

These Are the Days of Our Lives

1.1 *Synopsis*

These Are the Days of Our Lives is a four-hour chamber larp scenario about the lives of a group of women friends.

It consists of four scenes in which the characters meet up in their late teens, late 20s, late 30s and late 40s. Between these scenes are offgame interludes in which the players choose the life events that they want to have happened to their characters during the ten-year intervening period.

The scenario is soundtracked by music of the period appropriate for each scene, which serves as a timekeeper as well as setting underlying mood.

The gamesmaster role is primarily that of an offgame facilitator, with minimal intervention during live scenes.

The scenario is preceded by a preparatory workshop, and followed by a group debrief.

1.2 *Vision*

The design intention of *These Are the Days of Our Lives* is for players to explore and experience the drama of real lives. Play should be naturalistic and expressive. It will mix comic and tragic moments, light-hearted enjoyment and serious concern and grief, in the same way that life itself does. The players will be fitting thirty years' worth of ups and downs – in their characters' own lives, and in their interrelationships – into a few hours of play, so it will be an emotionally intense experience which may drain or elevate. They'll be invited to become strongly bonded as a group; and they may have reflections on their own lives as a result of what they've experienced in play.

2 Introduction

These Are the Days of Our Lives is about the evolution of female friendships over time. It is interested in the ebb and flow of warmth, trust, respect and emotional closeness around the group, as time goes on and life events happen. It's also interested in players' exploration of how women's lives express themselves as they grow older.

2.1 *Players and GM*

For four to six players and one GM. If you can't get six players, or if someone can't make it at the last minute, you can still play the larp with five or even four. In this situation, the GM can choose to play one of the characters as well as their facilitation duties. (It's recommended that you do choose this, if it's possible – firstly because it's fun, and secondly because it'll help you understand better what the other players are experiencing.)

Otherwise, the GM will just facilitate – reading through these instructions in advance and being prepared to tell everyone what to do, when.

2.2 *Practicalities*

2.2.1 *Timing*

The larp consists of four 30-minute scenes, with three 15-minute interludes inbetween. Preceded by a 60-minute workshop which will prepare the players for the larp, and succeeded by a 15-minute debrief in which they'll talk about their experiences of it. The total time should be four hours.

With experienced players, it's possible to omit parts of the workshop (this is discussed below). If you're able to save time this way, then use it to make the interludes between scenes longer.

2.2.2 *Space requirements*

Ideally *These Are the Days of Our Lives* would take place in a neutral, reconfigurable space, such as a theatre studio. Otherwise a social space such as a pub's function room or a domestic living-room can be used: or any plain room such as a classroom, if that's all you have. It should be free from interruption and being overheard, and should have the facility to play music.

2.2.3 *Contents*

This script includes:

- instructions for the GM;
- six character skeletons;
- one page of intro questions (copy this six times);
- a page of extra material for each character;

- six relationship cards;
- 60 life-event cards (10 are blank).

If you can, print the relationship and life-event cards onto card (if not available, paper is fine). Cut them all apart; and laminate the relationship cards, if you can.

2.2.4 Equipment

You'll also need:

- a timer;
- pens and blank paper;
- a way of playing music;
- ideally, chairs of various types (bar stools, dining chairs, lounge chairs), six of each kind. If not, any six chairs will do;
- a separate table off to one side away from the main play area, that you can use for admin.

2.2.5 Music

The larp works best if you can play music during it, both for atmosphere and for timing. If that just isn't possible, it's not a problem, the larp will still work: but you'll have to time the scenes manually.

2.3 *Alcohol*

Characters in the larp are likely to be drinking alcohol during at least some of the scenes (unless they're decided to be teetotal, or driving that day, or whatever). It's up to you if you have the players drinking alcohol as well – larp cultures vary a lot around this. If you don't have actual alcohol, it would be good to have some other liquid available that the players can use to simulate their characters' drinking of alcohol (and, if they wish, intoxication).

2.4 *Cultural assumptions*

This larp was written in the UK and embodies cultural assumptions about a First World lifestyle (in which, for example, women attending university and having careers is unremarkable; also alcohol as noted above). This was a conscious design choice both to narrow the larp's focus and also to reflect the designer's relative ignorance of other cultural backgrounds. If you want to adapt the larp to better describe the roles and lives of women in your own culture, you are encouraged to do so.

2.5 *Note for the GM*

This set of instructions has been written so that it can be used by people who aren't familiar with larp, or with roleplaying: so it goes into detail and spells everything out. If you are an experienced roleplayer or larper, you'll be familiar with a lot of this, so you'll be able to skip over most of the explanations.

As facilitator, depending on how many people you have, you might get to play the larp in the normal way like everyone else, but also you have to read and enact these instructions about what's supposed to happen when and how.

In the script, text that you're supposed to read out to the other players is in italics and in a box:

like this.

You don't have to read it out verbatim – please do feel free to use your own words and to improvise, explain in more detail, repeat, answer questions and so on – whatever will work best for you and the players. And if you're playing a character yourself, substitute 'we' for 'you' where appropriate!

2.6 *Extra material*

This larp has been designed to be largely improvised and to draw upon its players' own creativity. The possibility of creating and exploring their mutual story, rather than having a narrative imposed upon them, is an important part of allowing players to get the most out of their experience.

It is understood, though, that some players may feel uncomfortable with the idea of developing their characters and stories 'dry' from a small amount of initial material. To help support players who would like it, the larp includes extra background and story material that players can use if they wish, to give them more to work with. You will explain to the players during the preparatory workshop how they can use this material; but you should also keep an eye on them during the actual game, and prompt them to use it if they look stuck or lost. Also, you should feel free to make suggestions of your own, if the players want more.

3 Workshop

The larp is preceded by a preparatory workshop which helps get the players prepared for play, and also allows them to develop their characters and the setting a little, so they can hit the ground running when play starts.

3.1 Note for the GM

This workshop has been designed for players who are unfamiliar with improvised larp, and perhaps unfamiliar with larp or with gaming in general. Depending on who you've got playing and what their experience is, you may want to shorten, omit, or lengthen some of the elements.

