

In Dependence

— A Tale of a Love Triangle

a Freeform Role-Playing Game
for Four Players and a Game Master

Game design,
concept art
and layout by

Lauri Lukka



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Synopsis

In Dependence is a freeform role-playing game about indecisiveness, infidelity and relationships. The game is set in an ordinary city or a town where a couple, the Betrayer and the Betrayed, live. Their relationship has faded thin, verging on collapse, but neither is ready to admit it. The situation changes suddenly when the Betrayer visits the Third Wheel, his/her ex, and the two discover that they still have feelings towards each other...

The game emphasizes dramatic conflict and character immersion. It uses a variety of game mechanics such as scenes and voices to achieve this. The game is designed for four players and a game master. The game is rather gender-neutral and can be played with any combination of sexes. The game includes mature themes and might be emotionally demanding for some players. Players who have personally experienced demanding relationships might find the game most satisfying as they can reflect and process their previous relationships through the game. The total game time is about 2-3 hours.

Sitting bedside listening to her spouse in another room the Betrayer reflects.

“I can barely remember the time when it was different. I think our relationship used to feel warm, loving. Now there is only the coldness of being completely alone, even if we are together. I have never been very social. Could that be the reason this is not working?

Yet, there is the excitement of seeing the Third again. The Third makes me wake up inside... He/she is the sun and I am blissfully staring at it. Like a moth to a flame. I am a bad, immoral person! Why is the Betrayed not making me feel like this? It is my fault! I have not given this relationship enough. Then again, the Betrayed has kept quite a distance and we have not had sex in months. Not that I miss it. I hate my thoughts, I hate my brain. I loath, I despise, I disgust myself.”

Running the Game – A Guide for the Game Master

This chapter contains no secrets and all the players are free to read it. However, in *In Dependence* the role of the game master is important throughout the game and therefore he/she should study it carefully. **Before the game** the game master is responsible for preparing the game room, explaining the game setting and mechanics to the players and answering player questions. **During the game** the game master explains, controls and directs the scenes and affects the game pace. **After the game** the game master holds a debriefing, which is especially important after emotionally demanding games.

Theme and Atmosphere

The game is about the main character, the Betrayer, searching for his own opinions, wishes and rights. It is not a game, for example, about the conflict between the Third and the Betrayed. This is important to bear in mind while running the game. The game can be thought as analogous as rope pulling: the Betrayed and the Third Wheel are pulling the rope each to their own direction while the Betrayer is caught in between.

Considering the situation and the personality of the main character (see below) it should be clear that the journey of the main character finding his/her way should be extremely difficult for all the parties, even if in different ways. There should not be an easy way out for anyone. The game progresses to a point where the inability to make decisions greatly affects other people, forcing the main character to reflect his thoughts and emotions.

The game is set in various locations that change with the scenes. The Game Master is encouraged in being creative with the scenes: for instance, he could alter them or add elements should he feel that they support the story and the drama.

Game pace is important. There should be enough time to build topics in early scenes to be referred in the later scenes. The first scene should feel flat, tedious and ordinary, and there should not be much progress. The second

scene should progress slow and steady to the known event of discharge. The third scene changes its pace during the scene, while the fourth should have enough time for the characters to feel awkward, et cetera. Do not rush forward, but do not linger in the scenes if it does not build the game. The game master should acknowledge that he controls the pace and should affect it with cues.

Game Mechanics

The scenes are played here-and-now. This means that time altering techniques should not be used during the scenes. This game tells the story of a love triangle from the beginning to the end and the scenes provide focus points on this story. Diegetically (in-game), the whole story lasts some days, weeks or months but only the key points are played. The time between the scenes is not in the focus of the game, though the players are free to explain how their characters have felt or thought between the scenes.

Active players and Voices: Every scene focuses on two characters played by two players. These two are called active players while the other two act as voices. It should be noted that in this game one character, the Betrayer, is played by two players.

