

THE BEST MEDICINE

A larp about laughter
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For 5–8 players, lasting about 4 hours

“They laughed when I said I was going to become a comedian!
They’re not laughing now...”
(Bob Monkhouse)

Version 1.1 – 2nd March 2018

INTRODUCTION

This is a larp about laughter. Specifically, about how laughter is good for you: about how laughter is, as the old saying suggests, the best medicine.

[science bit]

What *The Best Medicine* seeks to investigate is whether ‘larped laughter’ is as effective for this as ‘real’ laughter. Prepare to have your sides split...

FACILITATING/GMING

This larp has been designed so that the facilitator can take part as one of the players, if they wish. You don’t have to, though: it’s up to your preference. The larp will work just as well either way.

SETUP

The characters are a group of funny people – comedians and comic actors,. They all know each other, or know of each other, to some extent. They are gathered to mourn/celebrate the loss of one of their number – a true great, with whom they all had different experiences.

They choose character archetype skeletons from a set, answer some self-questions, and form some relationships.

BING FUNNY

Not everyone is hilariously funny, much as they might believe themselves to be. So *The Best Medicine* has a metatechnique to indicate when a character is deliberately being funny.

YOU WILL NEED

- A chair for each player and yourself, and preferably a couple of tables.
- A printout of pages 9–17 of this document.
- And either a printout of the other pages, or an electronic version that you can read from.
- A pen for each player.

- A name label for each player.
- One black and three white beads (or similar) for each player.
- Something to play music.
- A prop to represent Maria's ashes.
- A small mirror that can either be held in the hand or that's on a stand.

WORKSHOP

INTRO

Explanation, practicalities, safety, etc.

METATECHNIQUES

BEING FUNNY

All the characters are professionally funny, and can induce laughter at will. Players will indicate when they are doing this by, while talking or moving or gesturing or whatever the funny thing is, holding up one to five fingers. The more fingers, the funnier the remark/story/action is, and the other characters should react accordingly. You don't have to actually say something that is formed as a joke – you can just say “[says something funny about X]”, and that works just as well.

The players should now practise responding with laughter to these five levels of hilarity.

During the course of the larp, each player should escalate gradually from one to five fingers, with at least one incident on each number. You can't skip a number, ie. you can't have a 5 funny without having previously had a 4. You can go back down to smaller numbers on subsequent funny incidents and then jump back up, so eg. 1 1 2 3 1 4 would be OK. You can have as many funny incidents as you like during the larp, as long as it's at least five: at least one for each number. The larp has five scenes, so you might think of escalating at one finger per scene: that works fine, but you don't have to do that.

ALONE WITH MY THOUGHTS

Even funny people need to commune with their own minds sometimes. Draw a meta box to do an internal monologue. [\[More details\]](#)

THE DOOR IS OPEN

You can leave the larp at any time.– you might be not enjoying it, or not feeling well, or need a break – any reason is fine, and you don't have to explain why. You can go away for a bit and then come back later, too, if you want – it won't hurt the larp at all.

CUT

Use Cut to cut the game.

LOOKDOWN

Use Lookdown to back out of a conversation.

BACKGROUND

Read out **THE INTRODUCTION**:

“Two weeks ago, Maria Moore died, aged 49. She was the funniest person in the world, probably. Maybe in the universe. She started in standup, back in the day – playing student unions and working-men’s clubs. She got onto TV, and pioneered a sharp, clever style of sketch show. After a while she moved into sitcom, and conquered that field too. The last time the public saw her was in feature films – starring as Daisy Chalmers in the hugely-successful *Daisy Goes Crazy* trilogy. Behind the scenes, Maria had been ill for some time. Those who were close to her, and those who had worked with her down the years, knew about it: but only a few knew how serious it was.

“The day before yesterday, Maria’s body was cremated, at a private family service. Her wish was that a selection of comedians and comic actors who she had interacted with at various stages in her career should take her ashes to the Beachy Head cliff, in Sussex, and throw them into the water. Your characters are now about to satisfy that request.”

Take any questions, and then read this bit:

“The larp is made up of three 25-minute scenes – at the hotel where the characters meet; at a country pub halfway along their journey; and on the cliffs at the end of it – separated by two 15-minute scenes while driving. Before that there’s this workshop, which should take about an hour total.”

Put the printout of **THE INTRODUCTION** on the table, for players to refer to if they wish.

Explain that each scene is soundtracked, with the three long scenes ending with ‘Smile’, and the two short scenes being just one track. In all but the last scene, the music is diegetic – it can be talked about, etc – but it can’t be changed. (In the long scenes it’s piped, and in the short ones, the car stereo is stuck.)

CHARACTERS

Spread out the character sheets, let the players choose one each. (If you can send them out to the players in advance, that’s no bad thing.)

Tell the players to think about the questions on their sheets, and to write the answers down if they should wish to (but not to share these answers with each other).

Ask the players to think of names for their characters (forenames only are fine), and to write those names onto labels that they stick to themselves. When everyone's done this, they should then go around the circle and introduce their characters, in a sentence, in the third person.

