

FRAGMENTS

A FREEFORM LARP BY
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Colophon

Title: Fragments

Writer: Piotr Duda-Dziewierz

Players: 3

Game Master: 1

Preparation: 1 hour

Play time: 1 hour

Intro

Fragments is a family drama about a child and two parents, one of whom gradually succumbs to a disease which ultimately leads to an inevitable death. It's also a story about how we are affected by intense situations, and how these remove us from the safe everyday life and cause trauma. How we lose the ability to see clearly, and how we form deeply subjective memories about what has happened. There is never one single truth - only fragments, which in this case are three different viewpoints forming a trajectory leading to tragedy.

About the game

The scenario is an abstract story about the steady decline of a family. It contains six short scenes which are played in reverse chronological order. A central point in the scenario is, that it's gradually revealed that the sickness of the "sick" family member actually is alcohol abuse.

Because the theme of alcoholism is intense, and potentially a difficult one to be surprised with, it's important for you as game master to carefully observe the player's reactions throughout the game. I see the debriefing as mandatory, as it allows for proper discussion of the experience and the themes touched.

Abstraction

The scenario is written abstractly on purpose. The characters don't have names or gender. There is a child and two parents, but the child can be adopted so all combinations of gender are possible. In the workshop the players will get time to design their unique family, as well as to decide where and when their story takes place - again something not determined by me beforehand.

Execution

During the game, the players will be sitting closely on three chairs facing each other. You, the game master, will be standing besides them and setting the scenes.

Between the scenes you will be the narrator, and start the scenes by describing them. Each scene has the same structure - to begin with you read the intro text. Take your time, reading it with proper pace and intonation. It is supposed to give the players a starting point in the scene. A feeling where they are physically and

emotionally.

Then the three players in turn do a monologue, where they tell how their character experienced the situation just described, and how they felt at that time. It's important that it's their own subjective version of what happened. The two other players are not allowed to join or interrupt. It's a personal monologue - here's an example:

Example for a monologue. The Child, scene 1:

I'm sitting on the side of the bed, looking at what's left of my mother. She's so pale and bony. I... don't know what to say. This has been coming for so long, and I've been crying so much. But I'm all dried up now. All empty inside. In a way she's already gone. I don't recognize the mother I once knew, behind those hollowed eyes. I know this is coming to an end, but I don't know what to say or do. Even though I know it's wrong, I'd wish it would be over with now. There's no reason to keep it going. I look to my dad and can feel that he's not really there. I think about how my mother used to be, and feel how the tears start pressing after all.

When all the players have done their monologues, you say "And it happened like this" and they now play out the scene based on the intro and what was just said. Knowing all of the monologues, they can now play directly and create tension and conflict as they see fit. Still they have to base their play in their own monologue, and not do or say something that would contradict it. With the knowledge about the other's innermost thoughts, the scene should be set for some heartfelt and gut wrenching scenes, with the outcome already decided.

You cut the scene and continue to the next, where you start with its intro text. At the very end there is a special scene - a prologue - which is without the usual monologues.

The scenario is supposed to be short and intense. To achieve that the scenes have a fixed time limit. The monologues are two minutes for each player and the common scenes are four minutes. Try to get a feel for how long two and four minutes feel like. You're not supposed to sit with a stopwatch and cut people off as soon as they go over time - the limits are guidelines. But in order to keep it short and intense, they should be followed as much as possible.

With the initial workshop and final debriefing, the structure of the scenario is as follows:

Workshop

Intro

Structure of play

Monologue training

Distribution of Characters

The Game (For each scene 1-6)

Intro text

Monologues

Common scene

Debriefing

Workshop (1 hour)

Intro (5 minutes)

Present the scenario - what is to be expected and how long it will take (45 minutes preparation, one hour of play and 15 minutes of debriefing). Briefly explain the theme of a family tragedy, how not everything is known beforehand and how things will be revealed along the way. Small talk about initial expectation to get people to relax. Don't spoil anything or answer too specific questions!

Structure of play (10 minutes)

Go through the structure of play, once you get started. One hour of play. No breaks. Scenes consist of an intro, 3 monologues and a common scene. Point out that the monologues should be kept to 2 minutes, and the common scenes to 4. Describe the nature of the monologues and common scenes as explained above. The monologues are personal and indirect - they give a foundation to act out the common scenes together, where it will be possible to play on direct conflict. Show the players the signal to wrap up the monologue or scene - as you put a hand on their shoulder, they should try to end their current sentence or point. Go for a fade out or natural pause. It's not supposed to be cut too abruptly.

Monologue training and Touch (15 minutes)

It's important that the players understand how to do their monologues. Allow them to practice - to each in shift give a rehearsal monologue for two minutes. The theme is not important, it could be about last time they commuted to work, or how they were out shopping. Something everyday like. The form should be in present tense, something like: *"I'm in the bathroom looking in the mirror. Noticing the lines in my face. How I'm aging"*. Ask the players to focus on their inner thoughts, and on how they perceive their surroundings. If they don't seem to catch on, and are having problems doing a monologue, you can begin and give them an good example on how it can be done.

