



**THIS
PARTY
SUCKS**

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*a 3-player RPG
about queer breakups*

created for the Record Collection
2K19 Game Jam by Naomi Bosch

inspired by Mal Blum's album
Tempest in a Teacup

ABOUT THE GAME

(to set up the game, take turns reading sections of this page aloud)

This Party Sucks is a game about being a twentysomething who is (badly) processing a recent breakup. You will play out a piece of their story as they attend a series of three parties while trying (and failing) not to think about their ex.

This is a queer and trans game in many senses. It is by a queer and trans author, based on an album of music by a queer and trans musician, and if you want to play it true to form, your Protagonist will be queer and/or trans in some way. They may not know that about themselves yet, or have complicated feelings about it, but it is a factor in their life.

Be tender with your Protagonist. They are in pain, and you are not seeing them at their best, but they are not an inherently tragic character. Their queerness and transness, especially, are not tragic. Someday, they will feel much better than they do now, and this breakup (and entire phase of life) will fade gently into their past. This is not the story of that warm and gentle future, but the potential for such a future is an important thread weaving through the tough and messy time where the Protagonist resides. Believe in that future for them as you play, and when they stumble, know that they are moving towards something better.

MATERIALS

- 3 players, 3 small tokens, pens/pencils, index cards

GAME SETUP

As a group of three, collaborate to describe your Protagonist. Take turns giving them qualities including, but not limited to:

- a hairstyle, a hobby, a job (or a collection of jobs, or a reason they aren't working), a favorite item of clothing, something they miss about their ex, something they don't miss about their ex, a habit they tend to show when nervous, a gender, a name (it's often easiest to name the Protagonist last)

SAMPLE PROTAGONIST TRAITS

- **Hairstyles:** undercut, short locs, messy bun, buzz cut, bob, that awkward I'm-growing-it-out mid-length moment
- **Hobbies:** theater, dance, school or community sports team, art, music, game design, cooking, hiking
- **Favorite piece of clothing:** bright fishnets, oversized hoodie, thrifted blazer, dress with pockets, heavy boots, handmade scarf, denim jacket covered with pins
- **Nervous habit:** bite nails, hide behind hair, avoid eye contact, hum, laugh, text someone you shouldn't
- **Names:** Sparrow, Tai, Julie, Kenji, Asher, Nina, Ritu, Rachel

Record these qualities on an index card. Fold another index card in half and make a small name card tent for the Protagonist. Make two other name cards labeled Venue and Other People.

GAME SETUP - THE PALETTE

A good way to start gathering ideas and shaping your game's setting and tone is to make a **Palette**, a setup tool from Ben Robbins' game *Microscope*. Draw a line down the middle of an index card, dividing it into two columns labeled YES and NO. Take turns going around the circle (in any order) and having each person add one thing to either the YES or NO column. Continue going around the circle until at least one person decides to pass for the round. Give everyone else one final chance to add to the Palette if they wish, then end Palette creation by reviewing what everyone has added.

If something is placed in the **NO** column, **it will not appear in the game**. This is a good place to put themes or topics that will make a game unpleasant for you, or to put tropes that you think would make the game less interesting.

If something is placed in the **YES** column, that means the writer is indicating that they would enjoy having it in the game, and all players are **encouraged to incorporate it into gameplay** if they wish and the opportunity arises. This is a good place to look for inspiration if you're not sure what themes or details to add when setting up or playing a scene.

Review what is on the Palette, and pay attention to what it indicates about the setting and tone of the game. What type of region or community might your Protagonist live in? What kinds of events/elements in their life are players interested in exploring, related to or separate from their recent breakup?

EXAMPLE PALETTE

YES	NO
Coffee shops	Corporate/office parties
College town	Blackout drinking
Fall/stormy weather	
Karaoke bars	

This Palette suggests a caffeine-fueled collegiate setting that might include seasonal fall parties, karaoke nights, or cafe events, but won't feature corporate work spaces or blackout drinking.

You don't have to explain your reasoning for putting something in either column, though you are welcome to if you like, or believe it would help with the clarity of your request. For example, maybe you don't want your game to feature office parties because your actual office job is making you anxious right now, or maybe you just played a game that used an office setting recently and you'd rather mix it up - both are possible reasons for writing something under NO.

This Party Sucks is designed to engage with themes like social awkwardness, self doubt, and relationship tension. As players, you are playing to collaboratively explore the ways that the Protagonist attempts to handle and/or avoid their feelings during a messy, tender emotional time. When in doubt about tone, lean into that, and create Party scenes where the Protagonist has chances to spark, complicate, or sidestep potential social connections and chances for personal growth.

GAME SETUP - #IFCOBPC

During one of the first playtests of *This Party Sucks*, I and my fellow players found ourselves repeatedly laughing, sighing, and sometimes wincing at the situations we created for our Protagonist, as **facets of their actions and experiences often reminded us of our own younger queer and trans selves.**

This element of the game can be a big plus - **it can be fun and cathartic to look back at your own actions and laugh** - but it also made us all pay more attention to the body language and mood of everyone at the table, because wincing and awkward laughter isn't always a sign that a game is running well.

Our solution was to add a new index card to the table, bearing a long abbreviation - #IFCOBPC, or "I feel called out, but please continue." Whenever events in game reminded a player of their own past awkwardness or relationship behavior in some way, they could tap the card to show that they still liked the direction the game was going even if it was also making them wince.

We soon grew accustomed to tapping the card for emphasis when a line of dialogue, a description, or a plot point landed particularly well, making one or more of us feel like we were more deeply immersed in the Protagonist's strange and tender headspace as a proxy for our own past(s).

