

Still Life

A Larp by Wendy Gorman, David Hertz, and Heather Silsbee

Created using the Larp House "Larpjam" process

Introduction

This is a game about relationships and their inherent instability due to forces beyond our control. Also rocks.

In this game one player takes on the role of the Elemental Forces (EF). The other players take the roles of rocks pondering the meaning of their existence with each other and their environment, as their lives are determined by the whims of the Elemental Forces.

This game is for 4 to 10 players. It requires space for play and around 2 hours.

Disclaimers

This game involves physical contact between players.

The rules as written require players to be able to sit, stand, and/or lay down for extended periods. However, we encourage the EF to make accommodations for players who may have difficulty with this.

Set-Up

Touch Boundaries.

Before the game begins, the Elemental Forces should lead the group in defining touch boundaries. This game involves the EF gently repositioning players, so it is important to establish where the players are comfortable being touched. We recommend the EF keep a short list of where the different players are comfortable being touched, or having all of the players agree on places they are ok being touched. For example, all of the players could agree that arms and feet are a safe place for the EF to touch, and then the EF could reposition people using their arms, feet, and gentle verbal suggestions.

Define the Play Space.

Still Life requires an area in which players will be comfortable standing, sitting, or lying down. The acoustics should allow for multiple conversations to be held at the same time.

Set the Tone.

As a group, players should discuss and decide what tone they want the game to take. This game can be played as a serious, meditative experience to explore relationships and internal thoughts, or it can be played as a wacky rock comedy, or something in-between. The rules can work for any tone. All players' input should be taken into account, since the real goal of this larp is for everyone to have a good experience!

Your Rock's Question.

Each player should define their rock type and their central question (or the GM can provide one for them). Examples of rocks and questions are provided in the Example section.

Starting Positions.

When the group is ready to start play, the EF should physically position players in their starting positions. The EF should put some players in large or small groups, others in pairs, and others alone; some players standing up, others sitting, and others lying down.

Playing Still Life

Questions.

Each rock will have a question about the meaning of its existence. The focus of play will be striving to find an answer to this question. Players may do this by interior meditation and by talking to other rocks about their questions. Both methods are encouraged. The players may or may not ultimately find an answer to their questions. The important thing is to explore the possibilities presented by your question.

Persistent.

Still Life is a persistent larp. Once the players are positioned by the EF, they will remain in character until the game is over. In-game time is continuous.

Movement and Interaction.

Rocks cannot move unless acted upon by an elemental force. Rocks can only interact (talk to / make faces at / etc.) with rocks within touching distance.

Changing Position.

When rocks change position, they should think about the way in which that change in position influences their question. It may result in the question being answered!

Answering questions.

When a rock arrives at an answer to their question that they are satisfied with, they may stand up and explain what their question was, their answer to it, and how they cease to be the same rock (by turning into sand, melting into lava, breaking in half, etc). When a rock stands up to answer their question, all other rocks should stop any other conversations and pay attention. Rocks may learn something about themselves from other rocks' answers.

A New Question.

When a rock feels that their question has been answered, they can come up with a new one. This question should reflect their changed state, and should be something that the rock is interested in exploring further.

Becoming an Elemental Force.

When a rock answers their question, they have the option to become an Elemental Force. If they choose to become an Elemental Force, the current EF may become a rock. There must always be at least one Elemental Force.

Ending Play.

At the end of play, each rock gets the opportunity to say a few words in character, whether or not they answered their question(s).

Elemental Forces Guidelines

Role of the Elemental Force.

Many of the duties of the Elemental Forces will look something like what a Game Master might do in another game, but in this game, their role will be a little different. If it helps you to think of this role as a GM, go ahead, but be prepared for things to look a little different than what you're used to.

Tone.

The tone in this game can be widely variable, and it is largely up to the Elemental Forces to maintain the tone of their specific game, as decided during set-up.

Movement.

Act upon everyone at least once (this includes physically moving people). Make sure that no one is being left out or is put in uncomfortable situations. Keep in mind player's touch boundaries.

Narration.

Narrate what the forces are doing as the rocks are acted upon. This can be done loudly, so that everyone can hear, or in a quiet tone, so that only the player being acted upon is able to hear.

Mix Up The Groups.

Strive for interesting dynamics. Put people in pairs, large groups, or alone. Don't leave any rock alone for too long, but don't be afraid to just let things sit for some length of time.

Ending Play.

At the end of two hours (or however long the group has agreed to play for), the EF will announce that play is at an end. They will then choose rocks, one at a time, to make their closing statements. The EF will continue choosing rocks until all of the rocks have stood up and made their closing statements.

Example Rocks and Questions

Piece of Brick.

What if I can't carry them forever?

Marble.

Why haven't I been chosen?

Granite.

Can I be tough enough to withstand the elements?

Unidentified Pebble.

What am I?

Shale.

As parts of myself break away, am I still the same rock?

Sandstone.

What does it mean to be both a stone and sand?

Quartz.

Do I only exist for the human gaze?

Petrified wood.

I was once alive, but am now a rock. Which side do I truly belong to?

Fool's gold.

If I try hard enough, will people think I'm authentic?

Suggestions for Play

Costuming.

Optionally, players can decide on their rock in advance and come to the larp appropriately costumed based on their initial vision for their rock.

Play Space.

An outside play space for Still Life is strongly recommended.

Rock Ideas. The Elemental Forces is encouraged to bring a list of rocks to help players come up with their initial rock idea.