

Acting Edition

The Game

by Bekah Brunstetter

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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THE GAME was commissioned and produced by Playmakers Repertory in Chapel Hill, North Carolina in April 2024. The performance was directed by Vivienne Benesch, with sets by Lee Savage, costumes by Pamela A. Bond, lighting design by Carolina Ortiz Herrera, and sound design by Kate Marvin. The Production Stage Manager was Sarah Smiley. The cast was as follows:

ALYSSA		Megan Ketch
HOMER		Lucas Dixon
JEN		Sanjana Taskar
CLEO		Elizabeth Dye
RHONDA		Kathryn Hunter-Williams
MYRA		Cinny Strickland

CHARACTERS

ALYSSA – (30s/40s) a high-functioning multitasking Woman with squishy insides; our leader.

HOMER – (30s/40s) her husband, a Man in a basement entrenched in a virtual world.

JEN – (30s/40s) a very good photographer, a terrible socializer.

CLEO – (20s) a pregnant military wife, and this is her entire personality.

RHONDA – (40s/50s) a serial online shopper, image obsessed.

MYRA – (70s/80s) a gentle but quietly brilliant little old lady.

Note on casting: Jen and Rhonda should be played by women of color.

SETTING

A mid-sized town near a military base.

TIME

Now.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Note on performance: Do your best with the overlapping dialogue, move things around as you find a natural rhythm of women anxiously talking over each other.

Note on time: This play takes place in the year your production is produced. You may adjust any years mentioned to be relative to the year you are producing this play.

Prologue

(The sounds of war. Epic, all-out, timeless war. All of the wars throughout time.)

(Horns and shouts, broken limbs. Cries and radio crackles, planes going down, sons lost, mothers crying by phones, arrows ricocheting off shields. Bombs falling.)

(Then, the sounds get sucked into a Game, and fade away.)

*(All that's left is **ALYSSA**. She has a baby strapped to her chest, its face turned into her breasts. She moves towards us, epic music swelling,* like she's about to welcome us to another world, like she's about to tell us that her parents were Wolves, or how she once climbed up a Waterfall –)*

ALYSSA. Welcome to THE GAMEEEEE!

*(**ALYSSA** then becomes herself. A regular human woman with a mental To-Do list longer than her own life.)*

Okay, first and foremost, I can't be fully objective here, because, the thing is, *I do not play Games*. I just find them to be a complete waste of time. Even as a

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kid, I remember *Mall Madness* feeling like a time suck, and *Candy Land*, when you're done, you have to put all of the pieces back into the box and it's just *so many pieces*, and I was always very distracted by that.

Don't get me wrong! I'm fun. I just think work is fun!

I'm an architect, I specialize in sustainable retail spaces.

(Her phone dings with a text.)

Actually let me just –

(She stops and reads the full text. It fills her with a microdose of rage, but she compartmentalizes hard, she's a chest of fucking drawers. She starts to respond quickly to the text.)

(As she texts:)

Sorry.

But I'm not all work and no play. I like to exercise!
And – organize drawers.

And – that's it.

(She's done with her text manifesto. Gives us her full attention.)

But my husband, he *loves* Games. *Video* Games. They're his go-to. His resting state. Which is fine. They make him happy. And I want him to be happy. But lately – it's become something more. It's not a break from life, it *is* life.

What you're about to see is *not* a simulation, or hyperbole. It's not a marketing strategy and it's not a cry for help. Even though actually – it might be that.

I present to you an ACTUAL image of my husband, playing The Game. And yes, this is to scale.

*(Her husband **HOMER** appears, playing The Game.)*

(He's at home, tucked into his favorite chair which seems to have formed around him.)

(He wears a headset and holds an Xbox controller.)

(He's completely consumed by The Game.)

(There's a box of cheese crackers next to him.)

*(The Game's colors and shapes move across **ALYSSA**'s face. To her, they're primitive, childish. She doesn't understand them.)*

*(But still, **ALYSSA** looks at him with so, so much love. And a bit of pity, too.)*

HOMER. Yeah, man. I see him. What's with this noob?!

(Then.)

No no no GO GO GO – I can't see – I'm in the fog.

Nah, I can't respawn. My health's bad.

(Then.)

Oh SHIT! There's a mob up there! Let's rush these fools!

ALYSSA. *(To us.)* He has a Master's degree in biochemical engineering.

