Jump: A LARP About Suicide, by Abigail Robin

Content Warning:

This game delves deeply into the inner world of people contemplating suicide. Its design follows media guidelines for talking about suicide where possible and relevant. I have also used my training as a therapist and LARP designer/player to create as much safety as I can for players before, during and after the game. Please carefully consider whether this is a safe and healthy game for you to run, play or read given your own mental health history, current needs, and triggers. If you are considering suicide at this time, there is help. In the United States, call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. This number will be on character sheets as well.

Overview:

Jump is a LARP about a group of individuals contemplating suicide. It can accommodate between four and ten players, and one or two GMs (two are recommended, particularly for larger groups). Game length varies based on player numbers (see below). It is intended to bring players deeply into the mental and emotional world of people driven to the brink of death by despair, and to explore if and how it is possible to save ourselves and others.

Materials and Preparation:

GM(s): print two or three copies of each character sheet. In addition, print one copy of each Hope Card. You will also need a method of keeping time—stopwatch, cell phone with alarm, clock, etc., that is large enough to be visible to players. Set up two spaces for play, one to be the "black box" where past scenes will happen, and one to be the Bridge. The Bridge space should include a line on the ground, made in tape, pen, etc. (it must be a barrier that can be easily stepped over). Crossing this line signifies having jumped from the Bridge. Additionally, provide one blank slip of paper per player.

Next, create and post, visible to players, a schedule for the game, using the following guidelines: Each Bridge scene is ten minutes long. Each flashback is five minutes long. Game opens and closes with a Bridge scene, and contains six total Bridge scenes. An additional 10 minutes of play (for two flashbacks) is required for each player. With 4-5 players, flashbacks come in pairs, with one Bridge scene between each two. With 6-10 players, flashbacks should begin to be clustered in groups of three.

Sample Schedule for Five Players:

5min Flashback 2
10min Bridge
5min Flashback 2
5min Flashback 2
10min Bridge
5min Flashback 2
5min Flashback 2
10min Bridge

How to Play:

Safety Mechanisms:

Read these aloud to the group, or summarize. If the players are unfamiliar with these or similar mechanisms, have them practice. This will make it much more likely that the tools will be used when they are needed.

- 1. OK Check-in: If a player is concerned about another player, they may make an "OK" sign with their thumb and forefinger without pausing the action. If the other player is fine with what's happening, they should respond with a thumbs up, and play continues. If they are not all right, they should provide a thumbs down, and those two players should step out of character to determine how best to continue. If the whole group is involved in the scene with those two, everyone should pause and determine how to proceed. A thumbs sideways gesture should be treated as a thumbs down.
- 2. Cut and Brake: If a player says "Cut!", ALL play must pause while all players determine how best to proceed. If a player says "Brake," play may continue, but should decrease in intensity.
- 3. **The Door is Always Open:** If, for any reason, a player no longer wishes to continue the game, they may leave at any time. Due to the nature of this game, please check in briefly with the GM on your way out so they can provide care and resources as needed.
- 4. X Arms: If a player is cast in a role with which they are not comfortable, they may cross their arms over their own chest. This indicates to the protagonist that they should immediately and without discussion move on and cast someone else in this role.

Next, explain the structure of the game to the group, reading the following summaries aloud, starting here:

Schedule

There will be six total scenes on the bridge and two flashbacks for each player. The first flashbacks are in a random order, chosen by the GM randomly selecting slips of paper with character names on them. The order of the second flashbacks are chosen by the GM's discretion, aimed at creating maximum dramatic impact. It is essential that the GM keep the players to the timeline, even if it feels awkward and cuts scenes off midstream. This both imitates the way that flashbacks and memories often appear as interruptions in real life, and also to show the inevitable ticking down of the final hours of the lives of the characters who choose to end them. Finally, it creates containment and limits for a game about a difficult subject. This way, everyone will know exactly when it will be over.

Hope Cards

Hope Cards are a mechanic designed to shape each person's game, and to provide a structure for players to determine whether their characters jump off the Bridge. Each character archetype automatically comes with one specific Hope Card. In addition, each player receives two more from the pile at random. It's always OK to trade in a card for any reason. Hope Cards represent what your character would need to find the internal and external resources not to jump (even if just not today). They describe events and realizations that can happen in flashbacks, or in present scenes. You may choose to play towards saving your character, to play specifically against saving your character, or to just see what happens. It is completely up to you. It is expected that players aiming towards a specific goal will use this metagame knowledge as they structure their flashbacks. If your character achieves all three of the things on their Hope Cards during any portion of the game, the character does not jump. If they do not achieve all three, they do. The player is the ultimate and only arbiter of whether a Hope Card condition has happened or not. The information on these cards may not at any time be shared with any other character or player. This is to avoid other players metagaming on your behalf, or having a say in your character to jump or not depending on how you interpret the events of the game through the lens of the Hope Cards. This is not cheating, and is in fact a design element of the game.