You should take part in all these exercises yourself, whether or not you're playing the larp yourself. Partly so as to show the players what to do, and partly so as to help with binding the group.

3.2 Intro

Welcome everyone to the larp, and ask the players to each in turn introduce themselves, say what their experience of larp and gaming is (if any), and say a fun or interesting fact about themselves. Start this off yourself, so they can see what you mean them to do.

Eg. "I'm Ashley, I've never larped before although I have done some tabletop role-playing. I once had to run away from an enraged bull, when I was walking in Devon."

Then say to the players:

This larp is going to take about four hours in total. The first part is a preparatory workshop, which we've already started – that should take about an hour. Then the main part of the larp is in four scenes, with interludes inbetween. And then at the end there'll be a short debrief in which we can share our experiences and thoughts about of what we've been doing.

3.3 About the workshop

The idea of a preparatory workshop may be new to the players, so here's a brief explanation that you can give them about it. (Edit it as appropriate if you've decided to cut bits out of the workshop.)

The main point of the workshop is to get you all ready for the main part of the larp, so that when it starts you can get into it right away; and generally to make sure you get the most out of the experience. So there are four strands to that: preparing your bodies, preparing your minds, preparing you as a group, and preparing your characters. And then also I'll explain how we're going to actually play the larp, and how the details of it are going to work.

So first you'll warm up your bodies to make yourselves flexible, open and receptive. Then you'll ready your minds for improvising dialogue and responding to each other's ideas. After that you'll talk about trust, and how you can work together safely as a group. Then I'll explain how the larp works, and what you're going to be doing during it, and how. Then finally you'll take up our characters, talk and think about them as people, and ready yourselves for playing them in the larp.

People may have questions about what's going to happen. For most of the likely questions, you can say that they'll be answered during the course of the workshop: this is better than pulling answers forward to now when they'll be out of context.

3.4 Warmup

If you have a preferred warmup for a small group, do please use it. Otherwise, a good one you can use is 'Shake hands'. Tell the players:

Everyone stand up. Now when I say "Go!" all of you are going to shake hands with someone, say "Hello, I'm [whatever your name is]," and then rapidly move on to do the same with someone else. The target is to have shaken hands with and introduced yourself to all five other players as quickly as possible.

If anyone would prefer not to shake hands, that's fine – instead, stand in front of the other person, meet their eyes, and salute while saying "Hello, I'm [whatever your name is]."

Set a timer, and say:

Go!

That should be pretty straightforward for them to do, so next say:

Right, as that was easy, you're now going to do the same thing again, but this time you have 10 seconds less [or 5 seconds less, if they did it really quickly the first time]. Go!

If they manage that as well, repeat it with time reduced again: and then again, etc, until you get to the point where it's not possible to shake hands with everyone in the time allowed. By this point everyone should be well warmed up, and probably laughing together with relief.

3.5 Trust

Say:

During this larp it's important that you can trust each other, and part of that means being comfortable around physical contact. It might be natural for a group of friends to touch one another – anything from affectionate hugs to angry swipes. But if you as players are personally not so keen on physical touch, that's fine, of course. You just need to be sure about what your boundaries are, and then you can use these techniques for 'deflecting' any attempt at touch that you'd rather not accept, without disrupting the flow of the game. So this is if eg. your character is happy to be touched in this way, but you as a player are not. If on the other hand your character doesn't want to be touched in that way, then you can just play out his refusal as normal. These deflections are for if you want the touch to have been accepted and taken place in-game, but not to actually physically play it out.

- *To deflect a handshake: put your hand in your pocket;*
- *to deflect a hug: turn your body sideways;*
- *to deflect a kiss on the cheek: put your hand alongside your face;*
- *to deflect a kiss on the lips: put your finger over your lips.*

And then get the players to practise the deflection techniques, in pairs. Change the pairs around between types of deflection. Then say:

Violence is handled slightly differently. We don't want anyone to be suffering damage, even if they don't mind it. So we use stage slap/punch techniques to give the effect of a blow without any actual impact.

And have them practise stage slaps and punches in pairs.

3.6 How to play

Depending on what sort of background your players have (larpers, freeformers, storygamers, other-gamers, non-gamers) you may need to explain how a larp like this works. Judge for yourself how much of this you need to tell them.

During the game scenes, play will be fully live, ie. you will embody your character, move as her, speak as her, and so on, like an actor does in a play. You won't narrate "I go over and say hallo"; you'll just go over and say "Hallo". You should respond to questions etc as your character would respond, if she was a real person.

Your characters are only described briefly, and what happens to them during their lives is described even more briefly. The details are all up to you – you as players will be providing most of the content of the larp. I, as facilitator, won't be contributing any new material during play – there isn't any 'GM plot' that will kick in, and there are no secrets apart from those that you decide to keep from each other.

If you do have secrets, the expectation is that they'll come out during the course of the game – to make a better story. You'll be able to judge when it's dramatically best to reveal your secrets, or to spread clues so the other players can guess them.

I also won't be applying any rules or system, or making any judgement calls about what is or isn't allowed, or when certain things should be done or said. I will just be managing the timing of the scenes, by starting the background music. The larp is essentially unmoderated.

3.7 Expectations of play style

Say that:

The game will play out in a naturalistic way, without any zombies or aliens or Cthulhu or whatever. The events that take place will be things that could plausibly happen in real life. More dramatic than normal – if you want that – but generally within the bounds of belief.

The point of the game is not to 'win', or to solve a mystery, or to achieve any particular set of goals or targets. It is simply to play out a dramatic story in interaction with the other players. If you've had some strong interactions and emotions, and found relationships and experiences that were interesting or powerful to us, then that's success.

Although this larp is mostly set in the past, it's not intended to be a historical exercise – that's why it doesn't name specific years. You don't need to know the details of eg. who was Prime Minister or what was Number One in the charts when your characters first meet. The larp is about them as people, the age that they are and where they are in their lives, rather than being about the outside world. If a player says something that doesn't tie in to your recollection or understanding of the actual historical time being played, just let it pass.

3.8 Safety

Explain to the players that:

Your personal emotional safety is very important. We want to make sure that you can all enjoy the larp, and have a powerful emotional experience, but without crossing anyone's boundaries of comfort (unless they want to).

