

The Fake Out by Dakota Bloom.

For 1 person, about someone else they love.

The Fake Out is a playing-card-based journaling solo larp about how someone you love and care for has a decline in health, seems to improve just a bit, but ultimately dies despite your best efforts. This game is about the last weeks of someone you love's life, and hoping against hope that they'll get better. This game is made for Hope, my partner and I's contrary and lovely and strong old Chihuahua, who suffered heart failure last night. I'll be using her for my examples of play later on.

A. Purpose

I am having a very hard time expressing how I am feeling after Hope died- but blindsided by her health situation while at the same time as being so grateful that she died as well as she did is a start. I'm hoping that by playing this game it'll come across what I mean. This game is a grieving process. Take care of yourself, and please use the Safety Tools in D.1-2.

B. What You'll Need to Play

1. A standard deck of cards, including Jokers
2. A journal and pen to record your days with your loved one.
3. A loved one you have in mind, either Hope or someone you care about who spiraled out.

C. Preparation & Basics

1. With your deck, make separate stacks of the following cards and shuffle them well. We'll call these mini-decks **brackets**. King is high card, Ace is low. Make sure all four suite versions of each card are present, and make sure the brackets stay separate until said otherwise.
 - a. Bracket A: King, Queen, & Jack
 - b. Bracket B: 10, 9, & 8
 - c. Bracket C: 7, 6, & 5
 - d. Bracket D: 4, 3, 2, & A
 - e. The Two Jokers
2. Each turn you draw a card from the current brackets (mini-decks), note the suite and the number. Then write a journal entry, perhaps a few sentences long, about your main interaction with them that day.
3. Each card drawn represents a day spent living near or with your loved one. The number on the card represents how well they are doing that day; for example, the King is your loved one in excellent health, a Seven is them struggling but holding on, and Ace on the edge of death. The Suite tells you what the mood of your main interaction was with your loved one that day.

- a. The default assumed Suite meanings are below. Feel free to replace them with meanings or examples that resonate more with you.
 - ♥ = It was loving, fun, and brings a warm smile to remember. A cold night's toasty snuggles, sweet looks from under a pillow, a lovely walk on a windy day.
 - ♠ = It was exciting, boisterous, and may make you smile ruefully later. Play fighting over a chew toy, a goofy tumble when you tried to p, waking the neighbors with weird noises and being embarrassed later.
 - ♣ = It was hard, cantankerous on either or both ends, and may give you pause later to remember. A tough pain day leading to mutual grumpiness, stubbornness over taking vital medicine, or feeling helplessness in the face of what was happening.
 - ♦ = It was not good enough, maybe too busy to enjoy each others' time properly, and it's something to regret later. Maybe it was work, or your own mental health needs, or another person wanted your time and you just needed a break so you saw them instead and didn't realize you had so little time left.
4. After you play a card, discard it.

D. Safety

1. Luxton Yourself: One major part of the safety technique called the Luxton Technique is to be able to say - I need something to end a particular way, even if mechanics dictate otherwise, for the sake of your mental health. Do that freely for yourself here.
2. An inbuilt method to do so is the two Jokers you have set aside. If something isn't going well, take one of them and play it. Resolve the situation how you need to- maybe that Ace of Diamonds can't end the game, you can't disappoint your loved one that way. Or you need a little more time, to skip a card or change its suite. You can use the Jokers more than twice, do what you need to do to grieve.

E. Procedure of Play

1. Bracket A - No Reason to Worry

- a. **Your loved one is doing well**, with nothing suspected as being imminently fatal.
- b. Take Bracket A and play your first card, then write a journal entry based on that card's suite and number, as C.2 & C.3 said above. Discard the card.
- c. Keep playing one card at a time, writing journal entries, and discarding until you have drawn the lowest card of the bracket twice- in the case of Bracket A, that's drawing your second Jack. The first time is a scare, the second is a downward change in how your loved one is doing overall.

- d. After you draw that second Jack & write its entry, your loved one has started showing worrying signs of being ill and you visit the hospital. **The medical tests are inconclusive but the hospital was scary** - you have to wait for the prognosis. Jot down how that feels.

2. Bracket B - Uncertainty

- a. **Your loved one's condition has worsened**, but it isn't clear what is going on or why. **The tests aren't back yet.**
- b. Shuffle the non-discarded remains of Bracket A into Bracket B. Play as you did before, noting that the lower numbers here mean that your loved one is doing worse. Sometimes they have good days- a King can show up as they do better for a bit - but their baseline has gotten worse as you await the results of the tests. Make sure to discard used cards.
- c. After you draw the second 8 & do its entry, the tests come back from the doc. **Your loved one has a terrible prognosis**- measuring time in weeks or months. There's a second opinion on the way- you just have to wait a bit longer for the new doc to get back to you. In the meantime you just take care of them and hope the second opinion is a bit better. Jot down how that feels.

