



# The Drinklings

*A larp by Anna-Karin Linder and Mo Holkar*

# Introduction

A group of friends meet regularly in a pub. They all work as respectable and esteemed scholars at an ancient university, but they all also write fantastical fiction in their spare time. The larp is made up of scenes depicting a series of their monthly meetings, at which they talk about their writing and how it's going, and bounce ideas around the table. The last scene, set much later, involves a group of critics discussing the work of these giants.

This is a light-hearted larp, with themes of friendship and the tension between support and envy/competitiveness. When your friend gets a book contract for the work you've been helping them with, while your own (far superior!) masterpiece languishes unrecognized, how do you feel? What will the judgement of history have to say about you?

## Practicalities

*The Drinklings* is designed for anywhere from 4 to 8 people: 5 or 6 is probably the best number. Either with a separate facilitator; or one of the players can facilitate, as preferred. It lasts about two and a half hours.

It is designed to be played in a pub, or similar environment. The venue shouldn't be too noisy – the players need to be able to hear each other clearly as they talk across the table.

### A note about alcohol

We have designed this game to be played with alcohol if players wish it – as their characters drink, so can they. But, bear in mind that some players may not drink – or some may not feel comfortable about being around other players who they don't know and who are drinking. Player safety and security is the most important thing: so if you feel it should be a dry run, then that's perfectly OK, use soft drinks instead. The characters will still be drinking, of course, even if the players are not.



# Script

This script is written for you as facilitator of the larp, so it talks about ‘you’ and about ‘they’ meaning the players. If you are going to play a character in the game yourself as well as facilitating it (which is a lot of fun!), then make the obvious changes. It is assumed that the facilitator’s character will be the Chairman of the group, whether you’re playing it as a full character or just for the purposes of facilitation.

## Setting

This larp has a historic setting – the 1930s. It’s important not get too obsessed with historical detail and authenticity, so the players don't feel too awkward about improvising ideas -- but the 'feel' of the period is worth having. We’ve included a briefing document about the 1930s, which you will read out to set the scene.

Alternatively, it’s fine if the players (or the organizers) choose a different setting beforehand, and maybe dress up a bit in the appropriate style.

## Schedule

The larp runs like this:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Approximate time</b>
Setup and character creation	50 minutes
Round 1	20 minutes
Intermission 1	5 minutes
Round 2	20 minutes
Intermission 2	5 minutes
Round 3	20 minutes

Intermission 3 – the Career	5 minutes
Round 4 – the Epilogue	20 minutes
Close	5 minutes
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 hours 30 minutes</b>

Round 4 in particular will run longer with more players, so if you have 7 or 8 in your group, allow more time.

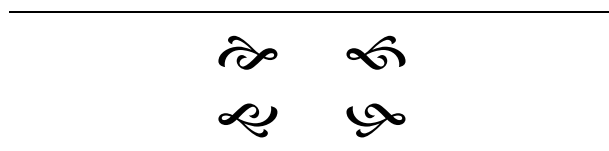
## Setup

Introduce yourself by name, and ask all the players to introduce themselves.

Explain what the larp is (perhaps by reading the ***Introduction***) and that it consists of four rounds. Explain that each round is played out in real time, but the intermissions inbetween do not represent fixed periods of time – how much time passes during each intermission is up to the players to decide. The next round could be the very next meeting, or half a year later, or ten years later if that fits the game.

Read out the following briefing about Britain in the 1930s, and about the historical Inklings group of writers.

(If the players agree beforehand that they'd like to a setting other than Britain in the 1930s, or if you've decided as organizer to use a different setting, that's fine: adjust accordingly.)



## Briefing – the 1930s

The United Kingdom in the early 1930s was an uncertain place. Millions of its young men had been destroyed in the Great War, which cast a shadow over every family. Those who survived the conflict, and are now middle-aged, may still bear mental scars. And it seems as though the lessons have not been learnt – the ‘war to end all wars’ did not succeed in bringing peace to Europe. From the British Isles, the view across the water is deeply worrying, as Fascism starts to rise, and as the Great Depression begins to bite.

But here in Oxford, at the ancient seat of learning, it’s possible to lay aside such concerns – or even to be unaware of them. The fabled ‘ivory tower’ allows those who are academically gifted to pursue their studies, undisturbed by news from outside – and often not even having to worry about teaching students. The sunlit college lawns, the gentle chimes of the chapel bells, the dusty, leathery smell of the great libraries – all this is conducive to reflection, to abstraction, to unworldliness.

