

Friends Who Larp

By Mo Holkar

The setup

Four larper friends - Alex, Bug, Cris, and Devon - are considering writing and organizing a weekend larp, as a team. They've got together today for a bonding exercise - they are going to play through four iterations of a microlarp named *Four of a Kind*. The idea is to investigate some themes that might be important in the project that they're planning, and also to have some nice larpy fun together.

None of the friends have played *Four of a Kind* before, but they have all read the script and are familiar with its reputation - it was very popular a while ago, back in the earlier days of 'progressive' chamber larping. It was written and uploaded to the web by a designer called Specunaut, who is no longer involved in the hobby. It feels a wee bit dated now, but still should be a good solid experience.

Friends Who Larp is about the four friends' experience as they proceed to play through *Four of a Kind* four times in succession.

(Both *Friends Who Larp* and the internal larp *Four of a Kind* are set in the ordinary present-day.)

Some meta considerations

There are a number of meta rules which are there basically to prevent the short spaces of time in which the four friends are playing as themselves (as against the times when they are in-character within *Four of a Kind*) from getting used up in unproductive or uninteresting play.

The kind of 'golden rule' is that their interaction should focus strongly on their interpersonal relations. Any topic is fine as a way into this, but they should not remain smalltalking or debating about the topic itself - they should quickly bring the conversation to bear on what it means for their friendships, their opinions of each other, etc.

There is nothing interesting about Specunaut or about the backstory of *Four of a Kind*, and people should not get into a rabbithole of speculation about it during play - that will use up time better spent on themselves.

Individual characters may not see the point of playing through the microlarp four times (or at all), or may be reluctant to do so. However, they must eventually agree to it. Likewise they must not undermine or subvert it by playing deliberately 'badly' etc. Essentially, while within *Four of a Kind* they should take it seriously, however they feel about it when they are outside it.

In theory, the four friends are playing with a 'The Door Is Open' safety rule, which allows any of them to drop out of *Four of a Kind* at any time. However, in practice there is a meta rule that means they will never do so. They will always complete the sequence of four larps, however much they might not want to.

(Although, of course, if someone *really* wants to leave the larp altogether, they can do so, at any time.)

Talking about the larp that the four friends are planning

The details of the content, setting, etc, of the larp that the four friends might create and organize together are not to be discussed. They can talk about how they might work together as a team, etc, but should not get into any specifics.

They already have an understanding that this larp is to be about realistic characters in a situation of high emotion and drama, in a modern real-world setting: there will be tears and perhaps screams. But the details of who the characters are, what's the setting, and so on, are to be held until a later meeting.

The in-game reasoning for this is that they don't want to pollute their blank sheet of paper too early in the process: they don't want to find that they've committed to ideas that aren't as good as they could have become.

If someone does start trying to drill down into the planned larp, that's fine: but one of the others should remind them in-character that they had agreed not to do so at this session.

Practical notes

Participants should read both the *Friends Who Larp* characters and the *Four of a Kind* characters in advance, if at all possible: otherwise more time will be required.

Unless you have a flexible timeslot to use, someone needs to keep quite a close eye on the timing of the four sessions of *Four of a Kind* and their debriefs. In the fiction, this would be Alex: but it can be someone else, if the player of Alex is not themselves particularly timekeepery. (Or if you have a facilitator who is not playing one of the four characters, then they can do it, of course.)

Approx timetable

0 minutes	Set up the session, briefing, choose <i>Friends Who Larp</i> characters
15	Start <i>Friends Who Larp</i> : the four friends talk about what they are about to do, brief <i>Four of a Kind</i> , and choose characters for the first session of it
45	First session of <i>Four of a Kind</i>
75	Debriefing it, and talking
90	Second session of <i>Four of a Kind</i>
120	Debriefing it, and talking
135	Third session of <i>Four of a Kind</i>
165	Debriefing it, and talking
180	Fourth session of <i>Four of a Kind</i>
210	Debriefing it, and talking
225	Finish <i>Friends Who Larp</i> : debrief it
240	Finish the session

The inner larp - *Four of a Kind*

Four of a Kind lasts 30 minutes. It has four characters. Tanya and Raquel (both female) are a former couple. Antonio (male) is Raquel's new partner. Sylvian (agender) is Tanya's bff, who once had a thing with Antonio. The occasion is an awkward meeting that Raquel has called, to try and smooth things over with Tanya.