There is an important way touch can be utilized during the monologues. If the active speaker touches and holds the hand of another, the content said, will be known to the recipient of the touch. So innermost feelings and secrets can be said without touch, but something they want to signify the other(s) somehow know - even by accident - can be shared by the touch. The non-active players still can't vocally respond to what is being said. Emotionally though...

Distribution of characters (15 minutes)

Make it clear to the players that the characters are written abstractly in the sense that they're not anchored in a specific point in time. The scenario takes place over a stretch of time, and is played chronologically backwards, so the characters and their

interaction, will develop and change throughout the scenes. The characters, as they are written, do not represent how they actually are at the time the scenario starts (the chronological ending). If they had to be placed in the chronology, it would be in the middle - around scene 3-4. That means that the players must be prepared to improvise on how their relations will develop, and towards the end (chronological beginning) change their relations to for how they were before later events shaped them.

It's solely up to you, the game master, to decide how to distribute the characters, but personally I'd like to point out that "The Sick" can be a very tough character to play, and should be given to a resilient player, however you choose to interpret that.

After the players have read their characters, ask them to give them gender and names to form a more specific, personal story. It's recommendable (but not mandatory), as it gives some more tools to create the common story of the 3. As mentioned, there are no restrictions regarding gender, sexuality or age.

To help them finish their characters and relations, ask them some or all of the following questions. Ask them to answer shortly - it's not supposed to be very detailed. There should still be room for individual interpretation.

- What are your names?
- The parents are middle aged at the beginning (end). How old are they? Are they roughly the same age?
- How old is the child?
- How and where do you live?
- What do the parents do for a living?
- What is the child's biggest interest?

Debriefing – after the game (15 minutes)

Ask the players to close their eyes, and hold hands. Tell them:

"You slip away from the fragments of these other troubled lives, and return to your own. You are right here. Thank you all for creating this experience. Thank you. Please open your eyes."

When they do, give them a minute to come back, and then discuss the game. First and foremost be aware if anyone is feeling particularly affected, and focus on being there for them. Here are some things you can ask the players:

- How are you feeling after the game?
- What did you like?
- What didn't work?
- What do you think about the hidden theme about alcohol abuse?
- Is there something you didn't act on, some inner play or thoughts that you would like to share now?

Character #1: The Sick

As far as you can remember, the pain has weighed you down. Few moments of being happy and content amidst the general feeling empty and depressed. You don't feel that you truly belong anywhere. You will never reach your true potential, for the fear of failure will always hold you back. That's why every talent you ever had was smothered before it had a chance to flourish. You were something once. A promising artist. But the only thing you have to show for it now is a life full of regret over not have taken the chance.

You never liked your job, and see your whole career as a meaningless grind. A true Sisyfos-task of pushing the same boulder back and forth.

You love your partner and your child, but they can't help you. They never could. You don't envy them for having to put up with you, but on the other hand you get sick of their well meant care and critique. You can get defensive and angry when they try to push you too much. But you know that you need them. For without them you would be all alone with your demons.

The guilt you feel towards your child is overwhelming. You haven't been there, as you should have, for so very long now. You can't even begin to imagine how your child will be influenced by the way you are. The shame and self loathing go hand in hand with your parenthood.

You are a shell about to crack. Your breath is heavy and tired. You have stopped fearing the end.

What is the matter with you?

Character #2: The Spouse

This wasn't the way your life had supposed to be. You love your partner so much, and when you got the child, the future looked so bright and secure. But as time passed, you slowly noticed the shadow growing still stronger inside your loved one.

All this time you have tried so hard to be supportive and helpful. And patient. Oh so patient. But in the end it doesn't feel like you have really made a difference. And the love has suffered... You remember how you swore that you would always take care of your partner, and how you loved everything about your relationship. This love, that felt so tender and true. The security and care...

All of that started to change as the shadow grew, and you began to feel that you stayed because of duty, and not love. That you couldn't leave someone who meant so much to you, and was in so much pain. There had to be a solution. A cure.

During that time you also started feeling guilty about having neglected your child. The child that had to grow up so fast, and take care of itself while it could see one parent become still weaker, while the other sank under helpless despair.

You always saw yourself as a good honest person, who tries to do the right thing, no matter what. Why does everything always have to be so difficult for you?

What is the matter with you?

Character #3: The Child

It came slowly at first, this sense of something being wrong, but when you finally knew, it was far too late. You still remember the good careless times where you and your parents were in harmony, but that seems like a distant dream now.

One of them started to change. You didn't see it until it was obvious to everyone. You were told that the disease went up and down. Sometimes it was fine, and others terrible. But it was clear to see that over time it was going in the wrong direction.

Most of all you felt abandoned and let down by your parents. You didn't get any positive attention, and felt left to yourself. You lost interest in school, and started getting in trouble. But when these cries for help were overlooked, you couldn't bring yourself to do anything further. You felt sorry for your parents. One sick and weakening and the other desperately trying to help without much success.

But it was hard on you! It wasn't fair. They were supposed to take care of you, not the other way round. You envied your classmates trouble free lives. If only they knew, they would be nicer to you. Wouldn't they?

