

Lost and Found: Belongings that Belong

A absurdist larp about political agency what it means to be alive

by Alex Brown



Do objects feel lost, if anything at all? Can they belong if they have no-one to belong to?

Stuck in an absurdist and mundane limbo, this larp explores what it's like to be lost property.

Players: 6-12 (an even number works best though not essential)

3 hours

Before the larp

Mark the play space in half with coloured tape, one red side one yellow. At the front of the space with the red and yellow shelves on either side, place a small table, separated into the same coloured boxes. The GM as the NPC Guard will sit on a chair behind this table, facing the play. A small amount of sandbox props are useful but not essential, for example string, paper, cushions, blankets, furniture. Avoid any items which you could imagine as lost property for example, clothing or bags.

Prepare sound

Prepare papers in 'Materials Needed' section

An on/off switch for light needs to be accessible for the GM to distinguish between Day Scenes and Night Scenes. There should still be some low light in the Night Scene.

If the larp is run at a festival or event, you should encourage players to bring their own personal belongings such as bags and coats to the larp, as they will be used for character creation.

Materials needed

A table and chair

2 rolls of coloured tape (red and yellow is used in this script although can be substituted as long as instructions are consistent to shelf colours)

1 per player of the following: Owner questions (print page 13 corresponding to half the number of players), Character tags, (print page 14 twice, 12 safety pins), pens

3 Red and 3 yellow cards, one card for each pair. (These can be pieces of paper with red and yellow marks on one side, if you have old paper train tickets it is a nice touch)

6 cross cards and 6 blank cards (I have used train tickets but can be pieces of paper, half with crosses on them and half blank)

2 Order of Play sheets (page 15 cut in half and taped to floor next to each floor representation of shelf)

2 Shelf Rules sheets 'Red Shelf Rules' page 16 and 'Yellow Shelf Rules' page 17

Sound system with downloaded steam train sound and frog sound, both are available on Spotify

Train sound (Track 2):

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/003xUIhLmGuTFARvNBb1a4?si=c7c6171983dc46f5>

Frog sound (Track 2, first 30 seconds):

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2YBtRj0Q6HPAtFP1xOtqFA?si=5793e0a8c09d4d58>

All text in the workshop and the larp should be read aloud, anything in brackets is a note or instruction to the GM.

Note to GM: the NPC of the Guard should be thought about in advance; movement and voice. I imagine this character as old, grumpy and negligent, however you may choose to play the character differently. There isn't anything scripted for the Guard as they are alone at work but you can improvise some under-the-breath mutterings or phrases which bring this character to life. Phrases such as 'Another day in paradise!' in a sarcastic tone have worked quite well.

WORKSHOP

(1 hour 30 minutes approx)

Introduction

Do objects feel lost, if anything at all? Can they belong if they have no-one to belong to?

Stuck in an absurdist and mundane limbo, this larp explores what it's like to be lost property.

Setting

The larp is set in the lost property office of a quiet suburban village train station.

You will be playing items of lost property that become sentient as they are lost by their owners. Most of the play will take place on the shelves of the lost property office, marked by the coloured tape on the floor, where the characters meet for the first time.

The objects are all in this room, you will bring them to life through a workshop and give them the opportunity to express themselves and feel emotion for the first time. This larp explores themes of community building, political agency and what it means to be alive.

Structure

The workshop will last around 1 hour 30 minutes and the larp will be just over an hour with time for a debrief at the end.

Character selection

Our characters are going to be created through choosing objects in this room, from players' personal belongings. Any personal items that players do not want to be available to play should be set aside, for example an expensive laptop or dirty underwear. All objects that remain will be available for players to build their characters around, these will be part of the play, handled with care by me as an NPC and some players during one scene.

All players will now choose their character from the objects on the table. Have a good look inside bags and choose one object which stands out for you, this will be the basis of your character. (2 minutes to select an object)

This is your character, please place it in front of me when you have chosen.

Movement

Deciding on your character's movement is where we will begin. Your character and all others in the lost and found community are unlikely to move in real life unless animated by their owner. How would it learn to move if it didn't have an owner? We will spend a few minutes doing some movement, trying to explore how your object might move around. Please start walking gently around the room in any direction. Using all the space in the room we're going to practice some different types of movement to help to bring the characters to life.

(Allow time for players to explore these movements and don't rush! 10-15 seconds for each)

Big precise movements...

Small erratic movements...

With purpose...

Without purpose...

Tiny introverted movements...

Very tall expansive movements...

And now rest.

Now I would like you to take a look at your object or visualise it in your mind, try and emphasise **the size of the object** into your own movement and begin again walking around the room.