The Voices affect the active players by words, gestures and expressions. Voices could be thought as influencing the players not necessarily the characters. The active players should pay attention the Voices, but the active players are not required to react immediately to them. The effect of the Voices may be more subtle and sway the character one way or the other. Both the active players and Voices are given instructions in each scene. Importantly, the focus point is in the active players, which means that the Voices should focus on quality rather than quantity when affecting the active players. The game master should encourage or suppress the Voices if needed.

Physical game space is divided into three spaces:

1) A space for the active players, including a sofa or a bed with enough room to have distance and to make out.

2) A space for the voice players, preferably two chairs facing the active player game space.

3) A seat for the game master, located at a convenient distance away from the focus areas aforementioned.

The lightning in the game room could be adjusted by the scene. Background music is not needed. The game should be run without any unnecessary interruptions. Make sure you have everything at hand before beginning.

The players are their characters. This game is played as more of a larp than a table-top role-playing game. The players should talk in first person and they are encouraged to move, act, shout, walk, sit, stand and so forth.

The game does not need props, as they are imaginary. If the story and the game experience would be enhanced by a character having something, they most certainly have it and on the contrary, sometimes missing something might add to the drama. Usually, there is no need to consult the game master for props. Props need not be real objects but can be imaginary. For instance, a character could have flowers to give to another character; a plate to smash to a wall or cell phone to read text messages in. In addition, the Voice players can, at times, affect the physical world: “you find a picture of me in your wallet” or “you see a work of art that is my favourite”.

The players are encouraged to improvise. The players may make up events, make accusations, talk about NPCs (non-player-characters) and refer to previous conversations should they improve the scene. Importantly, whatever players bring up is true in-game, part of the narrative. There is no need to ask for game master’s guidance or acceptance: the players have control over the game content.

The game is designed as gender neutral. This means that the game can be played with any combination of player sexes and the three characters can be of either gender. However, while the characters are sex neutral the playtesting has proved that the main character is rather more feminine than masculine. For this reason, the game might seem a bit unconventional if played with male players as the main character (The Betrayer). The game master should acknowledge this and make adjustments to the characters if necessary. The main character can be played by players of opposite sexes but this naturally changes the game and the game master should think beforehand how it can be used to the game’s advantage. Given the theme, the players might find they get the most out of the game when they immerse into a same sex character. The players can use the provided character names or make up their own – the game material refers to characters without names.



The Scenes

Scene 1: Baseline

Active Players:

The Insecure Betrayer and The Betrayed

The Plot:

This scene sets itself in the apartment of the Betrayer and the Betrayed. They are watching the tv, studying, making food or doing other household chores. They are not outright mean to each other but distant, cold and indifferent – however, this is not confronted in the scene. The scene should be slow, tedious and down to earth. It sets the foundation for the whole story. As a game master, give the scene a bit more time than the players feel comfortable with. There might be some discussion about the fact that the Betrayer and the Third meet tomorrow. The scene ends when one of the characters goes to bed alone.

The Insecure Betrayer:

You are not sure if something is wrong, but something does not feel right.

The Confident Betrayer:

Your eyes slowly open to see how unaffectionate your relationship is.

The Betrayed:

You do everything as you have done for years. You are confident in your relationship. Everything is obvious, there is no need to question anything.

The Third Wheel:

You feel great empathy toward the Betrayer and you would like him/her to find happiness somewhere.

Scene 2: The Change

Active Players:

The Confident Betrayer and The Third Wheel

The Plot:

The Betrayer and the Third meet for the first time in two years. They feel closely connected and their interaction slowly grows more passionate during the scene. At the beginning of the scene they meet and then enjoy some activities the Betrayer and the Betrayed no longer enjoy (for instance museum, gig, tennis and climbing). Afterwards they engage in a deep and thoughtful conversation and bind further. Both feeling increasingly intimate, they end up having sex.

The Insecure Betrayer:

You feel ambivalent, yet somehow this feels right.

The Confident Betrayer:

You are slowly finding your way out of a dead relationship into warmth.

The Betrayed:

You are slowly building doubt about the fidelity of your spouse. Maybe send him/her a text message? Is it normal to see one's ex?

