

How to Run this LARP

This is a Live Action Roleplaying Game, suitable to run in one evening's time (about four hours including preparation). First thing to do is read all the characters and familiarize yourself with them. Then you need to do some thinking about a system and props. Then you gather together eleven or so friends and get them to play them. You probably also want to recruit at least one person (maybe two) to be an assistant GM for the event, as eleven is too many players for one GM to handle.

Once you start playing, it's easy from there on out. Once you're finished, you should definitely contact me at nickwedig@yahoo.com and tell me how it all went.

The Situation:

Mr. Miracle, the city's top tier superhero, is busy fighting some sort of interstellar space menace. One of those big crossover events that happens all the time, right? And he's taken all the competent superheroes with him to help. So he has asked Cell Phone Guy to bring his super team to watch over Mr. Miracle's secret headquarters while he's gone, in case anything happens. Unfortunately, all the heroes Cell Phone Guy works with are incompetent morons, so things quickly go awry.

System

You could probably use any mechanical conflict resolution system you want. Got a bunch of Vampire LARPer looking for something more light-hearted? Use the WoD live action rules if they're more comfortable with that. People devoted to freeform LARPing might be able to work out work-arounds for the powers I describe as needing a challenge, but that's their problem.

But if you need a system, here's a really simple system that worked amazingly well for everything it needed to do, and didn't cause any problems the rest of the time:

There are bowls of poker chips all over the LARPing area (these bowls are assumed to be functionally infinite: the GMs might need to move chips from bowl to bowl to keep a reasonable number in each bowl). Each player starts with five poker chips.

- When a player does something funny, anyone else who thinks that is funny should grab a chip from the nearest bowl and hand it to them (or tell them to get one themselves, whatever's convenient).
- Similarly, each character has a roleplaying "hook", which is a simple one-note personality trait they can play out to entertain others. If you the GM or another player sees someone using their hook in an entertaining way, reward them with a chip.

So what are chips for? If you have a conflict between two players, they each decide in secret how many chips they wish to use in the conflict. They simultaneously reveal, and the one who spends the most wins the conflict. They get what they wanted, but have to discard the chips they bid. The loser of the conflict gets to keep their chips. Chips spent in a conflict go in the nearest bowl of chips.

If someone tries to do something difficult or weird, not opposing another PC, then they talk to a GM. The GM can either set a price ("that's two chips, cause it's easy" or "That's seven chips, cause it's hard") or ask how many chips a player wants to spend on the action then decide if that's enough chips. Either way, if the player spends enough chips, they succeed at their task. If they don't spend enough, they fail but can keep their chips. You the GM probably want chips ranging from two to seven chips, but I can't give strict guidelines on this (it in part depends on how often the group is awarding chips to other players). One chip things are really easy: I only had one chip difficulties for things where a PC wondered if they had a useful everyday sort of item not mentioned on their sheet (pocketknife, USB drive, etc).

And that's the whole system. It works, so long as people are more focused on entertaining each other than they are on beating each other. You probably want 80-100 poker chips, which is a lot.

Other tokens could work, or you could lower the starting values from 5 to 3 if you don't have enough chips. Expect some people to acquire piles of chips and spend them all quickly in the last part of the game. That's okay and even encouraged: it gives a good climax naturally to the game.

GM advice: try to spread out your chip giving, but always be trying to reward legitimately entertaining behavior. You don't want to discourage the wallflowers too much, but you do want to reward the people who are bringing the fun to the game. Make sure you do reward the less talkative or less noticeable characters when they do indeed do something entertaining.

When someone tries to do something, set the difficulties based on what is most amusing, not what's most plausible. If someone asks if they can do something, tell them "You can do it if it's funny" or say yes if it's funny. Try to allow Brainjack to stay hidden for most of the game, twisting things slightly in favor of him hiding out, just to keep the game interesting.

