

Trash



A freeform game by Anders Karls
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Introduction

- From the program leaflet of Solmukohta 2012

*Did I fail you in that world outside this place
Herein to light I say my last adieu
In sadness I contemplate my fall from grace
Alas – hoping to be born anew*

What combines comedy and philosophical depth? What brings everyday objects into the realm of the surreal? That is the small, simple and experimental larp named Trash, from the isolated Finno-Swedish larpscene!

In the obscurity of an imaginative trash bin, we take on the identity of everything from empty tin cans and rotten banana peels to the fuzz found in pockets. We find ourselves in total despair, being thrown away and forgotten, and ask ourselves "Why? What did I do wrong?". But there is hope. Legends tells us about the mystical Recycling, a state where you can leave your old life behind and return as something new.

Trash has three main focus points. First, the spontaneous creation and evolution of a character based on an inanimate object. Second, the existential mysteries concerning life, death and Recycling in an surreal world. Finally, the ultimate control over the fate of your character, guiding it from total despair to a state of spiritual enlightenment.

The road to Recycling is strange and unknown. Only by finding your true self and with the help of your comrades and may you discover the answers you seek.

Welcome into the trash bin!



Preface

- Something boring to begin with...

Game specifications

Genre: Experimental freeform larp, humoristic existentialism

Number of players: 8 – 20

Game duration: 30 – 60 minutes (excluding preparation time)

Material requirements: A small room or space, big black plastic bags, (paper, pencil, tape)

Trash was originally created in December 2011, in order to be a simple and silly program item on the annual Christmas party of the Finno-Swedish role-playing association Eloria. The game, which was written in Swedish and went under the name “Rosk”, was very much appreciated, and in March 2012 the game was re-organized in Turku. The concept evolved, and was translated into English in order to be a part of the program on Solmukohta 2012. During the larp convention Solmukohta the game was held two times and was positively received. Trash was then developed further and compiled into this compendium so that it can be shared with those who find it interesting.

This material can be distributed, translated, modified, and used freely, but the game creator would be grateful if those who organize Trash (or something similar based on this material) would write a few lines per e-mail about it. All kind of feedback and comments are welcome!

Additional material for running this game:

Character portraits: Request from game designer.

Character poems (Swedish): <http://www.eloria.fi/biblioteket/visa-artikel.php?id=36>

Character portraits with poems (Swedish): Request from game designer.

Contact the game creator through:

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Best regards

Anders Karls, game designer

*In association with Eloria
a Finno-Swedish role-playing association*

www.eloria.fi



Description

- Or at least a good try...

Trash is a simple game, in the way that it can be run without almost any preparation, but complex in the many ways the game can manifest itself. It combines both the concrete and the abstract, the humoristic and spiritual, and can be tweaked to become everything from a story about environmental issues to the meaning of existence itself. The game is in the end defined by the game masters understanding and interpretation of the idea, and how that interpretation is understood and acted upon by the players. This compendium serves only as a basis for understanding the game idea.

In Trash the player create a character based on an inanimate object, a trash. Initially, the character finds itself in a state of despair, but through interaction with others, and rapid evolution of the character, it might find a way to enlightened hope, and escape from the trash bin – or succumb to eternal suffering.

Trash is based on the notion that all objects have a soul, an awareness of itself and personality, which is formed by the life experiences of the object, and in part by the associations of the player. The first task for each player is to create a character based on this, and give it life.

The characters find themselves stuck in the trash bin after suddenly, without apparent reason, being thrown away. This trash bin is not as much a real container, as it is a dreamlike limbo where hope and fate is tested. When you find yourself in the trash bin you have only two options, succumb to despair and suffer eternally in the bottom of the bin, or cling to hope, escape the trash bin and be recycled.

The mysterious concept of recycling has taken on almost religious characteristics, and the road there is as elusive as it is simple. For a trash to be recycled it needs to reach a certain spiritual insight, come to terms with its old life, leave everything behind, and let the hope of recycling be paramount. This is achieved by interacting with other trash, exchanging life stories and ideas, supporting each other and letting the character evolve.

However, in the end it is the player that decides what fate the character will face and what kind of catalyst is needed for the trash to be recycled or fall into despair. This game is also an exercise for players in feeling what is right for *your* game and *your* character and letting yourself act upon that feeling.



Setting

- Where? Who? Why?

This section describes the basic setting for the game. In general can it be said that this game works better the simpler the setting is, and the more freedom the players are given to follow up their own ideas. Paradoxes and discrepancies should simply be ignored, since everything is possible within the trash bin and its strange metaphysics. However, there are of course limits to how much the players can fabulate own ideas, and it should be within the following framework.

The game world

The game takes place in the so called trash bin, a mystical place where all things abandoned, forgotten, and thrown away end up. The world outside the trash bin is very much as we know it, but with the small difference that all objects around us are silently aware of their own existence. However, the trash bin, in which this game is set, is not as concrete and simple as we might imagine. There are no physical walls or ceiling, no hatch or opening to escape through, only the floor made up of old deposited trash. Time and space loses its meaning in this place, and the only thing that really matters is the overhanging despair of having come to this place. But in this land of darkness the light of hope shines bright.