LINE-UPS

Get the players to **line up** in order of how long their characters have known Maria; of commercial success; of integrity; of contentment.

CONNECTIONS

Give each player three white and one black glass beads (or something similar), and sit them in a circle around a table. Explain that they can decide for themselves how much they know, or don't know, each other: but they will all be at least aware of the existence of all the others.

Go around the circle and ask each player in turn to put one of their beads in front of one of the other players, and suggest a relationship or a feeling between their characters. A relationship can be professional, like you worked together; or personal, like you were life partners, or related; or a mix of the two. A feeling can be based on experience of the other person, or it could be just based on having seen them on TV... etc. If a white bead, the suggested relationship or feeling should be positive; if a black bead, it should be negative.

The recipient player can tweak the suggestion if they wish, until both are happy; or they can veto it, in which case the giving player should try a different idea, or try someone else. Keep going round until each player has given a bead: then repeat three more times, using a different sequence of players each time. It's not important that everyone should end up with the same number and colour mix of beads in front of them; but it's better if they end up with fairly similar numbers at least.

Keep notes of the relationships that you've built, on your character sheet. It'll make them easier to remember during play.

TIMETABLE

Element	Duration	Your time
Workshop	90 mins	
Scene 1	30 mins	
Interlude 1	15 mins	
Scene 2	30 mins	
Interlude 2	15 mins	
Scene 3	30 mins	
Debrief	30 mins	

Before starting play, remind the players of the metatechniques (especially 'Be funny').

At the start of each scene, remind them of its theme, and of the themes of the remaining scenes that are to come. This will help them with pacing their stories.

SCENE 1 - AT THE HOTEL - 30 MINUTES

Theme: reintroduction.

"You are gathered in a hotel suite near Heathrow Airport, where one of you is staying. (Who?) Maria's ashes have been delivered and are out on the table. A hired people-carrier is waiting outside.

"You'll start the scene with just the person whose suite it is in the room, and everyone else outside: you should enter in turn, depending on how punctual or late you feel your character would be.

"The scene will end when the song 'Smile' ends, and at that point you should all be ready to leave the room to start your journey."

Music: lounge, followed by 'Smile' (Diana Ross). 25 mins.

SCENE 2 - M25 - 15 MINUTES

Theme: reminiscence.

“In the minibus, on London’s orbital motorway: plugging away steadily anticlockwise, through busy traffic. One of you is driving. (Who?)

“The scene starts in the middle of driving, in silence or conversation as you prefer. It ends the same way.”

Important for this: have a mirror or something, so the driver can see what’s happening behind them.

Music: ‘Autobahn’. 15 mins.

SCENE 3 - THE WHITE HORSE - 30 MINUTES

Theme: revelation.

“You’ve stopped for a drink, and a loo break (you can go in character) for those who need it. The pub is quiet, and gently lit.

“The scene starts with you approaching the pub tables as a group, working out who’s going to sit next to who.

It ends when the song ‘Smile’ finishes, and you should all then be ready to leave and start the journey once more.”

Music: classic pop hits, followed by ‘Smile’ (Michael Jackson). 25 mins.

SCENE 4 - CUCKMERE VALLEY - 15 MINUTES

Theme: recrimination.

Before this scene, tell the players to think about their characters’ needs: can they be met? – how?

“In the minibus again, threading through the rolling green chalk hills of Sussex, towards the sea.”

“Like before, the scene starts in the middle of driving, in silence or conversation as you prefer. It ends the same way.”

Music: ‘Freebird’. 15 mins.

SCENE 5 - BEACHY HEAD - 30 MINUTES

Theme: reconciliation.

“On the clifftop together. The day is breezy and bright, although the sun is low now. The waves pound, far below. There is a sign warning people against suicide, with The Samaritans’ phone number. Maria asked for her ashes to be scattered at sunset, and you are less than half an hour away

from that now. (The start of sunset will be signalled by the song 'Smile' starting.)

"This final scene starts with you approaching the edge of the cliff.

"It ends when the song 'Smile' finishes – although in this scene, the song is preceded by silence, and it isn't diegetic. By the end of the song, you probably will want to have disposed of Maria's ashes and said your goodbyes to her."

Music: Silence, followed by 'Smile' (Nat Cole). 25 mins.

THE INTRODUCTION

Two weeks ago, Maria Moore died, aged 49. She was the funniest person in the world, probably. Maybe in the universe. She started in standup, back in the day – playing student unions and working-men’s clubs. She got onto TV, and pioneered a sharp, clever style of sketch show. After a while she moved into sitcom, and conquered that field too. The last time the public saw her was in feature films – starring as Daisy Chalmers in the hugely-successful *Daisy Goes Crazy* trilogy. Behind the scenes, Maria had been ill for some time. Those who were close to her, and those who had worked with her down the years, knew about it: but only a few knew how serious it was.

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The five scenes have the themes of (1) Reintroduction, (2) Reminiscence, (3) Revelation, (4) Recrimination, and (5) Reconciliation.

THE TREASURE

You are a successful and established comic actor, with a thriving career. You are much loved by the general public – almost as much as Maria Moore was. You worked with her first in her sitcom *Flogging a Dead Horse*, and later co-starred in the second Daisy film, *Daisy Gets Lazy*.

