

Forever and Never

A Freeform Roleplay Game in 3 Acts about Divorce at the End of the World

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4 - 8 players plus a Facilitator, 90 - 120 minutes

Intensity: 3 to 5 teardrops (on a scale of 1 to 5)

Themes / Content Advisory: Divorce, Death, Unhappy Relationships, Strong interpersonal conflict, holding hands, prolonged eye contact, gently tying 2 players wrists together, possible other dark topics and themes per player choices.

Required materials: This game rules pamphlet, paper and writing implement, blank name tags, soft ropes or strings or ribbons (etc) to tie wrists together. Optional: scissors.

Forever and Never is a reasonably serious free-form roleplaying game that explores the topics of divorce, death, and loss. Players will be confronted with the question of whether people should divorce from a terrible marriage even as the world is imminently ending. While humor can and ought to enter play, *Forever and Never* is unlikely to be a silly or lighthearted game.

Special warning: It is **strongly** advised that players who are in or have been in real-life romantic relationships **do not** play as partners in this game!

Facilitator is responsible for rules, timekeeping, ending scenes, and playing a few small parts. Facilitator should read aloud the remainder of the rules, and do parenthetical instructions.

INTRODUCTION

Hello! Welcome to '*Forever and Never*', a roleplay game in 3 acts about divorce and the end of the world. In this game, the world WILL end shortly after the final scene. There is no avoiding this fate. However, the outcome of your relationships is up to you. This game will take place in 3 acts, roughly 20 to 30 minutes each. Most play will be in freeform scenes, prompted by me.

Let's all introduce ourselves. My name is (your name here), your Facilitator, and my pronouns are (your pronouns here). (Players should all similarly introduce themselves.)

This game explores serious topics and requires safety and trust. Let's begin by reviewing some safety and game calibration mechanics. (**See Safety and Calibration Mechanics on page 5 and 6**, and feel free to add any that are appropriate for your players.)
(continue reading once you've finished with safety and calibration mechanics)

Spotlight - When one or two particular players' scene is given "the spotlight", other players should be quiet and focus their attention on listening and watching the scene in the spotlight.

Scene / Last Line - The Facilitator will be responsible for keeping track of time and ending each scene by saying "Scene" or "Last Line". "Scene" ends the scene immediately. "Last Line" is said while pointing at a particular player. That player says one more line to wrap up the scene.

Touching and Eye Contact - *Forever and Never* involves some physical touch and eye contact. Players will be asked to make eye contact with their partners for 30 seconds after each of the 3 acts. Later, player partners will be asked to have hands tied together, and recommended allowable touch be hands, arms, and shoulders. As a group, let's discuss general comfortable touch levels and eye contact. (Do so.) Remember, even if you agree now, you **always** have the right to change your mind and say no to touch later!

MAKE PARTNERSHIPS

Players now choose who to be with in a partnership. These last the whole game. For an even number of players, pair up. For an odd number, one partnership can be a 3-person relationship, and for game purposes, they will marry as a threesome. (Pause until players are partnered.)

Each player will build their character by choosing a first name, pronouns, and 3 defining personality traits. For example, one character may be "optimistic, loyal, and foolish" and their partner "pessimistic, impulsive, and caring". Choose at least one positive and one negative trait per character. Partner players, feel free to consult each other. When you have this information, write them legibly on your nametag and wear it. (Pause until players are done.)

In partnerships, players should discuss their level of comfort both in physical contact and in subject matter that may be off-limits. Remember, players are **always** allowed to change their mind about physical contact and topics anytime during game! (Pause until players are done.)

Partners should now hold hands, make eye contact, and introduce themselves in character, "Hello, (partner name), my name is (your character name)." (Pause until players are done.) Let's pause here. Now is a time to get a drink of water or use the restroom.

ACT 1: SO HAPPY TOGETHER

In Act 1, I, your facilitator, will be taking the role of a wedding officiant at each of your weddings. Choose 4 or 5 happy memories from the table below. I will refer to those memories during the ceremony, and you will act them out as flashbacks. For instance, 'I've never performed a wedding for a couple whose proposal was quite like this...' or 'Many friends know how important these partners' shared hobby is to them...' Choose now. (Facilitator records choices.)

