



# The Upgrade

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*Players Manual*

Welcome to The Upgrade!, a freeform role-play about the imaginary game show with the same name. The pace will be high as we are thrown back and forth between different events. We'll be running a tight ship, and even though the game masters will try to keep tabs on time, you do good by remembering that time is a limited commodity. After all, this is television, where time is expensive, things happen fast and are edited down into its most basic elements. Thus, you will not always have the time to be slow and subtle. Before you do anything else, read this manual through as it describes the techniques used in this game. Then go back and read the outline of the game below one more time. Then get started on reading your character and forming a relationship with partner.

# Outline of the Game

1. Reading the player manual (this text).
2. Read your character. Find out who is playing your partner. Flesh out your relationship.
3. The game masters talk about of the techniques that are used in the game. By now, about 30 minutes should have passed.
4. Short in-character media training exercise for participating on television. This exercise doubles as a warm-up exercise.
5. The show begins. You will be in a studio shooting the weekly follow-up show.
6. The final event of the programme. This is a closed vote by all participants whether they would like to STAY in their old relationships, or UPGRADE to the new one.

Flesh out your interpretation of your character by answering the personal questions sheet. This sheet will be available in-game, so make sure to make the appropriate spelling errors, etc. At the same time you do this, get into character. When you are finished filling out the form, you should be in character. Find a good trigger to catapult you back into character—you will be swapping characters a lot.

Answer the couple questions sheet together with your partner. Do this in character—imagine you are in the

kitchen of your home answering the questions delivered to you by mail, or whatever makes you tick. These answers will also be available in-game.

In addition to playing your characters on The Upgrade! show, you will also play extras including: producers, directors, staff on the Upgrade! resort, etc. Except from the hosts of the show, there are no or few non-player characters. Importantly, you will play characters that's already been played by someone else, so pay attention to previous players' character interpretations.

*As you may not know, The Upgrade! show is broadcast as a daily 60-minute program with a long weekly follow-up show that recaps the most important events of the past week. The game will alter between playing the recording of the follow-up, which includes interviews, questions from viewers and studio audience, and, perhaps most important, the screening of clips from the past week. All this will be played and we will try to jump as seamlessly as possible.*

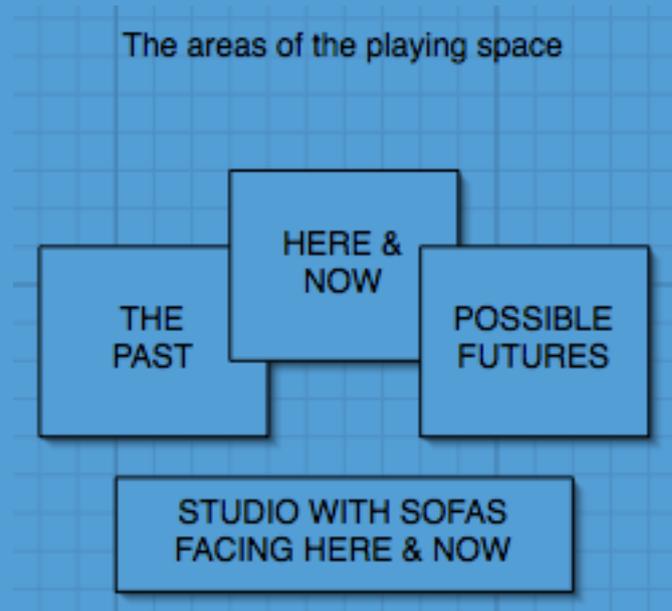
*The show will start with a recap of the first episode where who should date who was decided using the speed-dating concept (will be explained by the game masters). Remember that the show has been going for at least a week, so whenever you are playing in the studio, there is a history of events to play to—maybe you have met the love of your life the past week or wonder if your wife have been as faithful to you as you to her.*

New relationships where both partners independently votes UPGRADE get to stay together for another week at the UPGRADE luxury resort. The studio audience may also vote on the “couple of the week”, or by popular demand force two people into a couple overriding the result of the previously mentioned vote. Yep, it is a mess, but luckily, the game ends here and we can sort out who will be dating who afterwards.

# About the Scene and Setting

The entire game will take place in this room. As this game is not about surprises, don't leave the room if you want to have a private in-game conversation. We think that the CHARACTERS are better suited to know less if the PLAYERS know everything.

For the game, we divide the physical space into three areas. The MIDDLE area is the here and now—the shooting of the reality show. Everything that goes on in the LEFTMOST area reflects things that actually happened in the past-time (the way the characters remember them, anyway), whereas everything that goes on in the RIGHTMOST area is the future, or more correct, a POSSIBLE future—something that may or may not happen. The outer areas are used to give perspective to what happens in the middle—where the most of the game is played. For notational convenience we will refer to the areas as the PAST AREA, the NOW AREA, and the FUTURE AREA.



