



There Can Be Only One



A LARP About Connections, Generations, and Changing Times

(in tribute to the timeless Bea Arthur)

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PREMISE

Bea Arthur is to be honored as one of the top faces of television history, with a golden statue of her in character to be placed in the Television Hall of Fame. The problem is that unlike such legends as Jerry Seinfeld, Henry Winkler, and David Hasslehoff, Bea Arthur is associated with two incredibly influential characters: Maude Findlay, whose independent feminism pushed even further against the 1970s status quo than its launchpad series *All In the Family*, and Dorothy Zbornak, whose foursome of retired women in Florida somehow managed to become a cultural touchstone dominating every single demographic.

While Bea Arthur herself, a well decorated Marine who served during World War II, is an incredibly decisive and strong-willed person, even she has a hard time picking between her two Emmy Award Winning roles. (Thankfully, she only won one Tony, so that decision will be easier.)

So she enlists the best help possible - herself! Only, much to the ever-constant suffering of the Beas, the nincompoops that they put up with on the shows come along for the ride, as does one surprise guest star who MIGHT just be there to stir the pot.

Can this ragtag group of loons help The Real Bea Arthur decide, or will she blow her top dealing with a bunch of loons while Maude and Dorothy laugh together in the corner?

THE SHOWS

Maude is a spin-off from *All in the Family* focusing on **Edith's** cousin **Maude**, a liberal and headstrong woman who lives outside of New York City on Long Island. It has a large cast of characters and takes on social issues much like its predecessor.

The Golden Girls is about three retired women (**Dorothy**, **Blanche**, and **Rose**) in Florida who meet when one places an ad for housemates. Shortly after moving in they are joined by Dorothy's mother **Sophia** when her retirement home, Shady Pines, burns down.

WHO IS THIS LARP FOR?

While it's easy to say that this LARP is aimed towards fans of any of the shows, knowledge of them is not required. Instead, while there is an element of improv comedy in creating a television episode, the LARP itself deals with themes such as generational relationships, aging, connection between people alike and unlike, and the weight of politics and taking a stand. Depending upon the players involved it could skew more towards simple comedy or the more charged topics of bigotry and social challenges that the shows would tackle. Both are supported and valid directions for the LARP to take - and of course, the contrast between these two is a central part of the debate facing The Real Bea Arthur: Is *Maude* and its push for social change more important, or is *The Golden Girls* and its wide appeal a better measure of consequence?

CAST OF CHARACTERS

With the exception of **The Real Bea Arthur**, each player will take on the role of a **sitcom character**. These characters require no preparation in advance, although pre-casting may allow for costuming that matches with their well known representations. The players are the CHARACTERS, not their real-life performers. While a number of *Maude* characters are provided as character options, it is ideal to cast only three of them in addition to **Maude** herself.

Note: Because gender roles are critically important to the dynamics of both shows, while players of any gender or non-binary may elect to play any character, it is the expectation that each character is played consistently with the character's established gender representation.

Optional Rule: Each character is provided with one "special power" that they may invoke once during the LARP, with the exception of the Beas (**The Real Bea Arthur**, **Dorothy**, and **Maude**) - they are so iconic that they can use their power at will without exhaustion. Invocation of this power can be indicated by the use of the index finger (raising, wagging, beckoning) and then pointing at the desired target(s). These Powers are not required for the LARP to be successful, but can add a bit more flavor with the right group.

The Real Bea Arthur: A Brooklyn, NY native, Bea Arthur was a distinguished member of the Marine Corps during WWII, a star of stage and screen (silver and television), and proudly established herself as a performer of unquestioned integrity. Throughout her career and retirement, she was an advocate for several causes, most notably the LGBTIA+ community.

Power: *No one can tell Bea Arthur what to do. No one.*

Maude Findlay (Bea Arthur - *Maude*): A brash and outspoken politically liberal woman in suburban New York. Married to her fourth husband, she is a rampant feminist, promotes women's liberation, and advocates for all manner of equality. She can be overbearing and domineering, and frequently gets herself into trouble talking about these issues.

