

Hardship in Harmonia

A music theory puzzle LARP by Tracy Cooper

Hardship in Harmonia is a fantasy LARP for one facilitator and 6–24 players intended to reinforce music theory skills for students in 6th–8th grade. The game can be played in about 1–1.5 hours including player setup and debrief in either a classroom or music camp setting. Students will work together in a collaborative “race-to-the-finish” competition while immersed in a fantasy-themed story. This game is best suited to players with an understanding of music theory concepts such as reading music, constructing major scales, and sight-singing or sight-reading on the piano, in order to practice these skills.

WHAT IS A LARP?

A LARP, or live action role playing game, is a game in which players embody characters as they go on adventures and complete challenges in real time and space, walking, talking, and moving as their characters. In someLARPs, players may use soft, safe foam “weapons” to fight each other; others are based exclusively on interactions between characters. This game is a puzzle LARP. There is no combat, and the primary challenge that players will face as they become their characters is the music puzzles.

MATERIALS:

- 4 or more devices that can play audio files (one for each station)
- 1 copy per team of each worksheet you plan to use
- 1 or more pianos or keyboards (if the Melodies at the Piano challenge is being used)

BEFORE THE CLASS ARRIVES:

Select which version of each challenge you wish to use. Print the worksheets associated with your selections. For each challenge except Magic Rhythms, The Final Sing, and Melodies at the Piano, set up a station with one worksheet per team and a device that is ready to play the audio file associated with that challenge. The final station need not contain any worksheets or devices, but the facilitator should be stationed there during the game, and that station should have pianos or keyboards if the Melodies at the Piano challenge is being used.

PLAYER SETUP:

1. Split the players into groups of 3–6 people. Ensure that there are at least as many stations as groups, and at least one more facilitator than there are stations.
2. Read the following passage as a group:

In the nation of Harmonia, music flows through the world like water through the sea. A musician stands on every street corner sharing the tune in their heart; the town squares are constantly buzzing with song; and if you listen closely, you may even hear a melody in the whistling wind. It is said that the musical energy in Harmonia is fueled by the Planar Viola, an ancient instrument hidden in the depths of the Caverns for safekeeping that channels energy from other planes of existence into our own. Indeed, to the music lover Harmonia is paradise, yet there are those who seek to destroy it. King Quietus of Silencia has long resented Harmonia's thriving musical culture, and the Harmonian court has heard rumor that he plans to send a band of thieves to steal the Planar Viola and silence all music in Harmonia. Desperate to save the music, Queen Symphonia has announced that anybody who retrieves the Planar Viola and returns it to her so that she may protect Harmonia will be rewarded with 1,000 gold pieces to split between the members of the group that successfully brings it to her. You and your friends, a group of adventurers, have decided to try your hand at the task, but it isn't as simple as it seems. The Caverns are filled with mostly-invisible spirits who present musical riddles and challenges to guard the Planar Viola from all but those most worthy. Anybody who successfully completes these challenges will receive a gift of prosperity from the spirits. Can you and your friends solve these musical puzzles and reach the viola before the other groups seeking the same prize? Will you team up with other groups you meet along the way or aim to keep all of the gold for yourselves? Enter the Caverns and see.

3. Read the following safety game mechanics to the players:

Before we get started, we're going to talk about safety during this game. While the game doesn't inherently deal with dark subject matters, any role playing-game has the potential to go in that direction, and emotional well-being is always the first priority. If a given topic is brought up that makes you uncomfortable, you are encouraged to say the letter "X" in order to signal this. If you hear somebody say "X," you MUST change the subject away from what's making them uncomfortable, no questions asked. You can ask them to clarify what subject it is that they need to move away from, but you may not ask why or challenge them. If there are any problems that can't be resolved this way or if you see somebody disrespecting somebody's needs in this way, please come to me and I will help resolve the problem. Are there any questions?

4. Ask players to answer the following questions. Encourage them to discuss their answers with their group mates as they come up with them.
 - a. What is your character's name? What are their pronouns?