Remember the size is contextual to other objects.

Now try and transfer **the shape of the object** into your movement. This might feel awkward and limit speed and agility, both of these things are totally fine.

And now think about the **material or the purpose** of the object and how that affects movement.

And now rest.

Through a combination of these things, think about what worked and how you would like your object to move through its own will.

Now walk around the room as your object and be curious about other objects, really paying attention to how they move and express themselves.

Please stop where you are and form a pair with the closest person to you.

(Move players into pairs or a 3 if necessary)

Mirroring exercise

Turn to face each other about arms length apart. This is your cleaning buddy, this is going to be the character that you will spend the most time with and have the most regular interactions throughout the larp. This is someone that you will have great admiration and trust for.

If you're not already doing so, make eye contact with them. Give them your biggest smile.

Quickly choose one of you to go first for a short mirroring exercise.

In a moment this player will show the other your character's stance, how you hold yourself when just stationary as your character. The 2nd player will imitate the other player like a mirror. Let's try this now.

Everything that player 1 is doing, player 2 should be mirroring.

Make some movements with your hands as if you were your character, try to keep eye contact whilst you are following...

Now a few head movements...

Move your facial muscles around, try a few different expressions out...

Player 1 try a wave...

A few movements of the feet...

You are on your toes ready to go somewhere...

Now try a bit of a sideways walk, player 2 still mirroring these movements and keeping eye contact.

And rest.

Now switch so that player 2 is leading and player 1 is mirroring.

Player 2, remember back to your own characters' stance and how they would stand neutrally (then back to hand movements and repeat with player 2 leading.)

Shelf groups

There will be two groups of Lost and Found objects, initially divided by which shelf you live on, and you will spend more time with your immediate neighbours than those on the other shelf. (Give out 3 red/3 yellow tickets, one to each pair) As the floor is marked, please go to your correctly coloured shelf)

Utopia

We're going to change the pace slightly as this larp mainly relies on conversation. I'd like you to have a short discussion in your shelf group to answer the following 2 questions:

- What does utopia mean to you?
- What are the limits to utopia?

You have a few minutes to discuss this as a group. (3 minutes)

If people haven't moved on to the second question, please do so now (2 minutes).

(Ask 2 groups to quickly report back to the whole group)

Strength and limitation

Now we're back to creating your characters. Your character will be really good at something, useful or not. That can be literal to the function of the object; if you're a coat then simply you could keep people warm. If you're a pair of glasses then you could think a little more abstractly such as seeing into the future.

Your character will have at least one limitation, this could be something physical limit such as an arm out to the side for a rucksack, or it could be a limit in knowledge. As our characters we will have mostly the same knowledge of our players but limitations in knowledge will offer possibilities for play.

I'm now going to give out lost property tags for players which should be enough to identify you as lost property. (Give out a tag and safety pin to each player)

Please give your character a strength and a limitation and write them both on your tag. (2 mins)

Give your character a name, which could incorporate a description of the object. Write this on your tag. (1 min)

When both have chosen a name, introduce your character to your cleaning buddy and tell them why you made these choices.

(2 minutes introducing your character so far to your cleaning buddy)

All players should briefly introduce their cleaning buddy to the group, adding what it is that they like about their partner. (30 seconds each player report back - keep this moving)

(As they are spoken, write down name of character, object and name of player in list form, this will be useful later on)

Cleaning buddies

Each scene will begin with a daily cleaning routine. It's very important for the objects to stay clean in the dusty lost property office. This is also a social event, cleaning buddies will ask each other questions about how they feel and what their plans are for the night ahead.

We're now going to practice the cleaning routine with a safety mechanic as well. To clean each other, you can use the palm of your hand or a light fist.

I would suggest that you mainly clean hands and arms, if you are both comfortable in pushing these boundaries then you can move to other parts of the body.

Safety

As is standard practice in most larp, we'll be using safety mechanics to ensure that we have players' consent during play.

CUT stops play

BRAKE slows down play

Hand over eyes for off game, if you want to speak to the GM or use the toilet

OK sign to check in with other players

These safety mechanics are used for the entire play and not just the daily cleaning routine, if there are any situations in which you feel uncomfortable with the play then use one of these safety words.

I am going to demonstrate with someone cleaning me (use brake first,

We're now going to practice the cleaning routine, this will be at the beginning of each night scene when the objects wake up.

The point of this exercise isn't to test the boundaries which can be negotiated in play, it's to practice saying the safety words. Clean your partner until they say both safety words BRAKE and CUT.

Owner

Everyone will have the possibility of playing a second character as well, the owner of their object. (Hand out questions) You're going to create this character with your cleaning buddy, answering a question then passing the character sheet.