Bug found *Four of a Kind* online and downloaded it: it was written some years ago by a designer named Specunaut, who is no longer active in the hobby. It was briefly popular but has recently been in obscurity. Bug chose it because a number of people had commented that it really examined friendships and relationships, and made participants think about bleed.

This larp includes the full script for *Four of a Kind*, so that it can be used as an in-larp prop as well as a guide to play. It is deliberately rather sketchy: so, there are aspects of its operation that the four friends will need to discuss and agree.

Martin's Hack

Also included here are notes about a hack of *Four of a Kind*, also found on the internet, made by someone named Martin at an unknown time. These describe a different way of playing *Four of a Kind* - with fewer scenes, but more gaps between scenes to talk about the experience.

Participants may choose to have the characters use *Martin's Hack* rather than the original *Four of a Kind*, if they would like a more talk-y and less larp-y kind of experience. Or for example they might play through with the original design the first time, and then switch to *Martin's Hack* for the subsequent three. It's up to them.

Playing up, and casting

It's important that the four characters are 'played up' in their roles. By this we mean that Alex should be treated as a highly organized person, even if the player in that role is not especially so, and isn't able to convey it directly: and so on. React to the role as described, and ignore moments when the player is maybe not delivering it with complete similitude.

This means that you should feel free to cast anyone in any of the roles - so, one doesn't have to actually be a gifted entertainer to play the role of Devon, for example.

One thing that participants should bear in mind is whether they want to play close to, or far from, home - characters that either do or do not resemble themselves. Because this larp involves characters who are larpers, it can be quite bleed-y - for example, if one character criticizes another's style of larping, then this might feel like it's actually the participant's own style that's under attack - unless they've chosen to play a character who larps differently to how they themselves do.

But saying that, of course there is value in playing close to home and experiencing bleed, as well - and participants often choose to ride that edge. This is just a note to perhaps be a bit more careful with yourself than you might be in a more normal larp.

Breaks

There's no need to pause the larp for bathroom breaks, getting drinks, etc - participants can just do this in character, perhaps leaving the other characters to talk about them while they're absent.

Safety

Use whichever safety tools you and your group are familiar with for this kind of talk-y chamber larp. We suggest that Cut, Brake, and The Door is Open are a good default set.

Note - make sure that you have a unique safeword to stop *Friends Who Larp* which is not also used as a safeword in *Four of a Kind*. (So, don't use 'Cut' for both purposes.) It's important that people should realize immediately when a participant is stopping the outer larp, as distinct from their character stopping the inner one.

Play style

It would be possible to play *Friends Who Larp* as quite calm and detached, with the characters just playing through *Four of a Kind* and noting what's interesting about it. This is not really the intention of the design, though. The idea is that the experience of playing *Four of a Kind* should create drama among the *Friends Who Larp* characters - that it should raise their emotions and cause tensions between them. It may be that these can be reconciled, or it may be that by the end the friendship has broken down for one or more of them. You can lean into this - play as though this larping session is going to be a crucial turning-point in the story of them as a group.

It may be that characters say (deliberately or accidentally) things that can be read as critical of each other as larpers. It's important to be clear that these are not aimed at the participant, but at the character. It sounds obvious, but in the heat of the moment these things can be unexpectedly painful sometimes.

Debrief

You should probably use a debrief that's different in form to the one that the characters are themselves using within the larp. And maybe move to a different spot to where the larp was played out, as well, if you can.

Alex, ‘the organized one’

You are the person who makes things happen – the others turn to you when it’s time to actually develop an idea into a reality. You approach projects logically, breaking them down into tasks and seeing clearly how the different elements relate to each other.

You have the same kind of approach to life in general: you feel that by considering options beforehand, and weighing up pros and cons, one can usually come to the best decision. The human factor can sometimes be a bit of a puzzle – people are often irrational and unpredictable, which can throw off your reasoning. But that generally just makes it more interesting! ‘Solving’ a human problem – working out what someone *really* needs, as against what they’re asking you for – can be very satisfying.

