



DITCH'D (ENJOY THE SILENCE)

A Live-Action Role-Playing Game & Jeepform for eight players
© J. Tuomas Harviainen, 2009

"Words are very unnecessary – they can only do harm"

Welcome to the Silence

The purpose of this game is to play through the same scenario twice. The basic concept is very simple: four couples sitting together after a baptismal party. The relatives have left, and two weeks old Ella has fallen asleep. For a moment longer everyone is sharing time, at the little girl's parents' house, pretending things are fine between them all. Those things, however, aren't.

The couples (gender is based on player gender, or choice, as people see fit):

A____ and **R**____ - the parents of Ella Katarina. A bit under thirty years old, a software designer and an art history student. Engaged.

M____ and **T**____ - R's friend from the university and his/her live-in spouse. A bit under thirty, with no kids. M, who has just graduated, is the party-going type. T, a teacher, prefers spending most of his/her free time home.

J____ and **L**____ - friends with whom A shares a love of movies. Both are 35 years old, married with no intent of ever having children. A lawyer and an architect.

S____ and **K**____ - A's old friend and an ex of a good friend of J and L, here with a new significant other. S is a skating coach, K a medical student who is very near graduation. About 30 years old both.

Each player should choose one character, based on these short descriptions, when he or she signs up for the game.

The purpose of the larp is to immerse in the situation as it is, and of the Jeepform, to produce internal and/or external drama out of the situation, in a manner the players see fit. People may either switch characters between the two runs, if they want, or stay with the same ones. The emergent "script" of the first (larp) run should not affect the second (jeep) run, but suitable pieces may of course be re-used. After the runs, there should be a small discussion on the differences of the two runs. The main idea is to play two divergent versions of one concept and to enjoy the best sides of both, not to compare them against one another. Some players will, naturally, prefer one over the other, but that should not dominate the debriefing session.

If there is a need for game mechanics during the **larp**, explain things by using statements which start by the word "Meta". For example, "*Meta: I hit you*" will enable you to then act that punch out, with the target, in safety. Likewise, if you feel you need background information, invent it yourself. If it concerns also one of the other characters, you can agree on some facts with Meta-statements.

In the **Jeepform**, there will be some extra techniques. Anyone can stand up, with a dramatic movement, and hold an *inner monologue*. This is something that is meant for the other players to hear, but is not something the other characters will hear. For example, after a complement on someone's dress, one can stand up and proclaim how hideous that piece of clothing actually is in her view. In a similar vein, when someone else is speaking (either in character or holding an inner monologue), you may stand up and show with your gestures how your character feels inside about what is being said.

In Jeepform it is also completely acceptable to add all sorts of new facts – if you think that suddenly proclaiming that two of the characters have had an affair earlier will make the game more interesting, go ahead. Such elements may be added both by simply telling things are now so, but also by playing through a *flashback* or a *flash forward* – a short scene about things in the past or the future. And scenes can be re-played, from other people's viewpoints, or with a new, pre-determined ending. Also, feel free to *fast forward*, to skip over some parts and jump straight to a more interesting moment later in the evening.

The playing area should optimally be a small room, with enough seats for everyone. A few seats more than players is recommended, so that people may trade places during play. Some coffee or tea is nice and appropriate, as are some cookies. Especially for the larp.

- - -

Enjoy the boredom. And then enjoy the opportunity to turn that boredom into as much drama as possible.

TECHNIQUES

LARP

- Use “meta” statements to convey systems or new background information.
- Keep the feel of the situation as close to normal as possible.

JEEPFORM

- Add new facts as you see fit.
- Hold inner monologues to convey the thoughts of your character to other players.
- Fast Forward to a more interesting point later on, if the game seems to stall.
- Play through Flashbacks and Flashes Forward, to give the characters and their stories more depth and meaning.
- Re-play scenes if they are not to your liking, or if you want to experience them from a new perspective.

