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What's LARP?

A timed exercise

by Mia Sundby

Waiting in line at a concert, a guy has naively asked what you do for a living. What a poor, sweet fool. You can understand why, of course. It's January, bitterly cold, a sort of icy sleet spitting down onto the shivering queue in intermittent spats, like a bitter old married couple who know they should probably stop fighting and just get a bloody divorce but they can't quite break the habit of having a go at each other. As if the weather itself were waiting for someone to break.

And one has.

It started off with the usual small, tense smile that us English offer to each other to acknowledge that no, we're not being rude and yes, we have noticed you and hello, yes isn't today nice, and no I'm not going to talk any more than I have to. Then you'd witnessed a young boy walking past in his fashion-forward puffer jacket getting shat on by a pigeon, and it had been a sort of bonding moment between the two of you.

"Poor sod," you'd rumbled in that deep voice of yours, your thick beard wobbling with the movement.

The guy in front of you had laughed, pretending not to shiver in his denim jacket. Then he'd told you a story about the last time he was in the poor boy's situation, and how he'd had to go to work after that to a company meeting, covered in pigeon shit. You laughed, he relaxed a little.

You have an effect on people, being as big as you are. As wide as you are tall -- generally large enough to loom without meaning to.

People tend to take a step back from you when they meet you, if only so that they can avoid breaking their necks to look up at you. You've gotten used to it.

The guy in front stuck out a hand, grinning, and introduced himself as, "Dan." You shook his hand --carefully, particularly after all the extra work you've been putting into weight training--, and smiled down at him. "Jack."

"Nice to meet you, Jack."

"Nice to meet you too, Dan."

He could have said anything else next. He *should* have said anything else next. He could have asked how long you've been a fan of the band, if you've ever seen any of their shows before, what you thought of their new album --bit of a departure from their old stuff, isn't it?--, could have asked about the commute, poor Daniel could have even asked about the weather. We all know how us Brits love to talk about the weather. That could have stretched the stranger pleasantries out for another ten minutes, minimum.

However, Dan did not ask any of these questions. Instead, he asked the wrong one. A seemingly innocuous question, really. Maybe he expected you to say 'biker' --is that a living? It's certainly a lifestyle--, or 'bartender', hell maybe he was even bracing himself for something unexpected like 'accountant'.

Instead, you sucked in a breath through your lip piercing and thick moustache. To your credit, you really thought about lying. To Dan's misfortune, you didn't think about it long enough.

"I'm a LARPer."

Dan's friendly smile faltered --though, to *his* credit, it didn't falter for long.

"Sorry?"

"I work at a LARP camp."

"A... A what camp?"

"LARP camp."

Dan blinked. "A LARP camp?"

You nodded gravely, not quite able to hide the little flicker of a smile. You do so love this bit. The best part is, you'll never see Dan again. You can tell him as much as you want and he won't be able to judge you beyond the end of this queue.

"Yes," you say, "A LARP camp." And then you wait. You wait for the delicious moment. A moment which every nerd has experienced across the wide, wide world. It's close to, though not quite as satisfying as the 'um, actually' moments we experience throughout our lives when people *foolishly* bring up a treasured nerdy interest of ours. (That moment when you're watching Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers and you get to lean over and tell the person who naively agreed to watch it with you for the first time, that Viggo Morgenstern actually broke two of his toes when he kicked that Orc helmet --the scream of pain isn't just him acting, it's real! And also did you know--)

Dan opens his mouth. You watch in slow time as he asks, "What's LARP?" Oh, good. It's here. The moment. The *delicious* moment. You savour it, though not for long. Instead, you feel --for a split second-- a spark of sympathy for Dan. It wasn't his fault. He didn't know. Overhead, the clouds rip open, and sleet begins to spit down onto the grey city street.

Like Thor himself, you stand beneath the roiling grey clouds, big-bellied and big-bearded, in your leather jacket and your hand-sewn leather gloves you wore as your character, Glormir the Wily, and you smile.

"LARP stands for Live Action Role-Playing..."