


# I love Ana

**VUXENSPEL**

By Frederik Berg







**I love Ana is a terrible love story about a group of people who are madly in love with Ana. Through declarations of love, tumbler posts, love letters and other physical demonstrations they proclaim their love to Ana and try to prove that they deserve the attention and love only Anas can give.**

Unfortunately, Ana is demanding and merciless. It is difficult to love Ana the way she wants to be loved, so they will have to support each other to gain her affection. In the end, whether they obtain Ana's love is a matter of life or death.

**Would you sacrifice yourself for Ana?**

**Duration:** Four hours, depending on number of players.

**Genre:** Romantic Drama, Jeepform.

**Number of Players:** Six.  
Game is flexible however, but sizes between between 4-12 is possible

**Facilitator:** One.

**Difficulty:** Hard.

**Written by** Frederik Berg during 2011-2014 in Copenhagen, Denmark and Malmö, Sweden.

**All photos** by Flickr user Tracheotomy Bob. CC BY 2.0

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Sadly, this game would not have been made without you.



**I love Ana is also game about anorexia.** It's not a story about beauty. Nor about health. Or fitness. Or eating right. Or fat people. **This is a story about a deadly narrative.**

I had a couple of meetings with people suffering or had suffered from eating disorders. If you think about it, it's really not that hard. Perhaps a co-worker opens up to you, or you had a childhood friend, perhaps even yourself?

Fact is, it's super hard to treat. Even those people who are out of it, they still look back at the time when they were anorexic or bulimic, as a period of their lives when they were strong, in control of their lives (and bodies), had lots of energy so that they could study, hold two jobs and party all weekend.

This story—or success story—have none of those I spoken with left behind. The eating disorder is always lurking. This is perhaps what is at the heart of the matter. The narrative is so strong, so hard to let go, so convincing, that the conventional treatment system is treating the symptom and not the actual disorder.

What better way than retelling this story as a love story. A love story with a possible deadly outcome.

By making all this into a game, an interactive experience with tunnels directly to the heart of the pelvis is both interesting and dangerous. If this narrative is so strong, so alluring, could the players themselves develop an eating disorder just by playing it?

The answer is of course **no** (but perhaps?).

So, who's Ana? In the anorexia/bulimia online communities online, the disorder is often personified as respectively Ana or Mia. All of these, the pro-ana and thinspiration sites present one of those dark sides of online culture. Here people are discussing how to become a better anorexic, show pictures of themselves or people they idolize, or lead a diary.

That is in many ways how the game will play out except as a love story.



# I love Ana in a Nashell

The game is a love story about a group of people and their irrational love to a fictional person called Ana. All the characters are deeply in love with Ana, and they support each other in this love. It's a bit abstract, but think of it as a kind of support group.

## TRANSPARENCY

Should you tell the players what the game really is about? There are three ways to go about this.

1. **Tell them everything.**  
This is a game about eating disorders.
2. **Don't tell them anything.**  
Let the truth dawn on them, by themselves or at the end of the game, when you tell them.
3. **Tell some of them.**  
The narrative changes profoundly when there is this added context for some of the players.

Considering the sensitive content matter, **I recommend going with option one.** However, if you're playing with a hardcore group, consider options two and three.


Behind the curtain, all players are playing characters that have an eating disorder. They are all trying to help (and later force) each other to stay within the disorder personified as Ana.

No one is playing Ana. Not even the facilitator. Ana is an abstraction, who only exists within our play pretense world. Even there she's a projection and a representation of something else.

The story of the game is pretty straightforward. The game begins with the characters having fallen in love with Ana, then love evolves, turns sour and ends in either a breakup or sort-of a marriage. The nail in the coffin is of course, that getting married to Ana **means that you are dead.**

On the centerfold you can see a brief walkthrough of the different stages of the story and what happens in them.