You’re not yet sure about the proposal of organizing a larp together with your three friends. It will mean people being asked to deliver, on time, and with high quality. Might it put a strain on friendships? And will the others be prepared to work in a sensible, well-ordered fashion? You’d want some guarantees, ideally... but then it’s not really your style to rock the boat: you prefer to avoid confrontations if possible. If the others are all keen, then maybe you should just go ahead and try to make the best of it.

You quite like the idea of playing *Four of a Kind*: it looks like it should be fun. And there is something quite appealing about each trying out all four of the characters. But you aren’t sure if anything very useful or practical is going to come out of it... Still, fun is fun (of whatever type), and your friends are great larpers.

You’ve read the script, and you see that it’s divided into six scenes. If you can aim to play through each of them for about five minutes, that should fit the whole thing into half an hour or so. Then it won’t take too long to go through it four times. (It’s usually you who keeps track of time, when the four of you larp together.)

Bug is an amazing person – you’ve had such good times together, and some really wonderful larp moments. Bug can really bring the magic! But they are kind of wild and undisciplined in their thinking. They don’t always consider the practicalities of how something is actually going to work. It can be quite frustrating at times.

Cris is just lovely – a real sweetheart. Kind and generous, Cris seems to just know when you need to be quiet for a while, and when you have something to say – and how to say the right thing in response. If Cris has any downside, it’s being a bit passive – they rarely initiate anything, and in larps they can tend to just go along with what other people are doing.

Devon is great company, but can be a bit of a pain at times, to be honest. It’s like they are always performing – telling jokes, making funny noises, being entertaining, sparking people up. They’re good at it! But sometimes you just want to calm things down a bit and concentrate.

Bug, 'the creative one'

You are the person who has ideas – who inspires everyone to do cool things together, and to have fun and happy times. Well, the others are all also very creative too, of course, in their different ways. But it does generally fall to you to provide the spark.

You do sometimes wonder what they would do without you: just sit around and chat, maybe. That would be fine, but not as good as the experiences that you have had together, thanks to your own ideas.

Of course, you are not just defined by your creativity. You are also someone who cares, someone who's fun to be with, someone who gets things done. You feel that sometimes the others maybe forget this a little.

Designing a larp together, and playing through *Four of a Kind*, are both ideas of yours. Putting on a larp sounds like just the most amazing fun that you can have as a group – seeing your creation come to life, and the satisfaction of dealing with unexpected problems, etc. And giving a wonderful piece of art to the community!

That's probably what the author 'Specunaut' thought about *Four of a Kind* (although of course it's just a chamber larp, not a weekend larp like you're aiming to create together) – and it certainly looks like an interesting piece of work. With lots of scope for drama! Hopefully, it will really show the four of you where are the strengths and weaknesses of you as a team. And you'll come out of it as better friends than ever before!

You expect that the main design ideas for the larp you're going to make together will come from you, as usual: but things like the planning and logistics and marketing and catering and so on are not that interesting to you. You'll be happy for the others to take responsibility for those areas, and to just leave you to create wonderful things.

Alex is a very nice and useful person, and a good friend, but they do sometimes get hung up on details and practical things like that. It's great that they're so good at getting things organized and working properly: but it's not always necessary to weigh an idea down with chains of practicality, before it's even had time to grow its wings properly.

Cris is very caring, and can sometimes be almost a bit smothering. It's lovely that you are cared for – that all of you are – it holds the group together, for sure. You completely appreciate it. But you do sometimes secretly wish that Cris had a bit more fire and was a bit more open to risk. Sometimes people have to take the chance of being hurt, if they're testing the boundaries of what's possible.

Devon is such good company, not at all serious and always bringing the fun. You can never be bored around Devon, that's for sure. If they do have a more solemn side, they keep it very well hidden. You do wonder sometimes how, and why, they became so good at concealing emotional hurt, and other ups and downs, behind this 'entertainer' persona.

Cris, ‘the emotional glue’

Your friends look to you for love, for warmth, and for support – and you provide it. You care so much about all of them – and you know that they do about you, too, although they have different ways of showing it. It’s in this group of people that you’ve perhaps for the first time felt truly like you belonged.

Your life has not always been happy – in fact, really it was pretty miserable when you were young – but lately you’ve got on top of things and worked out how to deal with the world. And part of that is having firm bonds of friendship with people who, if they maybe don’t exactly understand you, at least do appreciate you and what you bring.

