

# Presence



A larp by Axelle Cazeneuve (2018)

## Themes

*Presence* is a game about long-distance relationships. It's a game about love, separation, and the continuous presence of the significant other. It's about missing someone you used to share a life with, about not being able to touch them or see them with your naked eye, about their ghostly company that lies in all things shared. It could also be a larp about how the ache somehow grows dull after a while, about how the connexion finally fades, about the deep sadness that arises as you get used to missing them. But it would have to be a much, much longer larp.

This is a game few might want to play, as reading it has proven painful to many. Should it never be played, however, this larp would still exist as a statement and, as the author believes, as an attempt at making art out of an extremely ordinary, yet always harrowing, life event.

## Structure

*Presence* is a **two-player game, without game master**. The players should be alone through the whole process, and preferably not interact (at least physically) with other people for the duration of the game. The whole game, including the workshops, lasts about 24 hours; the next morning should be reserved for debriefing thoroughly, and if possible, the players might also arrange for a more social activity in the afternoon after the game, in order to chase the sadness away.

There is no recommended level of prior intimacy between the players, although it is expected, as the game is entirely run by the players, that they have some basic level of mutual familiarity and trust. The nature and intensity of commitment between them, as well as how comfortable they are with each other, is likely to affect the immersion greatly; *bleed-out* is probably inevitable in the event that the game would go as planned, and the players should be aware that it could occur before engaging in the game. During the game, opting out is possible at any moment by texting or saying out loud the safeword “RED”, according to the **color scale** used in one of the main workshops which will be presented below. ***Presence* is not a dramatic game; it relies on slow-play, on the quiet building of an atmosphere, on introspection.** It is a heavy game, in which each minute feels twice as long. It can grow uncomfortable, lonely, restless or depressing; it is, in fact, how it is meant to be.

## Location

Ideally, the choice of location is dependant on the basic scenario chosen by the players; it can be one of the players' apartment, a small cottage, a hotel room, etc. It should, if possible, contain the following: **a kitchen or kitchen corner; a bedroom; a main room** (living room, kitchen, etc.). At least two rooms are preferable, although it could be played in a studio apartment if no other option is available. **No other person should be on location during the game.** Pets living there could remain, although they could set a bridge between the two different layers of reality of the characters, by equally acknowledging the presence of both humans... Additionally, they could be too comforting a presence for the game to go as dark as it may - however, it can be a lot of stress for our little friends to be moved to a different place, so act according to what seems best fit to your needs and those of your animal roommates.

## Characters

The characters are defined through several elements, some determined by each player in advance, some workshoped. The base scenario is that the characters had been living together for a while, and that due to a reason independant from the relationship, one of them at least has to move to another far-away location (preferentially not *that* far, as time zones should be close in order to support immersion). **The game can be played with at least two different settings: one in which both characters move, and thus feel estrangement and alienation each in their own way; one in which only one of them moves away, thus experiencing isolation while their partner experiences emptiness and loss.** This should be discussed in advance, and impact the setting as much as possible: for example, if only one character moves away, the game should

be played in an environment that is familiar to the other character's player (their own apartment for example).

The character should preferentially be of a similar age and gender than the person who plays it, although it is on the players to decide that.

## Initial situation

Before the game, the players should decide on a few elements: they should be set early enough for the players to have the time to think about their own character. The "qualitative" elements of their relationship (how is life together? What do they like to do? What are their common interests? etc.) will be mostly established and workshopped *in situ*, so the elements decided in advance should form a reliable structure, but not dig too deeply. The individualities of the characters should not be limited to their relationships, in order to provide a rich inner experience for the players **as during the game, they will not interact.**

**How long have they been together, and how long have they lived together?** [1] Including informal living, matrimony, etc. It can be useful to determine where and when did they meet at this stage, but you may also choose to do it during breakfast or hot seat, after defining the characters more intimately. **What triggered the separation?** [2] Studies, work, death of a distant parent, etc. **How long will it last?** [3] A few months, until the other finds a job, for an unknown length of time, etc. **Did they discuss the possibility of leaving? What did the partner think of this decision?** [4] Did they fight over it, was the possibility than the partner would follow considered, etc. **Have they experienced distance before? How did that turn out?** [5] (each player, individually, can also decide whether their character experienced long-distance in a previous relationship and its outcome). **Are they an open or closed couple?** [6] Keep it simple at this stage; coming up with a detailed third party, for example, is possible through the individual development and the relationship building workshops.