This is a jeepform game. Jeepform is best described as the marriage between tabletop role-playing and live action role-playing with a kind nod towards dramatic impro. You act out the action as if you were an actor, except there are no lines to remember. The players will have to figure out what to say or do themselves. You can read more at [jeepen.org](http://jeepen.org).

This game is a bit different though. First of all, there is no real action, the game doesn't take place anywhere. Everything is played out via spoken word. The players are doing monologues about their love and other related things. The interplay between the players is mostly reduced to physical affirmation, cheers, and at a later stage of the game, psychological pressure.

## CHARACTERS

The game does not use characters as such. The players are asked for a name—they can use their own—or a any name they want. The rest will come during the game.

As such, the players are not going to play themselves or a version of themselves either. However **a character** will emerge during the game, based on the player's thoughts and experiences from real life.

Due to the emergent nature of this character, the game cheats the defence mechanism the player applies towards playing something they are not—**the alibi**—the game does not destroy the alibi, it passes through it, essentially rendering it inert.

This is intentional and part of the inner workings of the game. **A strong narrative can go around the usual protective mechanisms of the mind.** This narrative resembles a 'character' in the way that it is an internalized narrative of a person that you share mind and body with. It is a version of yourself or a version you confuse yourself with. It is the narrative you cannot unsee or forget.

This is the theory—in practice you may have varying results, as it is very difficult convince someone of something they refuse to be convinced into. Which is good.



## Stage 1: Falling in Love

This stage is all about building character and reaffirming the common agreement that they love Ana, and building up a ritual that will be repeated in other stages.

**1. Presentations** Players introduce themselves to the others by saying something like: “Hi My name is xxx, and I am in love with Ana”. The other players acknowledge this and respond “Hi xxx”. You are leading this, making sure it happens.

**2. Ana Who** Let the players collectively describe Ana. Let them use single sentences where they do not refer to physical attributes. Continue until they run out of steam (at least every player gets a say). Cheer afterwards.

**3. Declarations of love** Each player, one by one, declare their love to Ana. Ending each declaration of love, all players cheer the player. Give hugs, hi-fives etc. Rotate until all players have been through it.

**4. Create the “code”** The players must take turns setting up a list of “Do’s” and “Don’ts”. Let the players have one input each. Write this down.

**5. #Selfie** All the players take a selfie to Ana.

## Stage 2: Love Evolves

Introduce positive affirmation. Encourage players to get close to the active player. Use touch, whispers, hugs, cheering and all other kinds of supporting activity.

**6. Identification** “Hi My name is xxx, and I am in love with Ana”. Other players respond: “Hi xxx”

**7. Love Letters I** The players read aloud a love letter they wrote to Ana.

**8. Confessions** What would you sacrifice for Ana? Select one thing that is now out of your life.

**9. Future with Ana** Describe how you envision life with Ana.

**10. Mirror I** Have a conversation with yourself (played towards another player). Describe how much you feel the love reciprocated. The other must acknowledge and support.

**11. Love Letters II** All players read another letter to Ana aloud.

**12. Refine the Code** Encourage players to sharpen the code (They must). Use Ana as a threat.





## Stage 3: Love Turns Sour

Now things take a turn to the worse. It is difficult to give what Ana wants and the players start to fail Ana. Positive affirmation now becomes negative affirmation. You also become harsh and take a much more active (negative) role from now on.

**13. Reify Name and Code** “Hi, My name is xxx, and I am in love with Ana.” They respond “Hi xxx.”. The player then swears to uphold the code (by reading it aloud and “I promise to...”).

**14. Radical Honesty** Players take turns by telling how they have strayed from Ana’s love. Continue until at least everyone has said at least one thing.

**15. What would Ana say?** Players take turns on giving their take on what Ana would say to each individual character, based on what they admitted in the previous scene.

**16. “Interview”** You interview all the players one by one. What is holding them back from loving Ana? Why aren’t they good enough?

**17. She Loves Me/Loves Me Not** Let the players place themselves in order of who Ana loves the most.

**18. Love letters III** Let the players read aloud the last love letter to Ana. This time encourage peer-pressure and one-up’ing the previous letter.