Your friends are good people – not perfect, but then, no-one is. And together you are awesome. You really would hate to lose any of them as friends – even to think of it makes you feel quite sick and uneasy.

You are a little concerned about the idea of creating and organizing a larp together, although you haven’t said so to the others yet. It will introduce new tensions and new responsibilities, which might put strain on the group. You will have to work extra hard to keep everyone together and happy. You hope that you’ll be up to it.

You don’t often think about your own emotional needs. Providing for others is rewarding enough, most of the time. And, after all, you can hardly expect them to understand what you might need yourself, when you haven’t ever talked about or shown it.

Four of a Kind looks like a clever larp design, but with lots of potential for negative emotions. You’ll all need to make sure that you manage them healthily. And there might be bleed – the debriefs after each session will have to take account of that. You will make sure this is done properly: the others don’t always appreciate the emotional risks of this kind of play.

Alex is a good solid friend, usually calm, providing a practical voice around some of the wilder ideas that come up. It’s a relief to sometimes have Alex rule something out because of impracticality, so that you don’t have to always be the one ruling things out for ‘killjoy’ reasons. Alex doesn’t give much away – they are quite self-contained, emotionally. You do sometimes wonder what that restraint might be concealing.

Bug is erratic, and wild at times – but they are the spark of energy that makes the group work, you all recognize that. Without their dynamism, you probably wouldn’t see so much of each other. And it’s worth accepting a few eccentricities, for that. You do worry, a little, about Bug: they have a kind of almost-wilful self-destructive streak, it sometimes seems.

Devon likes to come across as an uncomplicated bringer of fun. But you suspect there is more to this than meets the eye. Why this desire to constantly entertain, to never be serious? Might it conceal a person who cares too much? – or, more worryingly, one who doesn’t truly care at all?

Devon, 'the entertainer'

At school, you were an outsider – it seemed that there was something that marked you out as not quite fitting, not quite belonging. But you found that one way of making yourself welcome was to use your wit and quickness of thought. Cracking jokes and making people laugh was always welcome, and it helped you find your way into social circles that you could never otherwise have joined. But still, you knew you were only there as an entertainer – not as a true member of the group.

Sometimes, your humour was cruel. Among kids, the easiest way to get them to laugh is at someone else's expense. You were quick to tease and make fun of anyone who'd made some sort of mistake or embarrassed themselves – and that was at least as popular as your more spontaneous humour. It was just harmless banter – all kids do it. But you do sometimes feel a twinge of conscience, looking back.

With your group of friends now, it's different. You feel like you really do belong – that Bug, Cris, and Alex have accepted you fully. But you still feel the need to joke and tease – it is part of who you are, now, you suppose. You try to avoid the crueller end of humour, with your friends: but sometimes a rather sharp jibe does slip out, and you feel terribly guilty.

Well, 'accepted you fully' is perhaps exaggerating. They have accepted what you've shown to them. But there are still layers inside you which you haven't shown even to yourself. Perhaps the 'real' you isn't acceptable by anyone at all? That's too horrible to consider. But opening up further – even with your dear friends – feels like just too much of a risk.

You're looking forward to playing *Four of a Kind*, because it sounds like good intense emotional character play, with some fun dramatic scenes. Larp gives you a 'safe' outlet for serious emotions that you can rarely express in real life. You do have a slight fear of bleed from the larp affecting your relationships with your friends... but usually you're pretty good at managing that sort of thing.

Alex is a dear soul, always trying to do the right thing and to help people. You very much appreciate the effort that they go to, to make things work properly and to ensure good experiences. They can be a wee bit staid – and sometimes even boringly pedantic – when insisting that things should be done 'properly', but it's very forgivable.

Bug is the one that sometimes worries you. They are wonderfully inspired and creative, but they can flicker very quickly from positive to negative feelings. Your worry is that one day they will decide, for perhaps no reason, that they don't like you any more. It's a fear that doesn't really make sense... but that is just sometimes in the back of your mind.