But they're not. They keep away from you, and you can see their parents looking worried at you and whisper, when they think you can't hear. Saying you're different.

Why couldn't your parents have been normal? Is it because of you, that everything went wrong?

What is the matter with you?

The Game (1 hour)

Intro

You sit together. The child and the parents. Or are you sitting? Are you here at all? This place is special. Outside of time and space. But you remember each other clearly. Your family. The good times, and the bad. The love and the pain starts to come back. To each of you in your own way. What has happened can't be changed, but can it be understood?

Right now the easiest thing to recall, is the ending of your story...

Scene 1 – The Death Bed

You are at the hospital. It's all about to come to an end. One of you is dying, and you've all seen it coming for a long time. That inevitable fate slouching towards you. But again, maybe you could have done something differently? It doesn't matter anymore. It's too late now - nothing more can be done. The Sick One is lying still with needles and tubes giving the last futile life support. In a way it's more peaceful than you had imagined. It doesn't feel dramatic, but almost unreal to be here in this sterile room and see each other for the last time. Your final moment is here. It's time to say goodbye. How do you even do that? Does it make any sense?

Order of monologues:

The Sick - The Spouse - The Child

Common scene:

Nothing of particular to note here. Don't rush into cutting if apparently nothing happens. Looks and thoughts can say more than words here. It's perfectly fine if this is a silent scene.

Scene 2 – The Admittal

You arrive at the hospital. It's hard to believe that it has come so far. The sickness is winning. Taking over. You are slowly realizing that that this probably can't be stopped anymore. That the hope has been in vain. You [Point to The Sick] are a shadow of your former self. The sickness has trashed your body and clouded your mind. You are cold. This place is so uninviting. Sharp fluorescent lights, electronic beeps and smell of iodine. You [Point to The Spouse] are somewhat panicked and are desperately trying to get the receptionist to get hold of a doctor and a bed. The Child is left alone, to support and hold up the collapsing sick parent.

Order of monologues:

The Spouse - The Child - The Sick

Common scene:

You play along as a NPC - The Receptionist Nurse. You are professional, curt counterbalance to the upset Spouse.

Scene 3 – The Breakdown

This is the breaking point. You [Point to The Sick] have finally succumbed. You are lying on the bathroom floor, and can't get up. You desperately try to focus when you family comes to help. The nausea is overwhelming and you throw up. Is the sickness winning? You try talking to each other, but there is no understanding. You come from different worlds. You are manic and incoherent. They are frightened and worried.

Order of monologues:

The Sick - The Child - The Spouse

Common scene:

This is supposed to be intense. If the players can't seem to get the scene started in that direction, try pushing it a bit with describing some details in this chaotic situation:

Blood is running down your face. Your eyes are distant, trying to find way back home.

It stinks of sour bilious vomit. It's all over the place.

Scene 4 – The Escalation

You [Point to The Sick] have been found out. They know now, and there is no turning back. You have kept your abuse hidden for so long, and even you know that they knew [Look at the others - "And you have"], they never knew how bad it actually was. That you had lost it and let the addiction take control of your life. You are in the kitchen, looking at the empty bottles The Child has found in the cleaning closet. Even as you talk you are intoxicated.

Order of monologues:

The Child - The Spouse - The Sick

Common scene:

This is a central and hopefully conflicted scene. If it fails to kick off, you can try to nudge it, by whisperingly repeat some of the most emotionally hurting thing said during the monologues.

Scene 5 – The Birthday Party

It's your birthday [Point to The Child]. The whole family is gathered, and the house is full of guests celebrating. You are happy and overwhelmed, but it's like you can sense something is not quite right, beneath the surface. The adults look worried when they think you are not looking their way. You [Point to The Sick] are holding a speech. It's difficult. You had to have a little help. Just one sip. Or was it two? Now you're lost for words. can't finish the speech. Your spouse saves you. Out of care or embarrassment? The others are looking. Something is wrong here.

Order of monologues:

The Sick - The Spouse - The Child

Common scene:

You play along as a NPC - The Mother of The Spouse / Mother-In-Law of The Sick / Grandmother of The Child. You try to find out what's wrong with The Sick.

Scene 6 (Prologue)

You are on the beach. It's a warm summer evening. Most other people have already gone home. You are all sitting close together on the big blanket in the dunes. It's been a long wonderful day. You ate everything in your giant picnic basket, and have been so relaxed that you decided to stay some longer. None of you was in a hurry to leave. You all know that you will go home in a while, but right now you are sitting holding each other and watching the first stars appear over the setting sun. Everything is good. And always will be.

Order of monologues:

There are no monologues in this last scene.

Common scene:

Get the players to sit close. Let them act out this final scene. What do you say when everything is perfect? Anything at all?

The End of Play - Beginning of Debriefing

Ask the players to close their eyes, and hold hands. Tell them:

You slip away from the fragments of these other troubled lives, and return to your own. You are right here. Thank you all for creating this experience. Thank you. Please open your eyes.

End note

Thank you for reading. And hopefully playing. If you as game master or player have any questions, or wish to share your experience with *Fragments*, you are more than welcome to write me at: piotr@tdcadsl.dk

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