The players can interact freely about their characters and relationship ahead of the game, to the extent that feels comfortable or useful to them. This document presents the players with steps that the author of this larp thinks are necessary to build characters and a relationship in a way that can support the design of the game: however, the players, being the only game masters, should decide according to what they think is best, and are free to impact the design in any way that feels right to them.

## Individual development

As this is an introspective game, where interactions between players are scarce and the focus is on slow play, atmosphere, and emotional immersion, the players should be prepared to walk in their character's shoes without much else than their mind to support it. This is why they should give their character some depth, and reflect on who they are ahead of the game. They should also ask themselves why they're willing to play the game, and what outcome do they, as players, expect: it has been cathartic for their author to write, it may also play such role for the players if they enter the game with the right state of mind.

To sustain character immersion, the game relies on an intimate understanding of the **psyche** of the character, some **facts** about what they do and who they are (to be shared with the other player ahead of the game or during the workshops), and on some material elements, or **artifacts**, to represent them. **These elements act as a reminiscence of the character's presence in their loved one's life: for this, they need to be carefully chosen and invested with meaning.** Indeed, some things are likely to hold some of the partner's presence by conveying memory: such things can be as diverse as an old shirt; a perfume; a piece of jewelry received as gift; etc. These elements will be worn (for clothes and jewelry), shared (for music or food), or otherwise displayed during the workshops: **at the beginning of the game, the characters will exchange the tangible objects and keep them in their backpack (or other convenient travel container) until they settle.**

## Facts

A character should meet at least three factual elements: their **name** [1]; **age** [2]; and **occupations** [3] (professional and non-professional - what hobbies do they have? What are they good at? Etc.). Other useful elements could be, and aren't limited to: **family background** [4]; **social behavior and surroundings** [5]; etc.

## Psyche

The psyche represents the inner life of the character, their temper, drives, thoughts, or insecurities.

The **temper** [1] of the character should be described using a few adjectives, easy to remember for the other player. It should be shared during the Introducing character workshop. Apart from that, **all other elements of the psyche are free to be shared or kept as the character's private thoughts.**

There is no limit in how much the players can elaborate on their character's psyche; however, there are important questions that they probably want to sort out anyway, since the character likely did quite a lot of thinking about their situation. Here are a few suggestions.

**How do you represent long-distance relationship?** [2] Think about their insecurities: do they fear abandonment? Are they jealous, and do they admit it? Do they see it as an opportunity to meet completely new people, maybe fall in love? etc.

**What will you do when you're alone?** [3] Is there a book you've been waiting to read, a nice series to watch? etc.

**What does this relationship mean to you?** [4] Think about how much commitment they've put in it, and how much more they're willing to spend: is it a relationship to save at any cost, or are they more in a "life will tell" situation, etc.

**How do you think you'll react at the moment of separation?** [5] Are you afraid to let go? Do you want to be done with it as soon as possible? Is crying an option? etc.

## Artifacts

The artifacts represent tangible aspects of the relationship between the characters. They are very important features of the game. The present design suggests five artifacts of different kinds; feel free to add one more, but any extra item could probably weigh down their efficiency. For each, think deeply about why are they important to your character, and why did they decide to give it to their partner when they leave. The five types of artifacts are designed to sustain an immersive atmosphere calling on the five traditional senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste.

The first artifact is **a book** [1]; please choose a short(ish) excerpt to read during the workshops.