Flashbacks

Flashbacks receive their initial framing from the player to whose character they belong. Flashbacks have the following three qualities:

- 1. Uncertainty: All characters have the opportunity make significant choices during the scene, not just the protagonist.
- 2. Change: The flashback depicts a time after which the character's life would never be the same again.
- 3. Movement: The character takes a step towards or away from death.

Flashbacks are not literal depictions of what actually happened in the past, though they are played in a realistic style. They show what the character remembers of what happened in their own past, as they stand on the Bridge. If a player wishes, they may structure a flashback to try to have the character specifically achieve, or not achieve, one of the items on one of the Hope Cards, but there are no guarantees. If a Hope Card condition is met in flashback, this symbolizes a character re-processing an old memory in such a way that it brings them strength when they are standing on the bridge. When the flashback begins, the player should take a brief moment (the clock starts as this is happening, not after) to assign roles to the other players, and provide an extremely brief description of who these people are, and the general framing of the scene they intend. If a player is unable or unwilling to play a role in which they have been cast, they should make X-Arms (see safety mechanics above) and the protagonist should cast someone else in the role. The player may fully frame the scene when it begins, but may not dictate where it goes, as this would make it too easy to simply plan out Hope Card events. From there, the other players may improvise, keeping in mind how they can best contribute to the scene having the three qualities described above. When the protagonist is done framing, they should tell the scene to begin with a command like "go" or "begin." Any players not cast in the scene should watch silently from nearby.

For example: "You play my mom. She's stern and religious, but loves to feed people. You're my dad. He's strong and silent and we've never had a real conversation. You're my sister, who loves nerdy movies and is angry all the time. The scene is the first Thanksgiving after I came out. Go."

Bridge Scenes

Scenes on The Bridge are unstructured. They're an opportunity for the characters to interact with one another, to process the flashbacks they just experienced (characters can remember their own flashbacks only), to share with one another why they are there, and to try to make a decision about whether to jump. Events from a character's Hope Cards can also happen during these scenes. Characters may make the choice to jump any time after their own second flashbacks, but should plan to remain for the majority of the game. Jumping is signified by simply walking across the line. Anyone who chooses for their character to jump before the game is over may still play roles in others' flashbacks, but should watch silently from the edge of the room during bridge scenes.

During the final scene on the Bridge, each player remaining should consider whether their own Hope Card conditions have been met, whether they wish to interpret their experiences as meeting conditions or not, and make a final decision about whether their character will jump. When the final ten-minute timer winds down, the game is over regardless of what has happened or not. Be aware of the time. **(Stop reading aloud here)**

Character Choice and Preparation

Allow players to review the possible characters, and choose the one they wish to play. Extra characters are provided so each player has a choice, and so that players can opt out of characters they are not comfortable playing. Tell players that they may request that a limited number of characters be removed from play entirely. If too many characters are removed from play for the number of players you have, it is OK to have more than one person playing the same archetype. (If this does happen, the players should briefly confer to differentiate their portrayals.) When each player has a sheet, players should take a moment to answer the questions, and choose names for their respective characters. They should then write the name on the provided slip of paper, for the random drawing for the first flashbacks. Then, hand two Hope Cards at random to each player, as well as the Hope Card assigned to their archetype.

When each player has chosen a character and received three total Hope Cards, provide a few minutes for them to individually consider the answers to the following questions, writing them down if desired (these will also be on the character sheets).

- 1. What drove you to the point of choosing to come to the Bridge today?
- 2. Who will miss you the most?
- 3. Who or what has hurt you the most deeply?
- 4. What memory or scene lingers in your mind as you stand here?

After completing the questions, have players begin to walk around the room. As they walk, have them first walk neutrally "as themselves." Then, have them walk as their archetype. Last, they should use this movement to transition into walking as their characters. Then, read this description aloud as they walk:

Hundreds of people commit suicide each year by jumping off The Bridge. You are here today to become one of them. You look at each other, and instinctively you know why all of you are here. For this moment, nobody else is watching you. If you're going to do it, now is the time.

Each player should then enter the game by introducing themselves to the group with the ritual phrase "My name is [character name] and I am [character archetype]." As each player speaks this introduction, they walk into the Bridge play space. When all characters have entered, begin the schedule you created prior to game.