A

You are a 29 years old software designer, engaged to R. This is the home of the two of you (in your name, though, and your responsibility, because you earn more. You've got a daughter, Ella Katarina. And you just managed to get all the annoying and relatives out of the apartment.

You are normally very reliable and polite. You're not extremely social, but neither are you the person who stays constantly quiet. Today, however, you are exceptionally exhausted and grumpy. You can't tolerate R's mother, and you've really tired after having pretended to be friends with her for several hours. You have not yet truly settled into the role of a parent, despite - in theory, at least – having had months to get used to the idea. You fear that your own life is now over, and because of that, having old friends over both comforts and scares you.

You love your spouse (you've been together four years, engaged eight months) that much is certain. But the child was R's wish much more than it was yours. You have mentioned this, in a very negative tone, to your friend S, when you had a dark moment. You do not know whether R has heard about those words.

S is a pillar of strength to you, even though you've slowly began to grow apart. And he/she looks, after a long time, really happy. This is very different from the way S felt in his/her previous relationship. You have no real understanding of his/her new partner, excluding the fact that K was very blunt, almost rude, to some of your relatives earlier today.

J and L represent to you all the things you can no longer have, in the good and the bad sense. On one hand, you know that you can keep sharing your love of art movies with them (R does not understand that passion of yours), and at those times step momentarily away from your obligations. On the other hand, you envy them. You too would enjoy a life where you can do whatever you like, without duties towards others.

You have not yet really figured out your spouse's friend M, or his/her spouse T, either. M seems to still want to lead a youthful, carefree life, whereas T seems ten years older than M, almost to the point of having grown old before his/her time. You are polite to them, because they're important to your loved one, but some mistrust and inability to understand them can be heard from your words now and then. You seem to note a similar undertone when they talk to you.

You do not want to ask your guests to leave just yet, because you think of yourself as a good host. But you would, in truth, be happier if they'd just get up and leave already.

Can't you understand

R

You are incredibly happy. You have found the love of your life, A, four years ago. You got engaged eight months ago, and now you have a child. You have a home together (the costs of which A mostly pays). Everything is perfect. And if something would disturb that image of perfection, you completely ignore it. Preferably by explaining to others, too, why there can't be anything even slightly wrong.

You are, in fact, suffering from a very severe case of non-diagnosed depression. It stays in control because you deny the existence of all symptoms and all disturbing facts. You float above every problem, until that day when you rip everything around you to shreds. The dam will not hold forever.

You love and admire A, and you like art history (which you call "the study of fine arts"), which you study at the university. You are unsure of your future, because of your career choice, but "hey, everything will be fine". In this way you also skip unpleasant discussion topics, which might otherwise threaten your world-view.

There is one exception for you: M is for you a voice of reason, whom you listen to. You know you can't party quite as hard as he/she does, but excepting that, you take all advice from him/her very seriously. It can even change your views on the world, occasionally. Whenever you and A have a rougher patch, you feel saddened by the fact that you and M could never become a couple. (It would make things simpler.) At those times you also suspect that your spouse and S have had – or have – an affair, and they are not just old friends.

You do not share your spouse's passion for movies, and thus do not enjoy the company of his/her friends much, either. Your main hobby is partying – or, at least, used to be. That's why you dislike the fact that your best friend's spouse (T) is making a serious effort at dragging S down to becoming someone who just stays home all the time.

You are not evil or malicious in any way, but you nevertheless drain all energy from everyone around you.

Oh my little girl

M

You are a true "free spirit", and can't quite understand how you've ended up stuck this badly. In a sense you do like your spouse a lot, but you can't at all envision actually marrying T. There's just too much life within you, and you won't waste it. It's not that you want to sleep with other people – you are far more monogamous than people might think – but you love to party, enjoy things and be noticed. You need to know people like, and desire, you.

