

# Me and the Rat

Love and Deception at Oceanic Research Base A24

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## INTRODUCTION

Benjy Jackson works for the government. He's an engineer. An engineer on an offshore laboratory—which ostensibly studies marine life but actually spends most of its time monitoring undersea weapons tests. Benjy likes his job, and even gets along reasonably well with his boss, Jacob Hodges. When Sierra Annis joined the team a few months ago, they struck up a relationship. In fact, Benjy has plans to marry the woman.

Last night, however, Benjy found something out: Sierra is a rat. She's not here to do her PhD research, she's here to steal the lab's data, using it to expose the entire operation to various international agencies—everything the lab does breaks half a dozen treaties and international law. Sierra is due to leave the base in just four days, her research ostensibly complete. She asks Benjy not to reveal her, and tells him that after she's left, he can meet up with her in Paris...but only if she knows she can trust him.

## THE CAST

There need to be four players. Each takes on a single role:

- Benjy Jackson, a mild-mannered engineer.
- Sierra Annis, oceanographer, spy, whistle-blower, or some combination thereof.
- Jacob Hodges, the base administrator.
- Terry Godwin, a slimy government man who's currently conducting an inspection of the base and its operations.

The game plays out over the four days on the base before Sierra leaves. No one but Benjy knows what she's trying to do, though Jacob is suspicious that *someone* on-base is a spy and he's out to found him. Each character has his own goals and motivations. At the end of play, each player will get points for how well he's seen those through.

### Sierra

Sierra's goal is to finish getting the data she needs off the station's computers. That takes time, however, and her access is restricted. Above anything, though, Sierra wants not to be caught: even if she can't get the data, she'll leave the station in four days. If Hodges gets evidence against her, she'll be arrested, flown to the mainland and then shot as a traitor.

Sierra is fairly confident that Benjy won't give her away. She'd like to meet up with him later, but only if she can trust him. She doesn't *need* his help, but it will say a lot to her about how far he's willing to go. If he's too loyal to his government, then he's too dangerous to her.

## **Benjy**

Benjy doesn't know what he's going to do. He's in love with Sierra but also has loyalties to his government. He doesn't want her to be captured but also doesn't really want her to get the data. If her mission failed, but she escaped, he'd be happiest. At the same time, he has to prove that he's trustworthy if he wants to meet up with her in Paris—and he desperately wants that. But no matter what he does, he also can't get caught: Jacob wouldn't hesitate to turn Benjy over to the government if he had evidence against him.

## **Jacob**

Jacob likes to run a tight ship, and wants to produce good results from the tests. He suspects there's a spy on board but he has no real evidence. Above all, he doesn't want anyone to get the data and he wants to expose the spy, whoever he is. If Benjy turns out to be involved, Jacob wouldn't be particularly happy but wouldn't protect Benjy either.

Additionally, Jacob wants the government to know what a good job he's doing, and that all depends on the report Terry is writing. For the past month Jacob has been working overtime to make sure everything looks good, and he relies on Benjy to help do the same.

## **Terry**

Terry is a small, insecure man. He's at the base to do a job and his report will reflect whatever he sees at there—in this, at least, he's basically professional. He'll write the report no matter what anyone else does and his real concerns are elsewhere.

The moment he first spoke with Sierra, he began to fawn over her. She's young and attractive, and Terry desperately wants some show of favor from her. If he can get that, his ego will receive a tremendous boost and he'll even convince himself that they'll meet up later and he can sweep her off her feet. Of course this is ridiculous, and Sierra dislikes Terry intensely, but that won't stop her from using him.

Terry also has a rivalry with Benjy. Benjy's post at the base will be up in a few months and both of them have applied for a much better job elsewhere. If Terry can convince Jacob to mistrust Benjy, that will—Terry thinks—ensure Benjy's downfall and Terry's own installment. Terry is aware that Benjy and Sierra are involved, and that irks him, but he knows Sierra is leaving in four days and is sure that will be the end of the relationship.