# Telegraphing

One power of table-top and freeform role-play over most larp is that we can use the same physical space over and over for different scenes for different settings. For The Upgrade!, we discourage all use of decor as it would implicitly control what situations that will be played. Due to the lack of decor, it is important that we communicate to others what setting a scene takes place in, or what in-game thing is represented by the blue cup etc. We refer to this activity as TELEGRAPHING. Now, forgive us for giving a few examples.

Telegraphing can be done for example by actually stating the information off-game, or by weaving the information into the game while playing. If two players, out of the blue, wish to inject a small scene played in the past area, they might upon physically entering the area state, briefly to interrupt the game as little as possible, "Erkki and Ritva, in their kitchen, 1987". This should give the other players enough information to interpret the scene.

Of course, Erkki could just have come on to the set, calling to Ritva, "Ritva dear, would you come into the kitchen?", and Ritva would answer, "Of course, Erkki", or something or other, to give the same information. If the exact year is important (the choice of area to play in telegraphs that the scene takes place in the past), Erkki could state "1987" as he enters, or something more subtle like arguing when something happened in a way that gives the year away. However, if the year is important, it is probably better to state it clearly than to risk losing it just to avoid a second of out-of-character communication.

A situation where avoiding the second of out-of-character communication is easier and therefore more appropriate is when you want to give flowers to your date, and the only available physical prop is a pen, say. To make sure that everyone understands that the pen now represents a bouquet of roses, hand the pen over while saying "I wanted to give you red roses, but they only had white." Symbolic props like this are powerful: the pen can be handed over, smelled, be put in a cup and broken, just like a real rose.

**To make telegraphing work, learn to accept facts brought into the game by other players! Don't point out mistakes unless you fear they will mess up the game; if the name of your supporting character is not yet given and someone turns to you and says "What do you think, Mikko?", it is probably best for you to be Mikko for this scene.**

As this is probably obvious, just try to think about what you need to telegraph to the other players as you play. If you are new to this style of play—don't be intimidated. Even though it isn't hard, a few mistakes are bound to happen in the beginning. As with most things in role-playing, you master them by doing them. Always bear in mind that it is better to use less agile, out-of-character ways of telegraphing than to not telegraph.



## Supplemental Scenes

Supplemental scenes are played in the past area or the future area and are all about providing a perspective on what goes on in the middle (now). Below we exemplify various kinds of supplemental scenes.

**Playing the past** Playing the past is best explained by example. During a scene where Erkki and Päivi are dating and go on a romantic stroll on a high cliff, it might be interesting (for both the players and the audience) to know that Erkki is actually afraid of heights. An idle player comes up with this idea and enters the past area grabbing another player by the arm to play a scene as Erkki and his regular partner Ritva where they have a similar moment ruined by his fear of heights. The game in the now area is suspended for the duration of this scene.

Erkki's being scared of heights was invented entirely by an idle non-Erkki player. When this scene is played by, it adds to the Erkki character. Naturally, Erkki of today might have overcome this fear, or might be able to control it. The point here is to show that there is more to this scene than what you can see on the screen. Also, hopefully, Erkki in the now area can make some use of this additional input when the supplemental scene has ended.

**IMPORTANT:** if Erkki is in the now area playing a scene, Erkki should be restrictive about pausing his scene and play a past or possible future. Reserve this for any idle players.

## Possible futures

Possible futures work mostly like scenes in the past, but with a different impact on the story. Instead of providing insights into the past life of a character, they convey what might happen in the future if a scene goes in a particular direction, or what might go on in the mind of a character.

For example: after disclosing Erkki's fear of heights in the above example, some other idle non-Erkki and non-Päivi players might want to start a possible future scene where they as Erkki and Päivi have been together for a few years and Päivi talks about that day on the cliff where Erkki, due to his fear of heights, turned out to be so "vulnerable and sensitive that she couldn't but help falling for him".

Another example: Erkki and Päivi have a tense moment where they have to decide whether to have the courage to get physical or not. Two idle players may start a scene where they as Erkki and Päivi are married with screaming children and quarreling, which might be perceived as a thought in Erkki's and/or Päivi's head. After the scene has been played, a turned off Päivi in the now area slowly moves away from Erkki.