Cris seems to be just pure kindness and generosity of spirit. You feel that it's completely genuine – that Cris really does care about you all, and think about you, and consider your needs. It's the first time that you've really had someone like that in your life! But you do wonder: what about Cris's own needs? – how are those being met? And what has happened in their life, to make them be like this?

Four of a Kind

**A LARP about two pairs
(by Specunaut)**

Designer's note

This LARP was written as an attempt to get players to seriously examine real-life issues that affect real people. There is NO fantasy or magic or costume or makeup or anything like that. No distancing. You are playing people who are like you. Treat them with respect, and consider their feelings. There may not be a happy ending, or there may be. You should not try to manufacture one. Just let happen what will happen. This is LARPing as it should be, not cheap escapism.

How to play *Four of a Kind*

It needs four people. (Obviously.) You should each read all four of the characters, and then agree together who is going to play who. (This is a 'transparent' design. The characters have secrets from each other, but you as players know them in advance.)

You will need a room and a table and four chairs. You will need to be able to plunge the room into darkness briefly, inbetween scenes. You should have food and drinks as appropriate for what the characters would want to eat and drink during the scenes.

A note about emotions

Four of a Kind should be a powerful and affecting experience – perhaps a disturbing one – if you are playing it seriously. If you become upset or angry or other strong emotion, this is good: it means that you've engaged properly with the LARP. You may want to set aside some time afterwards to talk to each other about it, and maybe to hug, cry, etc.

Casting

The best way to cast people in *Four of a Kind* (and for LARP in general) is against their natural selves. So, if someone is usually quiet, give them the character who makes a lot of noise; if someone likes being the centre of attention, then give them the character who is on the edge of things; and so on.

In *Four of a Kind*, there are two leading-role characters and two who are more supporting. This is a useful guide:

- Tanya – leading, artistic
- Raquel – leading, scientific
- Sylvian – supporting, passionate
- Antonio – supporting, detached.

Scenes

Some of the scenes only involve two of the characters. Here the other two players should watch silently as an audience, preferably in the dark off to one side so that they don't distract the two who are playing the scene.

1. Tanya and Sylvian in the pub, waiting for the others to arrive.
2. Raquel and Antonio on their way to the pub. In game-time this is happening at the same time as 1., but you play it out consecutively.
3. Raquel and Antonio arrive at the pub, go over to the table where Tanya and Sylvian are sitting, and all greet each other and start to talk.

(Between scenes 3. and 4., in game time, some time passes and all four are now quite drunk and uninhibited.)

4. Tanya and Raquel have got up to go and get more drinks, leaving Sylvian and Antonio at the table. (Who now play out a scene together.)
5. Tanya and Raquel at the bar (this is happening at the same time as 4., but you play it consecutively).
6. Tanya and Raquel return to the table. All four in a scene together. It ends when one or more people decide to get up from the table and leave.

A note about breaking play

If you need to break play to use the bathroom or something like that, do it between scenes – don't pause a scene for it. And also don't 'go to the bathroom' as your character, during a scene – all four should be present for the whole of each scene, it's important that you don't miss anything.

The end

It might be that Scene 6. ends in an unresolved way, without any big decisions having been made, or without confrontations taking place and grievances being aired. That's OK – LARP should be like life, and life sometimes is open like that. Real stories don't always end neatly or dramatically. Just have a think about what it all means to your character – perhaps it has changed them internally?

Finishing the LARP

After the close of the sixth scene, you should all get up and move away from the table, stretch physically, get drinks, and anything else that you need. Then, all come back to the table, sitting in different seats to how you were during the LARP. You should debrief with each person sharing their emotional state and any thoughts and feelings that they may have about the experience of *Four of a Kind*. You should not analyse or critique the LARP design, but concentrate on expressing your own state of mind and of heart.

Tanya

You are an occasional street musician, occasional model for painters, occasional actor, occasional performance artist – you are part of the creative glue that holds this town together. You never have any money, but that’s OK, you have something more important – your integrity. You’ve turned down plenty of lucrative sponsorship opportunities, because the last thing you want is a corporate name next to yours.

It has been a tough life at times, though, you have to admit to yourself. Living in squats or in grotty tents on other people’s property – eating cheaply, spending any money that you do get on artistic supplies and so on – part of you kind of wishes that your talents had been recognized by now. It’s been ten years like this, pretty much. And your bones have started to sometimes ache a little, on cold nights.

