as you would usually see in abundance in similar games.

I interpret this as a reaction on the part of the players to the omnipresent threat of HIV/AIDS and cancer in the game. These seemingly random menaces, which the players had no way of fighting, and the totally meaningless way in which characters and their loved ones were ripped away, induced a strong drive with the players to make sense of the stories and to embed meaning in the otherwise meaningless stories of loss and despair.

The letter-writing exercise probably played a part in this process of constructing meaning, as most players wanted to convey something significant to their characters.

As I mentioned earlier, I feel that the story of Madison wrapped up nicely, and that the part of his life in which I had a say ended with the game. Thus, writing the letter to Madison came very easily to me, as I felt, this was my last chance (in many different ways) to help him on with the rest of his life and nudge him in the right direction.

It felt very much like how it must be for parents writing their kids, when they finish high school or similar, or like writing a letter of farewell to a very close friend.

THE DEADLY LOTTERY

by Jakob Ponsgaard

What turned out to be the most important piece of game design, in my opinion, was the lottery of death. In short, the lottery of death was a way to implement the threat, fear and consequence of AIDS into the game. It consisted of five core elements, as I see it.

SUSPENSE

As a player, this element was key, as it was the time to reflect, and in every act, prepare for an eventual loss of either your loved character, or even worse, your character's loved ones.

A very effective touch where, after listening to 5 minutes of meditative music, Death (Morgan and Petter in this case), would arrive and facilitate the lottery. This waiting was like sitting in the waiting room of a hospital:

Hopeless faces of people prepared to die, counting their previous escapades, weighing their own chance of survival. The sheer amount of despair and misery as these few minutes, were choked in silence, and turned inwards into deep reflection.

This filled the room with a very powerful energy, persisting through the writing of the tickets and escalating during the lottery.

THE LOTTERY

The drawing itself added the unfairness of random selection, which worked very well. Drawing the tickets in (almost) total silence, became an accelerant for the people related to the victims, and the victims themselves, enabling players to experience a broad array of feelings, and build up an intense package for the character to use in the funeral scene. This was the culmination of the suspense.





THE POTENTIAL FOR LIFE OR DEATH

The waiting was essential. This was while the contaminated were taken to the “fear of death ” meta-scene, before the remaining characters knew who was going to live and who would die among the taken.

This silent wait, and the walk to the funeral grounds, were the time for running through all the possible futures; the time to fear what tomorrow would bring; and the time to hope for the best. An absolutely essential mechanic, which I guess, more or less intentionally, would bring an element of angst and the horror of ‘not knowing’ into the bleeding pool.

THE FUNERAL SCENE - AS SEEN FROM THE UNINFECTED CHARACTERS' POINT OF VIEW

This was a very tough scene, balancing on the fine edge between being a very powerful catalyst for the relatives of the deceased and being emotional terrorism for the players. This was where the deceased would lie in open caskets, and people would say their goodbyes. Having built up this ticking bomb of all the different stages of emotional distress one goes through at the death of a loved one, was very risky business as it was compressed into a one-hour experience, but came through beautifully.

It actually triggered immense amounts of empathy and caring from everyone involved and became a very thought provoking and powerful ending to each act.

THE FUNERAL SCENE - "FEAR OF DEATH"

Being picked in the lottery was a whole different ballgame.

This was equally tough, but became a mixture of grief over the possible loss of character, and unresolved caring and intense love for the other characters. This was, in my case where I was not chosen to die, a powerful element for future gameplay, and getting cancer just added to this. It turned out, that these few minutes would redefine the last act for my character, and the effects would give me the best play of the game.

All in all, I am in awe over this piece of game-design, very beautifully made, and very well executed. A powerful game-mechanic with only a few flaws. Brilliant.



WHY PLAY A GAME ABOUT AIDS?

by Alexander Boepple

When I told friends, larpers and non-larpers alike, about *Just a Little Lovin'*, I was often met with curiosity. That is a good thing, but in most cases the understanding only went so far. Even though most people get what I did there, a question frequently asked was “Why on earth would one bother to spend a week of one’s holiday dealing with themes as unpleasant and threatening as AIDS, loss and death?”

Apparently it did not matter that I emphatically stressed the presence and prevalence of positive themes such as friendship, love and compassion. The question remained: why larp about HIV/AIDS and disease in general?