Power: *Maude can grandstand and argue passionately and loudly. When her voice rises, the one she is talking to can say only one more thing before walking away to allow her to cool down.*

Dorothy Zbornak (Bea Arthur - *The Golden Girls*- A retired school teacher. She is practical, sarcastic, short-tempered, a follower of current events, and often seen as the voice of reason. She is also the calming force among her friends, and the straight person to their jokes.

Power: *Dorothy can give a stare and a deadpan comeback like no other. When she does so with intent, the recipient must remain silent until Dorothy walks away.*

Rose Nylund (Betty White - *The Golden Girls*) - Sweet, kind, naive and dimwitted, but incredibly competitive. She often shares humorous tales of life in her tiny hometown of St. Olaf, MN.

Power: *Rose can initiate a story by saying "Back in St. Olaf..." and all must listen attentively for as long as she can continue to spin the tale.*

Blanche Deveraux (Rue McClanahan - *The Golden Girls*) - A widowed Southern Belle from a wealthy family, self-absorbed and man-hungry, although she still mourns her husband.

Power: *Blanche can flirt and any player who is the target of her current attention will be beguiled for a time after she finishes speaking to them.*

Sophia Petrillo (Estelle Getty - *The Golden Girls*) - Born in Sicily ("Picture it!"), she is a quick-witted straight talker with a dark sense of humor, a great cook, and is rather cantankerous.

Power: *Sophia can use her age, frailty, cunning, or guilt to get what she wants. When she turns it on, the person of her attention feels compelled to assist her, though if she pushes it it can wear off.*

Walter Findlay (Bill Macy - *Maude*) - Maude's husband, an appliance salesman. He has a lot of anxiety, may be an alcoholic, and often butts heads with his opinionated wife. He often loses.

Power: *Walter can sigh, accepting defeat but remain in place when a power would move him.*

Carol Traynor (Adrienne Barbeau - *Maude*) - Maude's bright and stubborn daughter. She is just as liberal and feminist as her mother, but due to the generation gap still manages to argue with her mother. She is single and actively dating, although not promiscuous.

Power: *Carol can trigger outrage and uproar from a character by dropping a "hot take".*

Arthur Harmon (Conrad Bain - *Maude*) - Neighbor and best friend of Walter, he is a staunch conservative Republican (of the 1970s) and finds himself frequently arguing with Maude on politics. Often mocked for being cheap, but without denying it, he was a widower before Vivian.

Power: *Arthur is immune to any Special Abilities wielded by a Bea Arthur.*

Vivian Cavender Harmon (Rue McClanahan - *Maude*) - Maude's best friend since college, the Cavenders and the Findlays often traveled together and were close friends. Vivian divorced her husband, and then eventually met and married Dr. Arthur Harmon.

Power: *Vivian can get Arthur to agree to any argument first made by either Maude or Carol.*

Florida Evans (Esther Rolle - *Maude*) - Maude's housekeeper, she often gets the last laugh at Maude's expense with her no-nonsense attitude. She is frustrated that Maude often makes a point of conspicuously and awkwardly demonstrating how open-minded and liberal she is.

Power: *Florida can counter any argument made by Maude by drawing on "reality".*

James Evans (John Amos - *Good Times*) - A proud man and a good father, often working two jobs to support his family, he is Florida's husband in the spin-off *Good Times*.

Power: *James can evade any argument with a deep sigh and an eye-roll.*

Edith Bunker (Jean Stapleton - *All in the Family*) - Edith is a sweet and kind woman, often appearing to be naive and uneducated but sometimes this may seem like an act. She puts up with her bigoted husband but does not discount his behavior. She has a strong sense of optimism and while she may seem to change her opinion based on who spoke last, when she does muster up her mind and will she can be hard to sway.

