

Screwing the crew

- a larp about open relationships, monogamy and a group of good old friends

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Fact box:

Genre: Humoristic realism

Total time use: 6h

Number of players: 7 - 15

Number of organizers: 1 +

Workload: Medium

Type of location: A home with room for a dinner party.

About the larp

This larp came about from the merging of two ideas: a larp investigating the background of a close-knit social scene, and a larp about dynamics and intrigues in a social circle where open relationships are common.

A is together with B and is making out with C who is in love with D who has an affair with E who rejected F who's hitting on everybody. A lot of people live like that. Sometimes everybody's happy, and other times it doesn't really work out that well. What emotions, conflicts and weird situations may arise in a group of friends with somewhat loose sexual relations crisscrossing the social sphere? And how did it turn out that way?

Screwing the Crew is a short larp where you can explore **questions** about monogamy, open relationships and sexual relations in a tight-knit group of friends. You can explore their **history** and how it has affected the relations they have today. The **characters** are around 30 years old, all of them are to some degree bisexual and most of them have known each other for at least ten years.

The larp's **setting** is a dinner party held by the most established couple in the group, in a city near you. It is played in a realistic playing style with some meta techniques to enhance inner thoughts and emotions in the characters and strengthen the focus on the subject of the story. It can be played in a seminar room or in a normal home. We find that a normal home gives a more realistic setting, and thus a better dynamic to the roleplay.

Structure: The larp has three acts. The act changes are natural transitions in the development of the story rather than clearly marked. The first act is the arrival and the dinner. When you finish eating the party gets going and if your location allows you can mark this by moving to another part of the room like a sofa group, or by cleaning away all the food and taking out some snacks. The last act starts when you put the liquor on the table and the conflicts and romances and other situations that have been simmering can come out in full play.

Time: Total time is about six hours, broken down to 30 minutes introduction and reading of characters, 2 hour workshop, 3 hour playing time and 30 minutes debrief.

People: The larp can be played with between 7 and 15 players including one or two organizers. The organizers should participate in the roleplay, playing characters just like the other players. Playing one of the hosts is practical. They lead the process before and after the larp, and initiate the act changes.

Preparations: All preparations are done through the workshop. If you want you can make the characters available for the players to read before they arrive.

Practical information

Food and drink. We think you should have something to eat and drink at this larp. If you are playing it at a seminar room, it can be just some snacks, but if you are playing it in somebody's home, dinner and drinks is better for the larp. We find that the right amount of drink -- but not too much -- lubricates the roleplay in a positive way. Tell the players how much beer/wine is planned for each person, and remind them not to drink so much that they do not play well. Have non-alcoholic alternatives available.

Props. In addition you need to provide three props that are used for the meta-techniques (See below). As you are using Ping the glass, all characters need to have a glass that can be pinged. Proper glasses are better than plastic glasses as the sound carries better. Blowing out a candle starts a scene that is beside the here and now of the larp. You thus need to have one or more candles centrally placed, and something to light them with after the scene has been played. We also use an escalating mechanic called The liquor on the table. For this you need to have a liquor bottle. The content can of course be non-alcoholic.

Music. You use music to create the right ambience at the different stages of the larp, and you use one specific song to end the larp. You need to provide something to play the music on and two playlists.

Printed characters. You should have a few sets of the characters printed out so the players can read them and use them for reference when they are deciding who plays who. It is nice but not necessary to have pens and paper for the players to write down notes about what is decided in the workshop. You might also want to have one big sheet to write down the names of the characters and players as this is decided, and then stick it to a wall.

<Factbox: Things to do and get:>

- Food and drinks
- Glasses for everybody
- Candles
- Liquor bottle
- Playlists and music equipment
- Printed characters
- Pens and paper

</Fact box>

The how and why

This is a description for the organizers of each point in the workshop, larp and debrief with instructions on how to do it, and why we think it is a good idea.

Introduction

As the players arrive, let them **read all the characters** and start thinking of two or three they would like to play. Let them greet each other, talk and get acquainted.

When they are all there or at the time you have set, you can start by welcoming them and set the frame for the event by telling them the timeline for the event and introducing them to the playing style. After that you go into the preparations.

Timeline for the event

We recommend that you use two hours for the workshop, three hours for the larp itself and half an hour for debriefing. It is also good to have half an hour before the workshop for the players to get a little acquainted and read through the characters.

If you follow our workshop walk-through, your time schedule is going to be pretty tight. You need to make this clear to the players, and you need to be quite strict. Players tend to want to play “Ball of yarn” all evening, so you have to keep the pace.

The more players you have, the longer time everything takes, so you might want to adjust the time used on the workshop if you have 15 players.

