

The Gift Horse





The Gift Horse is a game about tuning into yourself by tuning into an animal which has attached itself to your life.

It was created by Sarah Le-Fevre of Ludogogy and Terry Pearce of Untold Play, for a play session, entitled 'Interrogating your Avatar', which was first run during the Games-based Learning Virtual Conference in April 2022.

The game is dedicated to the games that came before that provided its inspiration, and in particular, Brave Sparrow and The Kiss of Walt Whitman.

Preparing to Play

You can't be quite sure when it began, but now you are sure, that the animal has attached itself to you.

You may already know what the animal is, as you may have been aware of it for years, or you may have just realised. It may be living in your home, as a pet, or its identify may be just out of your reach - for now...

Take a moment. Let the identity of your animal reveal itself to you. You can either make a conscious choice of the animal you want with you for the duration of the game, or it will just come to you - maybe if you close your eyes.

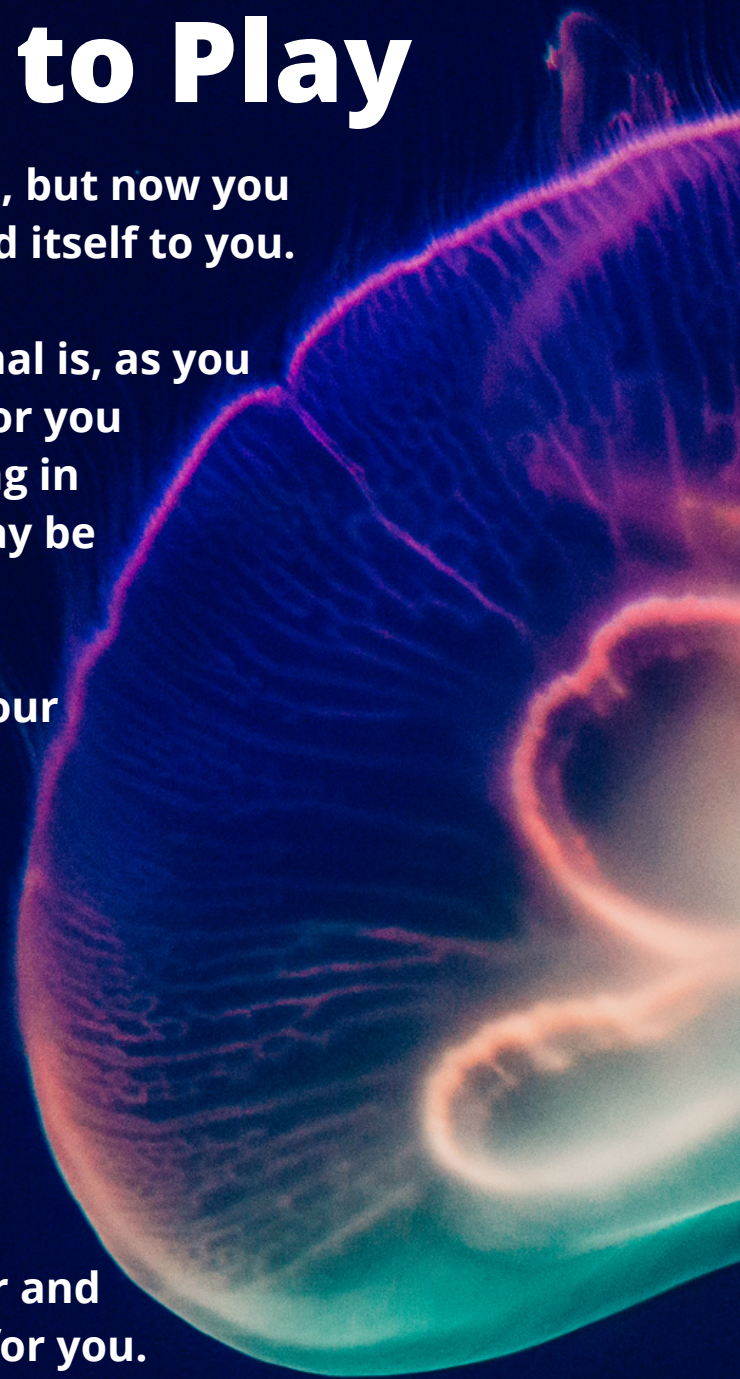
If it still fails to come when you call, look around you and seek a sign - an image, a word - or pick another player and ask them which animal they can see for you.

How to Play

The game is played in rounds. During each round, you may take one or more actions from the list below, or make up your own action. The round ends when players have taken all the actions they want and players can choose to share their plays and insights with others, but there is no obligation.

Once players have shared as they wish, the next round begins. You may choose the same action again, or choose, or make up a new one.

The game ends after a pre-arranged time period or when players agree it is time to stop. Any player may leave the game at any time.



Player Safety

As this game is about reflection and self-discovery, it may be that players are made uncomfortable by some of the topics which arise or are discussed. Consider your own safety, and the safety of other players as the highest priority in the game.

It is perfectly acceptable to ask 'Are you OK?' if you suspect that someone is being made uncomfortable.

