The Last Cigarette
by Mo Holkar

Short blurb
A group of people meet each day, in their workplace's designated smoking area. They are not close, but they have this one thing in common: so they chat. What will happen when together they decide to try and give up – to have the last cigarette?

Long blurb
You will create a group of colleagues, who work in different parts of a large organization, and who meet each day in its designated smoking area. The characters are not close friends, but they have this habit in common: so, over time, they chat and get to know each other.

Together they decide to try and give up smoking: will they be successful?

This larp is not really about smoking – it's more about casual friendships and regular encounters, and the way that those people can make an impression upon your life.

Introduction
The Last Cigarette is a short chamber larp about people who are giving up smoking. For 5–12 participants, lasting probably 2–3 hours (depending on numbers). You could play it with less – even just with 2 maybe – but we haven't tried that yet.

It doesn't need a separate facilitator – but it does need one of the participants to have looked through this document, and printed out the relevant bits.

You can run the larp in any ordinary room, or outdoors if you wish. It just needs enough play space for the participants to stand together in a loose huddle.

You do not need actual cigarettes, lighters, or any other smoking paraphernalia. Nor do participants need to be familiar with the actual activity of smoking and what it involves.

Briefing notes
Pass the **Briefing notes** around, each reads out a paragraph. Or you can just have one person read the whole briefing aloud, if that works better for you.

Setup
Together, complete the **organization sheet.**

Then, each completes a **character creation sheet.** When everyone has done so and has stuck on their name label, you are ready to start.

(There is no need to introduce characters to the other participants – before the start of the larp, they don't know each other.)

Scenes
Someone should read out the appropriate **Scene briefing** before each scene, and then start the music.

The designer uses 'No Doubt vs Talk Talk - It's My Life (Saint Ken Remix)' as scene music – it's about ten minutes long. But you can use whatever you like – or just have a timer, and no music. It should be quiet, and in the background. If you can edit the bell ringing (a minute before the end, and at the end) into the music file, that will make life easier.

Debrief

After the conclusion of the epilogue, hold a normal kind of debrief.

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Briefing notes

The Last Cigarette is a larp about a group of people who together decide to give up smoking. The characters all work in an office block or other such large building, for the same organization. But they are not direct colleagues: they each work in different parts of the organization. At the start of the larp, they only know each other by sight, if at all.

The larp takes place in the present day. The organization that employs all the characters might be a business, or an NGO, or a hospital, or a government ministry, etc – we will agree that together during setup.

The building has a designated outdoor smoking area, and this is where the larp takes place: the characters gather there to smoke. It plays out over five scenes, each about ten minutes long, at monthly intervals. These aren't the only occasions that the characters see each other – they go outside to smoke probably every day that they're in at work, and probably usually around the same time of day – but they represent five points of focus in the story.

In each scene, the characters will all light and smoke a cigarette, and chat together. That's it. The scenes are timed to music, with a bell one minute before the end and then again at the end. (The music and the bells are not diegetic.) By default, your cigarette will last until the end of the scene: but you can smoke it quicker, or stub it out unfinished, before the end if you wish. If you do so, you can either remain in the scene, or leave it early, as you prefer.

There is no need to mime the actual lighting, smoking, etc of cigarettes: although people can if they want to, and we are welcome to make play out of asking one another for a light, for example. There should be no play around what a person does with their cigarette (eg don't say that they are holding it in an interesting way). Basically it's 'play to lift', as far as the smoking goes – because participants may have different real-life levels of familiarity with it.

Each scene has a short briefing note, which one of us will read aloud before the start of the scene, before starting the music. Inbetween scenes, we will each take an event card, to determine something that happens during the month. This can be used to feed into play at the next scene. We can also freely invent other things that happened during the month, of course.

The five scenes are as follows. (1) February – the smoking area is newly designated and brought into use. The characters meet, and start to get to know each other. (2) March – just ahead of the Easter holidays. Chatting and plans. (3) April – there is a major destabilizing development at the organization. (4) May – the characters mutually decide to all give up over the course of the next month. (5) June – the last cigarette.

At the end of scene 3, some characters may lose their jobs – if the player so chooses. If they do so, then scene 4 is the end of their notice period – their last day at work. And in scene 5, they are returning to the smoking area as an outsider, to join their former colleagues for the last cigarette.