Debrief

When the game is over, all players and GM should take a moment of silence. Next, have the players (even those whose characters have jumped) begin to walk around the space as their characters. As they walk, direct them to slowly transition into walking as themselves.

Then, with as little speech as possible, the group moves into a circle. (The GM should softly prompt these actions.) Next, each player should take a moment, individually, to say to the group. "I am not [character's name] and I am not [archetype, or something that is true about character] (for example: dead, suicidal, an addict, etc.). My name is [real name] and I am [a positive archetype, or role you identify with]." (For example "I am not Alice and I am not a Cripple. My name is Abigail and I am a Healer/therapist.") After each group member makes this statement, one by one, each member of the group should respond to that person with the ritual phrase "[real name], I'm glad you're here," making eye contact if they feel comfortable doing so.

To close, players should take 5 minutes to, in pairs or groups of three, answer these questions.

- 1. What do you contribute the world/your community/your family/others?
- 2. What do you do to take care of yourself when you are struggling?
- 3. Who or what do you love deeply?

GMs, acknowledge that these questions may be hard to answer at this moment. Circulate between groups and offer suggestions to anyone who might be having trouble.

Following this, end the formal portion of the game and move into more unstructured debrief as appropriate.

Characters:

A Note on Naming: These character archetypes are given names based on the negative self-talk that suicidal people engage in, and the negative names others may call them. Some of them have also been reclaimed by some of those they name, and used in more positive ways. In this game, these names are used to support the player in entering their world, not because this game intends to put them down, or in any way devalue their struggles and experiences.

Casting Note: The Failure was conceived of as a white cis male. The Bitch was conceived of as a female character. However, these characters can be portrayed by players of any gender and race. If any player would like to keep The Victim in the game but limit the nature of the violation (i.e. no sexual assault), it is fine for them to place this limitation on the person portraying this character prior to casting.

The Failure

The failure is not succeeding in his career and/or personal life the way he believes society expects him to. He has recently been fired from his job, or will be soon. His personal relationships are rocky at best. His culture promised him success, and has not delivered, which he believes must be his fault. He has always defined himself by his successes. Without them, he feels like a failure.

Hope Card: A nontraditional success

Flashbacks: A firing, a father-figure's expectations, a woman's reliance, a breakup, a rejection, a moment of shame, a moment of acceptance

The Bitch

The bitch has been a little unstable her whole life. Her relationships with others burn bright and intense, and then explode into nothing. She often feels intense rage or grief. Some have called her their manic pixie dream girl. Some have just called her crazy. This likely isn't the first time she's considered suicide. Even her therapist may have rejected her.

Hope Card: Sabotage your own suicide attempt.

Flashbacks: a previous attempt, a breakup, an intense relationship, a meltdown, a deep connection.

The Burden

The burden is an older person who increasingly requires care and assistance from the people around them, probably their family. They might live in an old peoples' home and receive few visits, or live with younger relatives and fear that they take too many resources, and their time is over.

Hope Card: Contribute

Flashbacks: A peer's death, a child's rejection, a moment of confusion, a moment of contribution, a moment of nostalgia or anachronism.

The Cripple

The cripple has been feeling this physical pain for years. They find their world narrowing as their broken body allows them to do fewer and fewer things. The doctors don't have much to suggest, and friends and family are getting impatient at the lack of improvement each time they ask for updates.

Hope Card: The world widens

Flashbacks: A doctor's failure, a useless suggestion, a small win, the loss of a defining activity, a moment of shame, a diagnosis, a new limitation.

The Freak

The freak is a LGBTQQIA individual (player's choice) who has been rejected by family and/or friends after coming out. They fear that the price of living openly as who they truly are is too much, but can no longer deal with living in the closet. They might still fear going to hell, or the hatred of a god or gods.

Hope Card: Find acceptance.

Flashbacks: a coming out, a community, a rejection, a religious moment, a romance, a transition.

The Addict

The addict is addicted to a substance or substances. They might be in recovery, or recovery might feel completely out of reach. They might have had a recent relapse. Either way, life without this substance is becoming unbearable, but so is life as an addict. *Hope Card: An apology.*

Flashbacks: getting sober, a relapse, a program, an apology, a lost relationship, a moment of hopelessness.

The Crazy

The crazy has suffered from mental illness for many years. They're depressed, or anxious, or both. They've tried the therapy, the meds, maybe even the hospitals. Still, their brain just doesn't quite work the way they wish it would.

Hope Card: A reason to keep trying.