First time you noticed one another	First romantic date or another memorable happy date	Happy introduction to family or close friend
Got caught in the rain	Engagement to marry	Vacation or road trip
Graduation or celebration of a personal achievement	Visited a partner in hospital during their recovery	Adopted a new pet
Birth of a child	Child raising milestone	Moved into a home together
Sharing a hobby	Surprise party	A happy holiday

We will do 1 partner set at a time, roleplaying their 4 or 5 scenes as flashbacks, then moving to the next partners. Each flashback should be a short vignette, 30 seconds to 2 minutes. Players should seek out an extended moment where the characters feel strong positive feelings. If a flashback requires more characters, other players may be asked to join. (Choose order.)

On the way to the wedding, you hear a news report: *"Reports of goodwill and hope are pouring in from all over the world, following yesterday's United Nations signing of the unprecedented Aurora Energy Project. By using Earth's magnetic field to provide inexpensive, carbon-free energy, its multinational undertaking will usher in a new era of worldwide peace and prosperity."*

(For each partner set, Facilitator will, as wedding officiant: 1. Indicate which partner set has the spotlight. 2. Prompt those players, one flashback at a time, from their choices. 3. End the scene with "scene" or "last line" as appropriate. 4. Gently tie partners' wrists together.)

(After all partner sets have had their scenes and wrists tied) Everyone now face your partner, make eye contact, and we'll remain silent for 30 seconds and reflect. (Do so.)

ACT 2: DESTROY THE RELATIONSHIP

Collectively, players decide how many years have passed (5 to 15 years suggested).

In Act 2, we will be roleplaying a marriage counseling session for each of the partner sets.

Each partner set chooses 2 or 3 tragic memories from below.

The following are strongly recommended to **not** be used: Abusive relationship, changes in weight or body shape, change in sexual orientation or identity, or religious, racial, or similar characteristics. Also, please remember to respect player opt-outs from earlier! (brief pause)

Each scene should be about 2 to 4 minutes long. The goal is to build dramatic tension, not necessarily to end a scene at a resolution. Choose now. (Facilitator records choices.)

Financial hardships	Cheating	Lying / Dishonesty
Child-raising differences	Different stages of life	Communication Problems
Differing politics	Drug abuse	Boredom in relationship
Death of family member or close friend	Rapid / Dramatic change in interest in sexual activity	Gambling, gaming, or other addiction
Medical issues (specifically NOT weight or body shape)	Differing expectations and priorities in the relationship	Cultural differences (specifically not racial)

On the way to marriage counseling, you hear a news report on the radio: *"World Leaders are once again quarreling over the cost and security of the Aurora Energy Project. This massive global project is sapping national budgets and has been beset with red tape and monumental unforeseen challenges. However, project scientists are certain this united international effort will not only overcome its obstacles, but bring the world closer together."*

(For each partnership, Facilitator will, in character as a licensed marriage counselor: 1. Indicate which partner set has the spotlight. 2. Prompt the players, one scene at a time, from their choices above. 3. End the scene with “scene” or “last line” as appropriate.)

(After all partner sets have had their scenes) Please face your partner, make eye contact, and we’ll remain silent for 30 seconds and reflect. (Do so.)

ACT 3: ‘TIL DEATH DO US PART?

Six months pass. All of the partners have decided to divorce. (pause)

Act 3 will take place at Divorce Court, and I will be taking the role of your presiding Judge.

Act 3 works differently from Acts 1 and 2. It will have 2 parts and a finale.

In Act 3 Part 1, there is no spotlight; after I finish speaking, react freely for about 5 minutes.

In Part 2, each partner set takes a turn in the spotlight. They can air grievances, plead with each other, and ask questions of other characters not in their partnership. Players who do not have the spotlight should not speak unless asked a question. Each spotlight will be about 5 minutes.

Each wedded group decides whether or not to divorce - both players must agree to stay together, otherwise the divorce is finalized. Do not remove or cut your bond unless prompted.

Once I finish speaking as the Judge, you may begin Part 1 act react freely.

“Welcome to my courtroom. I see (# of partner sets) are here. Forgive me dispensing with protocol, but there is an extraordinary situation underway. This room’s automated security doors have been locked, and cannot be overridden for 25 minutes. Worse ... please, everyone, brace yourselves. (sigh) There’s no easy way to say this. I’ll just turn on this Internet radio broadcast.”