Casting The Characters:

The game is designed to be at least a little bit modular: most of the characters could be sacrificed if necessary. Changemaker and Cell Phone Guy are the two most essential to having in the game: cast them first. For Changemaker either cast a devious guy who could be an over the top supervillain, or cast someone no one would ever suspect as the villain. Both ways could work, though they'd be different. It helps if the guy playing Changemaker can twist the truth to his own purposes, if you're using the Salmon of Truth or the like. For Cell Phone Guy, you don't want someone that's a natural leader. He's supposed to be running around trying to keep everyone on track but failing miserably at it. Neither Cell Phone Guy nor Changemaker actually need to be male, they're just written that way (Brainjack can disguise himself as anyone regardless of gender, or something). Cell Phone Guy could just as easily be Cell Phone Girl.

Then the rest work in pairs or clusters: Credenza and The Detachable Head go together, so don't cast one and not the other. Copycat isn't part of their pairing (and in fact unaware he's involved in their plot), but should probably be in there too: if there's no Copycat, have The Detachable Head jealous of someone else. Copycat can be present without Credenza or the Detachable Head, though. Credenza and The Detachable Head need to be able to play off each other, so it

helps if they know each other already. Copycat needs to be eager but also needs to be someone okay with having no powers at all. Ideally, he's someone sneaky enough to avoid ever using his "powers". The "Be Somewhere Else" power is there as an out, but you want someone who won't need the mechanical ability whatsoever. All three of Credenza, Detachable Head and Copycat need to be their respective genders for the love triangle to work right.

Cohort and Cameraman are a pair, too, though they're not tied as closely together. Our Cohort was out of the game sick most of the evening, but Camerawoman worked out okay. Cameraman can be as involved or uninvolved in the action as the player is comfortable with, so it's good for a wallflower or less vocal player who can occasionally rise to a central role for a scene or two. Cohort should be someone who can play a vocal, strong-willed character, or someone who will enjoy showing off for the "camera". Either character can be any gender with little change.

Bjorn Yesterday and Powerbroker go together, too. Bjorn needs to be a male player who won't mind the only speaking nonsense, and who would have fun misunderstanding how modern technology works. Powerbroker can be any gender, but needs to be someone who can broker shifty deals and trade favors and such.

The remaining two, Nestor and Seaman, are the two who can most easily be sacrificed by themselves. Either will do okay by themselves, I think or either could be sacrificed without hurting some other player much. Both probably should be male just to get their names to make sense.

So that's five male characters, one female character and five of any gender. I'd first sacrifice Seaman if I only had ten players. If I had nine or less, I'd lose one of the pairings, as appropriate to the group. Below six and I'd be looking for another option for play for the night.

LARP Space and Props

The area where you're playing should have enough space for people to run around and to spread out into smaller groups so they can be sneaky if needs be. We used four separate locations: The upstairs was the "stately family manor" where Mr. Miracle's billionaire playboy secret identity lives. Downstairs, you had a communications center and crime computer system in one room, a workshop filled with strange items from Mr. Miracle's utility belt and the "Rogue's Gallery"

where Miracle stores items he takes from defeated criminals. You might use these locations, or vary them by combining them, adding more locations, etc. You might also change what props exist in the game, or where they are located or how they work. They're all optional, more or less, though the game would have been entirely different without the Doomsday Device, the Cheese Gun or the Mysterious Timer. Unfortunately, I don't have the document describing all the props in game terms any more.

In the stately manor, you could find all kinds of normal things (a DVD player so Cameraman can show people something he saw, food in the kitchen, whatever). You also can find the family vault, which is locked but contains valuable jewels, deeds, bonds, etc. The vault could be opened by someone being clever, but especially could be opened by a lot of chips by Powerbroker, for a moderate sum by Brainjack (he's a supersmartvillain, of course he knows how to crack a safe), or for a small fee by Credenza (who simply asks the vault for the combination). Not coincidentally, the vault is mainly there as temptation for Brainjack, Powerbroker or Cameraman.

In the Communications Lab, we had an encrypted laptop with all of Mr. Miracle's secret files on it. The files detail all kinds of stuff: the secret identities and weakness and abilities of lots of different superheroes and supervillains. Brainjack would like to learn about Mr. Miracle's secret vulnerability, no doubt. The laptop also had a program that might work with the Police Commissioner's homing device (see below). Miracle encrypted the laptop to keep these guys out of it, but Powerbroker can break it for cheap, or Brainjack might be able to break the encryption for a lot. In our game, the laptop got shorted out by Bjorn's singing, but Credenza spent a lot of chips to count it as furniture and talked to it about what it had known when it worked. Maybe your players will be that creative, too.