HOMER.

YEEEEEEE-AH! DUAL
WIELD, BABY!

Wait, watch the side,
watch the side –

ALYSSA.

What's that saying?
Behind every successful
man is a woman.

HOMER.

(Like someone died.)

NOOOOOOOOO

OOOOO!!!!!!!!!!!!

WHAT?!!! WHAT WAS
THAT?!

Are you grieving me,
dude?! Bad manners.

Okay, then go back in.
Around the *side*.

WHAT? NO!

You can't pee right now,
man! I've had to pee since
we dropped in, HOLD
YOUR PEE!

ALYSSA.

Behind every *unsuccessful*
woman, is a man.

Here's mine: Behind every
Successful *Woman* is a
Man, playing a video game.

ALYSSA. Okay, so. "*The Game*" – which is the actual name of The Game – like did everyone at the game-making company just give up? – It's a massively successful Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game, or MORPG, an acronym that I learned deep in a Reddit thread about Gaming addiction.

He plays *all* day. Every day. Seven days a week.

HOMER. DUDDDDDEEEEEEEEEEE!

*(He laughs, joyously. Then shoves some
crackers into his mouth.)*

(ALYSSA watches him, a bit sadly.)

ALYSSA. I don't fully understand The Game, but from what I've gathered, the basic premise is that the world has been at least partially destroyed by nuclear war, or climate change, or Facebook? And all that's left are dirty sports bras, and burnt down buildings, and weapons. Lots of weapons. And a single traffic cone. There doesn't appear to be any coffee anywhere, that's what REALLY stresses me out. It's up to the Players

to band together, fight the Enemy, and survive. I don't understand who the Enemy is, but sometimes, they're in a sports bra, too.

I don't get it. And I want to. *I want to get it.*

(Then.)

Out of fairness, maybe I should let *him* explain it.

(She turns to him.)

Hey, honey?

(He keeps playing.)

Homer.

(No response.)

HOMER.

(He pops a single ear out of a headset. He's warm with her, but distracted.)

Yeah, baby!

ALYSSA. Do you have a minute?

HOMER. I'm playing – lemmee just get to a / checkpoint –

No no no no –

ALYSSA. Can you pause it?

HOMER. No, I can't –

(He gets killed.)

GAHHHHHHHHHHHH

ALYSSA. What?

HOMER. I died.

ALYSSA. ...It's okay, though. You're still a living man!

HOMER. I know! But I was playing. Now I have to start over.

Sorry, did you need something?

ALYSSA. I was wondering if you could explain The Game to me?

HOMER. Really? You want me to?

ALYSSA. Yeah! I wanna hear about it!

(HOMER has been waiting for what feels like his whole life for her to take interest in The Game.)

(HOMER takes a breath, then:)

HOMER. Okay, so. The year is 2264, the planet is fried, water and resources are scarce. It's an open world.

ALYSSA. Open! / Right!

HOMER. You can go anywhere. There's a lot to explore. You can go solo, or can play with a Clan. There's sidequests, but your main goal is to get to the great Ancient City, it's been abandoned since the twelfth century B.C.E. but now it's the only inhabitable place on Earth.

ALYSSA. And it's in – / America?

HOMER. It's where survivors have started a new civilization. It can take forever to get there, depending on your XP –

ALYSSA. *(She knows this.)* XP! Experience points!

HOMER. Yep, you gain experience points as you gain new skills, skills accumulate with the levels based on your output. So you start in the blue zone, that's where the bulk of your resources are, clean water, fuel, crickets –

ALYSSA. Crickets?

HOMER. Main source of food. That's the future.

ALYSSA. *(To us.)* Am I the only one who doesn't want to eat crickets?

HOMER. Then you get to purple, it's a good place to just grind and earn some cash.

If you make it to the Ancient City, that's where you fight the Big Boss –

(ALYSSA is now replying to an email on her phone.)

Are you listening?

ALYSSA. Yes! *Yes.* Sorry – it's Carly, she's completely incompetent.

HOMER. It's like nine o'clock at night. Thought you were gonna / start setting some boundaries.

ALYSSA. I know. I just need to get this one thing out –

HOMER. *(On headset.)* MARCIO! 'Sup. No, I'm still here. I was just on mute!

ALYSSA. Who's Marcio?

HOMER. He's a guy I play with. I've told you about him. He's only avail Wednesday and Friday nights because of his class schedule.