- b. Who is your character and why did they accept this quest? Are they a noble knight fighting for the ideals of Harmonia and the gift of the spirits? A seasoned thief interested only in gold? A wise scholar seeking an intellectual challenge? Something else entirely?
 - c. What is your character's relationship with music? Are they a musician? A composer? A conductor? An avid listener? What is their favorite type of music? It's recommended that your character have some relationship with music!
 - d. How did your character get involved in the adventuring lifestyle? Perhaps they come from a long line of adventurers and always knew they would fall in their family's footsteps? Or they came across a group of adventurers who invited them on a quest? Maybe they stumbled upon a monster by accident and defeated it, only to discover a passion for adventuring? Come up with any story you'd like, and include plenty of details!
 - e. How did you and your group mates meet and become friends? Have you been adventuring together for long?
5. Explain that each challenge will allow players to ask for a clue if their characters meet certain requirements. Point out that each group may only receive one clue per question, and that they may approach the instructor to ask for these clues at any time.

SETUP AND GUIDELINES:

Gameplay:

Players travel from station to station, completing the worksheet at each station. Before beginning, they must play the audio recording that is set up at each station. Facilitators are advised to print the audio script (attached) and steps 1-4 above and provide them to students who wish to read along with the audio. Players will face a challenge at each of these stations, and must succeed in the challenge in order to continue searching for the Planar Viola. Once they have completed every station, they should approach the Final Guardian (facilitator), who checks their work and asks them to correct any mistakes, giving hints if necessary. Next, the Final Guardian should ask the group to introduce themselves in-character and state their reason for wanting the Planar Viola and why they believe they are worthy. The Final Guardian may choose to respond to their answer skeptically, enthusiastically, or otherwise. If the Magic Rhythms challenge is included in the game, the Final Guardian should then present it to the

players prior to the Final Challenge and check their work as they go, and then do the same for the Final Challenge. If multiple groups are participating in these challenges at once, the Final Guardian should go back and forth between groups, checking a given rhythm or melody when the students are ready. Melodies at the Piano or The Final Sing are recommended as the Final Challenge because they incorporate the skills of the other challenges, but another challenge may be selected instead. Once the group has successfully completed the Final Challenge, the Final Guardian presents the group with the Planar Viola. While not fulfilling this duty, the Final Guardian is responsible for answering player questions, resolving problems, and inciting role play interactions with characters. Once one group has reached the Viola, the other groups should continue to play, and the facilitators should remind the other groups if necessary that they will receive a gift of prosperity for completing the challenges, even if they do not finish first.

Facilitator story:

The facilitator plays the spirit of a Harmonian musician's past tasked with guarding the Planar Viola. They care very deeply about the music of Harmonia and therefore intend to protect it from all but those most worthy.

Miscellaneous tips:

- Encourage players to stay in-character. Act confused if they refer to each other using their out-of-character names or talk about real world events. Ask them about their backstory to assess their worthiness of access to the Planar Viola. Most importantly, lead by example; if you create a distinct character personality, players will be more likely to play along!
- Although each team is only allowed to explicitly ask for one clue per challenge, the facilitator is encouraged to give clues after unsuccessful attempts at any challenge to help students find the correct answers.
- As the facilitator, get into it! You are encouraged to wear a costume, and whatever you do, stay in character, go all out, and have fun!
- To increase the stakes, consider offering a real-life prize to the winning team.

Variations:

- If possible, have a separate facilitator at each station to check the students' work at each station as they go.
- Ask students to read the world description, create their characters, and discuss their relationships at home before the game to fit gameplay into a shorter time frame.

Below is a description of some challenges you may choose to include in your game, along with the skill(s) it reinforces.

Hidden Message

Skills: Pitch recognition on a staff

Difficulty: 2

Setup: Provide students with the Hidden Message worksheet.

Gameplay: Students must fill in the blanks with the notes on the staff in order to spell out a word.

Answer key: "BEACHBALL"

Variations: For added difficulty, use other clefs and adjust so that each note has the same name as in the original puzzle.

