



Dance the Macabray

a larp by Frida Lindegren and Sofia Stenler

About the larp

The dead are leaving their graveyard to dance with the living, one last time. Heavily inspired by the chapter with the same name in Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*, *Dance the Macabray* is a story about the struggle to leave the people you love, the sorrow of being left behind, all that which is unfinished and chafes, and the magical chance to meet again. Through dance, we pass through sorrow and grief, in search of what is needed to move on, out in life or into the great beyond. This is a scenario for 12-24 players. The number of players must be even. The scenario takes about 4 hours including workshop and debrief.

About the authors

Frida Lindegren is a psychology student, larp lecturer, experienced gamemaster and game designer of among many things *Restriction* in the *#Feminist* anthology.

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Materials needed

- 12-15 candles, preferably battery-operated
- 12 monochrome armbands, to distinguish who plays a dead character
- 12 colorful armbands, to distinguish who plays a living character
- Something to distribute the armbands from, e.g. a bag
- One pen per player and some extra
- One paper per player and some extra
- Tape to mark the different area on the floor
- At least 24 small objects to inspire character creation, e.g. a rosary, a locket, a photo, a medal
- Someone to dance Death - this can be one of the GMs or a helping hand
- A white shawl or such for Death
- Water and cups
- A device to play music on
- A stopwatch to keep the time

Music

Scenes with the living: <https://open.spotify.com/user/myopie/playlist/6IQjaoA7A7bdqeGWkZ7PoU>

Scenes with the dead: <https://open.spotify.com/user/myopie/playlist/3c294jhwTR93ImSPpfKGvk>

Scenes with dances: <https://open.spotify.com/user/myopie/playlist/6P4FbuECUilXSINPEkMx4B>

See appendix for list of songs.

Schedule

Information to players: 3 min

Dance workshop 1: 20 min

Character creation workshop: 40 min

Dance workshop 2: 20 min

Toilet break: 5 min

Information: 10 min

Larp: 43 min x 3

Debrief: 15 min

Preparations

Using tape, mark one space in one end of the room for the living. This is the town. It needs to be large enough for half of the players to stand in small groups. In the other end of the room, make one roughly equally-sized space for the dead, the graveyard. In between is the park where the two groups will meet. It needs to be large enough that all the players can dance there at the same time. Put a few chairs as benches in the park, but make sure there is space for dancing. Arrange the candles in the graveyard as you wish.

If possible, use different lighting for the different areas, e.g. yellow light in the town for the spoken scenes, and blue in the graveyard for their spoken scenes. Also use the lighting to signal the last song of each dance scene, e.g. by dimming the lights.

Place the pens and papers together with the character creation objects on a table.

Introduction to players (3 min)

Hello and welcome to the scenario *Dance the Macabray*.

The setting is this: Once in a blue moon, for three magical nights in a row, the dead leave their graveyard to dance with the living, one last time. The themes of the scenario are the struggle to leave the people you love, the sorrow of being left behind, all which is unfinished and chafes, and the magical chance to meet once again. Together, we will dance sorrow, grief and love, in search of what is needed to move on out in life or into the great beyond.

This scenario is heavily inspired by one chapter in Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*. In the book, the Dance Macabre, the Dance with the Dead, is a traditional event in the Old Town. The town's mayor or mayoress picks flowers from the Graveyard and pins them onto the clothes of each and every person in town. The dance takes place in the Town Square. Music will play out of nowhere, and the dead will arrive. The living and the dead dance together for three nights. Death, the Lady in Grey, is ever present.

Rich man, poor man, come away. Come to dance the Macabray.

Time to work and time to play. Time to dance the Macabray.

One and all will bear and stay. Come and dance the Macabray

All must dance the Macabray

Let's go!

Workshops

Dance workshop 1 (20 min)

The dancing in this workshop is heavily inspired by contact impro, but one can use whatever dance techniques one feels comfortable with in the larp itself.

1. Spread out in the room. Shift weight from one foot to another, at different speeds.
2. Pair up with someone and try to sync your weight shifting, changing the speed as you wish.
3. One person starts to move and the other will mirror the movement. Switch so the other one starts the initiative, and after that they can switch who is leading and who is following.
4. One person gives the other a very gentle push on the others hand, and the other responds with moving it's hand in the direction of the push, while maintaining a steady moving rhythm with the feet. Try this with the shoulder, the back, the hip, both pushing and receiving. Switch and try it out.
5. Try moving with a body part connected to the other person's, it could be hand, head, shoulder or back.

Character creation, relationships and physical space (40 min in all)

Draw an armband from the bag (or whatever you use to distribute the armbands). The colour of the armband will decide if you play one of the living or one of the dead: monochrome is for dead and colourful is for the living. Choose one small item that inspires you. Write a short text on who it is that owns this item, and why it is important. This is a basis for your character. Write e.g. three truths: One you tell others, one you tell yourself and one you don't even admit to yourself. You have 10 minutes.

Introduce the physical space

The town is the space for the living, the dead characters may never enter.

The graveyard is the space for the dead, the living characters may never enter.