Answer these questions for yourself – write down the answers if you'd like to, or just remember them. Don't discuss them with the other players. Don't worry if some of them seem hard to answer at the moment – leave those for now, and you might be able to fill them in later when you've found out a bit more about your character.

- How do you feel about the way that your career has gone, and where you are now?
- What was it like for you, working with Maria?
- How do you feel about Maria's career, her progress and her commercial success – and how do you compare it to your own development?
- How did you relate to Maria as a person? – and what do you think she thought of you?
- What do you know about that Maria that (you think) no-one else knows?
- What made you want, or need, to become a comedian?
- Have you satisfied that need in yourself?
- What do you need to happen in your career?
- Do you feel your work has achieved what you wanted it to?
- What is your secret doubt about yourself?
- How happy and satisfied are you in your personal life – your love life, family, etc?

THE THESPIAN

You come from the world of the theatre, and have worked for some years now in regional and small-scale drama – you have regular work, but are a long way from wealth or fame. You felt that your chance of a big break was a TV opportunity, working with Maria Moore on her sitcom *Moving Stationery*: but it didn't come to anything, and you went back to the stage.

Answer these questions for yourself – write down the answers if you'd like to, or just remember them. Don't discuss them with the other players. Don't worry if some of them seem hard to answer at the moment – leave those for now, and you might be able to fill them in later when you've found out a bit more about your character.

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THE HOTNESS

You are a newish and buzzing actor, with an edgy, sharp reputation which has made you very popular with the young especially. You never actually worked with Maria Moore. She was keen to get your credibility into one of her projects – you were tempted, but she never pitched an idea that you felt would really fit the way you want your career to develop. You are keen to learn more about her; about what made her successful and popular.

Answer these questions for yourself – write down the answers if you'd like to, or just remember them. Don't discuss them with the other players. Don't worry if some of them seem hard to answer at the moment – leave those for now, and you might be able to fill them in later when you've found out a bit more about your character.

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THE EMBITTERED

You've carved out a career in indie movies, playing the occasional leading role but mostly supporting. It pays the bills, but no more than that. You are bitter and cynical about the mainstream, entertainment-oriented film industry: your one brush with it was in Maria's first film *Daisy Goes Crazy*, where you played Daisy's second-best friend. Your part was edited down heavily in post-production, so you barely appeared in the final release.

Answer these questions for yourself – write down the answers if you'd like to, or just remember them. Don't discuss them with the other players. Don't worry if some of them seem hard to answer at the moment – leave those for now, and you might be able to fill them in later when you've found out a bit more about your character.

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THE ENTERTAINER

You first met Maria Moore many years ago, when you were both working the standup circuit. You built your own comedy career around your easy-going, lovable persona: when you teamed up with Maria in her TV sitcom *Double Bubble*, it was one of the biggest hits of the decade. You often talked about working together again: but she went into film, which didn't really interest you.

Answer these questions for yourself – write down the answers if you'd like to, or just remember them. Don't discuss them with the other players. Don't worry if some of them seem hard to answer at the moment – leave those for now, and you might be able to fill them in later when you've found out a bit more about your character.

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THE SIDEKICK

You worked with Maria Moore all through her career – starting in standup, where you first met her at a small venue on the Edinburgh Fringe, and immediately hit it off. You supported her in most of her TV sitcoms, and eventually following her into film, playing Daisy’s loyal sidekick Cameron. You realized a long time ago that you would never be a star: but hitching your wagon to Maria’s talent was the next best thing.

Answer these questions for yourself – write down the answers if you’d like to, or just remember them. Don’t discuss them with the other players. Don’t worry if some of them seem hard to answer at the moment – leave those for now, and you might be able to fill them in later when you’ve found out a bit more about your character.

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THE CONSCIENCE

You first met Maria Moore back when you were both young, passionate standup comedians, playing in a succession of small and grotty venues. You were both radical, back then: you stayed that way, while Maria went more mainstream. That got her the TV work, and her successful career: but you've done OK yourself, as the public learned to value your sometimes savage honesty. For old times' sake, you worked with Maria again in the third Daisy film, *Daisy Stays Hazy*: you enjoyed it, slightly to your surprise.

Answer these questions for yourself – write down the answers if you'd like to, or just remember them. Don't discuss them with the other players. Don't worry if some of them seem hard to answer at the moment – leave those for now, and you might be able to fill them in later when you've found out a bit more about your character.

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THE LEFT-BEHIND

You went way back with Maria Moore, having done standup comedy with her as a double-act, called *Strangeness and Charm*. But your careers went in opposite directions: you kept the faith, Maria sold out. You kept in touch with her, but it seemed increasingly strange that you were still friends: everything about her was getting further and further away from you. You still perform, in an occasional way: you know you've still got it.

Answer these questions for yourself – write down the answers if you'd like to, or just remember them. Don't discuss them with the other players. Don't worry if some of them seem hard to answer at the moment – leave those for now, and you might be able to fill them in later when you've found out a bit more about your character.

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