

## Unphrased

A text message based  
Role Playing Game.

By Duncan Gibbs

Do you want to play Unphrased?

What the fuck is Unphrased?

It's an RPG that we can play over text.

No thanks, man. This sounds like another one of your weird games you invented because you don't get enough social interaction in a day.

Oh come on. It's fun.

What do you do in it?

We'll pretend to be two people having a conversation.

Well that's imaginative.

We can be anyone in any time trying to do anything.

Okay. But what's the point? Do we just play this until we're dead? Because I don't think I'll last long.

We'll score points by getting the other person to say specific phrases, or by catching them acting out of character.

Huh. Okay. If we can be anywhere trying to do everyone, how do we catch people acting out of character?

At the beginning of the game, we'll take turns answering or adding to a previous answer to one of four questions: WHO, WHERE, WHEN, and WHAT.

Only those four?

These four actually cover most of a setting. WHO is the question of who the two of us will pretend to be.

So I could say that we're two Victorian ladies having a conversation at a tea party, or two aliens reporting their observations of earthlings to each other?

Exactly. WHERE is the location the two of us are pretending to be in. It can be as general as "the planet Earth," or as specific as "the top of the Eiffel Tower."

I think I get it. WHEN is the time period or year we pretend to be in. Like the 20s or a long time ago. What is WHAT though?

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WHAT is the motivation of our characters. What are we talking about? What is the situation? If we, two Roman senators, Weekend at Bernie's the slain corpse of Caesar, we might want to bring that up beforehand.

That makes sense, I guess. We can also add to answers?

Yeah. You don't want to negate someone's previous answer, but you can always make it more specific or add a clarifying element to it.

When do we stop answering questions?

When every question has at least one answer.

And then we fight, right? This is when the fighting happens?

Almost. Well, no actually. We never do that. After that, we pick our scoring phrases.

These are the phrases we have to get the other person to say in order to score points?

Correct. We'll have three of them at the start: a one word phrase, a two word phrase, and a three word phrase.

Can the scoring phrases be anything?

Of course. The only rule is that the entire phrase can't be articles.

Okay. And they're worth points if this other person says them while they're pretending to be a dragon or whatever?

Well, let's talk about how the game works. After you pick your setting and your scoring phrases, the game begins, and you'll take turns texting each other in character. Texts have to be at least 100 characters long.

I get it, I get it. And then if the other person says one of your phrases, you score a point.

Actually, your one word phrase is worth 1 point, your two word phrase is worth 2 points, and your three word phrase is worth 4 points. You also receive 1 point if your opponent texts you nonsense or speaks out of character.

That seems... strict. What if I have to text you something important, but I don't want to do it as The Batman?

Every text can have two components: an out of character section, and an in character section. The out of character section is where you can type whatever you want; it's also where you indicate if you scored. The in character section is where the role playing happens. A text could look something like this:

Last text I scored 1 one word phrase for 1 point.  
I have 1 point total.  
Also, no rush, but I need you to drive me to the hospital.  
  
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'Twould be my honor to be your escort to Saturday's royal ball Lady Cupcake-Swirl. I only hope that my rapid, butterfly heartbeat does not betray my nervousness when we dance.

How on earth are you single?

Shut up.

Text Message

Text Message

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Not every text has to have this division, but it's important because this where you indicate if you scored last text. But, and this is VERY IMPORTANT, you do not have to score if your opponent says your phrase.

Whoa. Mid rules explanation twist. You're terrible at this. So if I think you're on to what my phrase is I can choose not to score to confuse you?

Exactly. The last rules twist is that you can spend the points you earn to acquire new phrases. The cost of buying new phrases is equal to the number of words in it. So a one word phrase costs 1 point, a two word phrase costs 2 points, and a three word phrase costs 3 points. When you buy a new phrase, you also indicate this in the out of character section.

Okay, I think I get this surprisingly. If I was playing a mobster coming to collect from a debtor, my text might look something like this:

I scored 2 one word phrases and 1 two word phrase last text for 4 points total.  
I'll buy a one word phrase for 1 point.  
My total is 3 points.

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Listen, motherfucker. You owe One-Eyed Johnny a lot of money. You think eye patches just grow on trees? You have three days to pay up or grow an eye patch tree. Or else I'll see what grows when I plant you in the ground.

That's... actually perfect. We'll continue doing that until one of us has 11 points. The first one there wins. So want to play?

I'll play, but if I win, you have to agree to stop testing your weird games on me.

Never.

Thanks to:

Sam Brian for play testing the game.

Aaron Kinsey for naming the game.

My friends and family for their help and patience.

You, the reader, for reading and playing the game.