

# Together

A two player LARP by Eva Schiffer



This is a game about romance and agency for two players who have never been in a real-life romantic relationship with each other. You can optionally play this game with a GM who will facilitate the initial workshop, but if nobody is around to facilitate you can manage without.

The game will take about an hour and a half. Ideally you should play this game with someone you find potentially romantically attractive.

You will need a clear space about 5 feet square with good traction on level ground and an audible timer to time the scenes. You may also want some place to sit down for the debrief at the end of the game. Players will need be able to stand, competitively test their balance, and touch the other player's hands and forearms.

If you can only carry on a conversation when your hands are free, the mechanics of this game probably won't work for you. If you have difficulties seeing or reading other people's body language when standing near them, this game may not work well for you.

## Game Structure

The game is made up of one 15 minute workshop, six 5 to 10 minute in-character conversation scenes, and one 15 minute debrief. Each of the conversation scenes has two scene prompts: one for the pursuer and one for the pursued.

## Characters and Roles

The players take on the roles of the pursuer and the pursued. If you are playing this game with one woman and one man, the woman will play the pursuer and the man will play the pursued. If you have some other combination of genders, you should decide between yourselves which of you feels they have been the most passive in their real world relationships, this person should play the pursuer and the other player should play the pursued.

The pursuer and pursued will have their own unique scene prompts to read for each of the scenes in the game. They will both use the mechanics for conversations given below.

Each player should choose a given name for their character that is not their real life name and share it with the other player. Ask the other player if there are any general relationship themes or issues they would rather you did **not** incorporate in the game. Do your best to avoid these topics. If you find yourself slipping, call a time-out and make sure they are ok with where things are going (if not, rewind and try again).

During the game each player should feel free to make up anything about their own character that is not described in the scene prompts: hobbies, backstory, emotional reactions, or self justifications are all fair game. Try to avoid making up things about the other player's character, instead ask them in-character about things that you want to know.

## Conversation Mechanics and Workshop

There are two kinds of conversation in this game: cooperative and confrontational. All conversations are carried out with the players standing, facing each other at a comfortable distance where they can reach each other's arms. This is probably closer than you stand to talk to strangers and acquaintances, but you should still be far enough apart to see the other person's face and shoulders clearly.

The game includes scenes that are cooperative and scenes that are confrontational. Your scene prompts will tell you the conversation type for that scene as well as how long it will be. All scenes are timed with an audible timer. Set the timer at the beginning of the scene and then focus on the interaction between your characters, not how much time is left in the scene. When the timer goes off, players should step apart and each player may say one additional sentence in character to close the dialog.

If a player is finding a conversation emotionally or physically overwhelming they should say "time out" and both players should step apart. Take a 5 minute break (pausing your scene timer during the break) and check that both of you want to continue after the break. It is ok to stop the game part way through the conversation scenes because either or both of you do not want to continue. If you stop part way though you should still do the final debrief.

### Cooperative Conversations

Cooperative conversations are about exploring the growing bonds and relationship between your characters. Both players should face each other and maintain eye contact. Blinking is fine, just keep your gaze on the other player's eyes and face as best you can.

The pursuer should hold their hands out in front of them with their elbows bent and their palms up. The pursued should place their hands on the pursuer's wrists or forearms (with the pursued's palms face down) so that their wrists or forearms fall in the pursuer's hands. Hold the other player's arms, gripping them lightly in your hands.

### Confrontational Conversations

The core of confrontational conversations is a physical balance game. The players should stand a comfortable distance apart and hold their hands up with the palms touching the other player's palms. You will want to stand with your feet a little further apart than your regular posture (shoot for roughly as far apart as your shoulders) and keep your center of gravity low.

During a confrontational conversation players should speak as they normally would. They may physically interact only by pushing on each other's palms. You should be pushing with your

arms, not the weight of your body, so try to keep your shoulders from moving forward or back. The goal of the pushing is to push the other player off balance so they are forced to lift one of their feet and take a step. You do not want to knock anyone over or hurt anyone, so please be careful and do your best to gauge the other player's strength and balance. It's a good idea to clear the nearby area of anything hazardous or breakable that you could stagger into just in case.

While having a confrontational conversation, you should push on the other player's hands when you are frustrated or angry about their behavior or arguments. If a player is pushed off balance and takes a step, both players should let go of each other and the off balance player should briefly concede some point about reality or admit some fault in the argument. Things like "I shouldn't have X" or "I can't Y, even though I understand that it's important to you" are appropriate. If both players lose their balance at the same time, only players who stepped forward (towards the other player) must concede or admit something. Then return to the original confrontational conversation position and continue the conversation.

## Workshop

Once the players understand the idea of how conversations work, they should try having one brief confrontational conversation and one brief cooperative conversation. The prompts to use for these practice conversations are on the first pages of the pursuer's and the pursued's scene prompt booklets.

These are *practice conversations*, so whatever occurs in them is not relevant to the rest of the game. Address each other by your character names so that you will be more used to saying and responding to those names.

