

# Lover, Liar, Leaper, Thief.

A Penny Dreadful, GM-less LARP for 3 ghosts

Designed for virtual play. One penny.

## Before the game

Place an evocative object that could be from a penny dreadful story in a “**drawer**” near your computer. Hide it from the other players. **Do not reveal the object in your drawer until prompted!**

## A Mystery Confounding!

A hundred years ago, our bodies were discovered in a house. We died from causes unknown. Now we are haunted by doubts. We are spirits investigating our own demise in rooms where our diaries were.

## **We need answers.**

## What else do we need?

Three players  
Two to three hours  
Video conferencing computers  
A little room to move around  
Paper and pencils  
Mood lighting  
A Chime or bell if convenient  
A secret evocative prop

## **Do not reveal your prop!**

## Talk safety before playing

LLLT may have themes of violence, murder, self-harm, and suicide. You play ghosts who have died suddenly. Recommend LINES, VEILS, CUTS and BRAKES. And the door is open (link below)

<https://www.bigbadcon.com/blog/safety-mechanisms/>



A woman seen from behind standing at her dressing table Credit: Wellcome Library, London, CC Attribution only licence CC BY 4.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses>

## Read aloud to begin the game:

*As the first light of the moon comes through the window you are in an old house filled with Victorian furniture, dust, and mouse droppings. There's an armoire, and a dressing table with a clouded mirror behind it. You realize you cannot leave this room.*

*The grandfather clock in the hallway outside the door gives a tortured series of nine chimes. This all seems familiar. You try to recall how you arrived, but you don't even know who you are. You only know that you have until midnight to free yourself.*

*You sit at the dressing table and open the drawer. There is something important there, and a familiar looking diary. It's your diary.*

*It reminds you who you were and of your reputation....Were you The Lover? The Liar? Or The Leaper? Were you a Thief?*

*The object of the game is to understand the mystery of our own deaths. We knew each other in life, but somehow, for reasons we've all forgotten, we died in this house, on this day, sometime before midnight, some time ago. We are each bound in separate rooms, where our diaries were left behind.*

*We have until midnight to solve the central question of our own death or we will have to return each year, bound to each other through the reflections in the mirror, perhaps for eternity.*

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## The diary reveals who you were....

Decide who is going to play which of the three ghosts. You are either the lover, the liar, or the leaper. Work it out amongst yourselves.

You may also secretly be a thief. In this case, the object in your drawer was stolen by you from one of the other characters. If you are a thief, note it secretly, and reveal the theft when you reveal your object.

Everyone should answer the following questions about your character. Jot the answers down in a convenient place. When you're all done, share the answers with each other aloud.

- **What is your Name?**
- **What are your pronouns?**
- **What did you look like when you died?**
- **How did you get your reputation? (Lover, Liar, Leaper)**

Players should also answer the following special Questions

- **Lover:** What did you leave unsaid to your love?
- **Liar:** What truth did you speak that everyone thought was a lie?
- **Leaper:** What is tragically ironic about you?

At this point, post your Role, Name, and pronouns to your online avatar. Share all your answers with your fellow ghosts.

## And your many entanglements....

Take a few minutes together and work out your relationships with each other using these questions.

Involve and entangle each other's characters in your backstories. Work out how you know each other in a way that works for everybody.

It's possible you caused each other's deaths... but this should NOT be established yet!

Answer these questions about each other:

- **Lover:** Who did you really love? Why is the Leaper jealous?
- **Liar:** Who did you always wish knew the truth? What lie did you tell to the lover that you regretted?
- **Leaper:** Who did you hurt with your recklessness? How did the

liar's stories work to your advantage?

**Thieves (Write Secretly, so turn off all cameras!):**

Who is the rightful owner of what's in your drawer? Who benefited from your crimes?

Finally, chat about when and where your characters knew each other. Why were you gathered in this house the night you died?

Answer the questions with each other's names. Get tangled up.

## Dramatis Personae for Acts I-III

*There is another presence in the mirror. A mysterious stranger among you. The stranger watches YOU silently. Sometimes they move around and flail their arms. You think they trying to help you move on.*

There are 3 Acts before Midnight. Each Act consists of a:

- **Main Character-** setting the scene
- **Scene Partner-** opening the drawer
- **Mysterious Guest-** reflecting silently

These roles rotate each Act. Each player does each role once.

To Play an Act, the main character will frame a 2-player scene with their partner. The scene will incorporate physical action (contributed by the mysterious guest) and a prop from the drawer (contributed by the scene partner). During the scene the guest watches carefully, a silent audience. Make the scene about what happened to the main character before they died that night.