Trash

All objects in our world are sentient and gather experiences from the moment they are created. This forms their personality and what you could call their soul. When an object is thrown away, abandoned, or forgotten, it will “die” and end up in the trash bin, becoming trash. In this game, it is these trash that the players impersonate, and just after they wake up to find them self thrown away. Most trash has had a happy existence outside the trash bin, since the greatest thing that things can hope for is to live up to the purpose of them being created. Despite this, for some reason the transition to the trash bin comes as a shock, some trash never got to fulfil their purpose, some thought they would live forever, and some did not realise what their actual purpose was. The single most common factor for all trash is that they feel that there is something wrong with them being in the trash bin. This creates the enigma and the despair which this game builds upon.

Note: Unlike in the outside world, the trash are able to communicate with each other inside the trash bin. This phenomena is simply a strange fact that we accept, and should not become a topic of discussion inside the game.

Recycling & Deposition

The trash bin is not necessarily the end, but simply a temporary stop where the trash have one last chance to save them selves – a purgatory. While you are in the trash bin you have two options. Either you dwell upon your lost life and your mistakes, succumb to despair and apathy, and get deposited on the floor of the trash bin, becoming a part of the mass of all trash that has accumulated throughout the years, and spends eternity in darkness. Or, you cling to the hope of recycling, accept the unfair in your previous life, leave that behind, reach the enlightened state of recycling, and by this escaping the trash bin. Bear in mind that recycling in this case is a much more abstract and spiritual phenomena than we might picture. This recycling allows for anything becoming anything, and it does not follow the rules of the physical world. It is neither necessary for the trash to know what it will be reincarnated as. The concept of recycling has taken on almost religious proportions in the trash bin. Trash talk about it, but now one knows how to reach it. This makes it elusive and it its easy to loose hope.

Characters

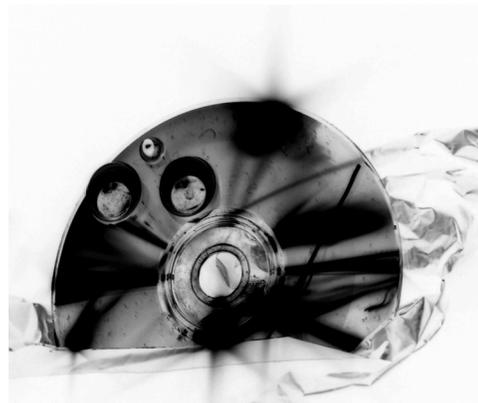
- List of characters and how to distribute them

The dynamics of this game is much dependent on the amount of players and which characters they portray. As mentioned above, players take on the roles of different kind of trash, and it has been proven that some constellations of characters give rise to more game dynamics than other. For example, the newspaper, candy wrap, flyer, and receipt are all some kind of paper, which probably does not create so much tension.

The game is suitable for about 8 to 22 players. Less than eight would probably create a dull and undynamic game, and more than 22 would quickly become chaotic, especially if the space is small. The less players who participate in the game, the more careful you have to be in choosing what characters to include in order to create proper dynamics. The character list below is arranged in the way that including characters in descending order, in theory, gives better dynamics to the game.

One of the original ideas about Trash is that the character creation is done spontaneously inside the game whit almost nothing to work with. For this to be possible, it is good if the distribution of the characters is done just before the game is about to start, and that it is done at random. This is, however, only suggestions and there might be benefits in disregarding them.

Arranging this game in its simplest form requires nothing more than the name of the characters. However, when the game was first run in Swedish, each character had a poem which served as inspirational material. The second run included “photo art” of each trash, and in the Solmukohta versions only the photos were used. Having more to work with might be better for less experienced players, but in general Trash should give as much freedom as possible to the players, so the extra material might prove limiting.





Character list

Here follows the list of characters which is suggested for the game. Other characters might be introduced, but always keep in mind the dynamics of the game.

The newspaper of yesterday
The half-smoked cigarette
The undeposited deposit can
The apple core
The faithful cup with broken ear
The pocket fuzz (what you find in your pocket)
The depleted battery
The blank lottery ticket (a lottery ticket that did not win)
The scratched CD
Drawn by Emma 4 y (an ugly drawing made by a child)
The pencil stub
The used condom
The lonely glove (one glove of a pair of gloves)
The misplaced important paper
The broken light bulb
The opened tin can
The unread flyer
The banana peel
The dry bread
The chewed chewing gum
The empty candy wrap
The receipt

Preparations

- Before the game

As said in the game description, Trash is a simple game which can be done without almost any preparation. Basically, the only thing the game master needs is eager players, a small and intimate space to play the game, and an understanding of the game which he or she can share with the players. However, there are a few things to think about which might improve the game.

Costumes

In the previous sessions of Trash, all the players were dressed in big black plastic bags. The reasons for this is that special costumes help to create a sense of being in another world and being another character. The neutrality and conformity of the plastic bags also help to create a group feeling and to some degree make the players seem less human.