The Third Wheel:

You want no harm to the Betrayer... you have no compassion for the Betrayer's distant and cold spouse. You want the Betrayer more and more.

Scene 3: The Return*Active Players:*

The Confident Betrayer and The Betrayed

The Plot:

The Betrayer returns home to the Betrayed, feeling ambivalent: how could he/she have had an affair and even more importantly – why on earth? In the beginning of the scene the Betrayer is pondering could and should he/she come clean about the infidelity. About halfway through the scene he/she reveals the secret. The scene continues with Betrayed emotionally clinging to the Betrayer and accusing the Betrayer. The scene ends with the Betrayer going off to think about what to do next.

The Insecure Betrayer:

How could I have done this? Why? Don't I love the Betrayed anymore?
How can I be so cruel? Do I honestly want out of this relationship?

The Confident Betrayer:

You want out: you want the Third.
You want to stay in safety: you want the Betrayed.

The Betrayed:

It takes you some time to notice that something is wrong. What is it?
After the Betrayer reveals the infidelity you want to work on your relationship – this is just a setback, a cry for help. You two can get over it, but not without you blaming the Betrayer and the Third.

The Third Wheel:

You have fallen madly in love. You are certain that the Betrayer is the one for you.

Scene 4: The Options*Active Players:*

The Insecure Betrayer and The Third Wheel

The Plot:

The Betrayer attempts to find answers by returning to the Third who has fallen madly in love with the Betrayer and already plans the future for the two of them. However, for the Betrayer, the feeling and situation is not the same anymore, even if there definitely are strong feelings. Instead of finding answers, the Betrayer only grows more confused about the whole situation.

The Insecure Betrayer:

Is this right after all? Is the Third the one? Why did I choose him? Is there no going back? Can the Betrayed forgive me? Can I forgive myself? Can I forget? Should I?

The Confident Betrayer:

You sway between the Third and the Betrayed.

The Betrayed:

You have a plan to make it all work. You and the Betrayer will have a good life together.

The Third Wheel:

You have no right to make decisions for anyone else. But you can provide a safe way out for the Betrayer – you have concrete plans for you two.

Scene 5: The Debate*Active Players:*

The Betrayed and The Third Wheel

The Plot:

The Betrayed and the Third sit beside each other. The characters are not physically in the same space. They have a conversation, even if there is no immediate interaction. The players are affected by what the other says and the two should comment on each other's monologue in their own. This Scene prepares the Betrayers for the final scene.

The Insecure Betrayed:

You are not sure what to think about this. If only you could just escape or have someone else decide.

The Confident Betrayed:

You alternate between the views of the active players.

The Betrayed:

You want this to be a wake-up call: you will work on the relationship and it *will* work. It may not be easy, but you and the Betrayed can work this out.

The Third Wheel:

You are madly in love. The relationship between Betrayed and the Betrayed has no value: it was dead to begin with. You and the Betrayed have finally found each other after a long time and you are sure you are meant for each other.

Scene 6: The Decision*Active Players:*

The Confident Betrayed and The Insecure Betrayed

The Plot:

The Confident Betrayed and the Insecure Betrayed have a conversation directly to each other while the Voices of the Betrayed and the Third affect both of them. The Confident has stronger beliefs but the Insecure still dominates and makes the final decisions. The GM interrupts the Voices when there are only a couple minutes left in the scene. After this the Confident and the Insecure discuss briefly without influence from the Voices. Should the Insecure not come to the decision quickly (which should be likely), the GM ends the scene and demands the Insecure player to chooses from the options below.

The Insecure Betrayed:

It might be fair for everyone if you just made a decision and chose either one or neither. Should you live alone for a while? But could you? Maybe you sleep on it...

The Confident Betrayed:

You alternate between the views and try to affect the Insecure Betrayed's decision.

The Betrayed:

You want the Insecure Betrayed to make the right decision: you two should stay together. You already have a secure life together.

The Third Wheel:

You want the Insecure Betrayed to make the right decision: you two should start a relationship. You have a great future full of bliss ahead of you.