Playing style

We want a **realistic** playing style with exploration through meta techniques. *Screwing the Crew* is not comedy or farce, but as we like to say, reality is sometimes quite funny. A realistic playing style can be many things, we like to think of it as portraying someone ordinary that you might know, like your neighbor or colleague or a friend of yours or even yourself. What would and would you not do at a dinner party with friends?

Transparency. We want all the players to have the same information as grounds for improvisation. We try to gain that through everybody reading all the characters and everybody participating in the building of relationships. In this sort of roleplay, where the focus is on exploring the history and relationships of these people, we find that transparency helps the players concentrate their play on what creates cool playing situations. The players need to separate things that are secrets between the characters, even if the players know them. This goes hand in hand with the next point.

In this sort of larp, the most interesting things can happen when players decide to let their characters out in all their insecurities, silliness and nastiness. We call it “**Playing to lose**” when you realistically do all the stupid, unproductive stuff people do, instead of playing your character as a perfect person that always makes the right choices. But beware that you do not overdo this and end up in tragicomedy.

Be nice to and tolerant of other people’s improvisation. This is very important to emphasize, so the players feel comfortable with improvising facts and stories about their own or other characters. It is not important whether a couple tells the same story about how they met, the important thing is that a story is told.

Workshop

1. Distribute the characters by letting the players suggest what characters they want to play. They should have read all the characters before you start the workshop and have some preferences about this.

Let the players decide the **names** of the characters, choosing names that begin with their character’s letter. For instance the character A takes the name Anna or Andrew or something, according to the player’s gender. Write the names of the characters and the players playing them on a sheet of paper as you go along. This gives an urgency and decisiveness to the process.

In this process the players also need to **decide how the characters know each other**. The premise is that at least the core of the group should have known each other for about ten

years or more. Make them decide together, but give them hints like high school class, handball team, a rock band, etc.

There are some things to be considered when distributing the characters. This way of doing things awards the players with the most **initiative**. The players with the least initiative may end up with the less attractive characters and co-players. This might not be favorable for your larp, so you should take some control over the situation. For instance we have experienced that if the gender balance dictates that there should be some homosexual couples, it might be a good idea to cast those first. Even if all the characters are bisexual (Yes, this is a rule), it is a good idea to have players who are actually enthusiastic about playing same-sex couples play them.

You might also have some people with **real life issues**, that make it important not to cast those as a couple or with some of the predefined relations. Make sure you have read the characters well yourself, so you can help them steer clear of those without them really noticing. If you do not know your players that well, you just have to trust them to make sure of that themselves.

2. Define the relationships. Let the couples decide how long they have been together, how established they are, do they have children, do they live together etc. What do they see as being unfaithful? Have they discussed the limitations of their relationship or is this a potential for conflict?

The Jokers talk together about whether they want to be in a relationship or not, and how they would like that relationship to be.

3. Presentation round. All couples and jokers tell a little bit about themselves, and repeat the relationships that are in the written characters. Help them remember the relationships they forget. Make sure that people use the character names as much as possible, so that they eventually learn all the names.

It might also be a point here to stress that the character A is not very attractive, regardless of how attractive the player is. Explain that the conflict between A and B won't work if A hits it off with one or more people.

4. The ball of yarn. This is a method for making relationships quickly, easily and transparently. It works like this: One player starts with a ball of yarn, let's call her Emma. Emma holds on to the end of the yarn and passes the ball on to Peter, while she makes some sort of relationship, like "I'm Peter's cousin." The Peter-player can then make a new relationship to another character, for instance "Peter once tried to hit on Martha, but it didn't really work out that well", and then send the ball of yarn to her while holding on to the yarn that now forms a line from Emma to Peter and then on to Martha. The Martha-player now has three choices. She can either make a new relationship, like the ones above. Or she can extend the relationship "Well, that was because I was dating Paul at the time" and pass the ball of yarn on to Paul. Or she can develop the relationship, "It felt kind of weird because Peter was and still is my best friend", and then make a new relationship to someone else. The players cannot say no to a relationship, but they can nuance it ("Yes, that's correct, but it was really because...").

The reason for doing this with a ball of yarn is that it gets obvious who has and who needs more relationships. Make sure everybody has a relationship before you go on to the next round. You can keep going with this for about 30 minutes and then round off. If you feel you need a little bit more time, use it. This is the point in the preparations where the players really

start getting the feel of the story they are going to play out in the larp. Get everyone to repeat their relationships before you take a break.

Cigarette / peeing break. Let the players know they have to be quick ;)

Rules, methods and techniques

1. Cut and brake. These are the most important rules for any larp. Anybody can at any time say Cut! if the player feels that their physical or mental boundaries have been crossed. All play around them should stop and the person made comfortable. Do not start to play again before that player says it is OK. Do not ask why they cut, as this might be very personal.