Flashbacks: a diagnosis, a medication, a hospital stay, a family member or friend's judgement, a misunderstanding, a meltdown

The Cursed

Suicide has always been a viable possibility for the cursed. It runs in the family, and they've already lost a parent, maybe a sibling, a grandparent, an aunt or uncle. There are family stories about it going back even further. And now, something has happened to drive the cursed to follow the family tradition. *Hope Card: Reject a script.*

Flashbacks: learn family history, find a body, stop another's suicide attempt, a mental health crisis, a moment of familial love

The Zombie

The zombie's life isn't working. It hasn't worked for some time. They're staying put in a bad marriage, a bad job, a bad group of friends, but they can't quite find the energy to make the necessary changes, and can't imagine a different life. Maybe it would be easier to end it than to try to fix it.

Hope Card: Something startles you deeply.

Flashbacks: an attempt at change (successful, unsuccessful), failure to react to a violation, a boundary is transgressed, a value is ignored, a moment of choice.

The Martyr

The martyr devotes all of their time to helping others with their problems. It's getting exhausting. They don't give any attention to self-care, and hang their self-worth on others. They're here because they're starting to believe that those same people who they've devoted their life to helping might be better off if they were dead. *Hope Card: A boundary*

Flashbacks: a boundary is transgressed, a boundary is set, genuinely helping someone, helping at your own expense.

The Victim

Something terrible has happened to the victim-- war, violation, abuse, a terrible secret they can never share. Does anyone even believe them? Slowly but surely, the terrible thing is eating the victim up inside, causing flashbacks, anger and avoidance. Sometimes, it's just too hard to live with what happened. *Hope Card: Be believed*

Flashbacks: the moment of violation, asked to keep a secret, speaking up, a moment of dissociation, an attack of rage. (Note: if the victim is a victim of sexual assault, do not portray this violation as a flashback.)

Hope Cards

Medication, Therapy, The right piece of fiction, The kind of rage that makes you want to show them you can survive, Connection to a public figure's mental health journey, Connection to a community of help, Repair a relationship, Repair an unmet need), Connect to nature, Receive praise for an accomplishment, Embrace the full experience of a sense, Realize who you would hurt, Ask for help, (Make a plan, Call a hotline, Tell the truth, Tell your story, Begin a project, Make a dramatic change, Someone cares, A thank you, Become afraid of death, A message from your own past

Designer's Note

This was not an easy game to write. Like "The Cursed," I grew up in a family with at least one suicide per generation as far back as I'm aware. I've had my own experience with depression, though I've never seriously considered ending my own life. As a therapist, I've worked with multiple clients with suicidal ideation, some severe. In September 2017, a close friend jumped off a bridge to his death, and my community was shattered. This game began as a way to vent my heartbreak at this tragic, unnecessary loss, and explore my confusion at what causes some people to make this most final decision. I spent hours obsessing over how we can save others from their own demons, and how we can save ourselves. I've fully written and discarded two entire systems for how to decide which characters jump, as I re-read therapy articles and textbooks, considered the experiences of my family and my clients, and tried to understand. In the end, I created Hope Cards and their system to represent the way that we can never predict the unexpected events and elements that will save someone from suicide. We can only offer what help we can, and hope it turns out to be what they need. This game is the result of my history, my training, my explorations, and my grief.

This game is dedicated to John (4/1/82 - 9/20/17)