Game end**At the end of the scene 6, if the Insecure Betrayer player chooses...**

- 1) to make up his/her mind and chooses the Betrayed or the Third:
end the game. proceed to debriefing.
- 2) not to make any choices at the moment:
rerun scenes 5 and 6 (see below).

First rerun: the Betrayed and the Third grow more anxious: why can't the Betrayer not make up his/her mind? The monologues in the scene 5 become a bit more like dialogue.

Second rerun: the Betrayer and the Third grow even more emotional. The Betrayed can no longer play with their feelings and keep them waiting. The conversation in the scene 5 is direct.

Third rerun: The feelings grow even more intense and physical. There might be a physical confrontation in the scene 5 or 6. Game master guides the game to an end.

Every rerun should get a little more tense than the last. In extreme cases the game might even end in suicides or murders. However, such themes should be given enough time to develop.

The game master estimates the appropriate time to end the game. He or she may choose to end the reruns if there is no more progression or the drama has run out. It is important to note, however, that only the Insecure Betrayer can make up the final decision!

A Step by Step Guide for the Game Master**Before the players arrive:**

Read the game materials and bring them along. Prepare the game room.

When the players arrive:

Role-playing requires a certain amount of trust in the group and therefore, the players should get to know each other before the game. Holding a short improvisation game or exercise can help the players feel secure and at ease.

Explain what the game is about: this is covered in the chapter "Theme and Atmosphere".

Explain all the rules covered in the chapter "Game Mechanics".

Deal the character sheets: players choose the sex and the name for their characters.

Explain the dating history found in the characters. Add details as needed.

Allow the Betrayers to discuss and build their character together.

Run the game.**Debriefing: discussion with the players.**

What was good about the game? What did it feel like? What should be improved?

Optionally, contact the author with debriefing information and for further discussion.

About the Game Design

In Dependence has been designed to convey a short story through strong, rather archetypal characters. The game explores freeform mechanics, but the mechanics are meant to support the game and not the other way around. The dual controlling method of the main characters means that the players can externalise the inner speech in dialogue rather than in monologues or worse: leave it inside the players head. Finally, some clinically oriented players may find it interesting that the game's main character was developed with dependent personality disorder (F60.7 in the International Classification of diseases), generalised anxiety disorder (F41.1) and compulsive tendency for rumination in mind.

Additionally, this game also acts as **psychodrama**. This means that the game intentionally focuses on a difficult subject, which the players can process through the game. The players might find solace and strength in experiencing this kind of painful situation in safe, understanding and supportive atmosphere. Creating such ambience is not a trivial task and the game master might want to run some warm-up role playing exercises before the main game. The effect of safe atmosphere is twofold: firstly, it enables deeper immersion creating a better play experience; secondly, it allows the players to process the emotions associated with difficult relationships. Having experienced a love triangle – or any relationship crisis – is not an exclusion criterion for entering the game, on the contrary.

Acknowledgements, feedback and copyright

The author would like to thank all the play testers for their important feedback, all the models in the photographs and the proofreaders. This game's mechanics have been inspired by the Jeepform game *Previous Occupants* (Frederik Berg Östergaard and Tobias Wrigstad, 2010). Should you run a game of In Dependence, the author would greatly appreciate feedback. When and where was the game played? How was the game? Are there any improvement ideas? Feel free to contact the author at lauri.m.lukka@gmail.com.

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All characters appearing in this work are fictitious.
May they become alive in your games.



Aleksandra / Alain

The Insecure Betrayal

History

- The Betrayal and the Third (Wheel) have dated for two years, seven years ago. They have stayed in contact, but they have not seen each other in two years.
- Briefly after the relationship with the Third, the Betrayal committed him/herself to the Betrayed.
- The Betrayal and the Betrayed have lived together for four years now. They are engaged.