In-between is the park where the dead and the living will meet. The players may use this space in the workshop and create memories together, e.g. the first kiss, the last goodbye, the betrayal.

Relationships

Randomly divide players into groups containing ideally 4 living and 4 dead. In these groups, the players should create:

- One anchor relationship that ties each living character to one dead. Examples: love, friendship, family. It should contain something unfinished, a longing/fear. You have 9 min.
- One relationship between dead-dead or living-living that is supporting and encouraging. You have 9 min.
- One relationship between dead-dead or living-living that is meant to challenge and confront. You have 9 min.

Tools:

Storytell memories together. Use "yes, and.../yes, but..."

Find places in the park and make them signify things.

Describe scent, sounds etc.

Work with attitudes: "I think that you.../you think that I..."

During the larp, your focus will be on your anchor relationship, but please play a lot on the other relationships as well.

Dance workshop 2 (20 min)

Now we combine the dance techniques from the earlier part with a will to communicate something. Pair up with your anchor relation.

1. Try to portray a desire in the dance: “Go away.”, “Come closer.”, “See me!” (Feel free to come up with other suggestions)
2. Try to portray different ways to dance feelings such as longing, friendship, love and hate. (Feel free to come up with other suggestions)
3. Now try to see how one can invite someone to a dance. You can do it in a friendly, desperate, careless or forcing way. Please remember to be considerate of the other players and don't use much force.

4. Now try to see how one can end a dance. Abruptly or slowly, with satisfaction or frustration. Try out different styles.
5. Now try to see how one can switch partners in the middle of a dance scene, or make other people dance with each other. Explore the possibilities. Again, remember to be considerate.

Information (10 min)

Safety technique

The tap-out, i.e. tapping the other person lightly twice, signals to end the scene you are in and the play in another direction. If you need, you can always step to the side of the game area and talk with your co-player and/or organizer.

The acts

Before the larp starts, the dead player will each light one of the candles on the graveyard.

The larp has 3 acts of 43 minutes

- Every act starts with a text being read by the game master to set the mood.
- Spoken scene for the living in the town, the dead can act as shadows.
- Spoken scene for the dead in the graveyard, the living can act as shadows.
- A short text to set the mood.
- Dance scene for everyone. This is a silent scene, no talking. The living must not enter the graveyard, the dead must not enter the town. Each dance scene is three songs, roughly 10 minutes in total. (If there will be a cue when the last song of the scene starts, e.g. a dimming of the lights, explain this.)
- Act break. Talk off game in your relationships, discuss where you are and where you want to take the game. Try to keep the tone serious, if possible. The act break will be 7 min.

Cycle through 3 times (no act break after the last act).

The larp will end with a text read by the game master.

The three acts have different themes:

1. Almost all is well.
2. Everything is bad.
3. Where do we go from here?

In the last act there is a possibility for the dead to move on, into the great beyond. To do this they will give their candle to the living. The dead will dance away with Death, and the living will carry the light into the town.

Meta techniques

Death: Death will be dancing with us, as the Lady in Grey, recognizable the white shawl they are wearing. Anyone can dance with Death, please charge these dances with your own symbolism.

Shadowing: Shadowing is a technique to give input to the player, not the character. This can be whispers, physical touch or how you position yourself around the player. Death will be shadowing you in all scenes. When the living characters have a spoken scene, the dead players can shadow them, and likewise when the dead characters have their spoken scene, the living players can shadow them.

Run the game (3 x 43 min)

Let the dead light their candle on the graveyard.

1. Text to set the mood. 1 minute
2. Spoken scene for the living in the town, the dead can act as shadows. 9 minutes
3. Spoken scene for the dead in the graveyard, the living can act as shadows. 9 minutes
4. Short text to set the mood. 1minute
5. Dance scene: 10 minutes. Signal with the light as the last song starts.
6. Act break. Talk off game in relationships: Where are we, where do we want to take the game? 7 minutes
(not after last act)

x3

Read the ending.

Debrief (15 min)

Gather in a circle. Go around the circle letting everyone in turn say one sentence about how they feel right now, and one about whether they need anything right now. If there is time, let the players talk freely about their experience during the larp.

Texts for setting the mood

Introduction to Act 1 - Dance the Macabray

“The music was still playing: somewhere, at the edge of perception, solemn and strange. Bod cocked his head to one side, trying to locate where it was coming from, without success.

It was in the air and all around. It was playing in the flapping of flags and awnings, in the rumble of distant traffic, the click of heels on the dry paving stones... And there was an oddness, thought Bod, as he watched the people heading home. They were walking in time to the music. And then the music stopped and there was silence in the square, a muffled silence, like the silence of falling snow, all noise swallowed by the night and the bodies in the square, no one stamping or shuffling, scarcely even breathing.

A clock began to strike somewhere close at hand: the chimes of midnight, and they came.

The dead walked on, row on row, until they reached the square.

