

# HUMAN PARSER

A pen-and-paper text-adventure  
about (not) understanding yourself



HUMAN PARSER:

- > an interpreter that is a human agent
- > an interpreter that parses humans
- > making the act of parsing human



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(Dissociation: sometimes there's a mismatch between how I experience the world, and how the world experiences me.)

# Introduction

Dear **PLAYERS**,

This game is about dissociation and about 'living with a manual'. About how difficult it is to understand yourself, and how beautiful it is to try anyway.

As a pen-and-paper text-adventure, this game relies on your input. It requires a little confusion, a little vulnerability, and a little imagination. Explore it at your own pace. Take it with you in your pocket to play anywhere. Play it with a friend, with a stranger, or with yourself.

I will address you as player and person imagined in my mind. That entity 'you', however, might not coincide fully with the actual you: the full person you are, that cannot ever be captured in words. Ultimately, that is what this game is about: the friction of the question: who are you?



## Where to play

This game can be played anywhere. It is preferable that the players are in the same location, but remote play is also possible. Try to face each other as you play. If you play by yourself, try to face a mirror.

Your game is unique to you: it can be grounded in the place you are in now, or a place you'd like to be in. The place where you met, or a place where you will meet again. Take a moment to look around, to listen and hear and smell. Create a mental image of this place. Throughout the game, you will build on this image.



## How to Play

One person will play as **HUMAN**, one as **PARSER**. Get an empty **character** sheet for each role and decide who plays which role. This manual is shared between you.

Before playing, make sure you've heard each other's voices, and you've heard your own. List some things you can see or hear, talk about what dinner you had yesterday or what your favorite animal's favorite color is. Meanwhile, browse through your **character** sheets to become familiar with them. Then:

- 1) Create a **character** (see page 12)
- 2) Play until an ending is reached or the game naturally comes to an end.

This game is about dissociation. You will embody a character that is you, but also subtly not you. This can be uncomfortable. Part of the game is exploring this discomfort. However, if it is too much: say so. The other player will understand.

## Character Creation

Your **character** sheets describe who you are. Before starting, some areas will be filled. Not all. Some will be filled during your ADVENTURE. Some might remain blank.

1. Start by find the ‘**character** appearance’ section. Take turns to describe the other player. As you are being described, make a sketch of your description.

For the description, try to use factual information. For example:

> You are wearing glasses. Your hair is shoulder length and wavy.

You might use empathic information. For example:

> You look energetic. I sense excitement in you.

2. After you’ve both drawn your **character**, take a moment to see yourself in

the third person. See how you're in a space and describe this in a few words below the drawing. Don't say this out loud.

3. Then, the **HUMAN** can fill in their **character** description by selecting 3 statements.
4. Then, the **PARSER** can start the adventure from their **character** sheet.



## Locations

### Location: Begin

Say: You are in a place that's oddly familiar. You ask yourself: how did we get here?

Choose:

- > I don't remember.
- > I remember: [description].

Say: I remember [a memory, distant or recent, that you share with the human.]

Choose:

- > Ah, I remember it well. It was [adjective].
- > Hm. I remember it differently: it was [adjective].

Fill 'a memory you share' on your **MAPS**.

Say: Right. Anyway, let's explore this place. We might make a new memory here.

Location 1: [the moment you share]

Say: You are now in a moment we share.  
Write a word for this moment on your MAPS.  
Human, we are in the now. Here, together.

> [make an observation about the place]

> [make an observation about the human]

Say: I (dis)agree.

> [make an observation about yourself]

> [make an observation about the parser]

Choose:

> I (don't) doubt that.

> OK. It has been brought to my attention that [repeat the observation]

Choose:

> We're wired differently / the same.

> Maybe I'm the problem here.

Say: Hmm. How do you feel? and continue from your character sheets.

Actions overriding the **PARSER**'s script:

> **talk** [parser name]:

Say: **Yes, I am here. How do you feel?**

> **move** [right]:

**Parser**, look at your **MAP** to see if a password is written down. If not:

> Think of a word that is meaningful to you. This is the password to the mirror room. Write it on your **character** sheet. Don't show this to the **HUMAN**.

