

Leaving On A Jet Plane

A Freeform Game About Escape and Personal Sacrifice

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Introduction

Your country is on the brink. Fascist thought has spread across your home country and into the very heart of the government. Government officials started passing a sweeping legislative agenda stripping people of their rights one by one. It began with minority groups, with immigrants and queer people and those of different religions. Media access and freedom of the press was first curtailed and then all but annihilated in favor of government controlled propaganda. Social media is being monitored. Freedom of movement has been curtailed, with all citizens required to carry identification at all times “for their protection.” The writing has long since been on the wall. But the worst is yet to come.

They call the new law a chance to collect the names of “subversives” in the country. Those who are working against the public good will be listed in a database. Already a pilot program was initiated in a small city and stories escaped of people rounded up, never to be seen again.

In the face of this madness, you’re worried about your safety. For any number of reasons, you’d belong on the list of “subversives.” Once the law goes into effect, you might be one of those people disappeared by government forces. You need a plan--and fast.

With the media quashed, all news comes by word of mouth. One day, while in the grocery store, someone from the neighborhood sidles up beside you. You know them a little from around. They say the bill is going to go into effect soon, and your city will be one of the first registered and swept for said subversives.

“You need to get away, and I have a way out,” they tell you. “There’s a plane, a private plane ready to take off in one week. It’s going to a safe country, someplace you’ll never have to worry about your freedom again.”

There it is. A chance for freedom. You think about it, hard, and a week later all your bags are packed. You’re ready to go. And before you know it, you stand on the threshold of a new life, far away from home.

Leaving On A Jetplane is a game about the choice to escape fascism and what you must leave behind. It was inspired by the escalating repressive government actions in many countries. This game might not represent what is going on in our world now, but it is only a few steps away in many cases. That fear and anxiety, inspired by the slight towards repression and fascist thought is the main inspiration behind *Leaving On A Jetplane*. For that reason, this game is played very *close to home*, with personal fears, hopes, and dreams brought to the table. Take those fears of a frightening future and bring them into the game with you, packed up in that suitcase, ready to go.

Game Play

Number of Players: 5-6

Number of Facilitators: 1

Where To Play: In a public place one can use to simulate an airport terminal

Props: Four index cards or folded pieces of paper as security passes, index cards and pens for character creation, index card for X card

Trigger/Content Warnings: fascism, high tension, escape, possible capture, mistrust, tragedy

Stages of Play:

- Player Introduction (approx. 30 minutes)
- The Game (approx. 1 hour)
- Debriefing (approx. 30 minutes)

Player Introduction

Find a table out in the open. This is a game meant to be played where others can see. That table however begins out of character where the facilitator and the players can prepare for the game to start.

To begin, the facilitator introduces the setting based on the text on page one. If there are more details the facilitator wants to add (example: details about the country in which the game is being played), then feel free to tailor the game as needed. Most games can remain abstract, playing on the overall idea of repression rather than focusing on detail. The most important part, however, is that each character has felt they needed to flee immediately or risk being imprisoned or perhaps worse.

After introducing the game's setting, there are two parts left to the introduction: *character preparation* and a brief *workshop* to explain the mechanics for the game.

Character Preparation

Now that the players know the basics of the setting, it's time for them to build their characters. As mentioned earlier, this game is meant to be played *close to home*, meaning the players are meant to build characters which bring in aspects of their lives, emotions, and concerns. To facilitate this and build a character for the game, the facilitator leads the players through a series of questions to help the player flesh out who they are playing, their lives, and everything they're leaving behind. The players *should not* share their answers, but instead write the answers on their cards and keep them hidden.

The facilitator can come up with their own questions, but some popular ones might be:

- How old are you?
- What did you do professionally?
- Did you have family? Pets? Friends?
Name a couple.
- Who/what was the most important thing
in your life.
- What put you in the government's
crosshairs?
- What made you decide to run?
- What are you leaving behind that you'll
miss the most?
- What is your name?

As said above, *the information about each character should NOT be shared with one another*. The characters do not know one another and therefore will only share in character. Only the facilitator may look at each player's card so they can know the names and some details about the characters.

Workshop

With characters prepared, the facilitator must introduce the players to the mechanics used for this game. There are two kinds of mechanics: the *game mechanics* used during play for the purpose of play, and the *safety mechanics* which help keep the game emotionally, mentally, and physically safe.

Game Mechanics

The Hush: The world around you is part of the game, representing the public within the nearly fascist state. Anyone could be listening, so you must be careful. Any time anyone who isn't part of the game comes near the table, you must either fall silent or change the subject so as not to be caught talking about escape. The facilitator will be listening nearby. If they believe the players haven't changed the subject fast enough, or if they can hear you talking about escape, they may come over and tap a player on the shoulder. Three taps, and the facilitator will come over as a security guard and ask everyone about their business, but will leave them in play. (Note this means three taps on any player, not three for each player). If the players are tapped three more times, the guard comes over once more, growing more suspicious. Should the facilitator come over three times, the guard asks the players to come with them to the security offices--they've been caught and the game ends.

