The Party

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"The struggle itself towards the heights
is enough to fill a man's heart.
One must imagine Sisyphus happy."
— The Myth of Sisyphus, Albert Camus

Participants: 5-10 players + 1 game master
Genre: philosophical drama
Time to play: 3 h

Introduction

The Party is a chamber larp about a group of friends having an amazing party. The game has five acts. At the end of every act, the world ends. Everyone dies. This is a game about death, but most of all a game about life, and the choices that we make.

Before the game starts, the players will build their characters together by writing down four character traits on index cards. They will also help each other create four fixed scenes. In the first act, all of these scenes will be played out. For each act, a character trait will be removed from the character; the character is now free not to act on that trait. In the same way, a scene will be removed for each act; this scene will no longer be played.

In the fifth and final act, the characters are free, both of the character traits they started the game with, and of the fixed scenes. This gradual increase in freedom is accompanied by the gradual realization of the situation that they are in: they are at a party moments before they will all die. After the last, free act, the game is over.

Preparations prior to the game, and props

Before the game starts, the game master needs to read this text, and make sure you have access to the props listed below when the game starts.

To play the Party you will need:
- Small paper cards (something like an index card is ideal) -- these are used to create the characters, so you will need 4 per player.
- Larger papers (at least A4) -- used to write down the descriptions of the scenes.
- Pens for writing on the above papers
- A device for playing music (loudspeakers, computer, or a phone) and a prepared recording of "Non, Je ne Regrette Rien" by Edit Piaf.[1] This song is played at the end of each act.
- A playlist with party music -- make your own or use this one https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6FlWQJxjBCALb3ypwhuFcL?si=6c95d2046ed84595
- A watch, for you as a game master to keep track of time.

The Party can be played in any venue which can fit the number of players you are hosting.

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3Kvu6Kgp88, and
https://open.spotify.com/track/3dkIE8P7hvl3tHl9KSb6dA?si=73be751f8ccf43f1

Time Requirements

The following is an approximate outline of how the game is played. The purpose of this is that you as a game master should get an overview of the act structure and the different parts of the game. Details about each part will follow in later sections.

Preparations (1 h)
- Let everyone arrive (5 min)
  Give the players some time to arrive, chit-chat, etc. When things calm down a bit, you can get going.
- General introduction (5 min)
  Present the game to the players and describe in broad strokes what the schedule for the game is.
- Create the characters (15 min)
  Each player will be tasked with writing down character traits on index cards. These will form the basis of the characters they will play.
- Create relationships between the characters (15 min)
  The players will do an exercise to create relationships between the characters.
- Create the fixed scenes (15 min)
  The players will create the fixed scenes together. Depending on the size of the ensemble, this will be done by the entire group together, or in smaller sub-groups.
- Time for questions, and a pause (15 min)
  A pause where the players can ask you questions, and have a bathroom break if needed.

The game (1h 25min)
- Playing the five acts (15 min per act, plus some extra time for transitioning between them)
  In each act, the players will act as their characters through the scenes that were prepared before the game began. For each act. one of these scenes is removed. In addition to this, one character trait is removed per scene. At the end of each act, the first minute of "Non, Je ne Regrette Rien" is played, to signal the end of the act.
- When the final act is over, "Non, Je ne Regrette Rien" is played in its entirety. When the song is finished, the game ends.

Debrief (25 min)
- Go round the ensemble and let everyone say something about how they feel now that the game is over.
- After the round, folks can stay and talk if they wish. Otherwise the game is finished.

Preparations

This section will describe how the participants will prepare their characters, relationships, and the scenes that will form the basis for the game.

General introduction (5 min)
Introduce the game. Explain to the players that:
- *The Party* is a chamber larp about a group of friends having an amazing party. The game has five acts. At the end of every act, the world ends. Everyone dies. This is a game about death, but more so a game about life, and the choices that we make.
- Each act begins when the party music starts, and ends with approximately 1 minute of "Non, Je ne Regrette Rien" being played. When the music goes quiet, the act ends. After the fifth act, the entire song will play. After that. the game ends. Between the acts the game masters will provide the players with instructions for the upcoming act.
- A ground rule of this game is to play-to-lift. If someone brings up something your characters have done together in the past, say "yes, that was awesome/sad/etc." instead of blocking it. If something gets a little confusing because some facts contradict each other, just keep playing and let it work itself out.
- Tell the players about the schedule (see time requirements).
- This game uses "OFF" as a safety mechanic. If at any time some feels that the game is heading in a direction that they are uncomfortable with, they will say "OFF" or "OFF-game." This will pause the game and the participants should discuss what has happened and how to proceed. The same mechanic is used should something happen that the players need to know about outside of the game, e.g. if someone has gotten physically hurt.
- Open up for questions.

Create characters (15 min)
The players will create the characters they will play together:
- Ask the players to write down three character traits on the index cards. Each of them should write a positive (e.g. loving), a negative (e.g. vengeful) and a neutral (e.g. stamp-collector) trait.
- Ask the players to place the cards in three stacks. One for positive traits, one for negative traits, and one for neutral traits. Mix the stacks.
- Ask the players to draw three cards each, one from each pile. Explain to the players that these traits form the outer elements of their characters. If one or more players have drawn cards that they feel are incompatible with each other, resolve this by switching cards between the players, or by writing new ones.
- Ask the players to take one additional card. On this card they should write down the trait that forms the core of the character they will play. This should be a positive trait, i.e. generous, loving, or loyal. This trait is not necessarily one that the character will always (or even ever) show, but they form the core of who they are.
- Ask the players to create a stack of the cards with the "core card" at the bottom. The rest of the cards should be placed in a random order.
- Let the players one by one briefly introduce their characters to each other.