Terry is also a loyal citizen and wouldn't want the base's data to get into the wrong hands. If Sierra gets captured, Terry won't gain anything but he won't really lose out either: he'll be glad that he's not involved with her, but any favors he's gotten will be so much the better for having come from a spy.

To sum up (with goals in order of importance)...

### **Sierra Annis**

- Doesn't want to be captured.
- Wants to get the data.
- Wants to trust Benjy.

### **Benjy Jackson**

- Doesn't want to be captured.
- Doesn't want Sierra to be captured.
- Wants Sierra to trust him.
- Doesn't want Sierra to get the data.

### **Jacob Hodges**

- Doesn't want Sierra to get the data.
- Wants to expose Sierra.
- Wants Terry to write a favorable report.

### **Terry**

- Wants Sierra to favor him.
- Wants Jacob not to trust Benjy.
- Doesn't want Sierra to get the data.

## **TURNS**

Play involves a steady turn rotation between the players. On each turn, the active player frames a scene on the station that involves his character performing a particular action, and possibly involving one other character as well. (Only two characters may appear in a given scene.) The scene may take place anywhere on the station; a list of convenient sets is given later.

There are five cycles before the game ends. Scenes basically need to come in chronological order, so the scene you describe must come at some time after the last player's, or maybe simultaneous. The first three cycles correspond to each of the first three days; the last two cycles both take place during the last day.

### **Tokens**

Players get tokens which they'll influence scene outcomes with. At the beginning of each day (not cycle), every player gets tokens, depending on their character.

Character	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Sierra	8	4	4	10
Benjy	4	6	8	6
Jacob	10	4	6	4
Terry	6	8	5	5

## RESOURCES

There are several resources that characters can acquire and trade during the game. Some act as a victory conditions as well.

*Access* is how easily you can get data from the station's computers. Anyone can hold Access. Jacob has an infinite pool of it. Benjy starts with 2 Access.

*Data* are the station's critical testing results. Terry holds an infinite amount. Sierra or Benjy can have Data. Jacob can trade to get Data but he immediately destroys it, so can never trade it back.

*Trust* measures the relationship other characters have with Benjy. Sierra has a Trust score and so does Jacob. Sierra's score begins at 0, while Jacob's begins at 3.

*Favors* are the minor toss-away gestures that Sierra can make to please Terry. Sierra has an infinite amount to give and only Terry can have them (he *can* trade them back to her though). Whenever Terry gains a Favor, his player also gets 1 token.

*Evidence* is proof of suspicious behavior. Evidence is handled somewhat differently than other resources. It comes in two forms: evidence against Sierra, and evidence against Benjy. When Sierra or Benjy do certain actions, Evidence against them will be created and deposited in a general pool, unclaimed. Any character can then do another action to possess that Evidence. Sierra can acquire Evidence, but she immediately destroys it, so can never trade it to anyone.

*Approval* is the positive contents of Terry report on the installation. Terry has an infinite pool to give away, but it can be earned in other ways as well. For Approval to really count, it must make its way to Jacob. Sierra cannot possess Approval.

## ACTIONS

In every scene, your character has to be taking some kind of action, which will have a mechanical effect in terms of resources. There are three main types of actions.

Accumulation – Most characters can spend a scene just accumulating some resource. They can accumulate 1 point at a time.

Resource Trading – Characters can trade, on a 1 to 1 basis, for different resources. They can trade in the same currency or different currencies, e.g. 1 evidence for 1 data (and since not all characters can hold the same resources, this becomes essential). Trust is used backwards: by trusting someone, you expect something in return.

Gift – You can also simply give someone most types of resource, but not trust. That has to be earned.

## SCENE RESOLUTION

Every scene has two possible outcomes. These are defined by the action of the active character and possibly by other players as well. A die roll, and the bidding of tokens, will decide which gets used.

### Proposing Outcomes

If the active character wants to accumulate some resource, then no other character is involved. One outcome will be successfully acquiring the resource. The other outcome depends on what specific resource is involved. Often, the character will still get his chosen resource, but will incur a side-effect as well.