The Failure	The Bitch
The failure is not succeeding in his career and/or personal life the way he believes society expects him to. He has recently been fired from his job, or will be soon. His personal relationships are rocky at best. His culture promised him success, and has not delivered, which he believes must be his fault. He has always defined himself by his successes. Without them, he feels like a failure.	The bitch has been a little unstable her whole life. Her relationships with others burn bright and intense, and then explode into nothing. She often feels intense rage or grief. Some have called her their manic pixie dream girl. Some have just called her crazy. This likely isn't the first time she's considered suicide. Even her therapist may have rejected her.
Hope Card: A nontraditional success	Hope Card: Sabotage your own suicide attempt.
Flashbacks: A firing, a father-figure's expectations, a breakup, a rejection, a moment of shame, a moment of acceptance, a woman's reliance	Flashbacks: a previous attempt, a breakup, an intense relationship, a meltdown, a deep connection.
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The Burden	The Cripple
The burden is an older person who increasingly requires care and assistance from the people around them, probably their family. They might live in an old peoples' home and receive few visits, or live with younger relatives and fear that they take too many resources, and their time is over.	The cripple has been feeling this physical pain for years. They find their world narrowing as their broken body allows them to do fewer and fewer things. The doctors don't have much to suggest, and friends and family are getting impatient at the lack of improvement each time they ask for updates.
Hope Card: Contribute	Hope Card: The world widens
Flashbacks: A peer's death, a child's rejection, a moment of confusion, a moment of contribution, a moment of nostalgia or anachronism.	Flashbacks: A doctor's failure, a useless suggestion, a small win, the loss of a defining activity, a moment of shame, a diagnosis, a new limitation.
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The Freak	The Addict
The Fleak	
The freak is a LGBTQQIA individual (player's choice) who has been rejected by family and/or friends after coming out. They fear that the price of living openly as who they truly are is too much, but can no longer deal with living in the closet. They might still fear going to hell, or the hatred of a god or gods.	The addict is addicted to a substance or substances. They might be in recovery, or recovery might feel completely out of reach. They might have had a recent relapse. Either way, life without this substance is becoming unbearable, but so is life as an addict.
Hope Card: Find acceptance.	Hope Card: An apology.
Flashbacks: a coming out, a community, a rejection, a religious moment, a romance, a transition.	Flashbacks: getting sober, a relapse, a program, an apology, a lost relationship, a moment of hopelessness.
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The Crazy	The Cursed
The crazy has suffered from mental illness for many years. They're depressed, or anxious, or both. They've tried the therapy, the meds, maybe even the hospitals. Still, their brain just doesn't quite work the way they wish it would.	Suicide has always been a viable possibility for the cursed. It runs in the family, and they've already lost a parent, maybe a sibling, a grandparent, an aunt or uncle. There are family stories about it going back even further. And now, something has happened to drive the cursed to follow the family tradition.
Hope Card: A reason to keep trying.	
	Hope Card: Reject a script.
Flashbacks: a diagnosis, a medication, a hospital stay, a family member or friend's judgement, a misunderstanding, a meltdown	Flashbacks: learn family history, find a body, stop another's suicide attempt, a mental health crisis, a
family member or friend's judgement, a	Flashbacks: learn family history, find a body, stop

The Zombie	The Martyr
The zombie's life isn't working. It hasn't worked for some time. They're staying put in a bad marriage, a bad job, a bad group of friends, but they can't quite find the energy to make the necessary changes, and can't imagine a different life. Maybe it would be easier to end it than to try to fix it. <i>Hope Card: Something startles you deeply.</i>	The martyr devotes all of their time to helping others with their problems. It's getting exhausting. They don't give any attention to self-care, and hang their self-worth on others. They're here because they're starting to believe that those same people who they've devoted their life to helping might be better off if they were dead.
	Hope Card: A boundary
Flashbacks: an attempt at change (successful, unsuccessful), failure to react to a violation, a boundary is transgressed, a value is ignored, a moment of choice.	Flashbacks: a boundary is transgressed, a boundary is set, genuinely helping someone, helping at your own expense.
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The Victim	
Something terrible has happened to the victim war, violation, abuse, a terrible secret they can never share. Does anyone even believe them? Slowly but surely, the terrible thing is eating the victim up inside, causing flashbacks, anger and avoidance. Sometimes, it's just too hard to live with what happened.	
Hope Card: Be believed	
Flashbacks: a moment of violation, asked to keep a secret, speaking up, a moment of dissociation, an attack of rage. (Note: if the victim is a victim of sexual assault, do not portray this violation as a flashback. See note.)	
 What drove you to the point of choosing to come to the Bridge today? Who will miss you the most? Who or what has hurt you the most deeply? What memory or scene lingers in your mind as you stand here? 	
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A Nontraditional Success (The Failure)	Sabotage Your Own Suicide Attempt (The Bitch)	Contribute (The Burden)
The World Widens (The Cripple)	Find Acceptance (The Freak)	An Apology (The Addict)
A Reason to Keep Trying (The Crazy)	Reject a Script (The Cursed)	Something Startles You Deeply (The Zombie)
A Boundary (The Martyr)	Be Believed (The Victim)	Medication

Therapy	The Right Piece of Fiction	The kind of rage that makes you want to show them you can survive
Connection to a public figure's mental health journey	Connection to a Community of Help	Repair a Relationship
Repair an Unmet Need	Connect to Nature	Receive Praise for an Accomplishment
Embrace the Full Experience of a Sense	Realize Who You Would Hurt	Ask For Help

Make a Plan	Call a Hotline	Tell the Truth
Tell Your Story	Begin a Project	Make a Dramatic Change
Someone Cares	A Thank You	Become Afraid of Death
A Message From Your Own Past		