3.8.1 Lines and Veils

If you weren't able to ask people in advance of the larp about **Lines** and **Veils**, read this now:

There is a risk with largely improvised larps, like this one, that people will unwittingly introduce material that another player finds distressing or otherwise squickening. But it's important that the larp be a 'safe space' where you know you can trust the other players to care about our emotional welfare. So we use this way to flag up certain topics or actions as 'off limits' from the start.

*A **Line** is a topic that you personally don't want to be included in the larp at all. Perhaps because it's painfully triggering for you, perhaps because you think it's generally inappropriate for a larp such as this, or for any other reason: you don't have to explain or defend it. So, for example, you may not want to deal with the idea of suicide in any way at all: this would be declared as a 'line' and so will not appear in the larp. You might not want the larp to involve cruelty to animals. You might not want violent racism to play a part.*

*Then a **Veil** is a topic that you're OK to have included in the larp, but you'd like a veil to be drawn over its actual enactment, ie. play shouldn't go into blow-by-blow detail. Again this can be for any reason. A common one is in-game sex – if two characters want to have sex in the larp, it can just be accepted that they have done so, and they will refrain from describing it. Or you might prefer to not have the nature of physical injuries described in detail. Or if someone finds a spider, you don't want it described or brandished about. And so on.*

But note, this is intended to be as emotionally intense a larp as you want it to be, and to include the potential to cover material that you do find distressing, in a safe way that may help you deal with those feelings. So don't just automatically rule out everything that you think might be difficult – also think about what you actually would quite like to keep in and to talk about in-character with the others.

Invite the players to individually write down any **Lines** and **Veils** that they wish to flag up, on pieces of paper. They should then pass those to you, and you should copy them into a list (together with any of your own) – in random order, so it isn't obvious who suggested which item.

If any of the topics that people have asked to **Line** are reflected in the Life Event cards – for example, if someone's asked to **Line** 'religion', there are two Life Event cards that are about that – remove those Life Event cards from the deck, so they won't be present during play.

Read out the list. Then put it prominently on display for the players to refer to during play and interludes, should they need to.

3.8.2 Cut and Brake

(You can skip the details of this if players are already familiar with **Cut and Brake**: just say that they can use them as normal.)

Then add:

*Sometimes when people are improvising freely during play, their memories will not be perfect, and someone may accidentally introduce Lined or Veiled material. This is not a problem – you shouldn't hold yourself back from improvising material for fear of having forgotten something. If it does happen, the people you're interacting with can if they wish use **Cut** or **Brake** to indicate that you should back up and go again. No blame will attach, we are all human. (Hopefully.)*

***Cut** and **Brake**, if you aren't familiar with them, are two common safety techniques for use during play. Saying "Cut" creates an instant local time-out – play stops in that interaction. Saying "Brake" signals to a player that they should ease off the direction in which they're taking the narrative, and tone things down. In both cases, you absolutely don't have to explain why you've called it. (Although you can if you want to.)*

Cut is also useful for physical safety, like if someone breaks a glass or loses a contact lens or something. When you hear someone say "Cut!", repeat it out loud yourself and then go quiet and stand still. This is to make sure the cut spreads quickly through the group.

It's good to practise using Cut and Brake, so people are familiar with them and will be OK to use them during the larp if they should need to. They can be practised in pairs. Agree beforehand an innocuous topic that will be Cut (eg. coffee) and one that will be Braked (eg. jogging). Then have conversations in pairs, about everyday activity. Either player can, whenever they want to, take the initiative of 'accidentally' introducing the chosen Cut or Brake topics into the conversation. When one player introduces the Cut topic, the other is to say "Cut!" and the first should repeat it and stop the conversation. Similarly when one player introduces the Brake topic, the other should say "Brake!" and the first should tone down their description and take the conversation in another direction.

3.8.3 The Door is Open

Then:

*And finally while we're talking about safety, the last rule is that **The Door is Open**. This means that any of you can leave the larp at any point. If it's getting too much for you, or you aren't enjoying it, for any reason – you can step out, without any blame or criticism or needing to explain yourself. And then you can come back and rejoin later, or not, as you prefer – either way is fine. Basically there's no pressure on you at all to stay in the larp if you don't really want to.*

3.9 Internal monologue and Ping the glass

The game includes two techniques which players can use to enhance their enjoyment. They break the naturalistic frame a little, but they're pretty simple and they do add a lot to the larp experience. If you'd rather not use them, though, that's absolutely fine – just skip this section.

Explain them to the players:

As well as ordinary conversation, we also have a couple of 'meta' ways in which you can express your character's thoughts. You don't have to use these, but they're included just in case they're useful.

*First, you can do an **internal monologue**. Stand by yourself, over to one side of the room, and stretch one of your hands up. Everyone else will notice you and go quiet. This is your opportunity to talk for a minute or so about your character's current thoughts, fear, hopes – a window into her internal monologue. Reality will pause briefly while you do so. Then, when you've finished, sit back down and carry on the scene as normal, as though nothing had happened. The purpose of this is to give the other players (but not their characters) some insight into your character, so that if they wish they can shape play to give you a more satisfying game. So this is useful if you've got some character aspect that you want to express, but which wouldn't normally come up in conversation, and which it would feel forced for you to introduce. An example might be if you are very ill: your character might not want to mention it. But the other players might not have noticed that you're 'acting ill'. You can use the monologue to talk about how terrible you're feeling: and hopefully at some point after the scene resumes, one of the others will ask "So, how have you been lately?" and introduce the subject.*

*The other technique is similar but it involves another player. If you **ping someone else's glass** with your finger, this pauses reality in the same sort of way, and invites them to raise their glass high and say what is currently on their character's mind. When they've finished, they lower their glass, and the scene resumes. This is useful if you can sense that one of the other players is thinking about something, but there's no easy conversational way to bring it out.*

And have everyone practise these two techniques, so people are familiar with them and will recognize them during the larp.

(The reason it's pinging the glass with a finger, rather than chinking glasses together, is that people might be just chinking glasses naturally as part of play, not meaning to trigger a pause. So it's better to use something that people wouldn't normally do!)