You partied for years with your best friend, the just as aimless R, but that time is now gone. R settled down with a much calmer person, and because he/she seemed happy, you tried the same. You attempted to overcome your strongest urges to be free by embracing love. It did not work, but you ended tied down to T anyway. You've been there for two years now. You are not selfish enough to go, but neither are you unselfish enough to start adjusting. You want to love your spouse, but the fact is that you are suffocating.

The situation does not get any easier, for in some ways you are still in love with your best friend, a thing you would not admit even to yourself. Or, more precisely, you are in love with the person R was before his/her current relationship. You've let memories and impressions mess up your head. Despite this state, you in many ways grasp the situation at hand, and mainly just grieve the fact that the only person in the world who understood you no longer really exists.

Mostly due to this you are feeling quite bad about being here today – here is your spouse, about whom you care but who also causes you guilt without knowing it. Here are also plenty of friends of A, who are sure to lure R even further away from you.

You feel that you are right now at a turning point – you just graduated as an art historian, and you have the right contacts in the right circles. You could re-make your whole life in a few weeks, should you choose to do so. At the moment you mostly see other people as obligations and/or opportunities, not as real persons worth valuing.

You are a loaded weapon. Pointed at the relationships and friendships of everyone else.

Vows are spoken to be broken

T

You don't really know whether you're really happy or completely broken down. You have a job you like, a home in the shape it should be, and it would be just the right time to get some children. You love your live-in girl/boyfriend (you have been together for two years), but also know that M does not love you. Nevertheless, he/she will learn to do so, once truly forced to commit. It is therefore really healthy for M to spend time with friends who already have settled down – as soon as he/she understands how much happier R is now, he/she will want to do the same.

Now and then strikes a fouler mood, when you think about possibly having wasted your future on the wrong person. There are two happy couples here, people who certainly belong together. And there's also someone who had the guts to walk away from an unsuccessful relationship. They give you hope, but they also cause you anxiety by their own success.

You are not a bitter or possessive person. Nor are you jealous, either. Yet you do believe very strongly that you too are entitled to be happy, and that such a happiness is found in understanding how the basic things in life are all you really need. Wanting too much is worse than lacking an ambition.

You have never really felt a connection with A or his/her friends, but the home-bound side of you appreciates the love some of them have for watching movies at home. Perhaps you too should buy a home theatre, as that would be one more reason to stay there, except the times you need to work.

You feel very sympathetic towards R. This is partially because you admire the way he/she has settled down after a wild life, partially because M means so much to you both.

You are the calm voice of reason, holding up conversations but also guiding people to be happy with what they already have. I one always wants more, it is easier to forget that which you already have.

All I ever needed is here in my arms

J

You are truly happy. You have found a spouse who matches you. You have lived together for five years, four of those married. And your passions in life seem to match to an incredible extent. You live for life's basic pleasures, such as sex and good movies.

What you don't understand is how people can live in any other manner. Yeah, humanity does need children in order to continue, but getting them is not a smart person's choice. Now that you have understood that you really can live your youth's dreams all your life through, you wonder why everyone doesn't do the same.

That, in turn, makes you quite sarcastic, when you get in the right mood or a bit drunk. You start making nasty comments about people who do not go for their goals. One should never settle for anything less than what they really want.

You worry quite a lot about what is happening to your friend A. He/she will probably soon wither away, not having any time to see the two of you at all. A's spouse, R, seems quite jealous of his/her use of time, and the baby certainly won't make things any easier.

You don't like seeing S here with a new partner, not this soon. You're not feeling bad about S leaving your friend Nick – they did not really fit together – but you know that he/she swore to him during their relationship that K was “just a friend he/she would never consider a relationship with”. That's not nice, given the current situation. And K seems to be quite a rude person, too.

Your own spouse keeps eyeing others quite a lot, and would fuck every attractive person here without any complications. You share that trait quite a lot, so you two have an open relationship. So far it seems to suit you both.