Each scene should start with the smoking area empty: characters should arrive in it as they wish. (Although don't wait too long before arriving.) At the end of each scene, they should all leave the area together.

After the scene is finished, we will spread out the new event cards for the following scene, together with any left over from previous scenes. Each of us will choose one (or draw one randomly, if they prefer.) We will have a few minutes to think, without discussion, about what the event means to us – and about what else might have happened in the character's life during that month. Then we are ready to hear the briefing for the next scene. Event cards that were not chosen should be left for next time: those that were chosen should be retained by the participant, not put back with the others.

After the end of Scene 5, there will be a brief epilogue during which we will consider whether our characters actually were able to give up smoking or not.

Scene briefings

Scene 1, February. The organization has designated a new outdoor smoking area, and today is the first day of its use. The characters each separately make their way to it, to enjoy a cigarette, and meet each other. Perhaps some are shyer or quieter than others, but eventually they all get to talking.

After the conclusion of this scene, we will each take an event card, to represent something that happens during the coming month.

Scene 2, March. This is the last work day before the Easter break. The characters gather at the smoking area as usual; and among other things might chat about their holiday plans.

After this scene ends, we will each take another event card.

Scene 3, April. A major reorganization is about to take place, and many people will be losing their jobs. None of the characters yet know (although they may suspect) whether that includes them, or not.

We should each decide, after the scene ends, if our own character does lose their job or not. And we will each take another event card.

Scene 4, May. For anyone who lost their job during the reorganization, this is their last day at work. At some point during this scene, the characters will together decide to give up smoking over the course of the coming month. Some might be cynical, doubtful of their willpower, etc – but all must agree to take part in the effort.

After this scene finishes, we will each take a last event card.

Scene 5, June. Any characters who earlier lost their jobs are here as visitors from the outside. This is what they have agreed will be the last cigarette.

After the music finishes at the end of this scene, we will fade the lights down (or people close their eyes). One of us will need some light, though, to be able to read the next box.

Epilogue. We should now think silently for a few moments about how our character feels about having had their last cigarette: what does this mean for their life? what is next for them?

(wait for a few moments)

Then each of us should in turn say (still with eyes closed) whether they are still smoke-free a month later. Then, each should say: are they still smoke-free a year later. Then, ten years later.

Once everyone has finished speaking, it's the end of the larp.

Organization sheet

Each participant in turn should make a statement about the organization that employs the characters. The first two statements are mandatory: subsequent ones can be about anything that the person whose turn it is wishes. They could be about the building, the neighbourhood, the management… anything at all that's relevant to the characters' joint workplace.

The way it works is: make the statement as a suggestion. If everyone else is happy with it, then write it in. If someone wants to reject it, they can do so, and they shouldn't be asked why (although they can say why if they wish) – the person whose turn it is should make a different suggestion instead. Alternatively, people can suggest tweaks. Once everyone is happy, write it in.

Finish when everyone has written in a statement, even if there are blank lines remaining. Further details can just be improvised as required.

The precise location of the building is not important (unless we've chosen something very specific, like the Vatican or the Pentagon).

We should not worry about whether it's plausible that the organization would create an outdoor smoking area. We should also not worry about the legislation etc around such a thing – assume, for the sake of the fiction, that it is both legal and unremarkable.

Nature of the organization (including its line of business if it has one, etc):
Name of the organization:

Character creation sheet

For the like/dislike questions, don't answer 'nothing' or otherwise evade the question – find something concrete that you can give as an answer.

This sheet doesn't include questions about your character's domestic situation, etc – you should feel free to invent that as you go along, through the larp. (But of course you can make notes on it at this stage, if you wish.)

Character name:
Character age:
What department do you work in?
What is your role?
What do you like/value/cherish about your work?
What do you dislike/resent/hate about it?
How long have you been a smoker?
How much do you smoke? Light [ ] Moderate [ ] Heavy [ ]
What does the first cigarette of the day feel like?
What do you feel that it says about you, that you are a smoker?
Why are you thinking about stopping?

When you've completed this sheet, write your character's name and role on a sticky label, and stick it onto yourself. This represents their building security ID badge, so other characters can read it in-game.