The second is **a piece of clothing** [2]; please wear it through the workshops, and take it off only to give it to the other character at the start of the game.

The third is **something that calls to the taste or smell** [3]; make sure to provide enough of it to share some during the workshop and still be made available during the game.

The fourth is **a music or a sound** [4]; play it during the workshops, so that the other player gets to be familiar with it.

The fifth is **any small present that your character could have for their partner** [5]; it can be something that your character gave as a present years ago, or a last minute present before they leave. In any case, they should be presented with it during the workshops, as the Prologue (during which the characters exchange the artifacts) is a silent scene.

## Relationship building

**Prior to the game, prepare a series of five questions to ask the other player about their character**, and answer them privately about your own character (for example: “What is your favorite type of food?” “What is your dearest dream?”). Prepare another serie of **five questions about the relationship the other character has with yours** (for example: “What do you do that I can’t stand?” “Have you cheated on me, and do I know it?” “Where did we last go on a vacation?”). They will then be asked to the other player during the hot seat.

## Pre-game workshops

Pre-game workshops aim at both constructing the characters and their relationship, and building intimacy between the players. They will probably take around three or four hours to complete, although there is no fixed duration to them; for this, it is advised that they would start in the morning, so that lunch could be taken around 1 or 2 PM. This way, the game could start around 3 PM at the latest, and last about ten hours (plus in-game sleep).

## Breakfast

The first assignment for the player on game’s day is to have breakfast together. They could meet between 9 and 11 AM, depending on their life habits, or they could even have spent the night at the same place already. Breakfast is here for the players to off-game bound, to express their state

of mind, what kind of week they had, if something happened in their life lately which might still be on their mind during the game, etc. It is also an appropriate time to share their worries, exchange on how much they prepared for the game, what they expect of it, etc. The workshops will focus on the characters, so **please open up as players during breakfast.**

**It is also important to sort out some practical questions regarding the location and players' behavior.** Some questions to answer could be: **how alone can you act?** (is it okay to appear in one's underwear? naked? to not wash the dishes, drink juice out of the bottle? think of the things you do when you're alone, and calibrate the level of acceptable behavior with your co-player); **what kind of sweet nothings are you comfortable with?** (sweet nicknames and I-love-you's are probably a part of the characters' relationship: please make sure to communicate the players' limits); **where is everything?** (if this is relevant that the characters would know where to find the kitchenware, for example, make sure the players know too); **where do you sleep?** (the game ends in the morning; sleep happens in game, as will be noted later. It is possible for the players to share a bed (no touching or other verbal or physical interaction should take place, as the game is based on the impossibility to touch), or to sleep in different beds/couch, but it must be decided before playing).

## Introducing characters

Each player starts with a general introduction of their character, stating the **facts**. They can share as much of their **psyche** as they wish to share. Then, they introduce the **artifacts**: one by one, they present the other with the objects, and what they mean to their character. Each object should be touched or experienced by the other player: if this is food, the player should have brought enough of it to share a piece during this workshop and save some for the other player to eat as character during the game. Same is true for any consumables, such as incense, candles, or any artifact calling on smell or taste. Each player brought at least a book that their character will give or lend to the other at the start of the game: they should read an excerpt of it at this point. For each artifact, the player is to explain what it means for their character.

**These artifacts are the tangible reminders of the relationship, and thus play a key role during the game.** They shape the way that their characters picture their relationship; take the time to build on the characters' feelings, make up stories, memories... During the game, the characters won't be able to directly interact with each other, **but they will have these artifacts as tokens of their relationship.**

## Hot seat

The hot seat is a workshop in which one player has to answer, often by improvising, questions asked by the other player. It serves in both giving the other player some knowledge of one's character and adding depth to it. This version of the hot seat consists of three rounds, in which the players answer questions turn by turn. There is no limited time to answer, although it could be good to keep in mind that the last workshop could also take a long time to complete. Players are free to opt out of any question, if they feel uncomfortable answering or if it is irrelevant to their character.