**You approach a new space. It looks familiar. What is the password?**

If the **HUMAN** says the same word as written on the **PARSER**'s sheet:

> **Correct.** Continue reading at **Location:** mirrors.

Otherwise:

> **Incorrect. You lose one spoon.**

Location 2: [a song you share]

Say: You are now in a place from your past.  
Can you tell me something about it?

Choose:

- > I'd love to: [description].
- > I'd rather not.

(\*) Say: Do you know the song [song name]?

Choose:

- > Yes. I (don't) like it (so much).
- > No. I wildly enjoy music such as [song name].

Choose:

- > I (dis)agree.
- > That's (no) surprise, it is (not) good.

If you have not found a song you both like, return to (\*), otherwise fill 'a song you share' on your MAPS. Continue from your character sheets.

Actions overriding the **PARSER**'s script:

> **move down**:

Say: You see two doors with a sign.  
One reads 'ACCEPT', the other 'DENY'.  
Which do you choose?

Choose:

> **ACCEPT**: continue at **Location**: End?

> **DENY**: continue at **Location**: 3

> **dance**:

Say: You dance, dance, dance. It  
this normal? You can't tell. You  
don't care. You think about [shared  
song] and dance.

Write a word for this moment on your  
**MAPS**.

> **reflect**:

Say: You think about the times you've  
listened to [shared song]. How do you  
feel?

### Location 3: [where you cannot go]

Say: You are in a place you did not decide to be in. You try to find the words for it, but can't. Now that you think about it, when are you able to find the words?

Choose:

- > I actually find the words often. Right now, [find words].

Write a word for this moment on your MAPS.

- > This is not me. This whole 'adventure', it hasn't been me.

Choose:

- > Why is that?
- > I thought so.

Then: [react genuinely]

Then: [react genuinely]

Then: [react genuinely]

Actions overriding the **PARSER**'s script:

- > **move**: read 'Action: talk' in the script and continue at 'taking a spoon'.
- > **talk**: read 'Action: dance' in the script and continue at 'taking a spoon'.
- > **dance**: read 'Action: reflect' in the script and continue at 'taking a spoon'.
- > **reflect**: read 'Action: move' in the script and continue at 'taking a spoon'.

When the **HUMAN** seems puzzled or is at 3+ spoons lost, continue by saying: **We like to think we're in control over our actions, but sometimes, we are not. This happens. In these moments, we need to center ourselves. Sometimes we need a break.**

THIS CAN BE AN END TO THE ADVENTURE. You can continue at 'switching roles', or decide to stop here. I encourage you to have some tea, think about your week, maybe take a walk.

## Location: Mirrors

Say: You look inside yourself and think about [password]. You know you're in a new location, but decide to keep your eyes closed. Sometimes you don't see yourself when you look in the mirror.

Actions overriding the **PARSER**'s script:

- > **move left**: you open your eyes. Continue reading at **Location: 1**.
- > **dance**: even with your eyes closed, you don't dance for more than 2 seconds. But you're OK with that.
- > **reflect**: You breath. With your eyes closed, you consider yourself not as the world sees you, but as you see yourself. You then open your eyes.

THIS CAN BE AN END TO THE ADVENTURE. You can continue at 'switching roles', or decide to stop here. Feel invited to stay in your position for a while, and talk without scripts.

Location: End?

Say: You are in this same place, a short moment from now.

Choose:

> I want to restart.

> I want to restart.

Say: Is that so? Or are you just reading that from the page?

Choose:

> Yes.

> No.

Say: Human, I don't know what to make of this. How can I parse you truly when I don't know where you begin and end? Where I begin and end?

THIS CAN BE AN END TO THE ADVENTURE. You can continue at 'switching roles', or decide to stop here using your own words to express you want to pause this adventure.

## Afterword

HUMAN PARSER was developed as the graduation project to my MFAD.

It is accompanied by a [thesis](#), that functions a text-adventure in its own right. You should be able to find it wherever you found these game files.

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~ [THIJS](#)