The other types of action, resource trading and gifting, involve a second character and therefore a second player. First, the active player names the gift or trade that he wants to take place in the scene. The other player can agree to this or offer an alternative. If they agree, then a default alternative is used: the exchange or gift doesn't take place.

In gifts and trades, players can name any amount of resource to be exchanged. But exchanges always happen one a 1 to 1 basis: 1 Trust for 1 Access; 2 Evidence for 2 Favors, etc. Never 1 for 2 or any other combination. Additionally, if the players disagree over the quantity of resources at stake, the lower number takes priority and is used in both outcomes. E.g. one player wants to trade 3 Approval for 3 Favors; the other wants to Gift 1 Favor. The quantity of 1 is used, so the actual outcomes are now (a) trade 1 Approval for 1 Favor, and (b) gift 1 Favor.

### Bidding Tokens

Next, all the players in the game—whether they have a character in the scene or not—can take a side in the conflict and bid tokens in support of it. Any number of tokens can be bid. Bidding takes place in one cycle only, so each player only gets to make one bid. The “opposing” player goes first, if there is one. Then the active player goes. Then any other players, going clockwise from the active player.

### Rolling

Now two players roll dice for each of the outcomes. The active player rolls for his outcome, the opposing player rolls for his. If there is no opposing player, someone who bid tokens for the alternative outcome rolls. If no one bid on it, just pick someone.

Each player rolls 1d4 and adds whatever tokens were bid. Bonuses based on the active player and the chosen action should also be added in Whatever outcome has the highest result is chosen. If they tie, it goes to the active player's outcome.

## **Results**

After the roll, mark any resource modifications on your character sheet and add Evidence to the common pool. Now each of the player who rolled narrates his character's part in the scene, using dialog and description. Their dialog and actions must somehow result in the prescribed outcome, so the players may want to discuss the outcome before acting it out.

The player who won the roll gets final say on what happens, and can ask for something to be changed if it doesn't fit the chosen outcome.

If there was only one character in the scene, and the character won, then only his player needs to say anything. If he loses, though, the other player can describe the environment working against him.

## **SPECIFIC ACTIONS**

Although the general types of action are outlined above, nearly every resource is handled in a slightly different way, and each character gets his own special rules. This section describes all the actions you can do with each character, based around each of the resources.

### **General Rules**

Access, Data, Approval and Evidence may be destroyed freely by whoever possesses it, and no scene is necessary.

Whenever Benjy and Sierra are trading resources, Sierra's outcome has a +2 to its roll because of Benjy's love for her.

### **Access**

While Jacob has an infinite supply, Benjy and Sierra can accumulate it; Terry can only trade for it. The alternative outcome when accumulating Access still gives the character 1 Access, but also produces 1 Evidence against them.

Sierra or Benjy can do a special action that converts Access to Data. This is mostly like a regular Accumulate action, in that no other characters are involved, but 1 Access is given up for 1 Data. As above, the alternate outcome is to leave Evidence, while still making the exchange. Benjy has a -2 penalty when doing this.

Anyone can trade in Access.

## **Data**

Terry has an infinite supply of Data which he can gift or trade. Other characters can perform the Access conversion described above. When Jacob acquires Data, he immediately destroys it.

## **Trust**

Trust is different from the above resources. It cannot be gifted or accumulated, only traded for. Sierra and Jacob may acquire Trust for Benjy as part of any trade. Trust cannot be destroyed except as part of a trade (1 Trust destroyed for 1 other resource gained, for instance). Trust has a special role regarding Evidence against Benjy: see below.

## **Favors**

Sierra has an infinite supply of Favors that she can gift or trade to Terry. Neither Benjy or Jacob can acquire them. When Terry acquires any, his player gets an equal amount of Tokens. Terry can also trade Favors back, if he so wishes.

## **Approval**

Approval can come into the game world in two ways. First, Terry has an infinite supply and can trade or gift it to Benjy or Jacob. Second, Benjy or Jacob can accumulate it directly with an appropriate scene, which Terry does not have to be a part of. Sierra cannot deal with Approval.