On the first round, players get to ask the **questions they prepared in advance about the character** (max. five each). On the second round, they should ask **questions they prepared about the relationship** between the characters (max. five each). On the third round, they can ask **other questions they didn't prepare** (max. five each).

Before proceeding to the last workshop, take a few minutes to make sure you remember the informations correctly if you have doubts. It is not necessary to know the other character by heart, but there's probably a great deal that your character would know about them.

## The Intimacy Workshop

The Intimacy Workshop is a theoretical tool for sex education and building a culture of consent, designed by the author of this larp based on pre-existing larp calibration techniques and available as a full text [here](#). The workshop presented here is a condensed version, re-adapted to larp context.

**The Intimacy Workshop is, as its name implies, a workshop directed towards building a feeling of physical and emotional intimacy between the players.** It consists in moving through stages of physical intimacy, previously decided and discussed on the basis provided here. It could last any amount of time, from a few minutes to a full hour: it is okay to interrupt it at any point, thus setting the limits for character-to-character interaction (mostly useful for the Prologue, as it is the only time the players will touch during the game). It makes use of **a color scale, ranging from BLUE to RED, to frame the interaction.**

### The scale

**The color scale ranges from BLUE, to GREEN, to YELLOW, to RED.** BLUE indicates consent to proceed to the next stage; GREEN, comfort in the present stage; YELLOW, the need to get back to the previous stage; RED stops the workshop entirely. **“No answer” means RED.**

**“BLUE?” is the question one asks to proceed to the next step.** One should never ask “BLUE?” before making sure the current situation is okay, using “GREEN?”. It should not be the same player asking “BLUE?” each time, but instead, the players should alternate, in order to make sure nobody is pressuring anyone. It is possible to agree to take turns in asking before or during the workshop, if it feels easier. No answer means RED.

**“GREEN”** means that the situation is comfortable. It should also be used as a question, to make sure the partner is also comfortable. No answer means RED.

**“YELLOW”** means that the present interaction is uncomfortable, and that the person would rather go back to the previous stage. **“YELLOW” doesn't interrupt the workshop, it simply slows it down: if they feel comfortable going again, the person who used this color can offer to try to go to the next stage again, using “BLUE?” as a question and waiting for their co-player to answer using the same color.** “YELLOW?” can also be used as a question, if one feels their co-player is uncomfortable. If the answer is “yellow”, they go back to the previous stage. If the answer is “green”, they keep on with the current stage. No answer means RED.

“RED” means that the interaction is not comfortable at all. Both players can use it at any moment to stop the workshop: **the other player then immediately ceases physical contact and asks “are you okay? What can I do for you?”**. It is perfectly okay to use “RED”. After checking on the person who said “RED”, making sure they have everything they need and feel better, the players may choose to resume the workshop or to start again. **The person who said “RED” should always be the one offering to resume.**

### The stages

During this workshop, the players will move, at their own pace, from touching hands, to arms, to chest, to neck and back, to face. **The contact may consist in:** touching, caressing, massaging, brushing with one’s fingers and nails, but doesn’t imply grabbing, clawing, or doing otherwise restrictive gesture, or one that can leave traces. **In any case, players should discuss beforehand what kind of touching is acceptable. It is also important to discuss the stages and make sure everyone is okay with them.** Adjustments, such as barring certain specific regions from the workshops, may be needed.

**Stage 1: Touching hands.** Sitting face to face, one of the partners asks: “BLUE?” or “Are you okay to start, BLUE?”. The partners can then hold, caress, brush each other’s hands... according to what was previously discussed between them.

**Stage 2: Touching arms.** When stage 1 feels comfortable enough, as **checked using GREEN**, partners may want to proceed to stage 2. **One asks “BLUE?” to make sure their co-player consents**, and they can then touch each other’s arms, from the tip of the fingers to the shoulders.

