

GUARANTOR

a dollhouse roleplaying game

created by Caroline Porter

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THEME

Play a mother, who comes with nothing but love. But whose mere presence is the entire stress of everyone else.

Play the mother who is called so infrequently, whose emails are unread, who cares deeply.

CONCEPT

Guarantor is a miniatures-based game that asks adults to play with the small objects of our childhood.

Through roleplaying the banality of a cramped, youth filled apartment, players are invited to examine the stories of each object we buy, sell, clean, cherish, hate, and ignore.

In *Guarantor* we are at once within the home, moving and changing the space, but also entirely outside. Too large to fit, to live within. Simply a voyeur to our own story.

UR TEXT

Guarantor draws inspiration from the miniature work of Frances Lee Glessner, police captain and artist.

Further, I am inspired by the following works:

The Fascination of the Miniature by Steven Millhauser

Critical Play by Mary Flanagan (esp. Her chapter "Playing House")

The photography and works of Mark Hogancamp

And of course, my mother, and the games of clean-up she had us playing every time someone came to visit.

SETTING

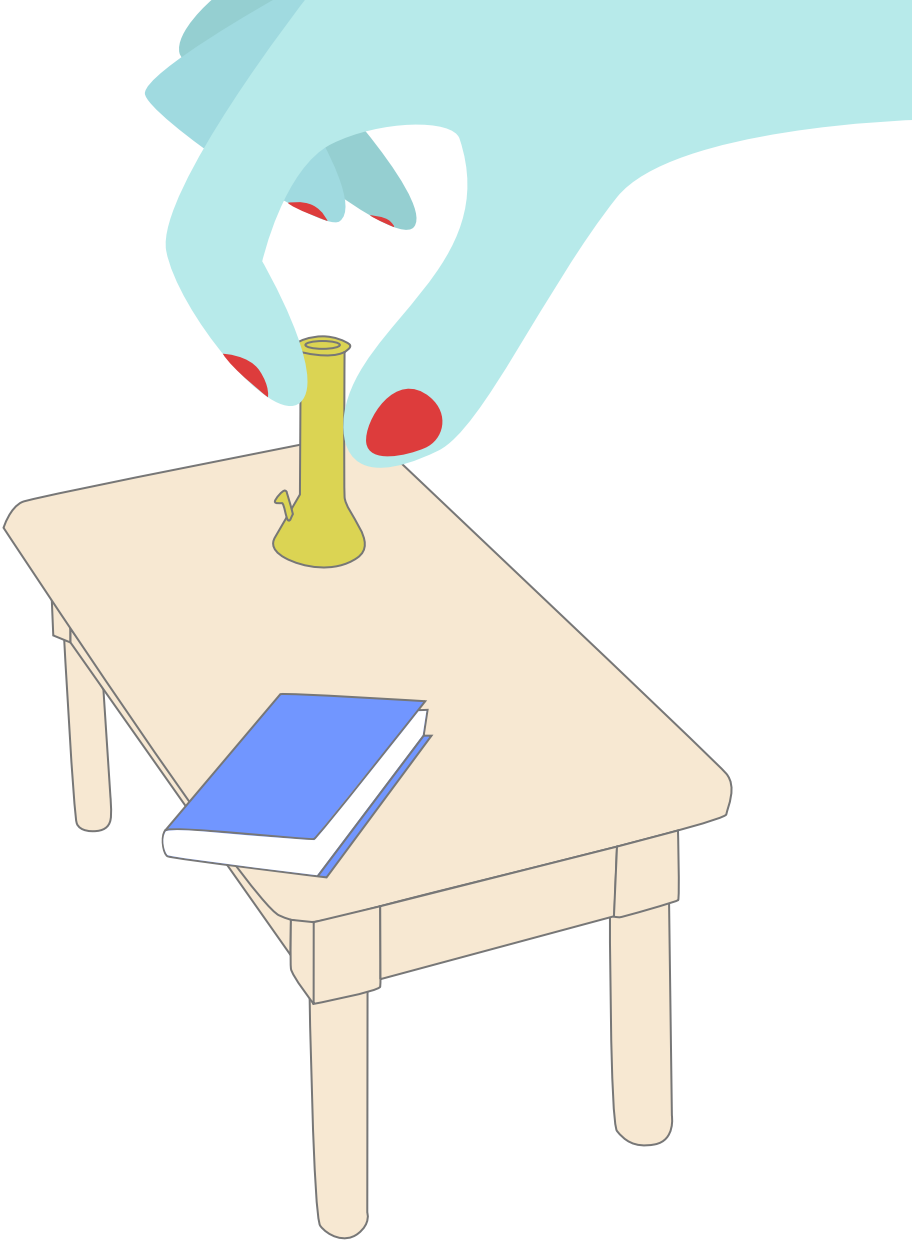
Guarantor takes place in a Brooklyn apartment building. Three roommates share a 3-bedroom home, paying roughly \$1000 a month each. This isn't a comfortable amount to pay with the jobs they have at this age, but it's among the cheapest places they can find off a good subway stop.