In your own mind, you are the voice of reason, guiding people to a better life. Which, naturally, is precisely the same lifestyle that you have.

All I ever wanted

L

You are very pleased with your life. Things have finally worked out – a poor child has grown up to be a successful architect. You have a lovely spouse, with whom you have been living for five years now (four of those married). Your marriage is an open one, which suits you just fine, and you have a lovely home.

You love two things: sex and movies. On both your palate is very wide. There are several people here, too, whom you'd gladly take to your bed. You flirt with nearly all people, all the time, regardless of gender. You are also, almost without exception, always in a good mood. The only thing that can really anger you is hearing your spouse being insulted. J is the center of your life.

You really enjoy seeing A happy, despite his/her choices in life being very different from yours. R still seems like a good partner for A, despite being a bit less happy than before.

S's new partner seems like a nice enough person, but you don't want to spend time with him/her. You are somewhat bitter about your friend Nick (S's ex) is broken due to S's actions, but you won't let that disturb you. You are polite.

You'd like to get to know both M and T a lot better. Both seem very likable, but not at all compatible with one another.

You think of yourself as a good person who always gives others a fair chance, and then another of things do go wrong. But if you have a negative view on a person even after that second chance, nothing will ever make you change your view on them again.

Feelings are intense

S

You are here with a very confused feel: You have your own life, which is mostly in very good order, but you are constantly irritated. This is mostly because you hate being defined by others. No one should ever label you. And this is one place where there are loads of preconceptions about you present, views you can't really affect.

You are here as an old friend of one of the parents, as the ex of a good friend of another couple who are here, and, as the, well, "something" of the person with you. Despite this, you feel welcome and safe in some strange way.

There's an awful lot of the control freak in you, which would probably be very annoying to others if you weren't really good at most things you do. On the other hand, you now and then seem to drift into situations – be they arguments, helping people or your current relationship. You have a tendency to find believable explanations afterwards, and do not thus ponder your motives very deeply.

A is still a very dear friend to you, and you wish him/her happiness, R, A's spouse does not seem as happy, so there are probably dark clouds gathering. And A has indeed once told you that he/she doesn't believe the relationship can last.

You've liked both J and L a lot from the start, but there's a wedge between you now. You recently left Nick, their good friend, and soon after hooked up with an old friend of yours. They probably think you cheated on Nick, but it's in truth all just a coincidence.

K is important to you, and you like him/her a lot. Yet only a few seem to see the kind, caring person below the socially inept, rude surface. You nevertheless do not want to define your relationship in any way, not for now at least. It's all too soon. And it's a label.

You are a benevolent, but not very empathic person. You know what you yourself do and can do, and thus brook no extra explanations or excuses from anyone.

Words are trivial

K

You are, at the core, a kind and well-meaning person. You are just very awkward in social situations. You are successful in your studies, and really do want to help others. You are a person whose company, or bed, many people briefly enjoy, but no one ever stays for long. Not before - just maybe - now. You feel very much an outsider here, despite having been formally welcomed by everyone.

You and S have been friends for a long time, but hooked up rather recently and mostly by accident, soon after S and Nick broke up. Before that there wasn't anything beyond an occasional little infatuation between the two of you.

You really want to get to know the others here a lot better, because you want S's friends to accept and like you. J and L are the biggest problem, as they are Nick's friends, and originally know your partner through him. For them you are "their friend's ex's new partner", maybe even "the reason he got dumped". That's not good.

Your situation isn't made any easier by the fact that when you become nervous, you tend to accidentally insult others by your choices of words. What you think is a funny thing to say may frighteningly often offend others, and you don't necessarily understand even afterwards how rude you have just been.

You really want to be a person who is liked by others, and want to share your life with someone who is also like that.

Break the silence

A big thanks to the people who tested this scenario
at Ropecon 2008 and MittelPunkt 2009.

For more on Jeepform, visit <http://jeepen.org>