3.10 Calibration

Tell the players:

So, you're now going to agree some details about where your characters are at university. They have all just arrived there: they're going to be meeting each other for the first time at a student disco. So the purpose of this bit is to get all of you into the same understanding of where the game starts.

Each of you in turn will make a statement about the town or the university itself. For example: it's on a picturesque river, or it's a poor city with lots of unemployment, or it's famous for a particular kind of cake, or there's an animal experimentation lab which gets protested regularly, or there's a good music scene... anything you want. If everyone else is happy with the statement, that's great, move on to the next person. If someone doesn't understand what you mean, they can ask you to elaborate or explain a little. You'll carry on going until everyone's made two statements.

And the idea isn't to suggest any particular town or university in the real world – but to achieve an imaginary one which will have enough agreed detail to feel real to you.

The players can write down the statements if they want, but it shouldn't be necessary.

If anyone really objects to another player's statement, they can ask them to replace it with a different one. (This should be pretty unusual.)

3.11 Character choice

Spread the six **Character skeletons** out on a table, so everyone can see them clearly.

Tell the players to come to the table together, spread out around it, and each choose a character – whichever one they most want to play. (If the last person gets stuck with a character they don't want, get someone else to swap with them.)

Once they've chosen and read through their chosen characters in detail, give each player the list of **Intro questions**. Tell the players to think about the answers to those questions. They can write the answers down if they want, but there's no need to do so if they think they'll remember them without. The answers are only for themselves, to help fill out the character – they will not be seen by anyone else. They should not say the answers out loud.

Give them five minutes or so for this. If anyone asks for **Extra material**, give them the piece that's appropriate for their character: or if you think someone looks lost and might benefit from extra material, ask them if they'd like to have it.

3.12 Take-off

Gather everyone together at one end of the room, away from the space where the main part of the larp will be taking place. Ask the players to form a line in order of who, out of their characters, would be most likely to turn up early for a student introductory party: earliest at the front, latest at the back. If a player doesn't know whether their character would be likely to turn up early or late, that's OK, they can just go into the middle of the line. If you're playing yourself as well as GMing, go on the back of the line.

Say:

The setting of this first scene will be a university student disco at the beginning of term: you are all newly arrived, at the age of 19 or so (you can each decide for yourselves exactly how old you are), and have never met each other before. The scene will last about 30 minutes.

Throughout the larp, the Queen song 'These Are the Days of Our Lives' (which you're shortly going to hear, in case anyone doesn't know it already) will be used to signal when each scene ends: when you hear it start to play, that means the current scene has only a few minutes to go, and it will end when the song finishes.

*Remember the meta-techniques that you can use – **internal monologue**, and **ping the glass**.*

I'm going to play the song now, to start the game. When it finishes, the soundtrack of the first scene will start. You're all then going to individually enter the game space, in character, and take a seat (or not, if you think your character would prefer standing). First the person who's at the 'early' end of the line (who will be sitting by herself at first); then after half a minute or so I'll send in the next person (at which point these two can start playing together); and so on until everyone's in the scene.

Tell them that if they want to go to the bar and get drinks, or to use the bathroom, during this scene or the other scenes to come, that's absolutely fine – they can just do that in character. There's no need to ask for a time-out or for the larp to be paused. But as each scene only lasts half an hour, they probably don't want to take too many minutes out of it, so make the visit quick!

Close your eyes – the song's about to start. While it's playing, think about your character – that young woman about to start her adult life. Think about where she's come from – her family and her background. Think about where she might be going to – her hopes and dreams. How will she fit into the university that you've described together? How will she make friends? When the song stops, you will no longer be yourself – you will be in that character, bringing her to life.

Start the Scene 1 soundtrack, which is preceded by 'These Are the Days of Our Lives'. It should be quite loud, as it's a disco, but not so loud as to make talking difficult. (Although if you have players with hearing issues, consideration for them should come above this – don't have it any louder than everyone's comfortable with.) When that song finishes, prompt the first person to go into the game, if they don't do so by themselves. Then prompt the next person to enter the game after half a minute or so, and so on.

4 The main part of the larp

4.1 Music

The four scenes each have a soundtrack which lasts 30 minutes (plus or minus a minute) and which ends with Queen's song 'These Are the Days of Our Lives'. (This is how the players know the end of the scene is at hand.)

For the first three scenes it's music of the 80s, 90s and 00s respectively; for the fourth scene it's subdued organ music, but still ending with 'These Are the Days of Our Lives'.

4.2 Scene 1 (30 minutes)

Setting: a university disco.

Ideal furnishing: six uncomfortable plastic stacking chairs, arranged around one edge of the space

Ideal lighting: disco lights with flashing colours

The characters meet each other for the first time, aged 19 or so, at a university disco. They are all newly arrived at university, and this is one of the first social events of the term, set up to get people to meet each other and make friends.

Initially there may be awkward silences and a feeling of not much to talk about. This is OK – it will match what the characters themselves should be feeling in this situation. Allow play to flow naturally, even when it seems uncomfortable.

When the scene ends (when 'These Are the Days of Our Lives' finishes) put the lights back to normal and bring the players back to the admin table. They should now be out of character.

4.3 Interlude 1 (15 minutes)

4.3.1 Life event cards (5 minutes)

Spread the **Life event cards** out on a table, so everyone can see them. (Don't include the 'Fatal illness or accident' card.) Remember that you should take out and not use any that infringe upon people's **Lines**.

In the interludes between scenes, you get to choose what happens to your character in the intervening ten years. Have a look at the cards, and you can each freely choose up to three of them (just one or two is fine if you feel that's enough for you). Think about your character's personality, her problems and issues, and how her life might develop. What will be interesting for you to play on, and what will take your character on an interesting journey? There's only one of each card, so if one person takes a card, other people can't have the same event (although there are several that are somewhat similar to each other).

You'll see there are some blank cards – you can use these to add any good ideas for life events that you have.

If there's a scramble for the cards, suggest that people take turns and choose just one at a time. But don't let them take too long!