As a gay man I know about HIV/AIDS. I know of its dangers and I know why safe sex is important and how to do it. When I came out in high school in the late 90s, one of the first things a straight friend told me was to be careful and to always have safe sex.

Hence, for me sex has always been connected with HIV/AIDS – or, to be more precise, with the need to protect oneself against HIV/AIDS. Still, until I started preparing for the larp *Just a Little Lovin'*, I did not know much about HIV/AIDS. I knew that it was out there and I knew that people still got infected – lately with an increasing number of new infections. It worried and troubled me. It worried and troubled me like the political climate in the United States or the war in Afghanistan.

It seemed to me something that was very far away and not really a part of my life, nothing that affected me personally. I knew that it was dangerous, but then again, I also knew how to protect myself. In the naive, absent-minded ignorance of someone who feels safe and protected, I was oblivious to the cultural impact HIV/AIDS had and still has - not only on the gay community but on all our lives no matter what sexual orientation.

Author’s disclaimer: I am fully aware that AIDS was by far not the only topic of the game, but for me, it was the most dominant one

Preparing for and playing *Just a Little Lovin'* changed my attitude towards HIV/AIDS and related issues greatly – not just on a cognitive level due to research, but also, and more profoundly, on an emotional level as it allowed me to empathize with the people who were (and are) more directly affected. That is a powerful thing.

This possibility to ever so vaguely (and most likely inadequately) experience what it must have been like to have been there when the AIDS epidemic hit the world is one reason that made *Just a Little Lovin'* such an amazing and rewarding experience for me.

Watching films about the topic as part of the preparation for the larp is one thing, physically and emotionally experiencing it is quite another – and watching films about it did not prepare me for the emotional impact at all. Playing the larp was so much more direct and – in a way – real, as it allowed me to approach the topic emotionally. This made me connect with the topic and a whole plethora of feelings that surrounded this it in a way that books and films can never achieve.





In my opinion, it is the brilliantly designed game mechanics and structure of the larp that makes this powerful emotional connection possible. The carefully balanced routine of workshops, briefings, debriefings and time to engage with other players more informally helped me to not only get to know my character (which was not always easy because it was too close to home), but also to create a very strong and detailed network of relationships – between players and characters alike.

As I only knew some of the players (having been the only German player), I had the chance to get to know players and characters at the same time. Now in retrospect, this led to the interesting scenario that I, as a player, and my character, moved and developed simultaneously but in parallel worlds, which I think is one reason why the game had such a strong element of bleed for me. I have never played a larp that caused more bleed.

In addition to this possibility of experiencing powerful emotions such as fear of loss and death, which partly led to a closer understanding of the effect of the AIDS epidemic, the larp also facilitated the experience of equally powerful positive emotions such as friendship and – most of all – love. The contrast to the negative emotions dealt with during the game made me feel and appreciate these positive emotions much more.

And as the effect of bleed was not at all restricted to the negative emotions, the larp – in the end – made me feel good. I not only learned a lot about HIV/AIDS, felt more compassion for the people who experienced the epidemic during the 1980s and in total gained a more holistic understanding of how AIDS affected the world we live in. I also felt love and compassion more strongly – compassion for the people who have suffered because of AIDS and love for the wonderful people with whom I had the privilege to play this larp. At the end of the day, *Just a Little Lovin'*, for me, was full of love.