If you have a GM helping you, they will demonstrate postures and answer any questions about the conversation mechanics. After the workshop a GM can observe the game from a distance if they wish and help facilitate the final debrief, but this is not required.

## A Note About Gaslighting

Wikipedia defines gaslighting as "a form of mental abuse in which information is twisted or spun, selectively omitted to favor the abuser, or false information is presented with the intent of making victims doubt their own memory, perception, and sanity." (For more details and the history of the term: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaslighting> )

Gaslighting has a unique relationship with tabletop RPGs, freeforms, and LARPs because so much of reality is determined by GM fiat and player improvisation. Reality is very fluid in roleplaying games, which unfortunately makes it easy to accidentally gaslight other players by improvising a reality that does not match theirs.

This game is not about abusive relationships and it's definitely not meant to be about gaslighting a lover. So please do your best to accept the reality the other player presents to you. It's ok if your characters interpreted the same events differently ("you abandoned me at the party without a word" vs "my car broke down and my phone died so I couldn't call you" for example) but if one of you says something like "I was at the concert but I couldn't find you!" both of you should behave as if they are telling the truth. Possibly something else went wrong, like they forgot the spot you had arranged to meet or you forgot to wear your green sweater so they could find you. You should muddle the full story out together during play.

TLDR version: Do not lie in this game to make your character look better. When you make things up accept that whatever the other player told you was the truth, even if it's not the *whole* truth.

## Debrief

The debrief allows both players to relax and decompress their thoughts about the intense interpersonal experience they shared. You should spend about 15 minutes on the debrief, but if you have more you need to talk about and the time, you can spend longer on it.

The Debrief has two parts. In the first part the players should take turns telling each other about parts of the game that they found intense, disturbing, or that sparked strong reactions because of their personal history. The other player should ask questions about the experience and try to make sure that their partner is going to be emotionally ok. The pursuer should start with the first observation.

The second part of the debrief is positive affirmation. The players should take turns saying things they liked about the other player's choices, improvisations, and interpretation of their character. You may not respond to these complements, simply reply with something you liked about the other player. Try to come up with at least 5 positive statements each and not more than 8.

If the positive affirmation shakes out anything else that you want to talk about, once the affirmation is done, take a minute or two to discuss it.

If a GM is present they can help guide you through the stages of the debrief and prompt both players by asking additional questions about their experience and perceptions. If possible the GM should also check back with the players later (in a few hours or the next day) to make sure they don't have any lingering things they need to talk about.

## Scene Prompts

The pursuer and pursued each get their own booklet of prompts. Prompts are labeled with the scene title, which player the prompt is for, the type of conversation, and the length of the scene. A prompt contains some thoughts and history for your character that will help to set the scene.

Some prompts also contain *meta instructions* in italics. Meta instructions are instructions for the player that will help to give structure and direction to the scenes. Try to follow the meta instructions the best you can.

At the beginning of a scene, each player should take a minute to read their prompt and remember the important details. Do not read ahead, only read the prompt for the next scene. You will not be able to refer to your booklet easily during a scene. If you totally blank on something important you can call a time-out, but try not to do this unless you must.

## About

This game was written for the 2015 Golden Cobra Challenge ( <http://www.goldencobra.org/index.html> ). The mechanics were inspired by a balance game I learned while taking Tai Chi many years ago. I like this balance game because it tends to favor shorter people with a lower center of gravity (on average, it more often favors women). I was hoping to create mechanics that would let two people feel the intensity of a romantic bond and the frustration that results from one partner having more agency than the other, even though the players have no romantic history with each other.

If the game is well received I hope I'll be able to write better sets of prompts to allow players to explore different relationship dynamics. I would also like to consider making player choices relevant to which prompts you use later in the game, in the same style the LARP *A Garden of Forking Paths* does.

The *Handshake* icon used on the cover of this game is by Marianna Nardella and can be found on the Project Noun website ( <https://thenounproject.com/search/?q=holding+hands&i=32239> ).

Print the booklet single or double sided. Cut the pages into horizontal sets of two pages. Stack them up so the page numbers in the upper corners are in order and staple bind in the center.

back cover	<h1>Pursued Scene Prompts Booklet</h1>
8  <b>Choices, Scene 6, Pursued</b> <b>(Confrontational; 10 minutes):</b> You've been dating pursuer for two years now... and things have started to get a bit, well stale. You still love them, but you're increasingly hurt that they don't want to commit to a lifelong relationship with you. <i>Meta: You may not ask pursuer to marry you, but you desperately want them to ask you.</i>	1  <b>Workshop Conversation A, Pursued</b> <b>(Confrontational; 2 minutes):</b> Bears are amazing predators. They're far more durable and tenacious than most other apex predators, and they're omnivorous to boot. A bear would probably win a fight with just about every other predator, even a shark. It might be fun to discuss how such a fight would go with the pursuer.