ALYSSA. His class schedule?

HOMER. He goes to State.

ALYSSA. *(To us.)* A thirty-nine-year-old man! Playing a game, with a college kid!

(HOMER gets sucked back into The Game.)

HOMER. *(Into headset.)* Yeah, I'm here!

(ALYSSA faces us again.)

ALYSSA. He didn't used to be like this.

ALYSSA. He used to be a God. Or, he was mine. We were partners.

(She feels like she said too much, so she stops.)

(She watches him play, sadly.)

(Faces us, again.)

A marriage is a treaty. You both agree to be happy. Because when one of you isn't, it's contagious. When they're sad, you miss them.

*(To **HOMER.**)* I miss you. I miss our peaceful world.

(A moment.)

(Back to us.)

A marriage is an entire world.

So this –

*(She points to her **HUSBAND**, playing *The Game*.)*

This means *War*. And in times of war, we must make sacrifices, we must be brave, I must step outside my comfort zone.

(She steels herself.)

What I'm about to do is not safe. It's dangerous and inadvisable, but it's the byproduct of *months* of desperation.

(She can't believe she's about to say this.)

I'm going to invite a bunch of random Women that I met on the internet into my House.

On a weeknight.

(Ding-dong!)

Greek Yogurt

(We're now in Alyssa's living room.)

(She's set out snacks.)

*(She's surrounded by **WOMEN** that she's never met before today.)*

*(**CLEO**, twenties, is visibly four or five months pregnant, wide-eyed and young.)*

*(**MYRA** is in her seventies and doesn't quite seem to understand exactly where she is, but she's up for anything.)*

*(**RHONDA** is in her late forties and wears ridiculous clothes that you might find deeeeeeep in a clearance rack, like a sweater with a sparkly parrot on it. She looks like she's trying to be eight different women at once.)*

*(**JEN**, thirties, is quiet, terrifyingly smart, and a bit awkward. She's hidden behind her camera, a really nice Canon. Every now and then, she snaps a picture of someone.)*

(They all buzz with nervous energy, balance little plates on their laps, all desperately wanting to be liked, to fit in.)

(It's all fake yet earnest, and completely terrifying.)

ALYSSA.

I have some Dip!

RHONDA. (To **JEN**.)

Great jacket, where's it from?

CLEO.

Yay this is fun!

MYRA.

I'm VERY sensitive to sugar!
But I eat it anyways!

JEN.

I found it at an
airport? I think?

RHONDA.

It looks like Zara, is it
Zara?

ALYSSA.

Yeah, I can't do
sugar anymore.
Just wine!

JEN.

No clue!

MYRA.

My mother had mai tais
for breakfast when she was
pregnant with me. And I
turned out mostly fine!

RHONDA.

I could get you fifty
bucks for that on
Poshmark.

JEN.

Posh what now?

CLEO.

Better safe than sorry!
(To **ALYSSA.**)
Are you breastfeeding?

RHONDA.

It's an app where you
can sell your clothes.
I am HOOKED!

JEN.

Oh, no thanks. I'm –
wearing it.

ALYSSA. (To **JEN.**)

What were you saying, about
melatonin?
(To **CLEO.**)
Oh, God no.
(To **ALL.**)
Would anyone like some dip?

RHONDA.

 Oooh, it looks yummy!

CLEO.

 I'm just going to put a little
 bit on my plate or I'll eat it
 all. Mmm.

 What's in this?

ALYSSA.

 Greek yogurt.

MYRA.

 The other day – I had
 something called *Kale* Slaw!

JEN.

 Coleslaw! I get it!

MYRA.

 KALE slaw!

RHONDA. (*Of dip.*)

 Are you sure this is
 Greek yogurt?

ALYSSA.

 Yep!

JEN. (*To ALYSSA.*)

 Oh, it helps me sleep,
 I'll take like, eight
 melatonin. It's non-
 habit-forming!

ALYSSA.

 I have the hardest time
 falling asleep. Can't turn
 off my brain!

MYRA.

 Menopause!

CLEO.

 Sorry, I have to stretch.
 (*She gets up to do it.*)

RHONDA.

 Girl, can I tell you, you
 got a cute little body.
 You better kiss that body
 goodbye, though.

(**JEN** snaps a picture.)

JEN. (*To MYRA.*) Sorry. Do you mind?

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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