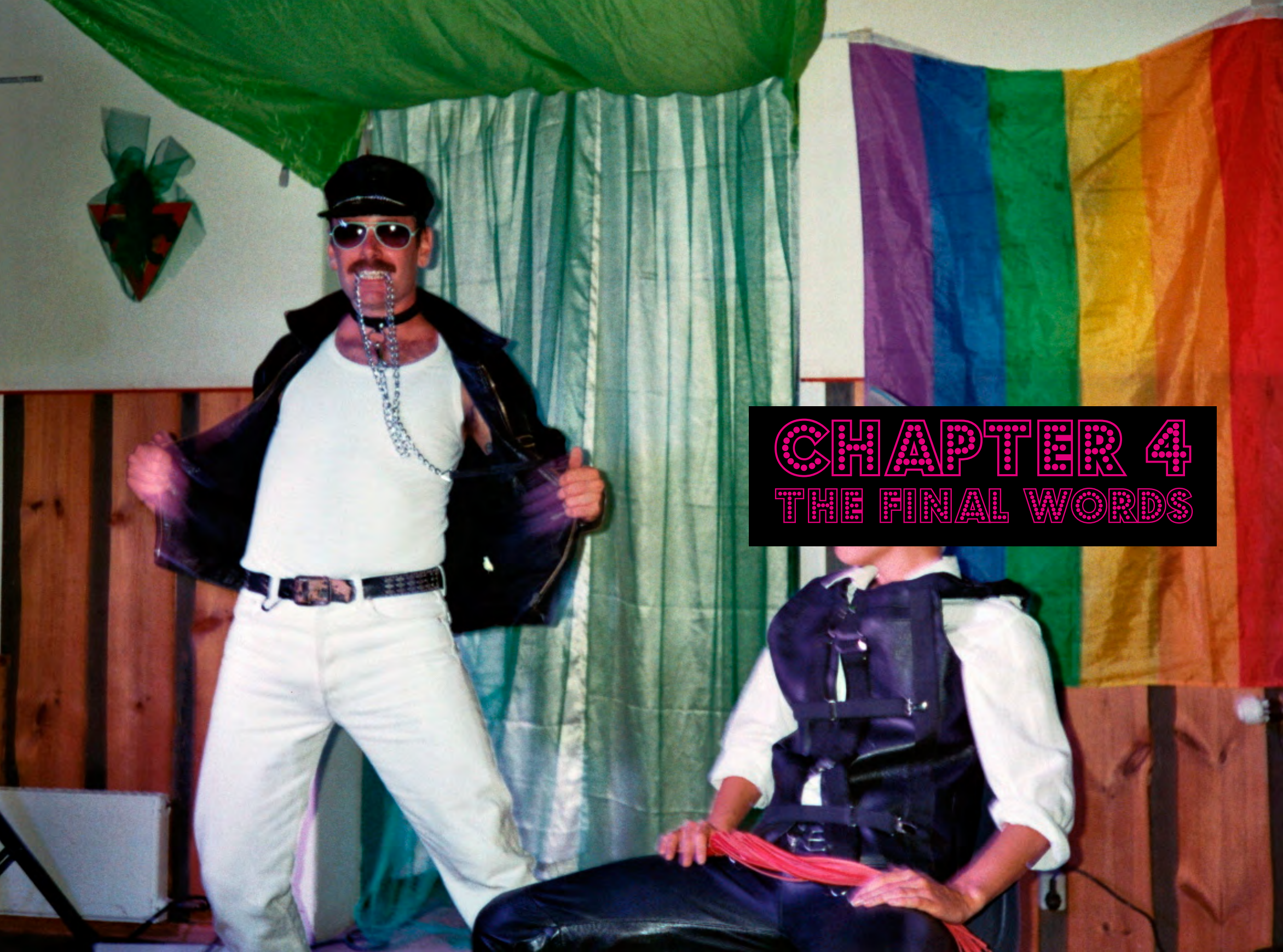
Jorgo: “I actually came to see them [the undertakers] as some sort of creepy angels - come to take away the souls of the dead. They really crept me out. I didn’t want to look at them, because I felt, that I would somehow draw their attention. They were untouchable and out of this world.”

Jorgo: “I remember hating them. But in a very impersonal way. They became like forces of nature to me - unpredictable and terrifying and utterly alien with their constant mindless babbling and strange detached compassion. Like they were staring at us and feeling with us through the lens of a microscope.”

Alex: “I’m with you there, Jorgo - in the sense that they felt unstoppable, inevitable, compassionate and horrible. I remember looking around, seeing all those fearful faces and people clinging to each other, and thinking “we are children, and they have come to eat us all up””

Carolina: “I also liked that Pepper had to help them. His voice... So terrified everytime he said a name. It was a good contrast to the ‘angels’.”

Alex: “Yes, he was really on our side, and it seemed such a terrible thing that he had to be the one to pick us.”



CHAPTER 4
THE FINAL WORDS

SO MUCH LOVE TO YOU ALL

by Morgan Jarl

After the larp, as we in the organizer group did our debrief, it struck me. The question in the customary round was “How am I feeling right now?” and my answer was easy, yet complex enough to summarize the objective of this whole project, the game design and larp.