Event cards

After Scene 1

Someone close to you became ill, and you are concerned for them	You bumped into one of the other smokers in a different context, outside work *(agree this with another participant, and together decide what happened)*	You used to have responsibilities caring for someone, but they have come to an end
You have got a new pet *(what is it?)*	You slipped and sustained a minor fracture	You had a very disappointing meal *(at what kind of restaurant?)*
You have been encouraged to apply for a promotion at work	You made a very ornate cake *(or something like that)* for the celebration of a friend or family member	A bird defecated on you as you were going into work
You attended a spiritual, or mystical, or otherwise transcendent event: and were changed by it	You visited a foreign country	Your car *(bicycle, etc)* broke down and needs to be repaired

Also after Scene 1

You won a useful, but not life-changing, amount of money	You are thinking about moving house, and are considering which area would be best to live in	You have started a humorous feud with a colleague, where you play pranks on each other
You saw one of the other smokers doing something outside work, but they did not see you *(agree this with another participant, and what they were doing)*	You read *(or listened to, etc)* an amazing book, that you've been telling everybody about	Your boss has asked you to do some overtime – it's very inconvenient, but you worry about how they might view you if you say no
You started taking lessons in dance *(or something else like that)* and are enthusiastic but tired	You are having trouble with your neighbours, who make lots of noise, including late at night	You found a beautiful *(or interesting, etc)* curio in a junk shop or boot sale or flea market
You accidentally caused a sizeable technological snarl-up, at work	Someone close to you is performing *(in a play, cabaret, etc),* and you have to go and support them, even though you don't really enjoy what they do	You are looking after someone's houseplants while they're away, but you're concerned that you're watering them too much / not enough

After Scene 2

You have a workplace enemy, who seems to be trying to make your life a misery	You are one of the few people to have heard about a minor scandal in the upper levels of the organization, which will soon become public knowledge *(embezzlement, nepotism, etc)*	You have had to temporarily move out of your residence because of repairs that it needs
You reconnected with someone who you'd long ago lost touch with *(how was it?)*	You arranged to meet up with one of the other smokers outside work, to accomplish some kind of joint plan *(agree this with another participant, and together decide what it was)*	You very visibly changed your physical appearance *(hair colour, way of dressing, etc),* but then changed back to how you were before
You suffered the loss of a good friend or family member	Someone you care about got married *(or otherwise ceremonially partnered)*	You lost/wasted a sizeable amount of money, through an unwise investment/purchase
You decided to start a new creative project, but you're unsure if you're any good at it or not	You've been seconded to a different department, and you don't like the atmosphere there	You've developed a strong crush/squish on someone who is probably unattainable

After Scene 3

You've suffered a serious health problem	You've suffered a major disappointment/betrayal in friendship/love	You weren't given appropriate credit for a major piece of work that you did
You've been experiencing weird memory gaps recently, and are concerned there might be something wrong with your brain	A public figure who you admired has been exposed as being actually a terrible person	A country where you have links *(friends, family, heritage, etc)* has been taken over by a dictatorial regime
You were the victim of a terrible transport snarl-up, and had to spend hours waiting, hungry and thirsty, at the airport/station/etc	The place where you live has won an award for some pleasant aspect of its environment	You've come to understand that some of the things that you blame yourself for are not really your fault
You had to cancel a nice plan that you'd been looking forward to *(holiday, etc)* because work were not being cooperative	You got a new piece of domestic technology that you're rather excited about	Someone close to you has recently got the job of their dreams, and it pays well too

After Scene 4

You have been questioning your spiritual/religious beliefs (or your lack of them)	You know that in many ways you are fortunate, but lately it's very hard to see it like that	You have recently been feeling that if you were to die today, you wouldn't have left much of a mark on the world
You remembered something from your childhood, which stirred a strong emotion (positive/negative/abstract) within you *(what was it?)*	You have really been struggling to make your wages last until the end of the month	You are due to have a major medical procedure in six weeks' time, and are nervous about it
You and one of the other smokers have decided to share a bigger part of your lives together *(agree who, and how)*	You are thinking about getting a job with one of the organization's main rivals	You have nearly saved enough money to do something that you've been planning for ages *(what is it?)*
You've been thinking about what is it that would make you really happy in life – and how could you get to there?	Your talent or skill *(what is it?)* has been recognized on a larger public scale – this could maybe lead towards real fame and success	You've been wondering if you will ever see any of the smokers again, now that you're all giving up