Take your cards away from the table, have another look at them, and think about them. They may require extra information – for example, if you've had children, what are their names? If you have a new job, what is it? Decide the answers to these questions. Don't say anything yet, though: keep the cards, and any extra information you decide upon, to yourself for the moment.

Give them (including yourself, if you're playing as well as GMing) a few minutes for this.

4.3.2 Relationship cards (5 minutes)

Then put out the six **Relationship cards**, shuffled and face down, and get each player (including yourself) to pick one randomly and reveal it.

(If there are only five players, remove one of the '~' cards. The person who draws the other '~' card won't have a match, so they can decide for themselves who they'd like to have that relationship with – but they'll have to wait until that person's finished talking about the relationship that they themselves drew. And if there are only four players, remove both '~' cards.)

You can also decide for yourselves how much each of you has kept up with each of the others over the next ten years. Maybe some of you have seen each other every week, or even house-share or are romantic partners – maybe others won't meet up for years on end. (Or at all, if you've had a falling-out.) It's up to you to agree between yourselves. Have a look at your relationship card, and decide what that means in relation to the other person who's drawn the card that has the matching symbol – discuss it together.

*It's important to **not** roleplay out this conversation – keep it 'out-of-character'. Otherwise it'll take far too long. What that means is, in these interludes, it's you as players talking about what your characters are doing – not the characters themselves talking. And there's no need to go into great detail – just enough to make sure you're both happy with how things stand between you.*

Keep the players firmly to time – it's easy for this activity to take longer than it should, if they start to negotiate and to think too hard. Keep them reminded of the timetable, and don't hesitate to move them on even if they say they aren't quite ready.

4.3.3 Updating the group (5 minutes)

Now that you've talked about your relationships, go round and update the other players on the important things that each of them would know about your life events – so if you see any of them regularly, they would probably know your children's names and what you work at, for example. And add your thoughts about how much you've kept up with the other characters – who you've spent a lot of time with, who you haven't seen as much (or at all). Keep this very brief! – you'll be able to fill in detail during the coming scene.

Gather back in all the life event and relationship cards, and set up the furniture, music and lighting for the next scene. (Get the players to help you!) If the players did write in any new life events (that are good ideas!), add them to the deck for the subsequent interludes.

Then tell the players to prepare for the next scene. This is set in a high-street wine bar, ten years on from the first scene. They should decide amongst themselves which of them it was who set up the reunion, and why. There's no need to debate this – just go with the first person who has an idea for it.

(If the players seem in need of it, then play 'These Are the Days of Our Lives' again while they close their eyes, to re-centre them into the game. This shouldn't be necessary, though. Also, remind them about the meta-techniques, if they didn't use them in the first scene. If they did, you probably won't need to.)

Get them to line up again (it might be in the same order, or some of them might feel their earliness tendencies will have changed over the ten years), and admit them into the scene as before. Start the **Scene 2** soundtrack – it should be not as loud as in **Scene 1**, but still fairly insistent.

4.4 Scene 2 (30 minutes)

Setting: a high-street wine bar.

Ideal furnishing: six bar stools, arranged around the end of a bar counter

Ideal lighting: randomly-oriented bright spotlights piercing relative gloom

In **Scene 2**, ten years on, the characters are aged 29 or so and meeting in a wine bar.

When the scene ends (when 'These Are the Days of Our Lives' finishes') put the lights back to normal and bring the players back to the admin table. They should now be out of character.

4.5 Interlude 2 (15 minutes)

Choose events and draw relationship cards just as in **Interlude 1**. (Make sure you've taken back the event cards that people took then, so they can be put out again: it's OK for the same card to be chosen repeatedly, by the same player or by other players.) Again, don't include the 'Fatal illness or accident' card. If you're playing with five and the same person draws the '~' card as did last time, let them swap it with someone else. Tell the players to discuss with and update each other, as before.

Set up the furnishing, music and lighting for **Scene 3**.

Tell the players that the next scene is set in a cosy café: as before, they should decide who is responsible for organizing this meet-up. It's ten years on from the last scene. Line them up in order again, and admit them to the scene one by one, starting the soundtrack. The music should now be fairly quiet and discreet.

4.6 Scene 3 (30 minutes)

Setting: a cosy cafe.

Ideal furnishing: six comfy chairs, arranged in facing pairs across coffee tables

Ideal lighting: mellow orange-brown mood lighting

In **Scene 3**, ten more years on, the characters are aged 39 or so and meet in a quiet cafe.

When the scene ends (when 'These Are the Days of Our Lives' finishes) put the lights back to normal and bring the players back to the admin table. They should now be out of character.

4.7 Interlude 3 (15 minutes)

Put out the life event cards as previously. This time, though, **do** include the 'Fatal illness or accident' card. Tell the players that one person (but no more than one!) can choose that card. If they do so, that means that they will die towards the end of these ten years, before the next scene, which will take place at their memorial event. They can decide for themselves how their death happens. The dead person will have a rather passive role in the scene, but the conversation will largely be about them and they will be able to get up and whisper voice-in-head comments to the other players, so it shouldn't get boring or uncomfortable.

Voice-in-head comments are words or short phrases that you whisper into the ear of another player. They are a meta thing, not a real voice – they represent that character's memories of your character, and the image of her that they hold. Don't get carried away with saying too much, or doing it constantly – let the conversation flow naturally, and when there's a mention of your character or an allusion to something she was involved with, whisper a memory or a thought to that player. Lie back down on the table inbetween these whispers.

Players choose life event cards, and draw relationship cards, just as before. Tell them to discuss with and update each other, as before.

Set up the furnishing, music and lighting for **Scene 4**.

Tell the players that the next scene is set at a memorial event, ten years on from the last scene. (Note: this is not a funeral, it's a gathering a few weeks after the funeral.) **If none of them chose to take the fatal life-event card**, then ask them to decide who the memorial is for: a mutual friend, or contact of most of them, who has recently died. This shouldn't be someone who any of them are especially close to: because it's not desirable that the scene should be too much focused on the loss and mourning of one character. Rather than being about the dead person, the scene is going to be about them gathering as a group. So they can just invent someone ('an old university comrade') if no suitable character has previously been established in their role-play so far.