Power: *Edith can end a fight by listening with compassion and understanding to both sides.*

Secret Guest Star (Varies - 1970s & 1980s Generic Guest Star) - The player assigned to this role can choose either a real actor or an imagined one to serve in a Guest Starring role incorporated into both shows. The Guest Star should either be a noteworthy celebrity or character actor of the era.

Note: Players may feel free to comment that several characters In Game look the same. Maude appears as a younger version of Dorothy, and both are younger versions of Bea Arthur. Additionally, Rue McClanahan played both Blanche and Vivian. This can be fun to play up!!

GM Roles - At least one GM should participate as the Executive of the Television Hall of Fame. They will inform The Real Bea Arthur of her nomination, explain the nature of her decision, and join her on her expedition. Additional GMs can play roles including an assistant, intern, or any other role which would make sense in this context. These roles can be added as PCs if desired.

Game Structure

Ten minutes of light workshoping precedes the LARP led by the GM(s). This is a very low mechanics game, and there is not an expectation for romance or intimacy rules needed. (Sorry, Blanche!) Most of this time will be spent allowing the players to interact and get comfortable with each other, as well as form any possible connections they might want to see come to life. Any veils or triggers can be openly discussed to achieve comfort among the player group.

Then the casts of the two shows will be split and given a few minutes out of character to work up any final connections within their group as well as come up with a fun idea for the episode that they will be playing out. Examples include “the Girls need to buy a new couch”, “Rose gets interviewed for the paper”, “Maude considers running for city council” or “Edith and Maude take Arnold to a drag bar for lunch”. The **Special Guest Star** can dip between groups, while **The Real Bea Arthur** will be given a briefing by the GMs.

The LARP will begin in three distinct spaces - two designed to serve as the “set” for each show, and any other space connecting or adjacent to allow for travel between the two. At game-on, the characters from each of the two shows will begin play *in media res* returning from the first commercial break of their show’s episode (picking up in Act II of the episode). At a time of her own choosing (because who else is going to choose for her?) **The Real Bea Arthur** will arrive to interrupt the action. After the interruption of both shows, the characters will be able to interact freely with each other and if they would like, use whatever means they deem fit to convince **The Real Bea Arthur** to enter the hall as either Maude or Dorothy. Note: Characters do NOT need to try to sway **The Real Bea Arthur** towards either show.

After this period of interaction, each show will in turn resume their episode, coming back from the second commercial break. The characters play the episode as before without any recollection of the interruption, while the others are present, observing as an unseen audience. They may discuss the show as it is unfolding without the characters even being aware that they are in a show. **The Real Bea Arthur** will determine in which order the shows play the third act.

After each episode concludes, the characters will all continue to interact until **The Real Bea Arthur** announces her verdict. The characters will have a few minutes to say goodbye to their new friends forever. Or taunt the losing side, if they wish. If time permits, the characters from the winning show may elect (with **The Real Bea Arthur**’s approval) to perform the episode’s “stinger” or “post-credits scene”.

GM Note (Spoiler): If the player of **The Real Bea Arthur** chooses to use her Special Power on the TV Hall of Fame Executive, she CAN successfully change the rules to her liking, including entering as both characters if she wishes. This can also be done even if the **Optional Secret Powers** are NOT in play for the other characters, based around the GM’s discretion. It is a fun way to allow both shows to “win”, and is consistent with the character of a woman unwilling to bend to anyone’s rules.

A Final Note on **Archie Bunker** - *Maude* spun off from *All in the Family* which featured arguably one of the most famous characters in all of American television, but also one of its most bigoted - Archie Bunker. Played by the incredibly liberal Carroll O’Connor, who wrote the pilot for *All in the Family*, Archie represented everything that was wrong in America at the time, but there to be mocked for his ignorance. Sadly, too many missed that part of the joke. This is why Archie is not included as a playable character, although certainly references can be made to him and his antics by Edith or anyone else.