“Love”, I started.

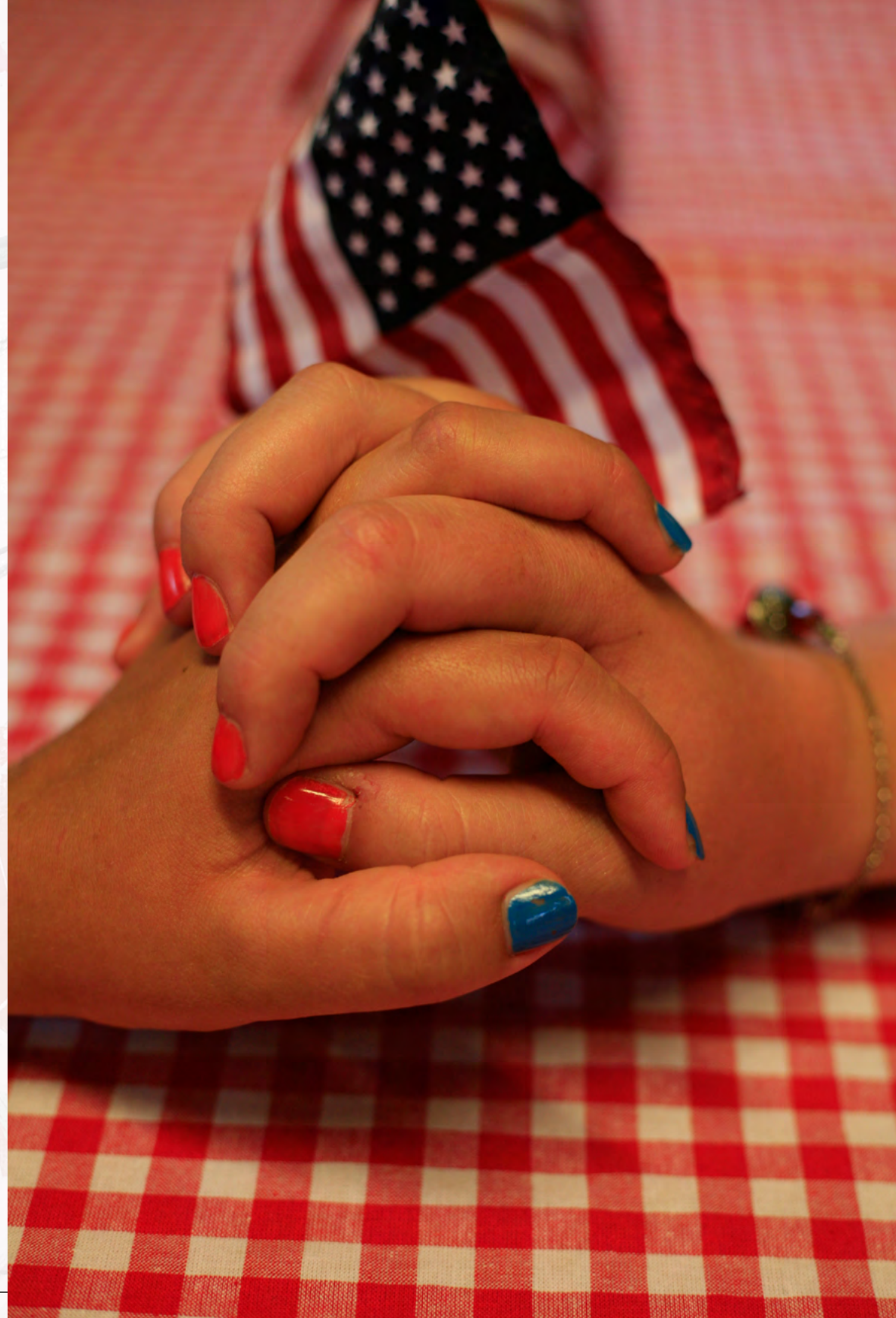
“So much love. Not just the love that I feel for you all, nor even just the love that everyone, player and organizer alike, feel for each other in this post-larp frenzy we are in.”

This game is not designed for us to understand how it is to die from AIDS or have someone you love do it, nor is it possible to do so unless you have been there. The point is not for us to understand how it is to be a gay man, a lesbian or an alternative lifestyle in the early 80s. It is not a game with the goal to educate, even if it does that too.