Bicycling, at a gentle pace, is the main form of transport around the university; and academics still wear their black gowns – trailing behind them, like the wings of crows. Their food is provided for them, and it is of the best – and the college cellars hold many fine vintages. But when scholars wish to relax, they come to one of the many pubs of the city – to gather around a massive old oak table, near to a crackling fire, to sink pint after pint of English ale. Here, conversation can turn away from the strict discipline of their studies – towards outside interests and hobbies. And, among friends who understand these things, the freedom is there to speak of the great work, the noblest calling of all – even though it can never be mentioned to their university superiors – the writing of fantastical fiction.

The Inklings were a group of scholars and writers based in Oxford in the 1930s and 40s. They included JRR Tolkien, CS Lewis, Charles Williams, and a number of others who were notable at the time, but to whom history has been less generous. The group met every Tuesday evening, in a pub called The Eagle and Child: to discuss their works in progress, and to support and critique each other’s writing.

The characters in this larp are not The Inklings: but they are inspired by them. You can choose, as players, how close you want to play to the historical group, and how serious or how light a tone you want to set for the larp.

## Mood

Help the players agree the mood of the game. This should be set by group decision. Maybe it's super over the top satire, or it's very small means drama about escaping the dreads of WW1. It could also be ambivalent, if the stories of the things they write is a symbol of their real-life relationships. Tell the players to keep their discussions short and snappy. Emphasize the comedy and lightness of the game.

Ask the players how they want to handle sexism and gender prejudice. There are basically two options:

- ❖ **No sexism:** play in an alternate-1930s where there is no sexism, and where professors and writers can unremarkably be of any gender.
- ❖ **In a bubble:** The world around you can be sexist, but YOU are very progressive types and there is both women and men in the group. The players play the gender that they feel comfortable in, and the group can also agree not to play on sexist themes if they don't want to.

Discuss safety techniques [Cut, Lookdown, The Door is Open]. Say that while this is not intended to be a deeply serious and affecting larp, people should still be considerate of themselves as players.



## Rounds

Read out these next three paragraphs, which tell the players about the round structure, and what the theme of each of the four rounds will be:

The game is divided into four rounds of beer (or something else, for players who don't like drinking beer). After the fourth round, the game ends. When a new round begins, time in the game has shifted. The players agree together on how long. It can be next meeting, several years or just an hour (and several pints) later. Each round is not necessarily the first round of the meeting in question – if you need an explanation as to why people have already had a few beers.

Each round should normally end fairly naturally, when the players are ready for it. Tell them beforehand that it should take about 20 minutes. Tell them that any of them can suggest to end the round by saying something like: *"I don't know about you chaps, but my throat's getting dry, after all this chit-chat. What say we send for another round of beer?"* If the others agree, then the round ends. (Or someone can maybe get in one closing remark and then the round ends.)

If after 20 minutes this has not happened, then the Chair should suggest the end in the same way.

Then the players go off game for a short intermission (until the new round of beer arrives), during which they draw new cards and decide together how long it has been since the last round. The game starts again when the Chair takes the first sip of the new round.

**Round 1** – Positioning against each other – "Friend or foe?"

**Round 2** – Personal drama and weakness – "Into the breach, dear friends"

**Round 3** – Friendship and safety – "The Fellowship"

**Round 4** – the Epilogue – "The greatness of these giants"



## Making characters

Spread out the three mini-decks of character-design cards on the table, and help the players choose the elements that will make up their characters.

Each player will choose and take three character-design cards – one of each type – from the selection available:

- ❖ Job title
- ❖ Field of research
- ❖ Title of work

There are some ‘choose your own’ cards, for players who prefer to design their own elements.

Explain that the job title cards are intended as an indication of relative academic seniority – by default, fellows should defer to professors, students should defer to everyone, etc. Although as your characters are all friends here, some of these differences can become less important with familiarity.

(In a less serious run of the larp, you can leave out the ‘choose your own’ cards and just assign each player one of the existing cards of each type at random – they will have to make sense of the combination as best they can.)

Give out pens and name labels/badges on which the players can write their characters’ names and titles (eg ‘Professor Harley Smith”), and stick them to themselves so the name is visible to other players. Then give out the blank character sheets: the players should now write the relevant data from their chosen cards onto their character sheet.

## Lore

Now spread out the nine different Lore inspiration cards on the table. Each player choose a selection of elements from them (maybe one from each, but it doesn’t have to be), and compose a few sentences to describe the basis of their character’s writing. (This time, they shouldn’t take the cards away – they have to share them with each other.)