Create relationships between the characters (15 min)

The characters are friends at a party. Some of them will likely know each other very well, others might only be casual acquaintances.

- Play the music from the party-playlist (see Preparations prior to the game, and props). While the music plays the characters should walk randomly around the room. Instruct them to walk like their characters, to try to get a feeling for the body language of their character.
- After 15-30 seconds, stop the music.
- When the music goes quiet, ask the players to pick someone close by thet thet have yet to create a relationship with. Create a relationship between those characters.
- Repeat this at least three times (more if you have time to spare).

Create the fixed scenes (15 min)

Let the players create four scenes that will be enacted during play. In the first act, all of the scenes will be played out, then one of the scenes per act will be removed. Depending on the number of players, let the players create the scenes in the full ensemble, or split them into smaller groups. Regardless of the number of groups, four scenes should be created (i.e. you need to split them into a maximum of four groups, 2-4 players per ground should be ideal).

- Once the players have formed groups, ask them to create a scene from a party together. This could be for example: "Robin and Puck are fighting in the kitchen; Alex tries to get them to calm down." Ask them to create a "statue" of this scene, that they can show to the other players. From the example above this could be, "Robin is staring needles at Puck with their arms crossed, while Puck is pointing their finger at them. Alex stands between them with a bewildered look on their face."
- When everyone has finished, ask the players to present their statues to each other, and explain what is going on.
- When everyone has presented their scene, write down a short description of it on the large papers.
- Ask the players to order these scenes from first to last. This is the order in which they will be played once the game starts.
- Explain to the players that their task is to play these scenes in order in each act. These instructions will change as the game progresses and how they will change will be made clear by the game master before each act starts.
- Place the scene descriptions in the correct order in an easy to read place, for example, on the wall of the room you play in.

Time for questions and a break(15 min)

Leave some time here for the players to ask questions, go to the bathroom, etc. Hopefully this will be quicker than 15 minutes. You can also use this time as a buffer should any of the other sections have taken longer than anticipated.

The game

The game is, as has already been mentioned, played in five acts. Below follows a description of how you as a game master can guide the players through the acts.

- Prepare for the start of the first act by asking the players to place themselves in the statue decided should go first in the act.
- The act will start when the party playlist starts playing. You can play it in "shuffle mode."
- The act ends after 15 minutes. The end is marked by the game master playing, "Non, Je ne Regrette Rien" (play approximately 1 minute of the song), and then turn down the volume and explain to the players that the world just ended and everyone is dead.
- Between act instructions:
  - Ask the players to pick one of the scenes two to four, and rip the corresponding paper in two. This scene is no longer part of the game.
  - Ask the players to take the top card from their stack of character traits, and tear that up. They no longer need to act on that character trait (though they can if they want to).
  - For each act, the characters become more and more aware of what is going on. See the table below for instructions you as a game master can tell the players, act by act.
- Start the next act in the same way as the previous one.
- Repeat this until there are no more scenes and character traits left.The final fifth act will be played without fixed scenes, and there are no longer any character traits that the players must enact. The characters are free to act as they chose in the light of the knowledge that they will soon die. Since the starting scene has been removed, the players themselves can decide how they want to start the last act.
- Finish the last act by playing all of "Non, Je ne Regrette Rien." The game is over when the song ends.

	What the characters remember of previous acts	Other instructions before the act
Act 1	-	-
Act 2	The characters might experience a vague sense of déjà vu. It is alright to comment on this, but it should not be a central part of the act.	Tear up one of the scenes 2-4
Act 3	The feeling of déjà vu grows stronger. They might have unspecific memories of the world ending.	Tear up one of the scenes 2-4
Act 4	The characters remember that the world has ended in the previous acts. However, they do not need to be convinced that it will happen again.	Tear up one of the scenes 2-4
Act 5	The characters remember with complete clarity what has previously transpired. They know with certainty that they will die when the act ends.	Tear up scene 1 Before act 5, tell the players that you will be playing all of "Non, Je ne Regrette Rien" at the end of the act. Like before they can keep playing when the song starts, and then end when it feels natural. The song is 2 min and 22 seconds long.

Debrief

When the game is over it can be a good idea to form a circle and let everyone say how they are feeling and how they experienced the game. After this, let folks stay around and talk freely amongst themselves if they wish. But at this point the game is finished.

General tips to game masters

Some players might feel that there is a lot to keep track of with what they are supposed to do between the acts. Assure them that you as a game master will keep track of this, and let them know what to do between each act.

In playtests, the players have wondered what the end of the world is; for the sake of the game, it does not matter. The only important thing is that the world ends and everyone dies. There is no way of avoiding this. The game is not about escaping one's fate -- even if the characters might try to do so.

This game might look very boring to you as a game master looking on from the sidelines, especially in the beginning. Trust that the players can have a rewarding game, even so.

Inspiration and acknowledgments

The Party is inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre's *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* and the TV series *Russian Doll*. The character creation process and the idea to remove one character trait at the time is borrowed from the role-playing game *Ten Candles* by Stephen Dewey.

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