



Take The Star Out Of The Window*

A Nordic Freeform Larp
by Kjell Hedgard Hugaas

Take The Star Out of The Window

- A chamber-larp in the “Norwegian Prine” anthology

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- Inspired by a song by John Prine

Playtime: Roughly 50-60 min

Number of players: 3-4

What is this game about?

“A service flag or service banner is a banner that family members of those serving in the United States Armed Forces can display. The flag or banner is officially defined as a white field with a red border, with a blue star for each family member serving in the Armed Forces of the United States during any period of war or hostilities. A gold star (with a blue edge) represents a family member who died during military operations...” (Wikipedia)

Take The Star Out of The Window is a nano-larp about war. It is not a game about war itself, but rather what happens to families in times of war. It is set specifically in the US, as mainstream US entertainment has shaped the understanding of what war looks like to many of us who have grown up in the western world post WW2. This portrayal of perpetual warfare on foreign soil has persisted through the decades as the theaters of war have changed: Korea, Vietnam, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, etc... This nano game is centered on one US family, and the effect of war (and propaganda) on them specifically. In the game the players will play the Johnson's, a family with a long and proud history of military service that stretches all the way back to the American Revolutionary War of 1775-1783.

The game is created as an attempt to provide players with a deeper emotional connection to a type of warfare that is almost an abstraction of what we imagine when we think about war. It seems clear to me that this normalization of perpetual war comes at a price, even though large parts of society seem to not consider this. The name of the larp refers to the practice of families hanging service banners on display in their windows to signal that one or more of their family members are currently serving in the military.

The song that inspired the game:

 [Take the Star Out of the Window \(2020 Remaster\)](#)

Disclaimer:

- A. This larp is normatively centered on a classic understanding of the nuclear family. This is purely for reasons of playability and to keep close to the inspiration for the larp. It is not meant to be an endorsement for any kind of family structure or a comment on any other way of organizing your own.

- B. We are exploring a specific experience related to war. The designer of this larp is very aware that things usually are a lot more complicated than this game could ever hope to convey.

Pre-game set up and workshops:

1. Read “What is this game about?” and the “Disclaimer” out loud.
2. Another one of the players read the safety techniques out loud, and the players repeat the safety words after each paragraph.
 - i. Cut
 1. *Players can say the word “Cut” at any time if they do not want the scene to continue. For emphasis they can form a T with their hands, similar to how Time-Out is called in many other contexts. They will not be asked to explain why. When “Cut” is used, all play stops immediately and it will not be resumed until the situation is resolved.*
 - ii. X-card
 1. *Players can “X-card” any content that they do not wish to play on, both before and during the game. They do this by for instance saying: “I X-card any content related to animal cruelty”: For emphasis they can form an X with their arms in front of their chest. They will not be asked to explain why. When “X-card” is used, the players will do their best to remove the mentioned content from further play.*
 - a. For this game, the following is X-carded. As the facilitator, model X-carding when presenting these:
 - i. X-Card on Racism. There is surely systemic racism in the US, and we do not want to erase that. This is not what we are playing on in this larp though.
 - ii. X-Card on Vaccines and other conspiracy theories. There is no conspiracy here.
 - iii. X-Card on extreme political and religious views.
 - iii. Softer
 1. *Players can say the word “Softer” when they wish for the play to continue, but with a lower intensity. This can be emphasized by putting your hand palm down, and gesturing downwards, as if you are pressing the brake pedal on a car. They will not be asked to explain why. When “Softer” is used, the players will do their best to reduce the intensity of the scene to a level that all the players are comfortable with.*
3. The players decide on who will play which characters. If there are only 3 players, the character of the grandfather (character c) will be played by the facilitator. Note: This

character will not be part of the final scene of the game, but can of course listen to it as it is being played out.