If someone did choose the 'Fatal accident or illness' card, the last scene of the larp will be **Scene 4A** below. If no-one chose that card, then instead the last scene will be **Scene 4B** below.

4.8 Scene 4A (30 minutes) – if someone chose the 'Fatal accident or illness' card

Setting: a memorial event for one of the group.

Ideal furnishing: six dining-type chairs, arranged in two rows of three one behind the other. A table covered with cushions – which the dead person can lie on – is in front of the chairs. Vases of white flowers, if you want to go for atmosphere.

Ideal lighting: low normal-house-type-room lighting. A spotlight on the table with the dead person.

In **Scene 4A**, ten years on again, the characters are aged 49 or so and meet at the memorial of one of the group, who has recently died after a fatal accident or illness. Take the player of the dead character into the scene and lie her down: she has to remain silent and unmoving through this scene. Then line the other players up in order again, and admit them to the scene one by one, starting the soundtrack. The music should be only at a background volume level.

When the scene ends (when 'These Are the Days of Our Lives' finishes') put the lights back to normal and declare the game finished. Then start the debrief process.

4.9 Scene 4B (30 minutes) – if no-one chose the 'Fatal accident or illness' card

Setting: a memorial event.

Ideal furnishing: six dining-type chairs, arranged in two rows of three one behind the other. A table covered with cushions is in front of the chairs. Vases of white flowers, if you want to go for atmosphere.

Ideal lighting: low normal-house-type-room lighting. A spotlight on the table with the dead person.

In **Scene 4B**, ten years on again, the characters are aged 49 or so and meet at the memorial of a mutual friend or other person whose death is a sufficient reason to gather them together.

When the scene ends (when 'These Are the Days of Our Lives' finishes') put the lights back to normal and declare the game finished. Then start the debrief process.

5 Debrief

5.1 Guided decompression

Once the final play of 'These Are the Days of Our Lives' finishes, gently tell everyone to sit or lie down, and to be quiet. Say that you are now going to talk them through a transition from the heightened emotional state of the larp back to the real world.

Close your eyes, and get as comfortable and relaxed as your body will let you. Be still. Feel your breath moving in and out – your lungs expanding and contracting. Feel the air passing through your mouth and nose. Take three slow deep breaths – in – out – in – out – in – out. Keep breathing in a gentle, comfortable rhythm.

Feel the solidity of the floor [or of the chair] under you. Feel the weight of your body pressing down through your feet, your legs, your back. Feel yourself being very real and present here in this room.

You aren't your character any more – let her go. The larp is over. You are yourself again. Let yourself come back in. You will move as yourself, talk as yourself, feel as yourself. We will all be together in this room.

Move your fingers gently, then your hands. Tilt your head from side to side. Then, when you're ready to rejoin us, open your eyes.

Get everyone sitting up if they weren't, and in a circle so they can all see each other's faces.

5.2 Positive feedback round

(If time is running short, you can cut this round. But do include it if you can: it's a good mutually-supportive thing to do.)

Explain to the players that each in turn, one of them will remain quiet while the others give that person positive feedback about their play and what they did during the larp.

Try and make it concrete, eg. rather than "You are a good player", say "When you told us about losing your job, it sounded and felt so real!" Give positive feedback about things they did, what their character said, what great conversations they created, their character's body language, and so on. The person giving feedback should not be interrupted: when they're done, they hand over to the next person (in any order) to give more. The person receiving feedback should remain silent throughout (this is important!) They may smile and nod etc, but not speak.

It is expected that every player will receive a roughly similar amount of positive feedback.

When it seems like the group feels they are finished with giving the current person feedback you ask them “Do we have any more positive feedback for X, or should we move on to the next person?” If there are no more comments on the current person, then it’s the next person’s turn to sit quietly and receive feedback.

(See <http://www.gamingaswomen.com/posts/2015/02/positive-feedback-round/> for more details.)

5.3 A general round

Tell the players they can now in turn speak briefly, uninterrupted, about what they thought of the larp and about any feelings that it’s engendered. They don’t have to say anything if they don’t want to, of course. And they should aim not to go on for longer than a minute or so. It’s important to tell them to avoid talking about the details of what happened to them, and to also avoid design-y type thoughts about the larp’s structure, the setup and so on – there’ll be time for that later. This current bit is just for unloading personal reflections.

5.4 Closeout

Thank everyone for coming along and larping, and congratulate them as a group on their performance. It’s over!

Followed by group hug, planned mass drinking session in the cafeteria later, continued talking about what happened in the larp, or whatever else everyone finds agreeable.

5.5 Acknowledgements

These Are the Days of Our Lives is a version of a larp called *Women on the Verge...* which is basically the same but differs in a few small but important respects. Both were designed and scripted by Mo Holkar. And there’s another related game with all male characters, called *Real Men*, which was designed and scripted by Kevin Burns and Mo Holkar.

This larp was to a large extent inspired by playing in *L-World*, a chamber larp written by Lucie Chlumská and translated and run by Iva Vávrová.

Thanks particularly to Becky Annison and Tracy Bose for reading the draft and sharing lots of really helpful thoughts and suggestions; and to Susanne for some lovely extra life events.

And thanks to the wonderful playtesters, Angela, Christi, Ellen, Frances and Stianín.

T _____

How other people see you:

popular, charming, the social focal point

How you see yourself:

trying hard to make people comfortable and happy

You learned a long time ago that you have the gift of being able to attract attention. When you were small, you would often break up arguments or tense family moments by taking centre stage and distracting everyone – you could make people look, everyone thought you were charming and delightful.

As you grew up you found that you were popular: other kids wanted to be with you, to do the activities you suggested, to dress like you even. Sometimes you felt a little uneasy about this. But you realized that you provided an ‘easy in’ for people – if you made the social effort and created a comfortable mood, that helped them fit in and made them happy.

Whether you’ll always be like this, you don’t know. Maybe you’ll get tired of working for other people’s comfort. Or maybe one day you’ll want to find a private happiness for yourself. Time will tell...