Name tags

Since the players do not dress up as their characters it is very hard for everybody to know what the others are portraying. This calls for the need of name tags, or possibly character pictures, that each player wear on their chest. Note that there is a risk that players starts directing their focus on the name tags instead of peoples faces, so be sure to mention this to the players.

Warm up

Due to the short game time, and the intensity of the game, it is good if the players are already in the right mood when engaging the game. Therefore it is good to have some warm up exercises for the players, which allows them to activate themselves, feel more comfortable with each other, and to open their mind for the strangeness of the game ahead. For supporting the last mentioned, a special exercise has been devised, and it can be found in the end of this compendium.



The game

- Flow and mechanics

Because the rules and framework are so vague, and because the players are given so much freedom to shape the game, Trash can manifest into almost anything. As game master it is possible to participate as any other player, and one should not need to intervene in the middle of the game at all. Controlling the game goes against the idea of the game. Nevertheless, there is some structure in Trash, as described below.

Beginning

One simple way to start this game is by having everyone lying down on the floor, or walking around in the room, taking a moment to connect with their character. The first player who feels ready may begin by “waking up”, and start searching contact with other players. Other players follow when they feel ready and soon the game is up and running. The game can certainly start in many different ways, but no cataclysmic event is needed.

The game

The game itself, on the social level, is about interacting with each other, telling life stories, and sharing ideas and feelings. This may spontaneously give rise to intrigues, social structures and unforeseen events. Even though this is not the main purpose of Trash, it should not be discouraged, since this hopefully creates an interesting and fun game.

However, the game on the individual level is about the personal, emotional, and spiritual evolution of the character, which should be a result of the social interaction. As said many times before, during the game the player should guide the character either into the hopeful bliss of recycling or the despair of deposition.

Introducing recycling

Recycling, as a “religious” element, should be introduced sometime in the middle of the game. This can be done by the game master or an instructed player, but it might also occur spontaneously depending on how the players are prepared before the game. Introducing this concept in the game serves as a turning point, which is preceded by utter confusion, and followed by the divergence of players finding their different paths.

Although recycling gets this kind of focus, it does not include the same for the antipole of deposition. The impending eternity of darkness is not as important as the salvation from it. *“You are already in the water and will eventually drown. The question is, will you keep on swimming with the hope for a boat to pass, or will you let go and sink to the bottom.”*



End of game

Sooner or later, each player comes to a point where he or she feels that the journey is over. If a player feels that the character reaches the enigmatic state of recycling, described earlier in this compendium, the player should leave the game in an appropriately mystical way. On the other hand, if the character is heading towards the abyss, the player should gradually sink down on the floor, lay down and enter a state of apathy. This symbolises that the trash is deposited on the floor of the trash bin, becoming a part of all the other lost trash. The process of being deposited is slow, and the character never really exits the game, but as the apathy and hopelessness increases the interaction with other trash diminishes.

The game ends when all players have either left the game or are lying down on the ground, and there has been a suitably long moment of silence. A typical game lasts for 30-60 minutes, but this depends solely on how many players there are and how the game develops.

You are a thing

– A warm-up exercise

Before playing Trash it might be good for the players to warm up, in order to feel more relaxed and to better emphasise the purpose of the game. This is a description of an exercise held before the original game, which can be used in addition to some other warm-up.

The purpose of this exercise is to open the minds of the players, and give them new ways to approach, and create, a character. The exercise strives to turn away from the intellectual way of deconstructing characters and things, and instead open way for a deeper, more spiritual, more emotional and, especially, more personal approach. For example, if you say to a group of people “Now you’re all cats!” they will probably react in the same way, going down on the floor and start behaving as they intellectually know that a cat behaves. This is NOT what we are looking for, but something that lies beyond this.

The exercise in it self is simple. The players walk around freely in the room, not noticing each other. Each 15-30 seconds the game master announces the name of a thing and the players task is to quickly impersonate this thing. Throughout the exercise the game master can give comments, and, step by step, guide the players to an understanding more in line with the goal of this exercise.

The exercise can go on for as long as the game master finds necessary. The objects that the players should impersonate can be freely improvised, but below is more or less the list that was used during Solmukohta, with corresponding comments.

Suggested list of things with comments

A stone – *Try not to sit still on the floor. How would a stone be if it were human?*

A watch – *You may choose the kind of watch freely. A wristwatch, a Rolex, a clock on the wall...?*

An umbrella

A cat – *Avoid acting as a cat, try to act as a human with the soul of a cat.*

A toad

A whale

A beach ball

A basket ball – *How does the basketball differ from the beach ball?*

Growing grass – *What personality traits comes from the adjective “growing”?*

Mouldy cheese (as in a cheese on which mould grows)

Burning house – *Not a house that burns but a burning house. How does the house feel?*

An axolotl – *Doesn’t matter if you don’t know what it is. Taste the word itself, and become the word.*

Sound

40 metre electric wire – *There is a difference in the soul for a long and short wire.*

A black hole

A sand dune

A mirror image

A dream