Who was your owner? (pass paper to your buddy)

What were the great times you had? (pass back)
 Were there any doubts that they didn't care for you? (pass)
 How did you become separated?

Find someone else who isn't your cleaning buddy.

Take a turn each to practice a mimed scene of how your owner lost their object, whilst you are playing the part of the owner, you will be *narrating as the object* in a flashback scene. If you have an object character voice, now is a good time to practice it. (2 mins)

If you haven't already done so, switch over so the other character is narrating their owner's story. (2 mins)

Towards the end of the larp, some players will play their owner character as well so keep that saved. The relationship between your object character and owner character might inform some of your play, it's up to you.

Object character development

Your object character is going to develop throughout the play, as they become more independent they will learn new aspects to their personality.

At the beginning they will have their **name, movement, strength and limitation** as the basis for their character. At points in the play you will add **additional** aspects to your character. This might be a new character trait, a goal to accomplish or a hidden secret. You will fill this in on your tag when prompted so your tag will need to be detachable with the from your clothes.

Play scenes

Play will happen through 4 night scenes with short daytime interludes separating them.

All objects will occupy the red and yellow shelves of the lost property office. Objects come to life at night when no-one is around and cannot be seen to move or speak by humans. There is one person that you will encounter throughout the larp, the guard, who will be played by me.

Each of the 4 scenes are going to take place at night, when the guard isn't around.

They will be separated by 3 days, when the guard is at work in the train station.

During daytime when the guard is working, the objects cannot move or risk being caught.

In these daytime interludes, the guard will pick up objects from the shelf next to them which represent the characters. Whilst the guard holds the object, the character will give a monologue to reveal their thoughts and reflections to other players. **Even though players can hear, other characters will not be able to hear these monologues as they are inner thoughts spoken aloud.** If the guard puts your object down you should finish your

There will be a narration before each scene to give some direction to players then the sound of a train will begin the play.

A frog sounds halfway through night scenes.

At the end of each night scene you hear footsteps and must all return back to your own shelf before the guard sees you.

You will add facets to your character throughout the play when prompted to do so by the narrator and write them on your tags. Please keep your pens close by.

The order of scenes is taped to the floor next to each shelf in case you get lost during play. It's a repetitive structure so it will become second nature soon.

To recap:

There are 4 night scenes, a train will sound to begin these scenes. The cleaning ritual begins play. Halfway through the night, the frog sounds and when you hear the footsteps, you must return to your own shelf.

During the day, the guard enters, lifts objects one by one. When your object is lifted by the guard, you will give a monologue, this will be instructed during play so please listen to the narration. After the guard has done their day at work, they leave and then the objects will add to their character tags. We will then go back to a night scene and repeat.

We're coming to the end of the workshop, are there any questions?

The larp will last around 1 hour 15 minutes. Now is a good time for a quick comfort break.

(End of workshop, before the larp ensure the space is ready and all papers and materials are nearby)

The Larp

(1 hour 15 mins approx)

(You should read the Scene names as well as instructions marked 'Narrator' in this section)

As Narrator: Scene 1: Arrivals

As Narrator: The Arrivals scene begins with the objects waking up in Lost and Found. Your owners are nowhere to be seen. You meet each other for the first time and realise what has happened.

Tonight, the characters get to know each other and their surroundings. Half way through the night when you hear the frog, players can move to the other shelf if they wish. Players can share some food together at this point.

The play begins with the daily cleaning ritual and meeting another lost object for the first time.

(Play Train sound)

(7 minutes)

(Play Frog sound)

(7 minutes)

(During this time it's advised to read ahead to the next scene so you know what is coming. At the beginning of Scene 2, you will put the 'Shelf Rules sheets' in the corner of each floor space shelf)

(Scene ends with the arrival of the Guard - footsteps 20 secs 1 per sec)

(no need to read this)

Guard scene - daytime INTERLUDE 1

(LIGHT ON)

Narrator: Today the objects reflect on how they feel about what has happened and what is to come. (5 minutes)

(Walk in **as Guard**, shuffle papers, mutter a few words if you feel inclined, etc)

(As the Guard **pick up objects** from alternate shelves and examine them - ie Red1 Yellow1 R2 Y2.)

(Guard finishes their day at work after examining all objects walks off to the side near light switch)

Narrator: As the guard goes home from work, players add something to their character for the next scene, this can be a new personality trait or a goal to accomplish. Write this on your tag now before the night time begins.

(1-2 mins)

(LIGHT OFF)

Narrator: Scene 2: Connections

Narrator: Objects try to overcome their initial fears; they realise that through cooperating as a group they occupy themselves with purpose and start to build new freedoms.