The characters are:

- a. Robbie - The oldest child of the family. Has just returned home from a tour of duty. (The players decide on which together - The player of this character should make sure that this happens.) Robbie went to war and came back changed. The experiences they had were sobering, but they are not sure of how to breach this subject with the family.
 - b. The Mother (The player decides on the name and tells the others) - She is proud of having the star banner in her window and the long military story of her family. Her husband (and the children's father, and grandfather's son) died in Afghanistan almost 20 years ago. The player of this character also gets to name the dead husband if they so choose. If not, this can be done collaboratively.
 - c. The Grandfather (The player decides on the name and tells the others) - He served with honor in Vietnam and received several medals. He has seen the horrors of war and losing his son was a hard blow for him. Now, he is firmly against the idea of honour in war, but he has not been very vocal about it so far. If anyone in the family were to bring it up though, he might make his anti-war sentiments strongly known.
 - d. The Sibling (The player decides on the gender and name, and tells the others) - Robbie's 17 year old, younger sibling. They look up to Robbie and are eager to sign up for the army when they turn 18. It will take a lot for them to change their mind on this.
4. Relation-building workshop: Anita's Ball of Yarn
- One player starts by telling a very short story about a shared memory with another player. For instance: "Hey [Character's name]. Remember that time when we drove our old car down to the beach and went searching for opals in the middle of the night?" This is where the first player throws a ball of yarn to the other player in the analog version of this workshop (If you are playing the game digitally, you will have to keep score of the different stories some other way). The player who is named by the first player (and receives the ball of yarn) then adds to the story in the "Yes, but..." OR "Yes, and..." fashion. For example: "Yes, but then we got our car stuck in sand, and Dad had to come rescue us. He was not very happy." The second player now repeats the exercise, but with another player. Repeat until every character has at least one shared story with every one of the other characters.

Playing The Game

Scene 1:

The game starts with the characters sitting around the kitchen table. If you wish to, sharing an actual dinner meal while playing can be a good way to pace the game and allow for tension to build slowly without erupting.

Robbie returned from active military duty yesterday and has to report back in 2 weeks. This is the first shared meal that the family has had since Robbie left 6 months ago. The whole game is just this one scene.

Start the game by asking the players to close their eyes and count down from 5 to 1. After the facilitator has counted one, the players open their eyes, and the game has started.

There is no win/lose state in this game, and there is no particular state that marks the end of each scene. Simply decide to cut and end when you feel that you have played long enough. Based on previous runs of the game, this moment will be easy to recognize when it presents itself.

Workshop between the Scenes:

When the first scene has ended, the players will return to the Anita's Ball of Yarn workshop that they did pre-game. This time though, they will be describing events that took place for the next two weeks after the first scene, while Robbie was home. In addition, they will not use the "Yes, and.." response, but rather the "Yes, BUT..." response, adding tension and friction to the scenes they narrate. It is also important that they do not narrate what happened when Robbie left or after they had left, as the second scene is set at the departure.

Scene 2:

The scene takes place at the airport, just outside of the security screening. Robbie, The Mother, and The Sibling are present. The loudspeaker has just called Robbie's flight, and they have about 15 minutes before Robbie has to go through security in order to reach the flight in time. Note: The game is hard coded so that Robbie HAS to go. This is not something that the player can decide. The scene will end when the facilitator reads out the final call Go-To-Gate announcement.

Start the scene by asking the players to close their eyes and count down from 5 to 1. After the facilitator has counted one, the players open their eyes, and the scene has started.

When the scene is nearing a climax, the facilitator reads out the following:

"This is the final call for AA 1776. Passenger Robbie Johnson, please report to the gate. The gate is closing."


Debriefing

There are many different debriefing methods that can be applicable to this larp, and time might be short but it is recommended to at least do the following:

- Let the players sit with their family around the kitchen table for a few minutes to let the first reactions play themselves out.
- Start by thanking each other for playing the scenario.
- Do a short de-roleing exercise. The players take turns saying: (And please follow this script) "Hi. I am [your name]. In this larp I played [Name of Character]. Right now I need [whatever you feel like you need. Time. Affirmation. A hug...]" Go around the circle. Thank each player after they have shared.
- Contextualization. Read this short piece out loud:
Before WW2, the US did not have a standing army. In the 77 years since, the US army has only grown in size. In his farewell address in 1961, President Eisenhower, himself a decorated general, warned against how the military-industrial complex of the US meant that the country would soon be in

a situation of perpetual warfare. This situation is now normalized, and you have played a game that is based on this.

- For further contextualization, there are a lot of sources to choose from. The designer of this game suggests that you listen to Eisenhower's speech. You can find it here:

 [Eisenhower Farewell Address \(Best Quality\) - 'Military Industrial Comp...](#)

- If anybody has something else that they want to share or talk about, you should set aside time for that.