(radio) “---stay inside and seek atonement from whatever higher power you may believe in. I repeat, the Aurora Energy Project has eradicated the planet’s magnetic field. Anyone outside will be killed within minutes. The loss of Earth’s protective shield is resulting in worldwide seismic activity that will increase past Richter scale 10, within 90 minutes! Stay inside--- (static)”
(Allow players up to 5 minutes to react.)

Everyone: as long as we’re locked up here, I’ll have order in my court, and I have a duty to fulfill. One marriage at a time, decide whether you wish to divorce or stay together. Feel free to ask others for advice. (Give 5 minutes of spotlight to each couple, as described above.)

That’s all the time we have, I’m afraid. I need your decisions now.

By a show of hands, who wishes to stay together? (pause to let players raise hands)

(If any partner sets have **every** partner in the group agree to stay together, read the next line.)

“(NAMES OF PARTNERS), I hereby decree your divorce request legally null and void.”

(If any partner sets are not in agreement to stay married, read the next line.)

“(NAMES OF PARTNERS), I hereby decree you divorced. You may remove your bond.”

(After all decrees made for all partner sets) We have a bit over 30 seconds before the doors unlock. Everyone face your partners, make eye contact, reflect and remain silent. (Do so.)

(After 30 sec.) You hear the doors unlock. The world will end in an hour. The game ends now.

SAFETY AND CALIBRATION MECHANICS

Door is Always Open - A player is always more important than a game. A player is always welcome to leave, for any reason, and without being required to give a reason if they prefer not.

Lookdown - Lookdown is a nonverbal cue used if you need to leave, without explanation, and return soon. It may be to get water, use the restroom, or you simply need an emotional break. To use lookdown, place your open hand outward from your brow, like shielding your eyes from a bright light, and look down. (demonstrate) Players should treat this as if the character has not left. When the player returns, players should treat it as if the character was there the whole time.

Out of Game - A player can say “Out of game ...” to temporarily pause a scene. They can follow up with a question or request or statement of intent, etc.

Cut - Any player may say “CUT!” to immediately pause the game. They can optionally cross their forearms in an “X” shape in front of their chest in addition. If and when someone says “CUT!”, all players stop the action, and resolve whatever issue there may be. This may be physical danger (i.e. someone tripping or about to trip on furniture), a need to recalibrate the intensity of a scene, an uncomfortable topic that should be excluded, etc.

Okay Check-In - *Forever and Never* deals with some intense topics, and characters can often appear in distress. It’s important we make sure that the player is having a good time, even if their character is having an awful time. When roleplay gets suddenly intense, louder, or more confrontational, or at the end of a tense scene, please do use the Okay Check-in.

1. Make eye contact with the player you wish to check in on, or generally look around if with everyone.
2. Hold an “OK” symbol with your hand at about chest-height. In this game, this symbol ONLY means “Out of game, are you okay?”
3. The person can reply with a thumbs up, thumbs down, or a shaky in-between hand. Thumbs up means that the player is okay, and wishes to continue. If a player responds with the thumbs down or the in-between, please say “Cut”, ask the player what you can do to assist, then assist the player as appropriate and you are able.

Brake / Largo - Saying “brake” or “largo” requests to lower the intensity of the scene. They can be accompanied by a non-verbal cue of holding both palms out.

Let’s Not - Saying “Let’s Not” is a way to decline an uncomfortable subject or topic without pausing. When one player says, “Let’s Not”, other players should offer alternative suggestions.

Yes, And - This is the spirit of good roleplay. Players should (to their comfort level) build on suggestions from other players, rather than reject others’ ideas.

Off-limits topics - Are there specific topics any player prefers to be off-limits? Likewise, are there topics that are okay to mention, but not go into any detail? (Players should discuss now.)

Debrief - Let's hang around after game ends and discuss our feelings about the game, to let out feelings as needed, and to praise other players as appropriate. This is a chance to de-role, leaving behind the characters we embodied during the game, and returning to who we are in the outside world.

===== **END OF SAFETY AND CALIBRATION MECHANICS** =====

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