**Stage 3: Touching chest.** When stage 2 feels comfortable, the players can agree to stage 3. Stage 3 implies touching the bust, the sides, the hips. **Co-players should discuss beforehand whether breasts and belly, in particular, are included.**

**Stage 4: Touching neck and back.** If this stage doesn’t come too early, it is because leaning forward to be able to touch the other player’s neck and back may imply contact with different bodyparts, or otherwise closeness (much like a gentle hug). **Partners with long hair should discuss beforehand if touching hair is okay or not** (if it is not, tying them might feel more comfortable for both players).

**Stage 5: Touching face.** Stage 5 includes touching the face, cheeks, chin, and forehead. **Partners should discuss beforehand if touching hair, as well as the lips and mouth, is okay or not.**

### The workshop

When both players feel ready and have expressed so, they should sit face to face, for example cross-legged on the bed. They should be dressed up, but wearing short sleeves, as skin-to-skin contact is part of building physical intimacy. When they are comfortably seated, one of the partner may launch the workshop using the color scale (“BLUE?” “BLUE.”).

**If players complete the five stages and still don’t feel like using “RED”, they may simply use “BLUE?” again as a way to move to lunch break.**



## Safeword

**The color scale can also be used as a safety and calibration technique during the game, especially [YELLOW] (to reduce the intensity of the interaction) and [RED] (to stop it). The colors (their names) can be sent by text message, as this is likely to be the main communication channel between the characters, using square brackets as a way to outline that it is an off-game message. They can also be used during a phone call between characters. Finally, RED can be spoken out loud, directly towards the other player, as it is meant to stop the game in any case.**

**If a player makes use of the safeword RED at any point during the game, the other player should immediately ask how they feel and what they need. Sit down, make tea, take the time to cool down: only after the player feels better, they can offer to resume the game, or decide to stop it and proceed to debriefing.**

**It is okay to feel bad. It is okay to feel bored. It is okay to interrupt the game.**

## Start of the game

After completing the Intimacy Workshop, the players should take some time to cool off, by eating lunch for example. It shouldn't be a very talkative moment, even though the workshops could have been intense: they may of course exchange their last worries or say a few things that feel important, but focus should be put on thinking about the game to come.

The game has, so to speak, two starts: the *Prologue* is a short, planned introductory scene, while the *Presence* slowly builds after the players as characters took a moment to collect.

## Prologue

The players, as characters, exchange the objects they presented each other with during the workshops. Silence is an important feature of the scene; the characters and the players know which memory or meaning is associated to each object, and don't need a reminder. Proceed slowly, carefully: look each other in the eyes, weigh each gesture, be solemn. Place the objects in your character's purse or backpack. **When all the objects have been exchanged, hug, or proceed to any other (preferably physical) farewell gesture compatible with the limits established during the Intimacy Workshop.** You may try to make the moment last, or on the contrary get done with it quickly, as your character would. **Remember that this is the last direct contact that your characters will have for months. This is an important moment.**

When the characters part, say: **"I will miss you, [CHARACTER NAME]"**, or any other good bye **calling the other by their character's name.** Then, **walk away: if possible, go to different rooms, if not, make sure to sit far enough from each other and to break all direct contact for the duration of the game.**

## Presence

The players should spend some time apart, reflect on what their character is living, focus on the feelings, maybe imagine going through the airport or other tiring travel experience. When they

feel ready, they should **slowly unpack their bag, start arranging the space the way their character would have it, and go about their day**. One character may start by sending the other a message to say they arrived safely, for example. **Both players should start at their own pace; there is absolutely no need for them to engage in the Presence phase at the same time.**

## During the game

The game relies on continuous presence and the inability for direct communication. The players share the same environment, but the characters are, simply put, **on different layers of reality**: the spaces in which they each live are similar, but separated by several hundreds or thousands of kilometers. This means that **the players must share the same space without direct interaction, including directly talking, looking in each other's direction, touching (even lightly), etc.** They should not wash the other character's dishes, pick up their stuff, or otherwise interact with the other character's reality. **The characters are not together.** They must act **as if the other player is invisible**; because for their character, the presence of the loved one, however constant, is merely in their head.