## **Evidence**

Evidence is the most complicated of the resources. Whenever Benjy or Sierra fail in a scene where they're accumulating Data or Access, Evidence against them will be created and added to a common pool (record it on a scrap of paper in the middle of the table; there are separate pools for each of them). Additionally, Benjy or Sierra can themselves trade with other character to create evidence and add it to the pool—in essence, they make some small admission of guilt.

Once Evidence is in the general pool, it can be acquired by any character who performs an accumulation action. Sierra automatically destroys any Evidence she acquires, whether it's against her or Benjy. Anyone else can hang onto the Evidence and trade or gift it.

There's one further complication, however. When Jacob acquires Evidence against Benjy, it cancels out against any existing Trust Jacob has. That is, both the Trust and the Evidence are destroyed. Only when Jacob has 0 Trust in Benjy can he actually hold onto Evidence against him.

## **ENDING THE GAME**

After four days, Sierra will leave the base. In what stat she leaves, and all the characters' futures depends on what's happened in five rounds of play. Major events will unfold as follows.

- If Sierra has 10 Data or more, she's completed her mission and ratted out the base...unless she's captured.
- If Jacob has 6 Evidence against Sierra, she's arrested and killed.
- If Jacob has 6 Evidence against Benjy, he's arrested and killed.
- If Sierra and Benjy haven't been captured, and if Sierra has 6 or more Trust in Benjy, then they meet up in Paris.

Count up points for each player according to the following rules.

### **Sierra Annis**

- 6 pts if she isn't captured.
- 12 pts if she accomplishes her mission as well.
- 7 pts if she meets up with Benjy in Paris.

### **Benjy Jackson**

- 2 pts if he isn't captured, 0 pts *total* if he is.
- 2 pts if Sierra isn't captured.
- 10 pts if they meet up in Paris.
- 3 pts if Sierra fails in her mission.

### **Jacob Hodges**

- 10 pts if Sierra fails her mission.
- 4 pts if Sierra is captured.
- 1 pt for every Approval.

### **Terry Godwin**

- 6 pts if Sierra fails her mission.
- 4 pts if Jacob has 0 Trust in Benjy.
- 1 pt for every Favor.

## **AFTERWARD**

What will you get when you play through the five cycles? Only how you play the character can decide. Is the game about maximizing your points at endgame? Kind of. Points say how well you maximized your character's goals, and that's an important part of play. But, on the other hand, if you wan your character to suffer terribly because you think he or she deserves it, then that's your prerogative too.



### **Recommended Ambiance and props.**

Play in a harshly lit area. Eat prepackaged food (preferably government issue). Listen to a random mix of James Bond theme tracks and sappy love songs. Use poker chips for Tokens and, if you're clever, other daily objects for the other resources. If you have a huge pile of old floppy disks, for instance, use those for Data. At least have a few such items lying around, representing each of the major resources.

### **Credit**

Credit goes to two games in particular. The Token distribution is ripped off straight from Primetime Adventures by Matt Wilson. The basic inspiration for the small cast of characters, with fixed roles, came from My Love for You is Way Out of Line by "Deidzoeb" (<http://evilbobdayjob.tripod.com/ml4u/>).

**FIN**

# Me and the Rat

**Sierra Annis**  
 played by \_\_\_\_\_

Access       Data       Tokens

Trust       Favors  (∞)

**Common Pool**

**Evidence**  
 vs Sierra       vs Benjy

√	Day	Sierra	Benji	Jacob	Terry
	1	8	4	10	6
	2	4	6	4	8
	3	4	8	6	5
	4	10	6	4	5

**Benjy Jackson**  
 played by \_\_\_\_\_

Access       Data       Approval

**Evidence**  
 vs Sierra       vs Me       Tokens

**Jacob Hodges**  
 played by \_\_\_\_\_

Access  (∞)      Data       Tokens

Trust       Approval

**Evidence**  
 vs Sierra       vs Benjy

**Terry Godwin**  
 played by \_\_\_\_\_

Access       Data  (∞)      Tokens

Favors       Approval  (∞)

**Evidence**  
 vs Sierra       vs Benjy