OVERVIEW

Guarantor is a tabletop roleplaying game where a group of young roommates rush to prepare for one of the roommates' mother to arrive for dinner. The main feature of this game is a 1:12 scale dollhouse in which players must arrange and clean in whatever way they can, as well as scrounge together food to impress their guest.

I find it best when playing *Guarantor* if only the GM is aware of the premise while players simply are told that they are playing a "dollhouse roleplaying game, where you play as 20something roommates" so that the surprise of mom calling to come for dinner may cause franticness with full effect.

Throughout this book I will refer to the GM as "you" as only Game Masters should refer to this text.



PREPARATION FOR THE GAME MASTER

In order to play this game, you'll need to obtain a dollhouse and furnishings (see Making your Own Home and Setting Up the Home sections). Further, you'll need three players to join you at the table.

ROLEPLAYING

Players will each role-play as a 20something living together as room-mates. You will be playing one of their mothers, as well as the new boyfriend of the mother who also surprises them for dinner.

Of course, every mother is a unique human, and I don't want the roleplaying of the mother role to end up as a cliché. But I will outline some character traits that may help you embody this role as well as the boyfriend of the mother role. If you find you'd like to explore a different interpretation of a mother, feel free to do so. Base it off your own mother, yourself as a mother, or something entirely of its own creation.

I encourage you to also play off of the relationship between the player character who is your child and yourself. Ask yourself, does this player dread me coming over? Do they want to impress me? Are they apathetic to what I might think of their apartment? - Try to modify your character to play into the reactions.

STRUCTURE OF PLAY

Guarantor will play over three acts of a single day: **Morning**, **Afternoon**, and **Evening**. In the Morning and Afternoon, players will have limited time to take actions within the house (see Actions). In between Morning and Afternoon, players will have “lunch time” in which they will each take some time apart to “text” a friend about their day. In the Evening, the guests (Mother and Boyfriend) will arrive for dinner, and timed actions will no longer take place. Instead, this act is the denouement to the day and consists only of role-play between the players and you. For a general reminder you can refer to this structure:

- Introduce Players to dollhouse
 - Character Creation
 - The Mother calls the Creative
 - Morning phase
 - Lunch time, reflection moment
 - Afternoon phase
 - The Mother calls the Creative
 - Evening phase
- End

ACTIONS

During play, you will ask players “What would you like to do this morning/afternoon?” And they can respond with any number of actions to take within the house. The only strict rule is:

No objects can be taken out of the house.

As the GM, you can justify this any number of ways - *its not garbage day, or the bathroom/bedrooms are full so you can't store things there*, etc. If your players seem upset by this, just kindly remind them that it is the rule of the game, and move on.