**19. Video Confessional** The players all record a testimonial to Ana, where they promise to uphold the code, do better and love Ana higher.

**20. Mirror II** The character who came last in the She Loves Me/Loves Me Not Scene has another conversation with itself in front of a mirror (played towards all the other players), describing how much you try to love Ana. The other players are all but understanding.

**21. Recite the code** A simple scene where all players recite the code in union.

It is now time for the players to take the ultimate choice. Will they follow Ana or will they stay behind without her love?

## Stage 4: Til Death Do Us Part

**The Last Letter** Each player reads their last letter aloud. The players must tell Ana whether they will truly choose her over everything and follow her or if they will stay behind without her love.







# Thoughts and Techniques

In many ways the game employs a procedural mechanic in order to get the players into the game. It is both a character generation process as well as part of the game itself. The point of having all these (semi-identical) repeating scenes is twofold. First of all it serves the identification process—by reaffirming your role (ie your name and that you love Ana), you strengthen identity. Sharing something you that all do, creates a very strong communal feeling—even if it at first seems forced.

Secondly, agreeing on common values (that later turn on you), sharpening, and reifying them also helps strengthen the bond between the players, so that when the time is right, being thrown out just makes you want to go back even more.

The monologue types scenes are all ways of letting the players in their own words contextualize their characters identity and values to themselves.

## Positive Affirmations

Everyone likes to feel good, special, or successful and it is central to the game that this mechanic is properly used. The players must in the first two stages be very attentive to the other players. Use touching, claps, shoutouts, hugs, cheering and all other kinds of supporting activity. It's really not that hard. As the stages progress the

players should step up the affirmations gradually, so they culminate at

In the last two stages things are a bit different. Now instead of being nice and friendly, they're supposed to be harsh, competitive, and focusing on what is not good enough. Sadly, this is not that hard either.

You will have to be the driving force in this, as changing this behavior in the players can take a while, as they're most likely stuck in the previous mode.

## The Changing Facilitator Role

As facilitator or game master your role changes during the game. You have two distinct roles during the game. First of all you are the one that makes sure that the players do what they should—just tell them what you want them to do. This stays more or less constant during the game.

Where things begin to become more interesting is in stage two and three, where you sort-of enter the game. As facilitator or game master you are in a position of power and by using (and later abusing) this power, you can set the rules of what is possible and acceptable. If you're accepting, friendly and comforting or nasty, unfair and partial, it has a tremendous effect.



# Aftercare

Remember to take care of your players after the game has ended. What I am describing here is the **worst case scenario**, but you'll most likely end somewhere before that. Also, if you already haven't, now might be a good time to talk about what the game was really about.

I suggest you take the time necessary to make everyone land properly. Since the latter parts of the game can be pretty intense, let the players shed their characters and return to their normal selves, leaving behind any bad stuff with their now shedded character.

After an emotional experience with shifting identities, it is important to know that you cannot directly shift back into who you were before the game. This takes some time, but it is important to send players off in the right direction.

The main goal is to get the players out of character and to let them leave with the positive experiences intact and the negative stuff rendered harmless. This is not because I do not want players to handle the bad stuff, it is just that often, **describing or focusing on negative stuff actually strengthens the negative experience** either for player affected or the other players.

1. **Insist that they use “my character” instead of “I”** to further distance the player from their character. This is to avoid any confusion between who “I” was and who the player was.
2. **Let them describe their experience in positive terms.** Instead of focusing on what was hard or tough, let them focus on what they got out of the game what was great, what inspired them or made them think about.
3. **Talk about the technical things.** What was difficult to play, what was easy, what did they feel have the best effect. Keep things on a meta level.

As the facilitator of the game, it is your job to listen and be attentive. It is really important that you let the players talk. You do not need to have an answer to everything, but most often it is just the fact **that someone listens** that helps.

Oh, and all of the above goes for you as well.







Vi åker Jeep

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