**Act I - Main Character = Lover**

**Scene Partner = Leaper**

**Guest/Reflection = Liar**

*(Nine Chimes of Clock)*

**Act II- Main Character = Liar**

**Scene Partner = Lover**

**Guest/Reflection = Leaper**

*(Ten Chimes of Clock)*

**Act III- Main Character = Leaper**

**Scene Partner = Liar**

**Guest/Reflection = Lover**

*(Eleven Chimes of Clock)*

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## Acts I-III (Read aloud as you play)

### **Beat One: Main character reads:**

*I sit at the nightstand and peer into the mirror. Through the dust I see the reflection not only of myself, but both of you. You can see me too. Your lips are moving but I can't hear you. This seems terribly familiar. I see you, but you cannot hear me. One of you reaches into a drawer and takes something familiar out and shows it to me. The memory of an encounter I had preceding my death comes rushing back. **If you have a chime, ring it now to represent the hour of the scene.***

**Beat Two -The Drawer:** The scene partner reaches into the drawer of their night table and reveals the object they concealed there

earlier. The scene partner names the object and says a few words about why they have it, and



why it was important in life. Scene partner, if you are a thief, reveal now to everyone who you stole the object from and what that means to the story. Don't be afraid to make it dramatic.

**Beat Three- The Reflection:** The Mysterious guest and the main character stand and face each other on camera. The Mysterious guest plays out, physically, a pantomime of something that the main character did the night before they died. The main character, if they accept the cue, imitates the pantomime with the Guest in the mirror. This should be done silently, with the notable exception, that if the main character does NOT accept the cue, they can say out loud, "the mirror cracks" (or "let's not!.") At which point, the Guest will suggest a different pantomime, mindful of all safety agreements.

**Beat Four – Frame a Scene leading up to the main**

**character's death:** The main character stages a scene between themselves, and their scene partner that involves 1) the object revealed from the drawer; and 2.) the action revealed by the reflection in the mirror. The main character works out with their partner what they want the scene to be like, and then they play it out together. The scene ends anytime after the object and the pantomime are incorporated, when either player calls "Scene".

### **Beat Five – The Mysterious**

**Guest:** After the scene is over the mysterious guest says what they noticed about the scene and what they think it means about the death of the main character. Everybody discuss briefly what they think happened next. To end the beat, the mysterious Guest declares a surprising thing that they deduced from the scene. Whatever the guest deduced from the scene should turn out to be mostly true. Do not declare how anybody died.

## Act IV - Midnight (Read aloud as you play)

### **Strike the chime twelve times.**

Midnight consists of a scene for each ghost. Each character narrates to the mirror what they think happened to them that fateful night in the form of completing a diary entry they will never actually write.

Each scene the main character begins "Dear Diary...." and then explains to the "mirror" what happened the fateful night that led

to their death.

Consider pinning your own image to the foreground of the "mirror" and "reading" your diary to your own reflection.

The character's mysterious guest listens intently and then (secretly) writes down the answer to that character's question, as follows:

### **Scene One -The Lover's**

**question:** Did their faith in love outlive the Lover?

**Scene Two -The Liar's question:** Has the Liar convinced themselves that their story is true?

### **Scene Three -The Leaper's**

**question:** Has the Leaper learned the lesson they needed from their own death?

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## The Haunting Resolution

Revisit each character's unanswered question:

**The Lover's question:** Did their faith in love outlive the Lover?

**The Liar's question:** Has the Liar convinced themselves that their story is true?

**The Leaper's question:** Has the Leaper learned the lesson they needed from their own death?

In turn, each ghost (in character) now writes in the chat their own

assessment of the question for themselves (e.g. the lover says whether their diary entry indicates that their faith in love outlived them.)

Take a moment to explain your own answer to the group.

Now, in turn each mysterious guest reveals their judgement about the character they were visiting (e.g. the Liar judges the Lover).

If the judgements match, the ghost is freed to move on. If they do not, the ghost continues to haunt this room.

## Epilogues

Each of the characters, in turn, (lover, liar, leaper, thief) narrate a brief epilogue montage showing what happens next for their character.

Create the montage by saying: "Later, in the reflections of the mirror you see..."

Then describe what your character is doing.

Take turns until the montage gives your ghost an ending that satisfies.

***THE END – (We recommend having a structured, quiet debrief post game)***

## In Person Option

If you are playing in person, set up two chairs opposite of each other with space behind them, and a way next for the characters to have something hidden in a "drawer".

The Main Character and their scene partner should sit in the chairs. The Mysterious guest Should stand behind the scene partner to do their pantomime.

Jamey Harvey

phone: 703-472-7627  
jamey.harvey@gmail.com  
<http://agilian.com>  
<http://sanctorum.com>  
<http://sunsetracism.com>

Thanks for the opportunity and inspiration to put together Lover, Liar, Leaper, Thief (LLLT) for the 2022 Golden Cobra Awards.

LLLT owes a debt of gratitude to its playtesters: David Ackert, Laura Bingham, Marshall Bradshaw, Krin Irvine, Jamie O'Marr, Jakub Poniatowski, Wen Resichal, and Ben Rosenbaum.

Media inspirations include: The Sixth Sense, American Horror Story, Geek Love, and Penny Dreadful.

LARP/TTRPG inspirations include Witch the Road to Lindisfarne, Ghost Court, Skeletons, Wanderhome, Fiasco, and Monsterhearts.

Its not a TTRGP but LLLP is a love letter to Clue. In the 1970's, as a child I thrilled to slip the little murder weapons in and out of the official looking manila envelope. I loved the tension of not knowing what malevolent object was concealed there. A house, some bodies, mysterious concealed objects, and disembodied suspects eternally investigating their own murders? I hope to give our ghosts those kinds of thrills.