G _____

How other people see you:

thoughtful, inventive, hard-working

How you see yourself:

brave enough to be yourself when it counts

You learned a long time ago that you needed to make your own 'safe space'. When you were small, amid the chaos of your family, you were able to retreat into your own imagination and invention. You appeared calm, while your mind was working hard to keep you in a better place.

As you grew up you found that other people praised your creativity, but didn't realize that it was born of self-preservation. You carried on thinking and imagining, and it made you stronger: you could retain your identity and self-belief no matter what was going on around you.

Whether you'll always be like this, you don't know. Maybe something will turn up that you can't turn away from, and you'll crack. Or maybe one day you'll put the fruits of your creative labours out into the public view. Time will tell...

B_____

How other people see you:

warm, kind, good at cooking and providing

How you see yourself:

a partly broken person who wants to help others

You learned a long time ago that you needed to look out for other people. When you were small, you could feel such a lot of pain around you. You felt pain yourself, too: but you knew that by caring for others you could help them through.

As you grew up you became practical, skilled at providing, healing and nurturing generally. People automatically turn to you when they're in need. Your own need – which is sometimes desperate – is known to very few.

Whether you'll always be like this, you don't know. Maybe your reserves of caring will gradually run dry. Or maybe one day you'll be able to heal yourself. Time will tell...

S _____

How other people see you:

childlike, entertaining, always making a joke of things

How you see yourself:

ready to do almost anything to avoid an angry scene

You learned a long time ago that you could take the sting out of a difficult situation by being funny. When you were small, you usually managed to avoid punishment and to turn away anger by being 'the little one'. You knew it wasn't fair, but it worked.

As you grew up you carried on acting young, frivolous and harmless. You found that appearing so unthreatening and unserious was a good way of avoiding confrontation.

Whether you'll always be like this, you don't know. Maybe people will eventually get fed up with your fluffy ways. Or maybe one day you'll feel the need to be taken seriously. Time will tell...

C _____

How other people see you:

abstracted, clever, slightly obsessive

How you see yourself:

carving out a you-shaped space in a difficult world

You learned a long time ago that life wasn't going to be easy for you. When you were small, you saw that other people just seemed to understand how to act and how to be, while you sometimes didn't at all. Thinking, you were good at: interacting with the world, less so.

As you grew up, you more or less worked out how to get along without appearing too odd. You have your interests, and generally people respect them and don't judge your occasional awkwardness too harshly.

Whether you'll always be like this, you don't know. Maybe other people will start to get fed up with your strange ways. Or maybe one day something'll click and you'll no longer have such difficulty fitting yourself into the world. Time will tell...

L_____

How other people see you:

fun, risk-taking, a bit wild

How you see yourself:

feeling like you can only really trust yourself

You learned a long time ago that you were going to have to depend on yourself. When you were small, you were usually left to sort yourself out, make your own decisions, and generally take responsibility for your life.

As you grew up, you realized this was liberating. If no-one else was looking out for you, you could do whatever you wanted. You've had experiences that would freak most people out, and you like to encourage other people to open themselves out too.

Whether you'll always be like this, you don't know. Maybe you'll eventually destroy yourself, or get written off as crazy. Or maybe one day you'll meet someone who you'll allow to take care of you. Time will tell...

Intro questions

Answer these for yourself, don't announce them to the other players. When the larp starts you don't know anything about one another.

- What's your name?
- Where are you from? (A specific place eg. London, or a general description of the type of place eg. a small East Midlands town.)
- What are you studying?
- What do you want to achieve with that?
- What's your family like?
- Are you in a relationship at the moment?
- How do you feel about that?
- Do you believe in something larger and more mysterious than yourself? (Be it a religion or something else.)
- Do you think you'll keep up with your old schoolfriends?

If you feel you'd like some more concrete back-story with which to start your character off, ask the GM for **Extra material**. You don't have to use it, and you can adapt it as you wish: it's just there for anyone who would like more of a foothold to begin with.

Extra material

Make this available for the players to use if they wish to. Some of them may feel that they have enough on their character sheet and intro questions, and that they are happy to invent further details: that's fine, they can ignore this extra material. Or some may prefer to have something more concrete and predefined to start off with: great, that's what this is for. There's a chunk of extra material here for each player for the start of the game.

T_____

[You can use this as a basis to get you started in the larp. Do please amend it however you like!]

Intro

You arrived here at university good and early, and have unpacked and made your room into a beautiful and cosy place. You've met some of the other new students who are your neighbours, and they seem kind of shy and nervous, but generally OK. You haven't found anyone really interesting yet.

You are deeply disappointed with the standard of food in the canteen. Finding nice places to eat is going to have to be a priority! You don't think of yourself as fussy, but you do like things to look nice and to be cooked and served properly.

You heard that there's an interesting-sounding event tomorrow evening *[maybe it's a fashion show, or a concert, or a new movie – you decide]*. It'd be great to get some people to go along with you. You like having people with you when you're out and about; and it's nice for them too, especially if they're shy and might otherwise just be stuck indoors.

G_____

[You can use this as a basis to get you started in the larp. Do please amend it however you like!]

Intro

This is the first time you've been out socially since you arrived a few days ago: you've spent the time mostly exploring and finding the various places where you're going to have to be once tuition starts. Meeting other people hasn't been a priority: but this disco seems like a sensible enough way of making some contacts. It'll be useful to have some people you know around the campus.

You haven't tried anything creative yet. You've been surrounded by new sensations and experiences, but you haven't yet had the chance to sit down and process them. You're sure that once you've settled in, you'll be able to make some good things *[it could be music, writing, art – whatever you would like your creative talent to be]*.

Some of the other new students appear confident, but you can tell that most of them are faking it. You feel pretty sure that some of them aren't very emotionally strong or resilient, and will be seeking help and support. You aren't sure how you feel about that: you're not used to providing for anyone other than yourself.

B_____

[You can use this as a basis to get you started in the larp. Do please amend it however you like!]

Intro

You only arrived here at university yesterday, and you've barely settled in. It already strikes you as a tense, unhappy kind of atmosphere. Maybe things will calm down once people have been here a bit longer, but for now, you're picking up a lot of anxiety, loneliness and need.