For every action that the players wish to take, you will decide how much time it will take them, in increments of 10min. Here are some examples:

<i>Wash all Dishes</i>	<i>20min</i>
<i>Prepare and cook chicken</i>	<i>60min</i>
<i>Move a large piece of furniture</i>	<i>10min</i>

If players wish to do minor actions, like move small objects in the house, they can do so without a time penalty. However, if they do a few of these actions in a row, you can choose to take time from them by saying “since you’re doing a lot of tidying right now, its going to take you 10min.”

ACTIONS - TRACKING ACTIONS

Players will keep track of their actions on their Morning and Afternoon tracker. For each action they take, they must record it on their Time Tracker sheet, by writing what they did in the allotted time slot corresponding to the length of their activity.

Players will naturally take actions of varying time lengths, but in order to keep play chronological, you should keep an eye on whichever player is still in the earliest time slot, and ask them what actions they would like to take. For example:

MORNING - 2HRS <i>Artie</i>		MORNING - 2HRS <i>Sarah</i>	
11:00	Go to grocery store	11:00	washed dishes
11:10	Grocery store	11:10	washed dishes
11:20	Grocery store	11:20	
11:30	Grocery store	11:30	
11:40	Grocery store	11:40	
11:50		11:50	
12:00		12:00	

The character Artie has gone to the grocery store and won't be back until 11:50am, but meanwhile Sarah has just decided to do the dishes which won't take her very long. You would then ask: "Sarah, what would you like to do next while Artie is away at the grocery store?"

ACTIONS – PHYSICAL ACTIONS

Most actions will be things that actually take place in the house (as opposed to going to the grocery store). *Guarantor* is ultimately a dollhouse game, and players should always feel comfortable touching and moving things within the house.

At the beginning of play especially, players might not feel comfortable to do this yet, or may forget later during play. So whenever a player takes an action that can be physically represented, you can remind them to play this out in the house. For example:

Player 1: *I'm going to wash the dishes*

Game Master: *OK, that'll take you 20min. Go ahead and mark that on your time sheet, and why don't you place your character token in the kitchen, gather up the dishes, and put them on the drying rack*

ACTIONS – PLAYER TOKENS

Each player will receive a token to represent their character in the home. These tokens are not dolls, and will likely not be played with in such an expressive manner. But these tokens will help players track and remember what part of the house they are in, and where the other characters are during play.

THE MOTHER

You should refer to this section during play to structure the 3 Acts.

You will play the Mother of The Creative. You can decide the mother's name, voice, mannerisms, etc. but above all she is a loving mother, no matter how that manifests. As I said before, she may be strict, carefree, selfish, worrying, or so many other things - base her on whatever mothers you know, are, or imagine. But I will give some basic role-playing guidelines that may help you.

While the role-play of the mother can vary, there's a couple facts about her that shouldn't change:

- She is a widower, The Creative's father died some time in the last 2-5 years
- She lives in driving distance to NYC
- She has a new boyfriend - but **this will not be revealed until the afternoon**

The Mother Role in The Morning

After players have filled out their character sheets and introduced themselves to each other, you're going to call The Creative on their cell phone and inform them that'll **you'll be coming for dinner at 5pm**. The call might go something like this:

Hi sweetie, how are you? You doing well? Good, well listen, I drove down to Manhattan today for a meeting but we're actually getting off rather early and I thought 'Oh I've never seen your apartment before!' So I thought I'd come for dinner! Don't worry about it it's going to be so fun I can't wait to meet your roommates!

Here, the character of The Creative may try to say no, but The Mother insists.

No honey, I'd really love to come, I miss you so much. I'll bring a little appetizer for you but you can cook the main course. I'm going to be starving! I'll see you at 5 ok?