Personality

- At the moment you are working in a menial job and you are satisfied with it: you do not deserve more.
- You have artistic tendencies. You enjoy solitary activities. You are uncertain about your mental health.
- You are extremely insecure: you feel inadequate and helpless. You feel inept, unattractive and stupid. You are not an individual, but live through others. While you are naïve and uncritical toward the faults in others, you criticise yourself relentlessly.
- You find other people more competent, clever and capable than you. You constantly feel anxious in unfamiliar atmosphere if you do not have a trusted person nearby.
- The world is perilous and frightening. You could not survive there on your own.
- In a relationship you are very loyal, unquestioning and considerate.
- Very deep down you feel empty, forsaken and used. You might not be completely content with your unsatisfying and cold relationship with the Betrayed. You would like to fill that void with genuine feeling and intimacy.

Relationships

- **The Insecure Betrayal:** You cannot make up your mind. You want change, but you are terrified of it. You dominate the relationship between the two Betrayers. You are easily persuaded and you let the Confident Betrayed and the Third affect you easily. However, you would like to know what *you* genuinely feel, at least for a while. Sometimes you wish that the Confident would affect you as easily as other people, so you could make up your mind. But you know that such confidence is not real, not coming from within you.
- **The Confident Betrayal:** He/she has brief glimpses of clarity that guide your path. His/her opinions alter and fluctuate after hearing the opinions of others. He/she is quite certain about his/her views at times, which feels rather strange. He/she does what you would like to do: make up your mind.
- **The Betrayed:** You think you loved him/her. But if you loved the Betrayed, why betray him/her?
- **The Third Wheel:** You have been thinking about him/her somewhat frequently during the last years. You feel very close to him/her. What is it that you feel?

The Role of Your Character

- You are the main character. Your personality is split for two players.
- Your part as Insecure is to balance between the Betrayed, the Third and the Confident. You will listen to them all and agree to them all.
- This is a game about you (the Insecure and Confident Betrayal) searching for your own opinions, wishes and rights, while negotiating between the other characters. It is a long, rocky and demanding road and in the end you might not find them.

Aleksandra / Alain

The Confident Betrayer

History

- The Betrayer and the Third (Wheel) have dated for two years, seven years ago. They have stayed in contact, but they have not seen each other in two years.
- Briefly after the relationship with the Third, the Betrayer committed him/herself to the Betrayed.
- The Betrayer and the Betrayed have lived together for four years now. They are engaged.

Personality

- At the moment you are working in a menial job, but at times you wish for more.
- You have artistic tendencies and would like to learn more. You would like to spend more time with others but you do not know how.
- You dislike the fact that you are extremely insecure and usually feel rather inadequate and helpless. Sometimes it feels like you are not an individual, but live through others. You know you have the strength to stand on your own.
- Sometimes you see faults in other people, which gives you comfort: perhaps not all is your fault. There are times when you criticise yourself, but you would like to let go of that. You have inner strength, deep down. You could survive on your own, if you would know what you wanted.
- In a relationship you are very loyal, but also know how to stand up for your rights. You might not be completely content with your unsatisfying and cold relationships with the Betrayed. You would like to fill that void with genuine feeling and intimacy.

Relationships and how to play

- **The Insecure Betrayer:** It is draining how strongly the insecurity is buried inside you and how often you show it. It is so overwhelming that, at times, you do not remember that you exist at all. Then you just let the Insecure control you, which means that other people guide your way. When it comes to making decisions, it is usually the Insecurity that takes control and dominates by submitting him/herself.
- **The Confident Betrayer:** You have brief glimpses of clarity that guide your path. Your opinions alter and fluctuate slowly as you hear others opinions. Your character is mostly unaware of this. At times, you are quite certain about your views and occasionally they might even genuinely be your own opinions. However, making that distinction is difficult. You want to be an individual and make your mind, lead the life you are given, but the instability and insecurity makes it difficult. You are dominated by the Insecure Betrayer.
- **The Betrayed:** You think you loved him/her and he/she has provided you plenty. But can he/she ever fulfil that which you crave for?
- **The Third Wheel:** You have been thinking about him/her somewhat frequently during the last years. You feel very close to him/her, but you are uncertain about the exact feeling.