Example: "An epic about a post-apocalyptic galactic nation, set on a distant empire planet that has started to die. Inspired by space science and ancient Atlantis. The piece is heavy with world lore and the story is a bit in the background, but follows one of the ruling families that tries to find the ancient blueprints to space travel, so they can escape the dying world. No sexual content. A lot of strange creatures and heavy with symbolism."

If the players would like to compose this lore summary in the form of a blurb – like a publisher might put on the back cover of a book – then that's great. As long as it communicates the general intention and flavour of the work.

## **Interviews and introductions**

As players finish this preparation, pair them up (or if there's an odd number of players, then the first group should be a group of three) to step aside from the table and interview each other. This is a brief process in which each learns the most important details about one of the others. When all players have interviewed, they will return to the table and, in turn, introduce each other to the group.

The introduction is done as their character would at a prestigious speech or gala or something. So you stand up and say something like: "This is Professor Mabuse Mumford. He is a scholar of Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, linguist, and one of the most intelligent men I know. And apart from being a Cambridge man (I am myself an Oxford alumnus, of course) he is one of the most decent chaps I have ever met. Give a big hand to Professor Mumford!"

(If players would like their characters to develop further links with each other – apart from writing and drinking – then that's absolutely fine. Perhaps they go to watch the moving pictures together, or they like rowing small boats on the river. Or one might be the babysitter of the other's children. But the important message is: they should feel free to create these things during the game, not spend time on them during this setup phase.)

If the players would like a transition into the game, you can manage this by asking them to close their eyes, think about their character, think how they talk and feel, and when they open their eyes, they are in-game – or something like that. This shouldn't really be necessary, though.

## The Game

### Round 1 – Positioning against each other – “Friend or foe?”

This round is about being the best, and the smartest, and getting the others look bad while you look good. It's about 'splanation of linguistic details when inventing your own language, and that *elves* is a vulgarisation of the gaelic fae and so on. But always polite and with “well that is all right you old chap” attitude. No outright attacking or hostility – that should be saved for the second round.

### Intermission 1 – off game

Draw intermission cards (see below for details), and decide together how much time has passed. Make the players switch seats randomly before the start of the next round.

### Round 2 – Personal drama and weakness – “Into the breach, dear friends”

Backstabbing, back-talking and being weak. Trying to hide pain or failure, by boasting larger. Being overly intricate about the work, and try to get others to say something nice. Quarrelling, and breakup of friendships.

*(Note: you may have picked up intermission cards that seem to go against this mood: but you as a player should choose how you want to enact the intermission cards. Similarly in subsequent rounds.)*

### Intermission 2 – off game

Draw intermission cards (see below for details), and decide together how much time has passed. Make the players switch seats randomly before the start of the next round.

### Round 3 – Friendship and safety – “The Fellowship”

The need for positioning is over, and now it is about genuine interest in each other's work, and also personal lives. It is giving each other love and affection, and sharing truths like “I have always thought you were the most intelligent of us all”. Some spikiness is still possible – but the general tone should end positively.

### Intermission 3 – the Career

Off game – preparing the epilogue (but not too much). The players will each independently be deciding about the rest of their own character's career up until death – with no cards, just inventing the story as required. They can make notes for it on the back of their character sheets. Make the players switch seats randomly before the start of the next round.

### Round 4 – the Epilogue – “The greatness of these giants”

Although this round is not in the same timestream as the earlier ones, it still takes place in a pub and is accompanied by a fresh round of beer. (The critics like their beer as much as the original Drinklings did.)

Basically, the message is: They were all great geniuses. Each player, in the persona of a literary critic, says a short memorial over the Drinkling that they played and that their critic is an expert on. It can be assumed that the event is some sort of informal celebratory colloquium.

After this speech (which should only be a couple of minutes) the critic should take and answer questions from the other critics. This will allow them to develop their ideas, and to make callbacks to earlier material if they wish.

The Chair continues to help people keep it short(fish), fair and sort of drunkenly snappy according to number of players. The time budget is about five minutes total (speech plus Q&A) per critic.

### Close

If the players would like to talk through their thoughts and feelings about the larp, the usual kind of round – each person talking for a minute or so, uninterrupted – is fine. But Most likely it won't be necessary: the gathering can just degenerate into chatting.