THE MOTHER - CONTINUED

The Mother Role in The Afternoon

Just as the Actions begin in The Afternoon, The Creative will receive another phone call. Here, The Mother will reveal to her child that she has a boyfriend, whom with things have just gotten serious, that she'd like to introduce The Creative to. She will be bringing this boyfriend to dinner as well. The call might go something like this:

Hey _character name_, sorry to call you again, but I have something to tell you. I wasn't sure if I wanted to do this now, but I think you're adult enough, you can handle it. Listen, I want you to meet my boyfriend David. We've been dating for 6 months now, and I didn't want to leave him to fend for dinner on his own tonight! And besides, I really want you to meet him. I wouldn't tell you this if it wasn't serious, he's a great guy. You're going to love him

At this point The Creative might be angry, upset, or want to say no. But The Mother insists.

Listen, sweetie. You're really going to like him I promise, and he's been dying to meet you. Maybe he can give you some writing advice, you know he used to be a writer too! Ok? It's going to be fun. We'll be there at 5, ok, and don't forget that'll be 5 people for dinner, I hope that doesn't mess up your recipe or anything. Love you.

The Boyfriend

The Boyfriend, like The Mother, is a largely mutable character, but here are a few guidelines:

- Names for him could be nondescript such as Michael, David, John, Andrew
- His job should be vaguely connected to one or more of the roommate's job - this is a large talking point for him, and how he tries to relate to them
- He is kind and loving to The Mother

THE MOTHER - CONTINUED

The Mother Role in The Evening

Once 5pm comes, the mother will knock on the door. The following act will be a role-play of the mother touring their child's apartment, meeting their roommates, and having dinner. This act is largely up to the role-play of characters, but as the mother you might guide the interactions as follow:

- Introduce The Boyfriend to The Creative
- Meet the roommates
- Tour the house

In this part of play, depending on the mother's character, she might nitpick the furniture, any messiness, general disarray. She might get very frantic if she sees drugs or alcohol laying around

- Have dinner

In conversation she will ask all of the roommates about their jobs. She will insinuate a romance between The Creative and The Lost one by saying something awkward like "They've told me sooooo much about you!"

She might ask probing questions that embarrass The Creative

- Leave dinner

At any point that the dinner feels over, The Mother can leave with the excuse "David and I are dying to check out this bar he told me about in the village while we're here"

BRINGING PLAYERS TO THE TABLE

Once you have read the rules and prepared the dollhouse, you are ready to bring players to the table. It is important that you don't reveal everything about what will unfold during play. Simply state something like the following:

We are going to play a game in this dollhouse in which you three play as roommates. Go ahead and examine the house, imagine what it would be like to live in here.

CHARACTER CREATION

Once they've looked around, you can hand out character sheets, allowing players to choose between the 3 characters: The Creative, The Lost One, and The Money Maker. They can divvy these up as they please but there can only be one of each character.

Find these sheets on the following three pages.

THE CREATIVE

name: _____

age: _____ **gender:** _____
(20-27)

How do you make money? (Circle One)

freelance writer

social media manager

graphic designer

How do you feel today? (Circle One)

frustrated

focused

optimistic

tired

PERSONAL FEELINGS

Whats your bad-roommate habit?

What is your favorite item in your home?

What is your least favorite item in the home?

THE LOST ONE

name: _____

age: _____ **gender:** _____
(20-27)

How do you make money? (Circle One)

food service

nanny/babysitting

parents' money

How do you feel today? (Circle One)

focused

optimistic

tired

PERSONAL FEELINGS

Whats your bad-roommate habit?

What is your favorite item in your home?

What is your least favorite item in the home?

THE MONEY MAKER

name: _____

age: _____ gender: _____
(20-27)

How do you make money? (Circle One)

marketing consultant personal assistant

How do you feel today? (Circle One)

frustrated focused optimistic

PERSONAL FEELINGS

Whats your bad-roommate habit?

What is your favorite item in your home?

What is your least favorite item in the home?

TIME TRACKERS

Copy and print 3 Morning, and 3 Afternoon time trackers. Hand out the Morning section during the beginning of play, and save the Afternoon section until the Afternoon phase.

The time tracker should be filled out during play as players decide what actions to take, and you tell them how long those actions will take.