For this reason, the players should act as if they were alone (at least, as their character is); for example, **if you listen to music, don't put headphones on, even if the other character is also listening to music; speak to yourself if your character would, ramble, hum, say crap; spend the whole day in your pajamas or pants** (upon agreement with the other player), etc.

Characters would probably maintain a steady communication, however, especially on the first day of being apart, with nothing yet to do; send texts, make phone or video calls, write silly poems and cheesy e-mails, etc. **You miss each other. You don't know how to cope with that.** One of you at least is in a completely different location they are not familiar with. They know no-one around. They're lost, and even though they may feel excitement for what comes next, at the moment they have nothing to do, and no way to really project themselves into the future.

**To send off-game messages**, if necessary for safety or practical purposes, use square brackets (example: [I'm going to take a bath, do you need to access the bathroom first?]). Please **do not speak to each other directly** (without using a phone or computer) **unless you want to say "RED" to interrupt the game.**

They go to bed as they spent the day; lonely, quiet, aimless. One of them could have watched a series; the other scrolled through Facebook. They could have called each other, and have nothing to say but "I love you". They could have made a videocall, lying silently in front of their respective computers, just for the sake of being somewhat together. But in the end, there's nothing to do; distance won't resorb, and there's only so much time they can spend entertaining the illusion of their mutual presence. They'll move on, eventually; the ache will dull, they'll get used to this part of their life. They'll have business to attend, things to do that are not the other's anymore. They'll grow, and their relationship will grow too; maybe will it become stronger, maybe will it fade, but never is it going to be the same.

## End of the game and debriefing



**The game ends when players wake up the next morning.** They may set an alarm if they think they would wake up at very different times, otherwise, waking up naturally is probably better. Around breakfast, they should proceed to debriefing. There are a few recommended questions, that players should ask each other (they should preferably answer all questions in a row). Others can be imagined if needed, and the discussion continue. **Let the other speak uninterrupted, and don't react to what they said until both players have answered the questions.**

**Are you okay?**

**How did that make you feel?**

**How do you feel towards me right now?**

**Is there anything more you would like to say?**

**Is there anything I can do for you?**

These are fairly difficult questions, and may take time to answer.

# The End

## Héroïs \e.ʁo.is\

As an illustration of character building, here is an autobiographical example inspired by the author's former self (spoilers: it turned out quite well for them, eventually), written according to the design suggestions for individual development. Numbers in square brackets indicate which element from the "Characters" section above the previous passage answers.



## Initial situation

When she took the decision to go to Finland to conduct ethnographic research, in the vain hope that it would help her attract funding at the end of her master's degree [2], he and Héroïs had been together for something like two years - not much, really, but it was still the longest she'd been with anyone. For the last few months she spent in France, she moved to his place - clothes, art, furnitures, everything, and for once, it somehow went well [1]. Now, however, she's leaving: three months, six, nine, she doesn't really know [3] - but it feels like forever anyway. She wanted him to follow her, but it would have cost him too much giving up on every project he'd already been working on: she felt a bit angry at first, but didn't blame him in the end [4]. However, separation was an unknown territory for them, and something they could only picture with anxiety [5]. Being a polyamorous couple, more questions arose, that they couldn't really sort out in advance [6].

## Individual development

### Facts

Héroïs [1] is 23 [2]. Her field of study is social and cultural anthropology, but in all fairness, she spends at least as much time questioning social issues, especially related to feminism, and doing a hundred larp- and culture-related things with some of the associations she's a part of [3]. She comes from a nice lower middle class family, and although she often feels out of place because she is the only one who pursued advanced studies (let alone in such abstract-looking fields as humanities), she knows how lucky she is to have grown up in an open-minded and supportive environment [4]. It didn't keep her from developing anxiety disorders, however, especially social anxiety and panic disorder with which she regularly struggles: as a consequence, she is very careful of her social surroundings, and has a tendency to take leadership positions in order to gain agency over building a safe, comfortable environment that she can trust. This, however, will be completely impossible when she's gone, and that's one of her main fears concerning her ethnographic trip [5].