They took hands, the living with the dead, and they began to dance. Mistress Owens smiled at Bod as she took the hand of the old newspaper seller, and Mr. Owens reached out and took the hand of a small girl, without condescension, and she took his hand as if she had been waiting to dance with him her whole life. Then Bod stopped looking because someone’s hand closed around his, and the dance began. The music filled Bod’s head and chest with a fierce joy, and his feet moved as if they knew the steps already, had known them forever. Each of the dancers took a partner, the living with the dead, each to each. Bod reached out his hand and found himself touching fingers with, and gazing into the grey eyes of, the lady in the cobweb dress. She smiled at him.

“Hello, Bod,” she said.

“Hello,” he said, as he danced with her. “I don’t know your name.”

“Names aren’t really important,” she said.

“I love your horse. He’s so big! I never knew horses could be that big.”

“He is gentle enough to bear the mightiest of you away on his broad back, and strong enough for the smallest of you as well.”

“Can I ride him?” asked Bod.

“One day,” she told him, and her cobweb skirts shimmered. “One day. Everybody does.”

“Promise?”

I promise.”

Neil Gaiman

Short for Act 1:

You’ve just walked on ahead of me
And I’ve got to understand
You must release the ones you love

And let go of their hand.

I try and cope the best I can
But I’m missing you so much

If I could only see you

And once more feel your touch.

Yes, you’ve just walked on ahead of me

Don’t worry I’ll be fine

But now and then I swear I feel

Your hand slip into mine.

Joyce Grenfell

Introduction to Act 2:

Because I liked you better
Than suits a man to say,
It irked you, and I promised
To throw the thought away.

To put the world between us
We parted, stiff and dry;
'Good-bye,' said you, 'forget me.'
'I will, no fear', said I.

If here, where clover whitens
The dead man's knoll, you pass,
And no tall flower to meet you
Starts in the trefoiled grass,

Halt by the headstone naming
The heart no longer stirred,
And say the lad that loved you
Was one that kept his word.

A.E. Housman

Short for Act 2:

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter
And my throat
Is deep with song,
You did not think
I suffer after
I've held my pain
So long.

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter
You do not hear
My inner cry:
Because my feet
Are gay with dancing,
You do not know
I die.

Langston Hughes

Introduction to Act 3:

Deep in our sub-conscious, we are told
Lie all our memories, lie all the notes
Of all the music we have ever heard
And all the phrases those we loved have spoken,
Sorrows and losses time has since consoled,
Family jokes, out-moded anecdotes
Each sentimental souvenir and token
Everything seen, experienced, each word
Addressed to us in infancy, before
Before we could even know or understand
The implications of our wonderland.
There they all are, the legendary lies
The birthday treats, the sights, the sounds, the tears
Forgotten debris of forgotten years
Waiting to be recalled, waiting to rise
Before our world dissolves before our eyes
Waiting for some small, intimate reminder,
A word, a tune, a known familiar scent
An echo from the past when, innocent
We looked upon the present with delight
And doubted not the future would be kinder
And never knew the loneliness of night.

Noël Coward

Short for act 3:

“Sleep my little baby-oh
Sleep until you waken
When you wake you'll see the world
If I'm not mistaken...”

Kiss a lover
Dance a measure,
Find your name
And buried treasure...

Face your life
Its pain,
Its pleasure,
Leave no path untaken.”

Neil Gaiman

Ending:

“There was a smile dancing on his lips, although it was a wary smile, for the world is a bigger place than a little graveyard on a hill; and there would be dangers in it and mysteries, new friends to make, old friends to rediscover, mistakes to be made and many paths to be walked before he would, finally, return to the graveyard or ride with the Lady on the broad back of her great grey stallion.”

Neil Gaiman

Appendix – The music

Songs for scenes with the living:

Visa från Utanmyra - Jan Johansson, Jazz på Svenska

Bandura - Jan Johansson, Jazz på Ryska

Polska från Medelpad - Jan Johansson, Jazz på Svenska

Monicas Slängpolska - Burgess Ådin & Wingård, Burgess, Doggerland

Årepolskan - Hazelus Hedin, Esbjörn Hazelius, Jhan Hedin, Om du ville människa heta

Mandas Brudvals - Triller, Ryttaren

Songs for scenes with the dead:

Bandura - Merit Hemmingson, Hommage till Jan

Polska från Medelpad - Merit Hemmingson, Hommage till Jan

Lapp Nils Polska efter Munter Johan - Merit Hemmingson, Hommage till Jan

Ack högaste himmel och fallande jord - Merit Hemmingson, Hommage till Jan

Bergs-Kristis Polska - Merit Hemmingson, Hommage till Jan

Visa från Utanmyra - Merit Hemmingson, Hommage till Jan

Songs for the dancing-scenes:

Act 1:

Autumn Leaves - Nat King Cole

They can't take that away from me - Billie Holiday, You Go to My Head

I'll be seeing you - Billie Holiday

Act 2:

You let me down - Jimmie Lunceford, Swing Hits

It was a sad night in Harlem - The Feetwarmers, Centrifugal Swing

The ballad of sad young men - Vienna Art Orchestra, Anna Lauvergnac, The Big Band Years

Act 3:

If I didn't care - Amy Adams, Lee Pace, Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day

We'll meet again - Vera Lynn

Don't worry about me - Ella Fitzgerald