You've come out to this disco tonight in the hope of enjoying yourself and meeting some fun and interesting people. But you have the feeling that there will probably also be some troubled souls here – people who are finding the dream of independent life isn't so wonderful, or who have brought painful baggage with them from their childhood. You know how that feels...

Earlier in the day you went shopping and picked up some food supplies. You're planning to cook a big meal *[you decide what kind of food it will be]* – something warm and comforting to eat. You don't think you'll have much trouble finding people who are glad to gather together around your table and share your meal.

S _____

[You can use this as a basis to get you started in the larp. Do please amend it however you like!]

Intro

You've been having a great time so far here at university, meeting people and introducing yourself. Most of the other new students seem a bit nervous and shy. You've been putting them at ease with jokes and bounciness, which mostly works.

You did have one person complain that you had your music on too loud, and it was disturbing her. Oh well! You can't please everybody. Everyone else seems to have been appreciating your tunes mightily.

You haven't really thought about your studies yet. There'll be plenty of time for that! How boring to be slaving over books already, when term hasn't even properly started.

You came along here to the disco hoping for some fun, although you expect that as usual you'll have to liven things up a bit: maybe do some silly dancing, get people laughing. Or you could tell the funny story about how you accidentally put lube on your hair instead of shampoo this morning.

C _____

[You can use this as a basis to get you started in the larp. Do please amend it however you like!]

Intro

You've dreaded coming to university as much as you've looked forward to it. The chance to learn new things, to find out more about how everything works, and maybe to meet some new people who understand you. But first the problem of being yourself, and not being too shy or ashamed, in front of a bunch of strangers.

It's going to be easy just to slip into routines centred around studying, and you're pretty sure no-one from the university authorities will care if that's all you do. But you're going to have to share accommodation with people, discuss your subject with them, maybe even socialize.

You decided to come along to this disco as a kind of test for yourself, and for the other people you might meet tonight. If you behave in your natural way – positive, friendly, open, but talking about subjects that other people often find strange – how will they react? And how much will you need to adjust, to fit in – and how much will you be prepared to do that?

L_____

[You can use this as a basis to get you started in the larp. Do please amend it however you like!]

Intro

You arrived here at university yesterday, and have already completely freaked out two other girls on the corridor by walking naked back to your room from the showers. You'd forgotten to bring your clothes with you! What's wrong with that, really: people are so easily shocked. And no, you're not worried about what might have happened if a boy had been there. You're more than a match for any spotty young student.

You can already see that some of the others are trying to create family-like, or school-like, structures around themselves – for comfort. That's not for you: you want to experience everything *different* that university life has to offer. What's the point of sticking in a tired old rut? You hope you can help other people to see that, too: how big and wonderful the world can be.

You've come along to this disco to have a good time, and to meet people. Hopefully the good time will be with the people, but if not, you're quite capable of making one by yourself. You've got a large lump of hash in your pocket, which could certainly make a good start.

Go travelling round the world	Go to work/live overseas for a long spell
Have a string of regular foreign holidays	Form a serious long-term relationship, which splits up before you wanted it to
Realize your sexuality is different to what people might expect	Publicly 'come out' as a different sexuality
Form a serious long-term relationship, which you end before your partner wanted to	Form a serious long-term relationship, which is still going strong
Form a serious long-term relationship, which is still limping along somehow	Have an affair (outside the terms of your relationship)
Have a series of affairs (outside the terms of your relationship)	Have a string of short relationships

Remain happily single	Remain unhappily single
Transition to male (or be in the process)	Have a child
Have more than one child	Have a multiple birth
Have a bad experience around pregnancy and/or childbirth	Have to raise a child, or children, by yourself
Have a serious illness or accident, which leaves a physical or psychological mark	Have a serious illness or accident, from which you recover completely
Have a fatal illness or accident	Become the carer for an elderly or sick relative

Lose a very dear loved one	Have an unfortunate brush with the law
Inherit enough money to be comfortable	Experience serious poverty
Create an impressive piece of artistic work	Perform unusually well in your job
Get promoted, or change employers, to become much better paid	Get made redundant as part of a larger business crisis
Lose your job for doing it poorly	Lose your job, or decide to leave it, for interpersonal reasons
Experience sexism, with serious adverse effects on your life	Experience sexism, with moderate adverse effects on your life

Set up a business, which fails	Change career completely
Set up a business, which ticks along unremarkably	Set up a business, which succeeds tremendously
Develop an absorbing hobby	Go back to studying
Stop being religious	Become religious
Become a spokesperson for a charitable cause dear to your heart	Suffer a sharply worsened relationship with a family member
Find that your social network has shrunk to very small dimensions	Find that your social network has grown to very large dimensions

Suffer an unexpected financial loss	Have a travel experience that goes really badly

+

Your relationship with the person who has the other '+' card has strengthened during these ten years. Decide with them what that means – what you mean to each other now. Perhaps you've become better friends, or business partners, or life partners – or whatever you both prefer. Decide the details together.

+

Your relationship with the person who has the other '+' card has strengthened during these ten years. Decide with them what that means – what you mean to each other now. Perhaps you've become better friends, or business partners, or life partners – or whatever you both prefer. Decide the details together.

—

Your relationship with the person who has the other '-' card has worsened during these ten years. Decide with them what that means – what you mean to each other now. Perhaps you've had a major disagreement, or one of you has betrayed the other, or you've just drifted into dislike – or whatever you both prefer. Decide the details together.

—

Your relationship with the person who has the other '-' card has worsened during these ten years. Decide with them what that means – what you mean to each other now. Perhaps you've had a major disagreement, or one of you has betrayed the other, or you've just drifted into dislike – or whatever you both prefer. Decide the details together.

~

Your relationship with the person who has the other '~' card has gone through ups and downs during these ten years. Decide with them what that means – what you mean to each other now. Perhaps you've had a row and then made up, or had a succession of niggles that you've resolved, or been close but now are less so – or whatever you both prefer. Decide the details together.

~

Your relationship with the person who has the other '~' card has gone through ups and downs during these ten years. Decide with them what that means – what you mean to each other now. Perhaps you've had a row and then made up, or had a succession of niggles that you've resolved, or been close but now are less so – or whatever you both prefer. Decide the details together.