### Psyche

Héroïs is passionate and uncompromising, yet caring, and faithful to those she loves [1].

She has already been in long-distance relationships before; her first lasting relationship actually started as long-distance, but collapsed when distance was removed. This time, however, things are very different: her relationship with her partner is balanced, secure, and they have a deep connexion that their everyday life supports. But she has doubts: their relationship, she thinks, is based on this very ordinary presence, on lying side by side at night, on being in the same room to work on completely different things. Despite being very close and intimate, their relationship relies on the simple, evident feeling of togetherness: their social circles intersect in some places, of course, but they have different friends; different game traditions; different fields of study. She wonders: when they're not together, what will be left to sustain this relationship? She knows that the relationship that she has with another person is more secondary, and that although losing

them might happen, she could get over it eventually. She's not as sure about that when it comes to her relationship with her primary partner... Moreover, she knows herself: passionate as she is, she will likely fall in love with someone else, and she is afraid distance might lead her to drift apart from her formerly mundane, yet paramount, relationship [2].

When she's alone, she's afraid that time will simply refuse to flow - although the rational part of her mind keeps telling her that she'll be as overbooked as she is here. She knows she will take refuge in her work, and build a structure for her not to collapse: when she can't cope, she knows there's still Netflix, crafting, and calling her best friend [3].

The relationship she has with her partner is extremely important: for the first time, she managed to not feel confined, insecure, or disappointed. She has been able to work a lot on her insecurities and mental health thanks to the continuous support of her partner, and their relationship brings her a feeling of stability that helps her cope with her anxiety and doubts. She can see no reason why this relationship would ever end... But since sadly, reason has little to do with the matters of the heart, she's worried that the shift of paradigm might endanger it [4].

Leaving feels unbearable. However much Héroïs thinks of it, she is stuck with a feeling: the perceived benefits of going abroad do not nearly outweigh the suffering and risks that leaving brings about. She's placing her whole life at stake for merely a bet - *maybe* getting her PhD funded by her university. Maybe. The thought eats her inside: she no longer feels pleasure in anything, spends her time crying, and her libido is dead and gone. She's afraid she would simply collapse before take-off, and remain in France - because she just couldn't, because expecting loneliness and strangeness would have overwhelmed her. Oh, she has responsibilities in Finland, already on the day after she arrives, and usually responsibilities keep her focus straight: duty gets her going - however zombified. But this might not be enough now. This is too big, too far away from her comfort zone; in last resort, some days before leaving, she starts taking anti-depressant to numb the pain [5].

## Artifacts

She ordered a copy of Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* before she left: Héroïs and her partner are in the middle of watching the first season together, and have the project to rerun a larp inspired by the book that they played earlier this year [1].

She loves scarves, and wears them in all season, as she'd fall sick if she didn't. When she's anxious, her scarf also works as a comforter: hopefully, the one she'll leave behind can comfort him too [2].

Before leaving, she made cookies: there are still some left. It feels weird to think that he can still eat them when she's two and half thousands of kilometers away [3].

They often sing together: The Black Keys' *Little Black Submarine* is one of the songs they like best, as it is a nice fit for their voices. The lyrics, which are a poetic depiction of depression, hit a sore spot for her now: but she knows it will somehow remind him of her when he plays it [4].

His birthday is only three weeks after she's gone: for this occasion, she bought him a small handpan found on Etsy. The eerie sound of these very peculiar drums fascinates her: and as he's

originally a drummer, albeit unable to keep his drums in the apartment, she figured it could be nice for him to have that. To be fair, she also hopes that, since it is small enough to be a hand luggage, he can bring it with him when he visits her and play for her... She'll miss his playing dearly, for sure [5].