That’s one of the reasons why it was so good with Raquel. She had her own apartment, it was a lovely warm and cosy nest. You never moved in – it wasn’t that kind of relationship – but you did spend quite a lot of time there. Raquel seemed to understand you; your beliefs and your needs. She seemed to care about the same things as you did, and to fully support you in putting your ideas into action.

That made it hurt all the more when things started to go wrong. You wonder now if perhaps it was just a fool’s paradise. Perhaps she never really meant any of that at all? If she had, then how could she have just dropped you so coldly and finally – saying that she couldn’t handle the relationship any more? But no – you’re absolutely sure that it was true love, between you. To start with, at least. Maybe you took it for granted that it would continue?

Ach, since you split up – six months ago now – you’ve been in an agony of self-questioning. What did you do wrong, what clues did you miss, how might it have turned out differently – and having imaginary conversations with Raquel where you try to get her to talk. Well, now you have that chance – at her suggestion, which was a surprise.

You aren't sure how well you will handle it – which is why you've brought Sylvian along. Your best friend since a while now, Sylvian understands you and cares about you. And they will be tactful enough to leave you and Raquel to talk alone, if it turns out that's necessary.

About the others:

Raquel – your 'big ex', the love of your life. You split up six months ago (initiated by her). You had been together for three years. She is a computer programmer of some sort, in a boring job that pays well. But she does kind of understand art and cool stuff as well.

Sylvian – your best friend, of about five years' standing. You supported Sylvian in transitioning to agender – you have their back, and they have yours. (Sylvian was assigned male at birth, and was originally named Paul.) They are a fashion designer – not very successful commercially, but they have an amazing creative talent.

Antonio – you have never met Antonio before, and know nothing about him. Until you meet him at the pub table in Scene 3, you have no idea that he even exists: you were not expecting Raquel to bring someone with her.

Questions to explore during play

- How do you feel about Raquel being with someone new already? – and it's a man?
- Does the conversation make you reevaluate your time with Raquel? How might your feelings and memories change?
- Is Sylvian being as loyal and supportive as you would wish them to be? Do you feel this is a balanced friendship – do you give each other the same amount?
- What sort of person do you think Antonio is? How successful might a relationship between him and Raquel be?

What sort of drunk will you become?

During the gap between scenes 3 and 4, you will become drunk. You tend to become rather entertaining and hilarious, although for some reason people don't always appreciate your humour.

Raquel

You work as a software developer, in multimedia applications. But that doesn't define you – it's just a job. You do enjoy the work and being with your team, and it's satisfying making good software that works and that people enjoy using – but you feel that you are a free spirit who could be doing pretty much anything, if you hadn't happened to have fallen into this career. You now have quite a bit of seniority in the team, and are being considered for management roles. You aren't quite sure how you should think about that.

When you were with Tanya – it was three years you spent together – you were kind of the provider. Tanya was even more of a free spirit than you, to the extent of not really having any money or anywhere nice to live. But that was OK, you enjoyed sharing your apartment when she stayed over – and you vicariously enjoyed her life of random and impractical artistic projects. You supported her in living her best life.

And that was part of what became the problem. You had started to feel like you were more like Tanya's mum than her partner. She seemed to have no awareness that you too might have impractical dreams that deserved to be cherished and indulged. That you might want to be doing more than just cheering her on. She really was very self-centred.

That's why it was such a surprise to her when you said you'd had enough. Perhaps you could have handled it better – she was terribly upset. But you felt a clean break was best – you didn't want to get drawn into negotiating about how to try and make things better. Because you knew that even if Tanya sincerely promised to change, she wasn't really capable of it.

You remained single for some months, and it's only recently that you started seeing Antonio. He is your first man – previously you had only dated women – and you aren't 100% sure about whether you like the idea. But he is a good person, kind and generous. It's early days yet, of course – really it's too early to even call him your partner. But you wanted to have him here when you met Tanya, for support.

About the others:

Tanya – your ‘big ex’, who at first you thought you might be with forever. But you came to realize that she was an unhealthy presence in your life. You split up six months ago, and this is the first time you’ve met since. You would like to be able to both put it behind you and be amicable, perhaps even be friends. Because she is a good person really: just that she wasn’t for you.