Safety Mechanics

This game is meant to be played close to home. The anxieties and fears of a rising fascist state can be very intense for many people. *Bleed* (the phenomenon of emotions crossing over from real life into the game and vice versa) must be considered, along with just the possibility of strong emotional response to the material. Therefore, safety mechanics should be used during the game. Two of those mechanics to be employed are the *OK Check-In*, the *X Card* and the *Look Down* mechanic:

- **OK Check-In:** Exchanges in game can sometimes become heated. To check if your partner in the exchange is all right, hold your hand up to your chest and flash the OK symbol. If the other person gives a thumbs up, keep on going. If they flash a 'maybe' or 'no' symbol, please disengage with the topic and move on to something else.
- **X Card:** The X-Card is an index card with a large X placed in the middle of the table. Should any content come up during play which a player finds objectionable, they can touch the X-Card. This immediately means players ought to move on from the subject.
- **Look Down:** Should a player have a serious problem with the material or for any reason need to step away from the table, they may put a hand up to shade their eyes and step away. This will signal to the facilitator as well as the other players they must go out of character and should not be disturbed.

It's important to note that if a player uses any of these techniques, they *should not be questioned why*. Play should continue without interrogating the player in question. Additionally, the facilitator should use this time to ask what content the players will want out of bounds for the entire game no matter what, sharing them together with the entire group.

The Game

Part One

Each of the players should leave the table with the facilitator remaining behind. When each of them approach and sit down, the facilitator explains the plan: there is a private plane at the airport. To get to it, the characters must have a security clearance, which the facilitator has arranged. The facilitator leaves to let the characters talk among themselves. A few minutes later, the facilitator returns with some bad news: they were only able to procure three security passes. Several people will not be able to get on the plane. The facilitator says they'll try to get more passes while the characters talk amongst themselves to make a decision: who will go and who will stay.

Part Two

The characters discuss themselves, their lives, who should stay and who should go. This situation can bring about paranoia, concern about trusting one another, etc. Moreover, several of the characters will have to decide whether or not they'll be willing to stay behind and face down the real possibility of being caught behind a fascist regime's borders as things get worse. The facilitator acts as the government guard, using The Hush mechanic to watch out for those players who are not careful speaking in front of others, or speaking too loudly in public. Note: the game can end here if the players are not careful with the facilitator leading them away should they break the Hush mechanic too often. That's what happens in a fascist state.

Part Three

The facilitator returns and says time is up: it's time to go. However, they're being given an extra miracle. The facilitator is giving up their own seat to one of the others to go. There is no time to lose. Someone must be chosen quickly to get on the plane out of those who were going to be left behind. The exchange must be brisk and pressed by the facilitator who, once the decision is made, hands out the security passes. Once the decision is made, those with security passes walk away together and stand not far away, listening in on what is said. The facilitator stays with those left behind to ask them: "What do you think will happen to them?"

The characters left behind then narrate something together for those characters who escaped. It can be bright, or sad - whatever they decide. But when it is over, the characters who are going free can say yes if they agree with the narrative presented, or no if they do not. If they do not, they get to say a few words about what really happened to them after they got on the plane.

Then, as the boundaries of the game fall away and the players return to themselves, the facilitator asks those whose characters escaped just what happened to those left behind. The players whose characters escaped narrate the other characters' futures. Only this time, there is no chance to say yes or no. The narrative put forward is set. There is no freedom of choice, not in a land where that freedom is gone.

With these decisions made and the characters' futures set, the game is over.

Debrief

After the game ends, the facilitator should gather together the players around the table once more for a debrief about the game. The debrief is less intended for players to hash out the events of the game once more (which is often called war stories in some game circles). Instead, the facilitator should lead players one by one to express how they felt about the game's events. Specifically, they ought to be encouraged to express their emotions in a safe space. 'I' statements are encouraged as opposed to directly addressing another player over feelings (example: "I felt mortified when called out about being rich" rather than "Sarah really hurt me when she called me out over being rich.")

Players should also be encouraged to speak about how they felt regarding the thematics of the game, including what feelings might have been brought up about fascist states, lack of freedom, etc. Individual character choices and the emotions they raise are important, but so are feelings over the broader themes and how they made people feel.

It should take approximately half an hour to go through the debrief. Once it wraps to a good breaking point, the facilitator may also ask if players would like a partner to further talk about the events of the game. If players are interested, the facilitator should help pair the players together so they can continue exploring their feelings afterwards.

With that, the facilitator should thank the players and the session of **Leaving On A Jet Plane** has come to an end.