## Intermissions 1 and 2

Each player draws an Intermission card randomly (or choose one, in a more serious game) during Intermission 1, and again during Intermission 2. It represents the major event that has happened to their character during the period since the last round. (After a card has been chosen, it should be discarded – so the same event doesn't happen twice.) Of course, they can also invent other things that have happened to their character in that time.

If a player really doesn't like the card that they've drawn – or if it doesn't fit the established facts, for example talking about a spouse when they have none -- they can put it back randomly into the deck, and draw a different one. But in general there should be a spirit of going with whatever fate has thrown at them, and making it somehow fit the story.

People might wonder, for example, about how a card about hating a fellow group member can be made to work in the spirit of the third round, which is about friendship. The answer is that they can start the round hating, but by the end of it they find a way to be friends.

At the end of the Intermission, if there's a major life event that the other characters would all know about – for example, if a character got married – the player should share this with them (out of character). But keep it to one sentence maximum! – you don't want people to go on about details of what has been happening in their characters' lives. They should instead aim to bring that out during the following round. Similarly if they want to invent major outside world events: do it during the round.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to our lovely playtesters! – and to the organizers of A Week in Sweden 2018, where *The Drinklings* first ran.

# The Drinklings character sheet

**Player name:**

**Character name:**

**Job title:**

**Field of research:**

**Title of work:**

**Lore:**

## Job title cards

<p><b>Head of Department</b> Known as “Professor [Smith]”</p> <p>The leader of their subject at the university</p>	<p><b>Professor</b> Known as “Professor [Smith]”</p> <p>One of the most senior people in their subject</p>	<p><b>Dean</b> Known as “Dean [Smith]”</p> <p>Not so senior in their subject, but with a lot of responsibility over students</p>
<p><b>Reader</b> Known as “Dr [Smith]”</p> <p>A respected name in their field of study, who people will travel to listen to</p>	<p><b>Fellow</b> Known as “Dr [Smith]”</p> <p>A well-established academic with a permanent job at one of the colleges</p>	<p><b>Lecturer</b> Known as “Dr [Smith]”</p> <p>A capable academic who has some responsibility for teaching students</p>
<p><b>Junior Researcher</b> Known as “Dr [Smith]”</p> <p>Just getting started in life as a professional academic</p>	<p><b>Postgraduate</b> Known as “Mr/Miss [Smith]”</p> <p>Still studying, working on a doctorate</p>	<p><b>Choose your own job title</b></p>

# Field of research cards

<p><b>Ancient History</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Mesopotamia</li> <li>❖ Egypt</li> <li>❖ Etruria</li> <li>❖ Rome</li> <li>❖ Athens</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>	<p><b>Languages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Sumerian</li> <li>❖ Ethiopian</li> <li>❖ Celtic</li> <li>❖ Gothic</li> <li>❖ Slavonic</li> <li>❖ Indic</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>	<p><b>Philosophy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Ethics</li> <li>❖ Logical Positivism</li> <li>❖ Stoicism</li> <li>❖ Neo-Platonism</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>
<p><b>Law</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Criminal</li> <li>❖ Jurisprudence</li> <li>❖ Contract</li> <li>❖ Tort</li> <li>❖ Constitutional</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>	<p><b>Classical literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Homer</li> <li>❖ Virgil</li> <li>❖ Horace</li> <li>❖ Dante</li> <li>❖ Chaucer</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>	<p><b>Modern literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Shakespeare</li> <li>❖ Milton</li> <li>❖ Dickens</li> <li>❖ Austen</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>
<p><b>Natural Sciences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Physics</li> <li>❖ Zoology</li> <li>❖ Botany</li> <li>❖ Chemistry</li> <li>❖ Geology</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>	<p><b>Miscellaneous</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Archaeology</li> <li>❖ Anthropology</li> <li>❖ Folklorics</li> <li>❖ Music</li> <li>❖ Mathematics</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>	<p><b>Choose your own field of research</b></p>

## Title of work cards

<b>The Chambers of Eden</b>	<b>Wolf and Heart</b>	<b>Vagrant Star</b>
<b>Of Sword and Smoke</b>	<b>Whistle's Journey</b>	<b>Tournament of Trials</b>
<b>The Eclareon</b>	<b>The Dark Argument</b>	<b>Choose your own title of work</b>