Also in the Communications Center: a videophone the police commissioner will use to talk to Miracle or the PCs (which freaked out Bjorn, leading to destruction of expensive electronics). Other things you might put in here: scientific experiments, unpredictable or experimental gadgets or weapons, expensive electronics, etc.

In the Workshop you find all the gadgets Mr. Miracle uses for specialized occasions: it's where Batman would store his Bat-Shark Repellant and Bat Anti-Mummy Bazooka when not fighting mummies at sea. Mr. Miracle could theoretically have all sorts of goofy impractical weapons in the war against crime. We had a few items of note:

- A crystal ball that acted like a Magic8-Ball. If a PC spent some chips, they might get a correct answer. If they ask too early on about someone being Brainjack, you should give them the chip back and say "Reply hazy. Ask again later." If they're near the end of the game, though, give the info away.
- The Wand of Babel, which forces people to speak only in Pig Latin if you hit them with it. Hitting them again reverses the effect.
- A mysterious timer that counts down from ten minutes to zero. Mr. Miracle said the PCs have to keep resetting it before it reaches zero, or something very bad will happen. What bad thing? He didn't say. You the GM can decide, at the appropriate time. It might do nothing. It might destroy the house in a fireball. It might rob Mr. Miracle of his superpowers, in which case he phones Cell Phone Guy very upset as he loses the war against demons of the 8th dimension, dooming this entire galaxy. It might do something else that you think is funny (grant better superpowers to Brainjack or Seaman or something). Pick which option happens when the timer finally reaches zero: if it's early, it's nothing or the irate powerless Mr. Miracle. If it's late, consider it wreaking havoc on the game. If the game has gone on long enough, consider killing everyone. Do whatever seems funniest or the best to disrupt the game's current state.

In the Rogue's Gallery, you can see costumes and souvenirs from defeated enemies. In here are some really interesting items:

- The Salmon of Truth, which forces the holder to tell the truth. (Captured from "The FishstickMystic"). Brainjack isn't his real name, of course, so he can say he's not Brainjack if asked. More specific questions or different questions might be harder to avoid, of course.
- The Cheese Gun, which can turn inanimate objects into cheese. One dial sets the kind of cheese, the other has "Forward" and "reverse". Reverse changes an object from cheese back into its original substance, though if it were destroyed it will still be destroyed. The cheese gun can't work on people, and if someone's holding the object you're transforming, they can resist in a challenge.

- The Doomsday Device. It's not clear if it really works or not. A PC could spend several chips figuring out how to arm it, but it would cost some more to know how long they have before it goes off. Sort of like the timer, it might be a total dud (Mr. Miracle disarmed it) or it might destroy the world if it goes off. Go with whatever is funniest or based on if the LARP has gone on long enough.

All those items are examples, but they all worked really well in play. The Salmon of Truth is a fish partly because I had an inflatable fish I wanted to use, and partly because I wanted to use the phrase "FishstickMystic". If you have other silly props, modify one of these powers or make up new ones: the fish could be any other silly, portable prop you want. You could theoretically use a real laptop for Mr. Miracle's laptop, and make up cool computer files on a variety of made up superheroes and villains. But I'd be worried your laptop would be dropped, smashed or otherwise damaged. So I just used an old tape deck as the physical representation.

Runtime events

At the start of play, explain the situation. Let the players enter Miracle's secret lair, wander around looking at the neat stuff, learning about the other PCs and mingling. Once everyone has a feel for their character, the other PCs and their environment, have the videophone in the Communications Center turn on. (This should be twenty minutes to half an hour into the game or so? Whenever the PCs seem to hit an equilibrium.)

It's the local police commissioner, and he's trying to contact Mr. Miracle about an emergency. The police just learned that supervillain Brainjack escaped from prison. A homing beacon he had implanted in him without his knowledge shows Brainjack's location as inside Miracle's hideout. The Commissioner wanted to warn Miracle, and will be baffled and disappointed in these guys who are here. He'll still relay the message, but hopes Mr. Miracle will come back soon.