Time Trials

Skills: Reading time signatures and rhythms

Difficulty: 3

Setup: Provide students with the Time Trials worksheet.

Gameplay: Students must circle the measures whose rhythms do not match the corresponding time signatures.

Answer key: Students should circle the third, fourth, and fifth lines.

Variations: The instructor may create their own measures to go with other time signatures that they want students to practice.

The Name Game

Skills: Scale identification

Difficulty: 4

Setup: Provide students with one of the Name Game worksheets. The first one includes major and minor scales, the second one includes musical passages in major keys, and the third one includes musical passages in major and minor keys.

Gameplay: The players must identify the key that each piece is in.

Answer key:

Version 1: F major, A minor, D major, A major

Version 2: C major, A major, Bb major, G major

Version 3: G major, D minor, D major, F major

Accidents Happen

Skills: Writing major scales, accidentals

Difficulty: 5

Setup: Provide each team with the “Accidents Happen” worksheet.

Gameplay: The players must add accidentals to scales so that they becomes major.

Answer key:



Variations: For an added challenge, put the same notes in a different clef for some or all of the scales, or choose different scales with more accidentals (omitting all accidentals other than for the first note).

Magic rhythms

Skills: Reading rhythms

Difficulty: 3

Setup: The Final Guardian should have access to one of the Magic Rhythms worksheets, cut into enough slips so that each group may receive one slip with each rhythm on it. Use version two for a greater challenge.

Gameplay: The station facilitator should give one slip with a different rhythm on it to each team member. The players succeed once each person successfully claps the rhythm on the slip they've been given. Although teamwork is encouraged to figure out the rhythms, it does not count if somebody else on the team claps that rhythm. If there are fewer than six players on a given team, give the remaining rhythms to the team after they have finished clapping the other rhythms, and ask them to clap it/them in unison.

Variations: The rhythms may be altered to fit students' skill level. You may also choose to add additional rhythms.

FINAL CHALLENGE option 1: Melodies at the Piano

Skills: Piano sight-reading

Difficulty: 4

Setup: Give students access to a piano or keyboard and one of the Melodies at the Piano worksheets. Use version 2 for a greater challenge, and version 3 for an ultra difficult challenge. Feel free to mix and match as you see fit.

Gameplay: The station facilitator should instruct the teams to play each of the melodies. They are encouraged to work together, but each team member must play at least one melody. Once they have successfully done this present them with the Planar Viola.

Variations: The instructor may choose to play each section for students before they are asked to play it on their own in order to make the challenge easier and to involve listening skills. The instructor may also allow students to play the passages on a different instrument.

FINAL CHALLENGE option 2: The Final Sing

Skills: Sight-singing

Difficulty: 4

Setup: Give students access to one of the Final Sing worksheets. Use version 2 for a greater challenge, and version 3 for an ultra difficult challenge. Allow students access to the audio recording associated with the worksheet they are using.

Gameplay: The station facilitator should instruct the teams to sing each of the melodies after listening to the recordings of the melodies, pausing between each melody so the students may sing it back. They may relisten to the recordings if necessary. They are encouraged to work together, but each melody should be sung by one person, and each team member must sing at least one melody. Once they have successfully done this, present them with the Planar Viola.

Variations: You may also choose to allow students to sing along with the recording of each melody.

DEBRIEF:

Ask students to consider their answers to the following questions. Provide them with the opportunity to share their answers with the class, but note that they may also simply think about them to themselves. Encourage them to speak with you privately after the game if they would like to share any of these answers one-on-one.

1. Which exercises were the easiest for you? The hardest?
2. Were your classmates able to help you understand something that you struggled with before?
3. What skills do you want to practice more?
4. How did it feel to collaborate with some of your classmates and compete against others?
5. In what ways did your character act that are the same or different than how you would have acted in the same situation? (Encourage students to answer this question out loud if they are comfortable.)
6. Did this game prompt any strong feelings for you? How do you plan to move forward from or with those feelings?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to consider or share?

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