Antonio – it was mostly lust to start with, to be honest; but you’ve grown to really like him as a person. He is a good partner. It’s only really him being a man that counts against him – you really struggle with the idea of being in a binary couple, and the social and emotional toxicity that usually comes with that territory.

Sylvian – you don’t know that Tanya is bringing Sylvian to meet with you today, but it probably won’t come as much of a surprise when you see them at the table with her. They are Tanya’s best friend, after all. You never liked Sylvian much – you think that they enable Tanya’s self-indulgent behaviour. And you don’t think that they much liked you either. Sylvian is agender – you think that they were assigned male at birth, but they had transitioned before you first met Tanya (and hence them).

Questions to explore during play

- Assuming Tanya can forgive you for leaving her; can you really forgive her for being the kind of person that she is?
- If you stay with Antonio – or even if you don’t – will that help you to become a full expression of yourself, as you so dearly have wished?
- Can you manage to work around Antonio being a man? – or to work with it?
- Should you tell Sylvian what you think of them?

What sort of drunk will you become?

During the gap between scenes 3 and 4, you will become drunk. You tend to become rather sentimental; and can be tearful, even weepy, if you feel that people aren’t on the same wavelength as you.

Sylvian

You were assigned male at birth (and given the name 'Paul'), but felt quite early on that something was wrong with that. To start with, you thought that you were gay – you had a string of associations with male lovers, but nothing seemed to stick. Then, about five years ago, you realized that you had been looking at things completely wrongly – and that actually you were agender.

It was a great relief to understand that the whole mess of the gender binary did not apply to you – you were not a gay man, nor a woman; you were not gendered at all. But it was tough – not least having to explain it to everyone. Here, Tanya, your best friend, was a complete rock. She supported you, through the good and the bad: and worked hard at helping your social circles to understand and accept you as you really are. You don't think you could have got through it without her.

You were, well, not exactly happy to accompany Tanya to this meeting with her ex Raquel – but absolutely willing. You want to be there for her wherever possible. But, you are a little worried that they might get back together. You felt Raquel was bad for Tanya – she was controlling and belittling, as well as being completely square and boring – and also she just ditched her horribly, ending the relationship without warning and without giving a reason. You might need to help Tanya to be strong and to resist the temptation to forgive.

You are a fashion designer, and have started to have some success locally – people with a good eye appreciate your vision, and your clothes get worn on the trendier streets. You aren't interested in working for one of the big fashion houses, though – well, not unless they really paid a lot. You want to follow your own creativity. And maybe find happiness with a partner – you've been single pretty much since you transitioned, trying to think about what a good relationship might look like for someone who's agender.

About the others:

Tanya – your best friend, you are here to support her however she needs it. And to stand up for her, if she's attacked. You feel that she does fully appreciate your friendship – she is also there for you when you need it – but even so, some acknowledgement from her will make you feel better.

Raquel – basically an awful person, some sort of computer programmer, only interested in making money and being boring. You never understood what Tanya saw in her. You hope that she has arranged this meeting so she can apologise to Tanya for dumping her so cruelly.

Antonio – you do not know that Antonio is going to come to the pub with Raquel, and it will be a nasty shock to you. You and he had a brief affair, several years ago, before you had transitioned. He was a good soul – he wanted to care for you – but you pushed him away, because it just felt wrong to have someone in that role with you. You realize now that this was mostly because you were still in the wrong gender, and still quite fucked up in the head – but you were rather mean to him, to get rid of him from your life: and you haven't been in contact since. But maybe he won't recognize you: after all, you have changed a lot.

Questions to explore during play

- How you feel about Antonio now – should you be friendly, should you apologise, should you try and explain yourself?
- And how do you feel that he and Raquel now seem to be together? Should you warn him about her? – or hope that they can somehow be happy with each other?
- Tanya doesn't know about you and Antonio, which was before you knew her – what should you say to her, if it becomes apparent that there's a history between you?
- How can you make sure that you give Tanya the help that she needs – which isn't always the same as what she asks for or what she wants?

What sort of drunk will you become?

During the gap between scenes 3 and 4, you will become drunk. You tend to become rather confused and repetitive, and you need things to be explained in great detail for them to sink in to your fuddled mind.