## Monologues

The purpose of monologues are to inform the other PLAYERS what goes on in the mind of your character. If your character really does not want to date the person sitting opposite, but you feel this would give rise to some great scenes, this is vital information to convey to other players so that they can make this situation happen. Don't be afraid to speak less in character in favor of sharing its thoughts with other players through monologues. Be sure to make it clear that what you are saying is a monologue (for example, by using a different tone of voice) and not something that is actually spoken in-game.

For example, playing a scene in the now area, Erkki suddenly stands up and changes the tone of his voice to mark that what he is saying is spoken in-game. He then proceeds to do an inner monologue: Fuck, that was stupid. I should never have kissed her. I didn't want to kiss her. Just because I can see the lust in her eyes, I feel compelled to satisfy her. I am never going to get rid of her now! Damn, damn, damn! I'm in love with Ritva for Christ sake! Why can't I stop thinking with my dick?

Erkki then slides back into the couch and continues to make out with Päivi.

## Supporting Characters

Few games are complete without extras, or supporting characters. Examples of supporting characters are the psychiatrist coming to check that the contestants are doing okay, the media trainers that initially train the contestants to work well on TV, some random passer-by that happens to witness some indiscrete fondeling at the beach, the bell boy, etc. Supporting characters can be played by anyone and introduced on-demand at any time. For example, to save a scene that's going into a stalemate, an idle player can suddenly choose to appear as the psychiatrist.

**Use supporting characters with care. Don't over-use them and think about telegraphing when you bring a new role into play.**

## Several Players Playing The Same Role

A supporting character might be played by different players at different times. Also, a character might be in play in different areas simultaneously—that is, being played by several players simultaneously. This is not a problem.

You chose how to interpret any differences in how a character is portrayed—as different character's view of the psychiatrist, etc., or to ignore it as just a side-effect. Just make sure you observe how a supporting character is played so that you can play it later, if necessary.

## Playing a Scene Several Times

Sometimes we might want to play the same scene several times. One example is playing a scene once for each character in it to show how the differences in how he or she experienced it. In this case, it should be OK to deviate from the "original scene" since everything is just nuances in peoples' heads. Another example is playing the same scene edited in a different way suitable for the younger audience. In this case, clips from other scenes (played or not) might be edited in, etc. Just act smart and it will go well.

## Producer Scenes

In our view of television, the producers control the final product. They will look at demographics and say, “we are going to lose the teenage girls unless we show more scenes with Ritva” and then do something about it. They will also decide what to do to what couples, like make them go bungy-jumping to test their relationship—if both contestants dare jump, they receive 1,000 euros. The game masters will probably start producer scenes, but feel free to bring the producers in to alter the course of the game at any time. Remember, the producers have full power over the hosts—that is, playing a producer, you have power over your game master. It makes perfect sense to become a producer for just 15 seconds to give a game master an order. For example, after the voting following the speed-dating, you might want to order an interview with the character that got three roses.

## Interview Scenes

In the interview scenes, a game master will state the forum, the time and ask one or two questions. For example, the game master might say “live TV-interview in teenage pop-music program three months after the show”, or “scornful cultural column in morning newspaper” and then have a go. Questions might be “what was the worst thing that happened during the show?” or “When did you realise that Erkki was really falling in love with you?”. If the game master asks you about something that has not yet happened in the game—just go along for the ride.

**Make sure not to say anything that will be too constraining to the game very early on—it is better to be a bit vague.**



## Behind the scenes

Sometimes, for example during retakes of scenes in the studio, or between commercial breaks if it is a live broadcast, the camera will be off. What happens behind the scenes? Are there domestic quarrels between supposedly, when the camera is on, loving couples? Are the producers trying to make the show more scandalous? You decide. Just be aware of the status of the camera and choose if you want to act on it or not.

## Inserting a Scene Before the Current One

There is great power in playing a scene and temporally placing it before another, already played scene. For example, if Erkki and Päivi has a tender moment where Erkki says "I love you. Wow, I never said that to anyone before!", other players can easily insert a supplemental scene, where Erkki says the exact same thing to Ritva the night before.

## About Resolving Action Situations in The Upgrade!

If Mauri is supposed to jump through a burning ring with a car in order to win 2,000 euros and a luxury dinner with Ritva, we will not make car sounds or run about the room. Instead, during the action event, our attention will be turned at someone in the audience, who will play a viewer in front of a TV set and through his reactions communicate what happens to Mauri, and decide if he succeeds.

“Fuck! He really does it, damn! Like an old stuntman! He deserves that dinner. Jesus, my palms are wet. Pass me a beer.”

### Comment

So, you may ask, “when can I (should I) start a supplemental scene?” The answer is “any time you think it is called for.” Just remember two things: this game is not about stealing screen-time; and don’t disrupt the game too much—there is still a central story-arc somewhere.