If you do not feel that your boundaries have been crossed yet, but you are afraid they will, you can say Brake!. The players around you should then back off a little and give you a chance to play yourself out of the situation.

2. Tell them how to have sex (if they really want to). We really don't think any of the characters actually will have sex during the larp. As we have asked the players rhetorically "How often do you have sex at a dinner party with friends?" You might want to emphasize this, as we have seen that when other organizers run this game, there tends to be more sex than when we do it. The reason we have included a sex mechanic is that since having sex is an option in the larp, it is important to have a technique for doing it because this reduces the stress for the players.

We have chosen to do this through the Ars amandi method, where you only touch each other's arms and use breath, sound and most importantly eye contact to simulate sex. If you want to use a different method, that's just fine, as long as you communicate it clearly to the players. If you stick to the Ars amandi method, demonstrate it briefly and then let the players do a very quick version by just holding hands and looking into the eyes of the different characters they have had sex with at some time during the years.

3. Meta techniques. A meta technique is a technique you use to express something that communicates to the other players, but not their characters. We like to use this, because we feel it gives possibilities for deeper and more realistic play. We use the following methods:

Ping the glass. You can prompt a monologue from another player by giving their glass a ping. That player then has to say whatever is going through their character's mind at the time. If you want to give a monologue yourself, you just ping your own glass. You finish the monologue by taking a sip of the glass. Make sure you use clear body language when doing this.

Blow out the candle. This is a method used for re-living things from the past or a dream or the future or a jealous fantasy etc. Anyone can at any given time stand up, blow out the burning candle and say "I blow out the candle because I want to play the scene where D and G broke up" or "... where H tells B that she is pregnant" or "...where the band got their first gig" or something.

The person who blows out the candle can choose whether it is a scene that they play in, or prompt somebody else to play out a scene they are curious about. They can choose how much they want to direct what is happening in the scene or if they just want to set the stage like in the examples mentioned above. If none of the players have started a scene by the middle of the second act, you should initiate one.

When the candles are blown out everybody else goes out of character and observes the scene being played out. When the scene comes to a natural end you light the candles again and the play resumes. If you do not remember where that was, it doesn't really matter. Just start playing where you are. And remember to light the candle again.

If you have the time, it is good to test play a couple of scenes in the workshop.

The liquor on the table. About 45 minutes before the larp ends, you should introduce a bottle of liquor. This symbolizes that everybody is getting more drunk and that it is time to take out whatever conflicts have been building up during the evening. When you present this technique it is good to say that the players should let the conflicts simmer in the first part of the larp and not take them out until the liquor is on the table.

End song. We end the larp by blowing out the candles and instructing the players to listen to the song being played. When the song is finished, the larp is finished.

Playing the larp

1. Start with most of the characters arriving as guests.
2. Ca. 45 minutes before the larp ends, introduce the liquor and change playlist.
3. End the larp by blowing out the candle and play for instance Björk's "Come to me".

Explain the act structure: Arrival and dinner, party and wilder party are the three acts that naturally follow each other. There are no clear act changes, but the players should keep the act structure in mind during play.

Letting the players **enter one at a time or in small groups** gives a more realistic start to the roleplay. It also gives the players the chance to work their way into character a little bit by taking a walk around the block or something. Last minute details can be settled between the couples or friends, and they have a chance to play for a few moments before they are thrown in with everybody. It also establishes who actually lives there.

We have written about the liquor on the table further up. We suggest that you **change playlist** as well when you are doing this. Music can be a powerful tool in creating the right atmosphere. As we want the degree of conflict to increase towards the end of the larp, what we ourselves have done is to create two different playlists. One for the first part, and one to start at the moment when the hosts present the liquor, the latter being a bit harder, rougher and heavier than the first. People won't necessarily be listening to the music, but we tried to handpick songs that in some way or another have something to do with the theme or the set of themes of the roleplay, like jealousy, love, attraction, broken hearts, friendship. etc.

We **ended the larp** with the Björk song 'Come to Me', because the text is quite fitting for the story. If you know of a song that you think will fit even better, use it!

Debrief

Do a round where all players get to say something very short about the experience and immediate reactions. Then go over to letting people talk freely. Look around for the people that obviously has something to say, but doesn't scream to get heard. make sure everybody gets to express themselves. If you have a possibility to continue the party afterwards, it is our experience that people use this to have a good time and continue reflecting about the experience.

Textbox Bio:

The larp was originally a co-production between the Larp Factories in Oslo and Trondheim. The larpscript has been published online, and the larp has been played several times and in different countries. It is made by Trine Lise Lindahl and Elin Nilsen. If you run it, we would like to hear from you. Please e-mail us at frk_elin@yahoo.com and trine.l.lindahl@gmail.com.

For download:

Characters

Cheat sheet

Character priority