MORNING - 2 HRS	
11:00	<i>washed dishes</i>
11:10	<i>washed dishes</i>
11:20	<i>moved couch upstairs</i>
11:30	<i>answered emails</i>
11:40	<i>answered emails</i>
11:50	<i>eat breakfast</i>
12:00	

The phases of Morning and Afternoon continue until every players' Time Tracker is completely filled out.

MORNING - 2HRS

11:00	
11:10	
11:20	
11:30	
11:40	
11:50	
12:00	

12:00	
12:10	
12:20	
12:30	
12:40	
12:50	
1:00	

AFTERNOON - 2HRS

3:00	
3:10	
3:20	
3:30	
3:40	
3:50	
4:00	

4:00	
4:10	
4:20	
4:30	
4:40	
4:50	
5:00	

CHARACTER SECRETS

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At the beginning of play especially, players might not feel comfortable to do this yet, or may forget later during play. So whenever a player takes an action that can be physically represented, you can remind them to play this out in the house. For example:

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THE CREATIVE

You and The Lost One have been romantically involved for a couple months in total secrecy. Just last night you guys decided to make it official. It's about time you let everyone know.

As a creative person, you want nothing more than to make your home reflect your personal aesthetic. You want to spend at least 30min today arranging your home, to create 3 truly instagram-worthy shots on your smartphone. Real photos encouraged.

THE MONEY MAKER

The Lost One has been your best friend since college, but this other roommate you don't know quite as well. It's not that you hate them, they just rub you the wrong way sometimes - like the way their TERRIBLE cooking stinks up the house. It's not that hard to not burn everything!

You've been working really hard on a new presentation for work but you're pretty nervous. Maybe if you practiced with someone you'd feel better. Today, spend 40min straight, along with another roommate, practicing your presentation.

THE LOST ONE

You and The Creative have been romantically involved for a couple months in total secrecy. Just last night you guys decided to make it official. It's about time you let everyone know.

Today, make sure you spend an hour working on your resume. It's time you moved forward with your career. You can work on it in stages, as long as you get a whole hour of work done - but you **MUST** be alone in the room or else you'll get distracted. If anyone enters the room while you're working you have to stop and do something else for 10min.

LUNCH TIME

After the Morning Phase, players must take a break for some alone time. You can tell the players they have the following things to do:

- The Creative has a yoga class
- The Money Maker has a dentist appointment
- The Lost One has a lecture to attend

During these appointments however, they'll all text friends of them who want to check up on their day. Hand out a **texting sheet** to each of them, and have a short, written, conversation with each to check up on how they are handling the day. You will roleplay as an anonymous friend, lean into digging in to their emotional reactions of the day - but you can keep the conversation to only a few replies long. An example conversation could look like this:

Hey, hows your day going?

Eh, not so great. I have to spend all day cleaning

Ew gross, but I mean what else do you have to do anyway

Well I need to write my resume but my roommates keep interrupting me!

Thats so annoying! You should tell them to buzz off!

Its ok, I can tell they're stressed out too

TEXTING SHEET

Hey, hows your day going?

MAKING YOUR OWN HOME

While *Guarantor* is originally intended to play with the dollhouse that I have created, you are welcome to make your own.

My dollhouse is fashioned to look like a Brooklyn apartment, but *Guarantors* can be played in another geographic location all together if you wish.

You'll need two rooms to represent the shared spaces of the home: the kitchen, and the living room. If you don't have access to a dollhouse, boxes such as shoe-boxes, or amazon packages can do just fine. I recommend constructing the home in roughly 1:12 scale, meaning one inch represents one foot.

