

shelter



Shelter is a game for two players that answers the question: **How will you reach the City of Scarabs?**

How to Play

Each player will take turns playing the Wanderer, a lone pilgrim journeying to the mythical City of Scarabs to reunite with their lost love. While your partner plays the Wanderer, you will describe the cruel environment and craft a dream-like landscape with obstacles drawn from your fears. It should take about an hour, or less, to play.

This game uses touch as a storytelling mechanic. This may be as light as brushing fingertips or as intimate as kissing. If you are familiar with the larp technique *Ars Amandi*, you may use that here, but knowing it isn't necessary. Before playing, you and your partner will have a conversation to determine the type of touch desired, and how to position yourselves during play; you may sit across from one another, lie down in an embrace, or be in any other position that feels natural. The standard here is **enthusiastic consent**—both players should feel comfortable with how and where they will be touched, and confident that any boundaries will be respected. At any point, either player may pause the game to re-open this discussion, proceeding only if both players wish to continue.

Setting Up

To begin play, answer the following questions with your partner. You may pick as many choices as you wish, or write your own.

How was your homeland destroyed?

- By drought and famine
- By strange disease
- By monstrous beasts
- By divine wrath
- By the foolishness of humans

Your people were famed for their beauty.

What forms do you take?

- Enormous bodies
- Feathery bodies
- Scaly bodies
- Shifting bodies
- Human bodies

What terrain must you cross?

- Vast desert
- Mercurial sea
- The heavens
- Sunken ruins littered with bones
- The still stone circle where time does not pass

What rumors of the City have you heard?

- All promises spoken within its walls must be kept
- Each night the City vanishes into the sand
- None share a common tongue, but all are understood
- The City's rulers are never seen; floating robes and masks appear in their stead
- Merchants convey themselves through the streets on the wings of giant bats

Once you have answered these questions, each player will take a moment alone to write down three fears. These are things that you, the player, are actually afraid of. Take your time, and keep them secret when you are done.

Playing Scenes

The game consists of five scenes: the first four will be with one player as the Wanderer and the other as the Narrator, switching roles after every scene. The fifth scene will be a flashback to the time before the Wanderer and their love were separated. You may choose to split or share the two roles. After the flashback is a short epilogue.

During these scenes you will touch one another according to the boundaries you and your partner agreed upon earlier. You should strive for constant physical contact, and to use touch to convey elements of the story. For example, you might gently trace your nails on your partner's skin when describing an elusive memory, place a hand on their cheek when you invoke their lost love, or grip their hands tightly in a moment of suspense.

As the Wanderer

When it is your turn to play the Wanderer, keep your eyes closed and react to the narrator's description of the landscape around you. Describe your actions, thoughts and feelings in the first person. End the scene when you overcome an obstacle, or it reaches its natural conclusion.

As the Narrator

Keep your eyes open and describe to the Wanderer what they encounter. Use the details generated during the set up and your list of fears (one or two per scene) to describe the landscape and any people, creatures or objects the Wanderer encounters. When drawing from your list of fears, you may be as literal or abstract as you would like—you won't be forced to reveal what you wrote down.

During the Flashback

Just before the Wanderer reaches the city gates you will play a short flashback scene between the Wanderer and their lost love.

This can be the last moment they shared, the first time they met, or any point in between. The purpose of this scene is to describe the sense of anticipation the Wanderer feels—are they excited and hopeful? Are they filled with a sense of dread? Both?

Discuss how you would like to frame the scene and divide the roles; one person may play the Wanderer and another their love, or the roles may be shared. Then decide together whether to both keep your eyes open or closed while you play it out. Either way, maintain physical contact.

Epilogue

After the flashback is an epilogue to describe what happens once the Wanderer passes through the city gates. You may answer these questions, or create your own:

- What about your love is not as you remembered?
- Which of the rumors about the City of Scarabs are true?
- Will you and your love be parted again?

Thoughts and Credits

Shelter is ©2014 Sara Williamson, written for the INDIE MIXTAPE project, and inspired by the song "Shelter" by The xx. You don't need to listen to "Shelter" to play the game, but you should anyway because it's beautiful.

Shelter was also inspired by fantastic liminal spaces like the bath house in *Spirited Away*, and "I Leapt Off The Mountain." by Avery Mcdaldno, a reflection on the game *Journey*. The gameplay was inspired by *Superhero*, a great two person game by Jackson Tegu. The beetle icon above was made by [Freeepik](#) from [Flaticon.com](#) and is licensed under CC BY 3.0.

If you play this game, I would love to hear about it! You can reach me at sara.e.williamson@gmail.com