The Role of Your Character

- You are the main character. Your personality is split for two players.
- Your part as Confident is to balance between the Betrayed, the Third and the Confident. You will listen to their arguments and slowly absorb them. They become yours and you become confident in them. You dislike the insecurity and you seek to comfort, aid and help from other people's views.
- This is a game about the Insecure side of the main character (the Insecure and Confident Betrayer) searching for his/her opinions, wishes and rights, while negotiating between the other characters. It is a long, rocky and demanding road and in the end he/she might not find them.

Marion / Mark

The Betrayed

History

- The Betrayer and the Third (Wheel) have dated for two years, seven years ago. They have stayed in contact, but they have not seen each other in two years.
- Briefly after the relationship with the Third, the Betrayer committed him/herself to the Betrayed.
- The Betrayer and the Betrayed have lived together for four years now. They are engaged.

Personality

- You are working in a menial job. You have no major aspirations in life.
- You want safety in relationship, because inside, you have none.
- You have major insecurities, low self esteem and other issues, but you are mostly unaware of them.
- You are not in touch with your feelings, which makes you appear somewhat cold and distant. You are primarily rational, not emotional. Emotions might frighten you and you have suppressed them long ago.
- You are very content with your relationship: it provides safety, warmth and intimacy. You have not thought about it for a while.

Relationships and how to play

- **The Betrayer:** You love him/her. The Betrayer likes to spend time home and never does anything surprising. You have a great life together.
- **The Third:** You have never spoken to each other. You think he/she is a bad influence to the Betrayer, but unfortunately you cannot forbid the Betrayer of seeing the Third.

The Role of Your Character

- You provide warmth, comfort and, in a way, an easy way out for the main character.
- Your part is to provide safety for the Betrayer. You hate that he/she cheated on you but you have no choice but to get over it. Maybe there was something wrong with your relationship that you did not notice? You will attempt to redeem yourself (counter-intuitively): you will make seemingly major changes just to stay together. You will not kneel and beg... unless you have to.
- This is a game about the main character (the Insecure and Confident Betrayer) searching for his/her opinions, wishes and rights. It is a rocky road and he/she might not find them. You are here to affect them for your own benefit.

Elisabeth / Elliot

The Third Wheel

History

- The Betrayer and the Third (Wheel) have dated for two years, seven years ago. They have stayed in contact, but they have not seen each other in two years.
- Briefly after the relationship with the Third, the Betrayer committed him/herself to the Betrayed.
- The Betrayer and the Betrayed have lived together for four years now. They are engaged.

Personality

- You are ambitious, (over)achieving and competent. You have already accomplished quite a lot in your life both academically and socially. You are proud of your achievements.
- You compensate your low self esteem with external accomplishments.
- You continuously seek new experiences, adventures, action and social contacts. However, do not exaggerate this in the game.
- You have your own issues: why are you constantly aspiring for more? Can you have no rest?
- Once you commit yourself to something, you will see it through. It applies to both work and relationships. You commit yourself easily.
- You have found yourself many times in relationships in which you attempt to rescue “a maiden in peril”.
- You are in touch with your feelings. Your emotions are intense, burning and, at times, intolerable.

Relationships and how to play

- **The Betrayer:** You will fall madly in love with him/her, again. You have never forgotten about your time together. It did not work out earlier, but back then you both were different. But there is no room for thoughts as the emotions take over. You want to save the Betrayer from the boring, uninspiring, withdrawn and apprehensive relationship that consumes him/her!
- **The Third:** You have never spoken to each other. You think he/she is a bad influence on the Betrayer: the Betrayed confines the Betrayer home. You hate that cold, emotionless and subhuman piece of shit. He is nothing. You are everything.

The Role of Your Character

- You will offer a way out of a supposedly ill relationship for the main character.
- Your part is to provide a way out for the Betrayer. You have wanted to rescue the Betrayer for years. It is difficult for the Betrayer to make decisions for him/herself. You will help him/her! It has to happen now! You are not afraid to make brave suggestions. You feel almost no pity toward the Betrayed.
- This is a game about the main character (the Insecure and Confident Betrayer) searching for his/her own opinions, wishes and rights. It is a rocky road and he/she might not find them. You are here to affect them in your direction.