<p>2</p> <p><b>Workshop Conversation B, Pursued (Cooperative; 2 minutes):</b> You're curious what the pursuer's favorite foods are. Maybe they have some of the same favorite foods as you? <i>Meta: If the pursuer mentions liking any foods that you find gross, try to get them to tell you why they like them.</i></p>	<p>7</p> <p><b>Little Things Adding Up, Scene 5, Pursued (Confrontational; 8 minutes):</b> You've been dating pursuer for a year. They've been very busy with work deadlines the last few weeks and you are feeling anxious about the relationship. Of course they need to put work first sometimes, but don't they have any time for you? You're supposed to be having dinner together tonight and they are already 15 minutes late... <i>Meta: Get the pursuer to promise to spend more time with you. If possible also get them to tell you how important your relationship is to them.</i></p>



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**Movie Night, Scene 4, Pursued**

**(Cooperative; 10 minutes):** You and pursuer have been dating for 10 months now and you have a weekly movie night date. Tonight you're planning to stay in and choose a fun scary movie to watch together. *Meta: Share your favorite movies with pursuer and learn about what they like. Let them know how much you love them and how glad you are that you have these times together.*

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**Introductory Date, Scene 1, Pursued**

**(Cooperative; 5 minutes):** Pursuer asked you out on a date. You've just finished dinner and are heading to a movie soon. They seem nice enough but you've only been casual acquaintances up till now. *Meta: Try to find out as much as you can about the pursuer so you can decide how compatible you are with them.*

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**First Month-i-versary, Scene 2, Pursued (Cooperative; 8 minutes):** It's the one month anniversary of your first date with pursuer and you've been out on several nice dates. They asked you over for a home cooked dinner tonight. *Meta: You are starting to fall for pursuer, but haven't yet made up your mind about the relationship.*

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**Moving Debate, Scene 3, Pursued (Confrontational; 6 minutes):** You and pursuer have been dating for six months now and are very much in love. Unfortunately your roommate has just screwed you over by moving out without any notice. Your lease is up at the end of the month and you're really hoping pursuer will be willing to move in with you so you don't have to find a smaller place. *Meta: Try to convince the pursuer to move in with you.*

Print the booklet single or double sided. Cut the pages into horizontal sets of two pages. Stack them up so the page numbers in the upper corners are in order and staple bind in the center.

<p>back cover</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Pursuer Scene Prompts Booklet</b></p>
<p>8</p> <p><b>Choices, Scene 6, Pursuer</b> <b>(Confrontational; 10 minutes):</b> You've been dating pursued for two years now, and you're starting to get a bit scared. They are still amazing and you're still wildly in love with them... but you can tell that they are beginning to balk at the fact that you haven't asked them to marry you. It's not that you don't want to get married... it's just that you really want to get this right. How can you tell that this is the right choice? What if things go terribly and the relationship falls apart after you say "I do?" <i>Meta: You are afraid to make a choice. Take your time and get pursued to assuage your fears before you decide.</i></p>	<p>1</p> <p><b>Workshop Conversation A, Pursuer</b> <b>(Confrontational; 2 minutes):</b> Sharks sure are awesome, they're the apex predators of the ocean and have been around for millions of years. You're pretty sure a shark would win a fight with just about any other predator, even a bear. You should talk about how such an awesome fight would go with the pursued.</p>

<p>2</p> <p><b>Workshop Conversation B, Pursuer (Cooperative; 2 minutes):</b> You're curious what the pursued's favorite foods are. Maybe they have some of the same favorite foods as you? <i>Meta: If the pursued mentions liking foods you like, try to find out what they like about them.</i></p>	<p>7</p> <p><b>Little Things Adding Up, Scene 5, Pursuer (Confrontational; 8 minutes):</b> You've been dating pursued for a year now, and while you love them a lot... things have been stressful lately. The last few weeks are a blur of long hours at work and looming deadlines. You're 15 minutes late to meet pursued for dinner because traffic was so bad and you are totally worn out. Hopefully you can have a relaxing evening together.</p>

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**Movie Night, Scene 4, Pursuer**

**(Cooperative; 10 minutes):** You and pursued have been dating for 10 months and you have a weekly movie night date. Tonight you're planning to stay in and choose a fun scary movie to watch together. *Meta: You couldn't care less what you watch as long as you spend time together.*

3

**Introductory Date, Scene 1, Pursuer**

**(Cooperative; 5 minutes):** After weeks of trying to get your nerve up, you asked pursued out on a date! Things are going well so far (you had a nice dinner and are heading to a movie soon). You're dazzled by how attractive and vibrant they are and hope they're willing to go out with you again.

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**First Month-i-versary, Scene 2, Pursuer (Cooperative; 8 minutes):** It's the one month anniversary of your first date with pursued and things are going well so far. You've asked them over to your place for a home cooked meal and you're pulling out all the stops to make it fancy and romantic. *Meta: Try to get the pursued to agree to an exclusive relationship.*

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**Moving Debate, Scene 3, Pursuer (Confrontational; 6 minutes):** You and pursued have been dating for six months now and you are very much in love with them. They've been hinting for a while that they'd like to be more serious but you are feeling unsure. What if things go badly? You're not sure you could stand the heartbreak. *Meta: You haven't decided for or against anything, but you want to be sure before you make any big decisions. Make the pursued justify any changes they want to you to your satisfaction.*