# Lore inspiration cards

<p><b>Structure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ novel</li> <li>❖ trilogy</li> <li>❖ epic poem</li> <li>❖ collection of episodic stories</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>	<p><b>Genre</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ high fantasy</li> <li>❖ low fantasy</li> <li>❖ historical-magical</li> <li>❖ space opera</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>	<p><b>Style</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ archaic</li> <li>❖ ornate</li> <li>❖ plain</li> <li>❖ imitative</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>
<p><b>Setting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ empire</li> <li>❖ post-apoc</li> <li>❖ barbarian</li> <li>❖ pastoral</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mode</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ decadent</li> <li>❖ heroic</li> <li>❖ light-hearted</li> <li>❖ fantastical</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>	<p><b>Tone</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ rollicking</li> <li>❖ melancholy</li> <li>❖ philosophical</li> <li>❖ symbolic</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>
<p><b>Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ journey</li> <li>❖ war and politics</li> <li>❖ personal drama</li> <li>❖ adventure</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>	<p><b>Theme</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ religious faith</li> <li>❖ inevitable doom</li> <li>❖ human exceptionalism</li> <li>❖ family duty</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>	<p><b>Inspiration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ myth</li> <li>❖ dream</li> <li>❖ literature</li> <li>❖ religious texts</li> <li>❖ [choose your own]</li> </ul>

## Intermission cards (3 pages)

<p>You are inventing a whole new language for your opus, but it's a lot harder than you first thought. Ask for help.</p>	<p>You burned your manuscript in a drunken rage. Choose a new title and lore.</p>	<p>You discovered tantric sex and your work has taken a sexual turn. Try to make it look like that is a sophisticated choice.</p>
<p>You have been offered a prestigious post in your college, but the Fellows might not approve of your fantastical and sensational writing. You need to make it seem more respectable, or else decline the post.</p>	<p>You have gained a contract to publish your novel, when you finish it. The publisher has asked if you can recommend any other new authors for their fiction line.</p>	<p>A vanity publisher has contacted you, offering to publish your novel in a beautiful leather-bound edition: but you will have to pay them fifty pounds.</p>
<p>An American fan of your writing has come to Oxford and is stalking you. You are not sure whether to boast about it to your friends, or ask for help.</p>	<p>You have recently started a family. This has the potential to take precious time away from your writing, if you allow it to. How have your friends managed this problem?</p>	<p>You are being sued by another (unknown) writer, who claims that the setting and theme of your novel are copied from theirs. You wonder darkly if one of your 'friends' has put them up to it.</p>

<p>You have received thirty-eight rejection letters from publishers. You are beginning to doubt yourself.</p>	<p>You are suing one of the other writers in the group, because of the atrocious theft of your core concept.</p>	<p>Your spouse has threatened to leave you unless you give up ‘that silly writing’.</p>
<p>You have been offered a senior position at another university: but if you take it, you will only be able to attend this gathering occasionally. You don’t know what effect that might have on your writing.</p>	<p>You have a new pet dog, to whom you are hopelessly devoted. You are rewriting your book to include a faithful hound as a heroic character.</p>	<p>Too many late nights drinking port while you write have given you a serious alcohol problem. You’re pretty sure that you’re in control of it, though – surely your friends won’t notice anything different.</p>
<p>You recently met a beautiful and talented poet, whose lyricism captured part of your soul. You are now feverishly rewriting your magnum opus in the form of rhyming couplets.</p>	<p>You really think the others are such talented and intelligent people, and that you might be the lesser talent of the group.</p>	<p>You started a bit earlier than the rest of the group with a few beers before the meeting. You are filled with love for the rest of the group. They are all the swellest mateys you can ever imagine.</p>

<p>Your spouse is giving you a hard time, preventing you from writing, and you need support about it.</p>	<p>Something another member of the group said in the last meeting has been really bugging you, and you have an itching need to sort it out. Did they really mean to call you a tragic old bugger [or other very English insult]?</p>	<p>You are starting to have doubts about your lore, and want to try to subtly seek support from the others without revealing that you have any quandary about your work.</p>
<p>One of the others in the group is getting on your nerves, and you feel the need to express your disdain, rather strongly.</p>	<p>Player: Your previous character died: you are now their son/daughter, taking over the book, and therefore joining the group.</p>	<p>You have been having troubles with your memory. Are you getting old and senile, or is it just stress?</p>
<p>You got a very prestigious literary award, and really want to brag about it... but without seeming like you really want to brag about it.</p>	<p>You have decided to quit the writing. During the round, though, you will start to doubt your decision, and will end up deciding instead to quit your other job to write full time.</p>	<p>[Choose your own intermission event.]</p>