3. Bracket C - Let Them be Wrong

- a. **Your loved one has been given a ticking clock.** How do you react, how do they if they are cognizant of it? The pain and illness has gotten worse, and you are waiting on a second opinion.
- b. Shuffle the non-discarded remains of Bracket A & B into Bracket C. Play as you did before, noting that the lower numbers here mean that your loved one is doing worse. They can still have good days- but they are fewer and farther between. Make sure to discard used cards.
- c. After you draw the second 5 and do its entry, the second opinion has come back and it seems great. **Yeah, they are still quite sick, but the dire prognosis is not as bad as it seems.** You have time, blessedly, you have time, but they still need pills and care and tests to help them get better. Jot down how that feels.

4. Bracket D - The Bait and Switch

- a. **Your loved one's rush toward death is stopped**, according to the doctors. Maybe with some care and that pile of pills things will get better. **But they weirdly don't seem all that better.** But they are going to be okay.
- b. Shuffle the non-discarded remains of Bracket A & B & C into Bracket D. This may be deceptively long, but it might end quickly. Again, there are some better days- but they largely seem worse. Still, you were told not to be

worried, right? You have time to enjoy them and maybe things get back to semi-normal. Adjust for long term care, changing to safer foods, but you'll have them so much longer.

- c. After you draw the second Ace & do its entry, it is time. **They die, and suddenly, and whatever last day you had is what you had.** How does it happen, and how do you say goodbye that day and the next. Jot down how that feels.

5. Overtime

- a. Take the rest of the unused cards that are left, see what kind of days were left, good or bad. Despite any issues you had with them, **they are loved.**

F. Examples of Play

A Journal Entry:

- 7 of Spades: Hope was pretty sick that day for a bit, but the new medicine kicked in. She perked up for the first time in what feels like forever, so we roughoused a bit and it was so much fun. Even if I bonked my head on a wall while being a dork.

Jotting Down How That Feels:

- The vet said that the heart murmur wasn't important, and I really want to believe that is true, especially if the cancer was just a scare. I have time. I have time.

Using a Joker:

- I pulled the Ace of Hearts, the first Ace I pulled during the final Bracket. Honestly, a Hearts card is how I wished Hope would go. So I played a Joker and ended the game there, so she could have the last day I wished she did.

Your Loved One Dying:

- Ace of Diamonds: I'd been frustrated with Hope earlier that day, after she almost her mama (and my partner) injured during their walk. I was angry and overheated and asthmatic from the fires. I played video games for most of the day as a distraction from other concerns that were overwhelming. But she started breathing so hard and we rushed her to the animal hospital and we got stuck in traffic and my partner pleaded with her to keep breathing. Hope's a fighter. She stuck it out despite fucking heart failure. We sat in our car waiting for the news because of fucking COVID. The vets let us pet her and comfort her as she died so late at night, and sleep was hard to find last night. I miss her so much, and I've put away Hope's stuff so my partner didn't have to. I hate this year so much.



Hope in all her glory. I miss her.

Golden Cobra Contest notes: You were supposed to get a game about how my dog sees demons. Or the Mortal Kombat spectator streaming one, after the first one got harder due to said dog's illness. Instead, 24 hours to deadline, my dog died.

So fuck it. You get this instead.

Part of the point of it for me was the way the cards came in pushes a downward spiral but allows for the natural oscillation of seeing someone fall ill. There will be days so good you almost couldn't tell she was ill- full of life and play and snarky looks. And more often than not it was just before she fell deeper into the spiral.

I made this because I am mad and sad and blindsided but shouldn't have been. We feel faked out because we were assured she was alright just days before heart failure. I am having trouble conveying how that felt, so I hoped to make a game that showed folks

playing it what that experience was like, good and bad. But to give them, and me, an opportunity to change it via the Jokers & a smidgen of Luxton.

A note on the draw technique- the upshot is that it is just random enough that you don't know when the bracket will draw to a close, and that it represents the ups and downs of these spirals by having a few of the cards that marked her best days have the chance to get all the way to end of the game.

Luxton Technique Writeup:

<https://briebeau.com/thoughty/2019/03/the-luxton-technique-by-p-h-lee/>

Example of Cards Played across two rounds:

Bracket 1: 12 cards.

Played: King of Hearts, Jack of Spades, Queen of Diamonds, King of Clubs, Jack of Clubs

Remaining: 7 cards

Bracket 2: 12 cards + 7 from the first set

Played: 10 of Hearts, 9 of Diamonds, Jack of Diamonds, 10 of Spades, 8 of Spades, 9 of Hearts, Queen of Hearts, Queen of Clubs, 10 of Clubs, 8 of Hearts

Remaining: 9 cards