(Place Shelf Rules sheets in corners of each corresponding floor space shelf)

Narrator: 3 rules are created by each shelf and written for everyone to see. Objects are encouraged, if they haven't done so already, to move props around their shelf to make themselves feel at home.

The night begins with the cleaning ritual, the sound of the frog means players can move to the other shelf if they wish but they must respect the rules of that shelf.

(Train)

(7 mins)

(Frog)

(7 mins)

(wrap up when play is slowing down - footsteps for 20 seconds)

(no need to read this)

Guard scene day INTERLUDE 2

(LIGHT ON)

Today the objects think about their hopes and fears. (5 minutes)

(As guard pick up objects in order from left to right from alternate shelves - ie Red1 Yellow1 R2 Y2. It doesn't have to be the same order as before.)

As the guard goes home from work, players add something to their character for the next scene, this can be a new personality trait or a goal to accomplish. Write this on your tag now before night time begins.

(1-2 mins)

(LIGHT OFF)

Narrator: Scene 3: Departures

Narrator: In this scene objects can freely move on either shelf at any time. If they wish, players can change or break rules on either shelf.

If no-one does this by the time you hear the frog then one player should give themselves this role.

As always, play begins with your daily cleaning ritual.

(Train)
 (7 mins)
 (Frog)
 (7 mins)
 (Scene ends with the arrival of the guard - footsteps 20 secs 1 per sec)

(Prepare blank and crossed cards/papers)

(no need to read this)

Guard scene day INTERLUDE 3

Narrator: Players will select a card as they are handed out. (Hand out cards, half marked with X). Those marked with an X will be collected by their owners during this scene. If this is the case, when the guard arrives at work you will come to the desk **as the object's owner** and ask for your object to be returned. Objects that are reunited with their owners must leave Lost and Found, lose their consciousness and observe from off-game.

The day will continue with the objects' monologue reflections - after the final voice is heard, owners will one by one start arriving to collect their lost property.

(LIGHT ON - Enter as **Guard**)

(As **Guard** pick up objects in any order from alternate shelves - ie Red1 Yellow1 R2 Y2)

(prompt if players unsure to come and collect, only if necessary **Guard:** 'Cor, I wish one day some of this old junk would come and be collected')

(Players one by one come up to collect)

(Guard ends working day)

(LIGHT OFF)

As Narrator: Scene 4: Epilogue

Narrator: In this final scene, the remaining objects at Lost and Found reflect on their time here. They think about their own future, and the future of those who are absent.

There are no special instructions for this scene and you may move freely across the shelves.

For those that have been collected by your owners, you may observe from the sides.

The night begins with your cleaning ritual, for those without a buddy, you will clean yourselves.

(7-10 mins)

(Guard footsteps to end scene)

That's the end of the larp, thank you for playing. Just take a moment, as long as you need, and we'll gather together in the middle for a debrief.

Debrief

(Check in with everyone how they are doing)

How is everyone feeling after that? (Go around room in turn to feedback, as decompression from larp)

Any additional comments about the larp design and how it was to play?

(Thank everyone and finish)

Owner character creation

Everyone will have the option of playing a second character as well, the owner of their object. You're going to co-create this character with your cleaning buddy.

Please answer the following:

Who was your owner? (pass paper to your buddy)

What were the great times you had? (pass back)

Were there any doubts that they didn't care for you? (pass)

How did you become separated?

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What were the great times you had? (pass back)

Were there any doubts that they didn't care for you? (pass)

How did you become separated?

LOST AND FOUND

Name:
Strength:
Limitation:
Additional:
Additional:

LOST AND FOUND

Name:
Strength:
Limitation:
Additional:
Additional:

LOST AND FOUND

Name:
Strength:
Limitation:
Additional:
Additional:

LOST AND FOUND

Name:
Strength:
Limitation:
Additional:
Additional:

LOST AND FOUND

Name:
Strength:
Limitation:
Additional:
Additional:

LOST AND FOUND

Name:
Strength:
Limitation:
Additional:
Additional:

ORDER OF SCENES

NIGHT x 4

Train - begin

Cleaning ritual

Frog - halfway point

Footsteps - return
to own shelf

DAY x 3

Guard enters

Lifts objects -
monologues

Guard leaves

Add to character
tags

NIGHT x 4

Train - begin

Cleaning ritual

Frog - halfway point

Footsteps - return
to own shelf

DAY x 3

Guard enters

Lifts objects -
monologues

Guard leaves

Add to character
tags

RED SHELF RULES

1.

2.

3.

YELLOW SHELF RULES

1.

2.

3.