Playing This Party Sucks can bring up memories of past personal awkward moments and relationships for players. Some may intentionally draw on their own memories or experiences to help build the Protagonist's world, while others may use reference points that are less close to home, but still find themselves responding to what the Protagonist goes through in ways they might not have anticipated. This is part of what the game is designed to let players do! You can laugh and wince at those moments together while also using them to support the flow of the shared story you are telling.

Write "I feel called out, but please continue" (or its abbreviation) on an index card, and place it on the table within easy reach of all the players. During gameplay, feel free to tap it anytime you want to affirm for other players that you like the direction you are taking the story together, and that it is resonating with you.



GAME SETUP

Decide who will be the Protagonist during the first Party. They claim their appropriate name card and the three tokens. The player to their left is Other People, and the player to their right is Venue. Before the first Party begins, the Protagonist picks an action from the Cope list and briefly describes what they have been doing to try and process the breakup. Next, they pick or create a new Party type to attend.

Venue picks or creates a new Complication that will affect the Party. Other People describes one guest at the Party and defines their relationship to the Protagonist. Write “Party 1” on an index card and place it in the middle of the table/game space. Write the Type, Complication, and Guest below the party number.

During the party, the Protagonist picks Moves from the list and describes their related actions, speaking in character to whatever degree they find comfortable. Other People plays the other attendees of the party, and/or friends and contacts the Protagonist texts or calls. Venue describes the physical and social nature of the party – sights, sounds, smells, overheard words, people glimpsed in passing – and can play additional party attendees or friends if needed. Venue can add both positive details and further complications to the space – they should add at least one detail (positive, negative, or neutral) for each Move the Protagonist uses.

The Protagonist's Moves reflect elements of their physical and emotional state. They may be harsh or kind to themselves and others, but it takes more energy for them to engage with others than it does to self-reflect or stay socially isolated. To perform an External Move, the Protagonist places one of their tokens on top of the Party index card while describing their actions. To perform an Internal Move, they simply describe it – no tokens needed. If the Protagonist runs out of tokens, that's a sign that their social energy is getting low and they may soon want to leave the Party (if they haven't done so already).

The Party ends when the Protagonist reaches a point where they Think About Their Ex. The players collaborate to execute this final Move, then pass their name cards to the left. All the tokens are passed along with the Protagonist card. Protagonist becomes Venue, Other People becomes Protagonist, and Venue becomes Other People. Take a brief break to stretch, take care of personal needs, and check in about how the game is going.

The new Protagonist picks a way they Cope in between the first and second Party. Play proceeds for Party 2, then Party 3. Give each party a different Type, Complication, and way in which the Protagonist Thinks About Their Ex. Ways to Cope can repeat.

After Party 3 concludes, play the Epilogue using its specialized Moves. See how the Protagonist is older, wiser, and also still tender and growing. Look at the arc of their story on the table before you, then let them go.

PARTY PREP

Cope – Protagonist picks one or makes a new one before each party, briefly describes

- Schedule therapy, hook up with someone, go to a thrift store, cut your hair, clean something, try to get sober, make music, sleep

Party Types – Protagonist picks one or makes a new one, briefly describes

- New Years, housewarming, divorce party, local gig, someone's birthday, someone's graduation, someone's surgery recovery celebration, karaoke, fundraiser, queer event at a usually non-queer venue, who knows?

Party Complications – Venue picks one or makes a new one, briefly describes

- Host has a pet you're allergic to, expired seafood appetizers, super loud music, awfully cold/hot weather, no alcohol/too much alcohol, you only know one person here, you don't know anyone here, more/less formal than expected, the whole thing sucks

Party Guests – Other People picks one or makes a new one, briefly describes

- School friend, roommate, coworker, used to be in your band, shared culture, shared hobby, shared ex(es), person you've felt too shy to meet, person you wish you'd never met, close friend of your ex, the person your ex cheated with, the person you cheated on your ex with

PARTY MOVES

External Moves – social actions take energy. spend a token to use. maximum use of 3 times per party

- **Reach Out:** Talk to a friend, meet someone new, offer to help someone out, send a check-in message or ask for one yourself
- **Lash Out:** Vent to someone without preamble, snub someone rudely, yell, send a passive-aggressive (or just plain aggressive) message, cry publicly

Internal Moves – retreating inward feels easier than reaching outward. use as many times as desired per party

- **Fold In:** Avoid someone you (don't want to) know, refill your drink without talking to anyone, scroll through messages reflexively, worry about a mundane detail of your outfit
- **Reflect:** Think about the past from a new perspective, take a break from the party to clear your head, make a note of something you want to remember in the morning

Think About Your Ex – describe the thoughts and actions that lead the Protagonist into one of the situations below, or into another messy situation you design. using this move ends a party

- Consider moving states to be with them, find out they are engaged, send a drunk text (not necessarily to them), see them at the party with someone uncomfortably similar to you, notice yourself still displaying a habit you learned from them, cry in your car while wearing/holding something that reminds you of them, show up at their house (or somewhere else equally ill-advised)

EPILOGUE MOVES

Share in any order until each player has completed two moves from the protagonist's perspective

- **Rising Star** – what form(s) of success and affirmation do you now receive that past you couldn't have imagined?
- **On the Road** – where have you traveled/what have you seen that you always wanted to see?
- **Altitude** – what is something tough you accomplished that initially frightened you?
- **What it Takes to Grow Old** – what do you look back on and laugh?
- **Counting My Breaths** – how have you learned to take care of yourself/get support through stress and panic?
- **I Know What I Need** – what important thing have you stopped compromising on?

You can download a digital version of This Party Sucks, and find links to learn more about the music and game jam that inspired it, at <https://beatingthebinary.itch.io/this-party-sucks>