Antonio

You are generally a happy and cheerful person, which is lucky, because your life has had a number of ups and downs. But nothing seems to have scarred you too badly – you are resilient and self-confident enough to know that stuff happens, and it isn't a judgement of you, or a conspiracy of fate. You rise again to face the world with a smile on your face.

The closest thing to setting you back was when you were dumped by a guy named Paul, several years ago. He was very talented, just starting up in fashion design: and you worked in a shop that carried his stuff, that's how you met. You really loved him: and you hoped that you could be together for a while. He was vulnerable and sweet, and you cared for him and made a safe space for him. But one day he just kicked you out of his life, with some cruel and hurtful comments. You have never understood why.

That was, perhaps, one of the things that drew you to Raquel – she had recently been through a painful breakup, and she was so sad and hurt. Your heart went out to her right away, and you carefully brought her back to herself. Now she is well-balanced and ready to face the world – with you at her side, hopefully. She probably doesn't *need* you in the same way that she did at the start, when she was broken. But that's ok – you can have a healthier, more balanced, relationship now. And there are bound to be times in the future when she needs your support again.

That sounds kind of calculating – and perhaps it is, in a way. You do tend to see patterns in how people relate to each other, and how you can fit into them. Such a lot of people are really at the mercy of their emotions and their state of mind, and not able to think things through. You aren't like that: you feel like you're always, in a sense, looking down at the board from above, as well as playing on it. It's probably one of the things that keeps you balanced and sane!

These days you have an import business, still involved with clothing, shipping in garments and getting them into stores. It's going well: and hopefully it'll continue to grow. It's not your dream, or anyone's dream probably: but it makes people happy to have nice clothes available at good prices. And, after all, someone has to earn money and pay taxes, or how would the country manage?

About the others:

Raquel – your girlfriend, and maybe hopefully long-term partner to be. You're here to help her close the door on her time with Tanya, which you know to have been troubled and unhealthy for her. She's such a great person: she deserves to be happy, and you intend to make sure that she is.

Tanya – you haven't met her: but, from what Raquel's said, she was grasping and unappreciative. (Not that Raquel has said anything as unkind or judgemental as that... but you can read between the lines.) She basically lived off Raquel's money, without showing her any appreciation; doing just as she pleased.

Sylvian – you don't know anything about Sylvian, and are not expecting anyone to be with Tanya at the pub. You will immediately recognize them as being your ex Paul – although they now have a different name (*assuming that Tanya introduces them at some point*). They look rather different now, for sure: but you can still clearly see the person who you loved so much, and who hurt you so much.

Questions to explore during play

- Should you acknowledge Paul? – or just pretend that you are meeting 'Sylvian' as a new person? If you do acknowledge him/them, how can you possibly refer to your past together, without stirring up tremendous hurt?
- Do you even want to know what went wrong – why Paul left you, and in such a cruel way?
- Aside from your own issues, how can you best help Raquel? What will she need from you? – and how can you make sure to provide it readily and subtly, preferably before she even realizes the need herself?
- How should you be towards Tanya? You have every reason to detest her, on reputation. But you are not really that sort of person: no doubt she does have some good qualities. And after all, you are now with the person who she once loved.

What sort of drunk will you become?

During the gap between scenes 3 and 4, you will become drunk. You tend to become self-righteous, and assertive – even verbally aggressive.

How to Hack 'Four of a Kind'

'Four of a Kind' is a great larp (or, rather, 'LARP'), but there is a *lot* of it. I mean like six scenes, and who knows how long each of them might last.

We came up with a shorter version which we think keeps a lot of the interest. So, in this version there are only three scenes - but perhaps you want to break between them and talk for a bit? The original design by Specunaut doesn't really allow for that.

So how it works is, you play Scenes 3, 4, and 5 only. You still have the getting-drunk between Scenes 3 and 4, of course, that's important. But you start with Raquel and Antonio arriving at the table where Tanya and Sylvian already are: and you end with Tanya and Raquel just about to come back to the table from the bar to rejoin Sylvian and Antonio, with both pairs having had their solo scenes.

Obviously this is a bit of a different experience, and you don't get so densely into the characters. But it can work pretty well, for occasions when you have a bit less larping time available.

-Martin