From the homing satellite, the beacon doesn't give very precise coordinates: they only know he's in the immediate area somewhere. If a PC is clever enough to think of it, they might be able to use the

encrypted laptop to track the homing beacon. First, they have to think of this plan. Then, they need to decrypt the laptop and access its programs. Then they can determine if the beacon is within 20 feet or so, but no more precise than that. The police commissioner won't think of this plan, but they'd need his help to transfer appropriate privileges and files to the laptop.

This event is to spur some people into action, especially the do-gooder types like Cell Phone Guy or Nestor, and especially the shady types like Brainjack or Powerbroker. After they all hear this, there should be lots of running around, plotting and scheming, secrets being desperately hidden or shockingly revealed and conflicts arising all over the place. Now you just wander around handing out chips for entertaining behavior, refereeing conflicts and answering questions. This is the easy part, where the players are entertaining you.

You might want to have another run-time event happen later on, if it seems like the game has settled down into some sort of equilibrium. Or if multiple potential climaxes came and went without anything definitive happening (ie, Brainjack and a heroic PC square off with the Doomsday Device, but after that encounter Brainjack is still free and the Earth still intact). The second runtime event should once again try to spur PCs into action. Perhaps Mr. Miracle contacts the base again, asking for some specific item (perhaps one already destroyed). Perhaps the Doomsday Device fizzles out and is clearly not working, or the Timer stops counting down or something else. Try to change the situation on the players somehow. This point is more dependent on what the situation is for your PCs: ours seized on several props (the Cheese Gun and Doomsday Device especially) so removing those from the equation might have been a good move. If your PCs already captured Brainjack, maybe let him escape. If they strongly suspect another character, perhaps Brainjack can disable another PC and take their place, or something (in which case give Brainjack's original PC something to do.)

Perhaps another, more brutish and straightforward villain comes hunting Mr. Miracle (or one of the PCs? Seaman or Nestor would be good candidates). This villain bursts through a wall or something and demands their target, and is actually pretty tough in direct battle. But they are dimwitted and easily fooled, and likely one of the PCs happens to have their ultimate weakness. Severe lactose intolerance came up as a weakness in our game, or perhaps the villain is made of candy or

expensive electronics and Bjorn can make it rain or something: use whatever might be entertaining.

Ending the Game

Sometimes, the LARP comes to a natural conclusion. Sometimes, the GM has to end it themselves. If Brainjack gets captured (or escapes) and the other plot threads resolved, you could just end the game then. Or if the Doomsday Device or other catastrophe occurs after a few hours of satisfying play, you can end the game with a bang.

The other big obvious way to end the game is to have Mr. Miracle return to his base. I played him as tired and annoyed, especially when he saw all the carnage in his home. He had travelled to the stars and back and spent the last several hours in a life or death struggle for the fate of the universe. That takes a lot out of you, and all he wanted was to relax a bit. Returning home, though, everything was a mess. His communications center was destroyed, dangerous gadgets all over the place, all sorts of things (including security cameras, a trash can and the Doomsday Device) had been made into cheese, a reality TV show had been wandering his house without permission and the housesitters were saying something about an escaped villain. He used some special eye-rays to pierce Brainjack's disguise, then decided to send the entire groups of PCs to the county jail for the night. He could sort out the details with the police commissioner in the morning. But first, he wanted a shower and a good night's sleep.

You might play Mr. Miracle some other way entirely. He might be friendly or grateful or himself a bumbling fool who lucked into better superpowers than the PCs did. Or he might have been spending the evening out drinking with prostitutes or something. whatever you think is funny, and wraps the night up in suitable fashion.

Then when you're done, you should sit everyone down together. Have them reveal secrets on their character sheets and cool things they saw happen during the game. Lead the discussion around: reveal secrets in a natural fashion, so everyone knows what's going on with The Detachable Head before they hear Credenza's backstory and why she really was avoiding him. That sort of thing. If you plan on doing more gaming with these people, you might want to talk about what worked and what didn't, so the next game would be more fun. And most importantly, you should email me at nickwedig@yahoo.com and tell me tales of how the game went.