It is impossible for us to understand. What this game does is to make us love. Love these people we have been for three days. Love the people that inspired them. It makes us love the people who need our love, not our pity or contempt.

The love we feel for people we have never met, and those that are the social descendants of these people - transgender, homo and queer people. That love, the love we feel towards them, that is the Love I feel right now. The Love that spreads in the world to counter fear and hatred. Love of our fellow humans.”

Love and Respect



I CHOOSE LOVE

by Signe Løndahl Hertel

What happened in those days of august 2013?
What did we witness?
Was it a love story?
A tragedy?

An elegy?
Was it ours?
Or was it theirs?

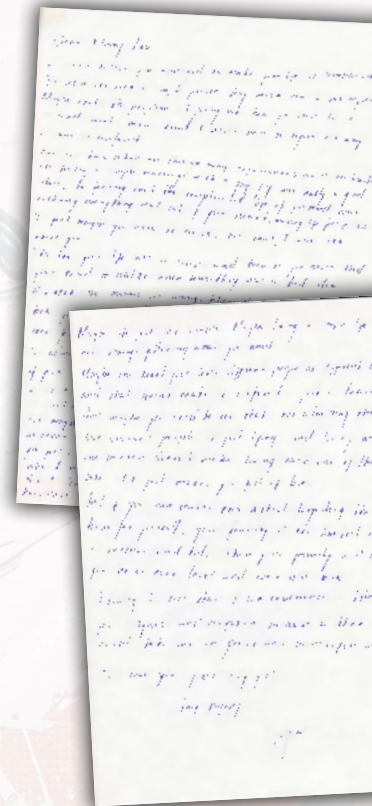
In those days I was forced to love, to lose, to be scared and be brave. I was forced to stumble and let someone else pick me up, accepting their support 'till the day I die. I was forced to put my faith in others in a way I have only dared to put my faith in few. This story we witnessed with tears in our eyes, stones in our chests, shivering bodies and beating hearts.

I have never felt so violently confronted with every weakness in me, everyone one which I have always tried to shed and to hide. Yet now I feel more strong, more complete, more beautiful than ever.

As if having witnessed this I dare look life straight in the face saying this:

I am ready to live. No matter what you throw at me, no matter what you take from me, no matter how many times you let me down. I will stand tall, smiling and embracing, for I have evicted cynicism and fear from my heart!

I choose love!



Dear Mary Lou

I can't believe you managed to make your life so complicated. You seem like such a simple person. Very much how I see myself. Maybe that's the problem... Figuring out how you could be so confused would mean that I would have to figure out why I am so confused.

But you have taken me through many experiences and realisations like feeling a simple marriage with a gay guy was really a good idea, to feeling that the complicated life of pretend was sucking everything real out of your heart, making life feel hollow. I feel maybe you were to naïve, but that, I also like about you.

It's like your life was so complicated because you never used your head to realize when something was a bad idea. But that also means you always followed your heart if it took you in a direction, or changed the direction you had been following. I admire that, even though I'm scared that it was because of your naivety and not because of courage.

I do not know if I'm a lot like you or actually not at all. I don't even know who is the stronger person. But maybe I should stop figuring out how we resemble one another and just think of you as a person that does what you feel is right in the moment, and try figuring out who I am, and what I feel is right. But I love you and hope every choice you take brings you happiness. And I hope to make the right choices for me.

Maybe life just isn't simple. Maybe living a simple life means not always following what you want. Maybe the heart just loves different people at different moments, and that doesn't make it confused – just a heart. And maybe you need to see that not admitting that you love several people is just lying, and loving more than one person doesn't make loving each one of them any less. It just makes you full of love.

And if you can realize this without forgetting the love you have for yourself, your family is not limited to only a partner and kids. Then your family will be everyone you have ever loved and ever will love. Actually I hope that I can experience a little of your silliness and confusion, because I think it could take me on great and wonderful adventures.

I love you, you silly girl.
Stay happy.
Signe





THANK YOU FOR READING
THANK YOU FOR CARING

**JUST A LITTLE LOVIN'
EARLY IN THE MORNIN'
BEATS A CUP OF COFFEE
FOR STARTING OFF THE DAY**

**- FROM THE SONG:
JUST A LITTLE LOVIN'**