Other tools for ensuring player safety include the words 'Cut', 'Pause' and 'Brake'. Use 'Cut' if you wish the current play/discussion to end immediately. Use 'Pause' if you are not sure if you or someone else is safe, and want to check before play continues. Use 'Brake' when you want the play/discussion to continue, but there is a need to 'ease up', maybe by sharing less detail, for example.

Actions

The following are suggested actions that you can take during the game. Please feel free to also make up your own actions:

- Consider the relationship between you and your animal. Is it separate from you? Is it an avatar, a part (or even whole) of you? Do you have some other relationship?
- Consider the intent of your animal. Is it there to advise, or communicate important truths to you? Is it there to remind you of a hidden part of yourself? Is it an antagonist in some way - an influence you want out of your life?
- Ask your animal a question, and listen quietly for its reply. Maybe you could ask 'What can you tell me about X?', or (considering a question), 'What would <<my animal>> do?'
- Consider why you chose your animal - or why it chose you.



- Look around you. Where do your eyes come to rest? Consider whatever you are seeing as a message from your animal. What is it trying to tell you?
- Draw a picture of your animal (or search for one to print out). You can use this later to play further with your animal, and/or you can reflect on it now to see what it is telling you now.
- Ask your animal to leave you. Thank it for its help. Reflect on why you wish it to leave.
- Choose another animal to continue playing the game
- Leave the game. Know that you will be welcome to rejoin at any time.

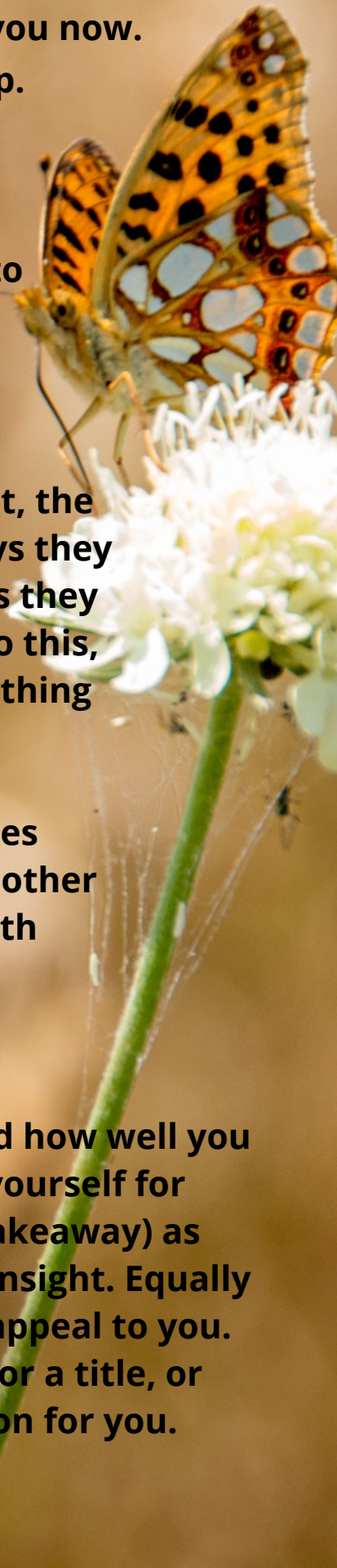
Round End

When all players have taken all the actions they want, the round ends, and players can choose to share the plays they have made, the insights they have gained, and scores they have accrued (see below). There is no obligation to do this, and please consider player safety before sharing anything that may be upsetting for yourself or other players.

Especially useful to share might be 'special' plays (ones that you have created). This may be just the thing another player needs to fully unlock a fruitful relationship with their animal.

Scoring

If you enjoy games where you accrue points to record how well you are doing within the game, please feel free to score yourself for anything you do within the game. You can give (or takeaway) as many points as you feel you deserve for any play or insight. Equally there is no need to keep score, if that idea does not appeal to you. You can also award points to your animal - or levels, or a title, or anything else which enhances the play of the situation for you.



Game End & Epilogue

As the game ends, you can take the opportunity to reflect on the experience you have just had, and either strengthen or loosen the link to your animal. It is your choice whether the prologue is a silent, solitary activity, or one you share with other players. You might:

- Commit to playing longer term / regularly with your animal (see below for ideas for further play).
- Decide you will stop play and take some time to withdraw gratefully from your animal.
- Share, or journal, or simply reflect on any aspect of the experience you have just had e.g. insights, score, the 'fit' between you and your animal, anything else.

Further Play

If you decide to make 'The Gift Horse' a regular practice you might:

- Create a 'trigger' - a specific time, place, object or other sensory stimulus which will prompt you to play the game.
- Ask a question and commit to hold it in mind for an extended period while you consider it with the help of your animal.
- Share the game with someone else.
- Allow your animal to start a conversation with someone else's animal. How do their insights / values differ from yours?
- Allow your animal to surprise you when something you see / hear reminds you of it. Treat that as a message. What were you thinking of when that happened? What is it trying to tell you?
- Take this game and modify it as you wish to create your own game. Maybe your animal can help you with that.
- Try 'shape-shifting' into your animal. What abilities do you now have that you didn't have as a human? How can that help / hinder you with whatever you are doing at the time.
- Get into the habit of calling on your animal at times when its powers or nature can especially help you.
- Take time now and again to reflect on what you have gained from the relationship with your animal, and thank it for its help.