If you have access to a laser cutter, you can find my plans at:

calport.itch.io/guarantor-home-floor-plans

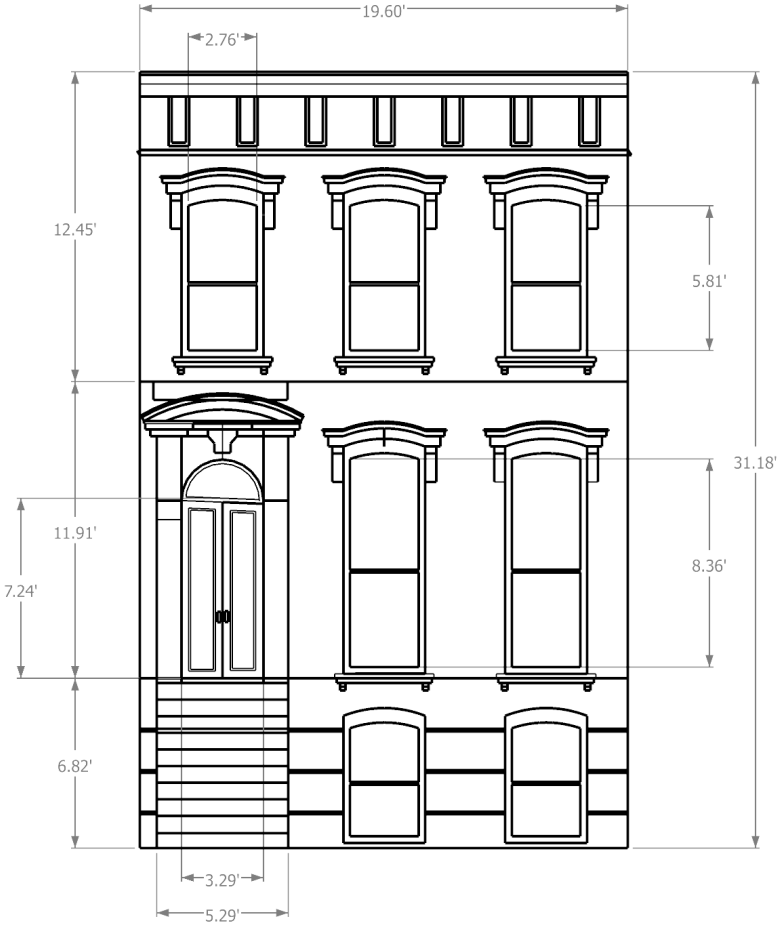
You should cut these plans into 1/4inch thick plywood.

To paint, you can use acrylic for everything. Mix it with a rough medium for the exterior brick texture (ceramic pumice works great) and a matte medium to water down the paint to finish the floors.

You can find wood to act as crowning and molding for the interior and windows at any miniature hobby store, or occasionally in Home Depot.

Next you'll need plenty of furniture and objects to fill the home. The players should come to the table to a home that feels familiar, a still life of a messy apartment, typical of a living situation with roommates. There should be food left out, dirty dishes, things unorganized and forgotten, old bottles put on shelves rather than recycled, a hodge-podge of furniture that doesn't quite fit together as it seems to be collected by 3 different people and 3 different income levels.

If you don't have access to miniatures, you can make your own. They can be as simple as carefully cut and painted cardboard pieces, or even laser cut. Try to keep visual representations as realistic, rather than impressionistic, as you can.



DESIGNER NOTES

As opposed to many RPGs, *Guarantor* does not include a campaign system but rather, is a one-off experience. I built this game around the concept of dollhouse, with a clear idea of my desire to showcase this game at events. With this in mind, I wanted to design a game that players could drop into and complete within an hour, in order to give further accessibility to play within a dollhouse - something I believe not many adults, even gamers, have access to.

Further, there is not a large subsystem within this game, though the reflection mechanic of the Lunch Time phase may constitute one in some minds. I intentionally kept the systems of this game bare, to lend focus to the objects within the house. This isn't to say I did not build the time trackers and roleplaying to be robust - quite the opposite. I found in a lot of ways that if the mechanics were not constrained and tense enough, that players would draw back from play, and attention to the house. With this knowledge I wanted players to be solely focused on the stress of my main time-system. In some ways, instead of a mechanical subsystem, the objects and spacial constraints of the home itself are a subsystem in which players have to adapt.

THANK YOU,
CAROLINE PORTER