

One Night Out

A Game of Dramatic Improv

By Michael Meinberg

Take on the roles of one of eight characters and play out a night in their life.

All you need is this manual, a deck of playing cards, and a total of 2-8 players.

Chapter 1: Flow of Play

Setup

Setup should take approximately 10 minutes.

You will need the following items:

- *A printed copy of these rules
- *A printed copy of each playbook
- *An unshuffled deck of cards, with the instruction and joker cards removed

Remove the face cards and the nines and tens from the deck, and set them to the side, they will be needed soon. Shuffle the remaining cards.

Fold each playbook along the trifolds, so that the blank side is facing out, and set them where everyone can reach. Each player then chooses one of the playbooks randomly and reads over the instructions within.

Each playbook will list two specific cards to take from the Kings and Queens and 9s and 10s. Once every player has taken their two, deal out three cards to each player from the shuffled deck.

Put the unused cards and playbooks away, then begin the game.

Acts

Throughout the course of the game, you will be playing the character described in your playbook. Motivations and background and relationships are described in each playbook, and provide useful guide as to how to play and inhabit the character you've been assigned.

Rather than describing the actions that your character takes, you'll perform them yourself. You'll

Speak the words of your character and live out their life during the course of play, inhabiting their skin and embodying the traits that you imagine that they would possess. The information in the playbooks is only a guide, feel free to expand on that information as you desire and see fit.

In addition, each playbook describes certain abstract qualities that your character desires and

wishes to avoid, which are represented by the cards in your hand, as described in your playbook. You will receive the two cards listed in your playbook, and three other random cards. As you interact with the other plays, you can offer to give, receive, or trade cards with that other person. However, you must remain in character at all times, and this includes not mentioning the names of the cards that you wish to trade.

The game is divided into three major Acts, each of which has set time limits. One of the players should keep track of the time and provide five minute warnings before the end of each Act.

The first Act lasts for thirty minutes. During the first Act, no cards can change hands. The players should get to know each other's characters and flesh out the details of their relationships.

The second Act lasts for forty five minutes. During the second Act, only cards from Ace to 7 can be exchanged. Conflicts should begin to emerge between players, and those relationships should grow deeper.

The third Act lasts for fifteen minutes. During the third Act, all cards can be exchanged. The resolution of conflicts and final stage of relationships should develop.

Resolution

During the third Act, you should be making the final decisions about your characters motivations, culminating in decisions relating to that character's set cards, the Queen/King and 9/10. After you've made those decisions, you should exit the scene, leaving the play space. Once there, examine the cards remaining in your hand and determine how many points you've earned, based on the description in your playbook. Once every player has finished their third Act activities, or the time limit has been reached, then everyone can compare their scores.

If your group feels compelled to name a winner, then the person with the most points is the victor of the game. Otherwise, those with the most points are those that have achieved their character's motivations the best. You may wish to take some time after the game to discuss the events and the feelings that were inspired by play.

Chapter 1: Rules & Guidelines

Consent & Safety

As you play One Night Out, you will move through the space you're in and interact with the other plays both verbally and physically. If you've been playing with this particular group for a long time, you'll already know where the limits of the other players are, and you should use that information to prevent violating the boundaries of the other players.

If you are playing with a new group, here are some useful guidelines to help keep everyone safe, both physically and emotionally.

Touch Confirmation

Before you touch another player, you must maintain eye contact with that player until they nod. If they shake their head instead, then you are not allowed to initiate contact.

No Violence

Even if you feel that your character's impulse is to act violently, you must not do so. Remember that you're in a public space, and theoretically playing with strangers. Even if the other play consents to contact, any strike or other violent action is not allowed.

Touch Control

When you are in contact with another player, or another player is in contact with you, the player being touched gets to maintain control over that contact. If possible, that player should place a hand onto the wrist of the touching player, and guide and restrict all motion of that physical contact. If this is not possible, pay special attention to the body language and words of the other player and do not pursue further contact if it is not desired.

Gender and Characters

The characters in One Night Out have a number of blank spaces, areas where details about their lives are left free for exploration. In many cases, it is appropriate to use

your own information for these blank spaces. Your gender, your orientation, your race, your religion can all inform the character, as shaped by the specifics of their

background. While gender specific language has been avoided where possible, in those cases where it has become necessary, the default has been for female pronouns. This

does not mean that the person described is female, and you should use the details of play to fill out those details as appropriate.

Acting Basics

At its core, One Night Out is a game of improvisational acting. Unlike many improv games, though, One Night Out aims for drama rather than for comedy.

Roleplaying in general is a form of acting, rooted in the idea of creating and playing a character. The characters presented in One Night Out all have some parts of their background and their motivations already described, the blank parts will either be unimportant or become revealed during play through your decisions as the player. How that play unfolds, though, is based on pursuing those motivations.

Here are a few concepts to keep in mind while playing a character:

Motivation

Motivation is perhaps the most important part of a character. It is what drives that character forward, and every action that a character takes should be in service of accomplishing their motivation. That motivation may have additional subtleties that are revealed through interaction with other characters, and most characters will pursue their motivation indirectly rather than constantly directly pushing towards

their motivation. It is up to you to determine what strategies you will use from moment to moment to accomplish your character's motivation.

As if

The central theme of the modern, realistic school of acting is "as if." That is to say, when you are playing a character, you behave as if you were that character. You can call upon memories of similar circumstances in your life to provide context and flavor to your actions and your decisions, even if you've never experienced identical circumstances. You do not become your character when you take on a role, but you must be aware of the needs of the character and how that character's background informs how that character would act.

Yes, not no

The core of good improv is never saying "no." Whenever another player introduces an element to the relationship between your two characters, never deny that this is the case. If you feel that this new element is not to your liking, instead of saying "no" say "yes, but." Rather than deny the existence of a complication, allow that complication to become even larger. It is within these

complications, the twists and turns that develop through play, that rich interactions are allowed to exist.

The rules described in the Consent and Safety section above take precedence, however.

Using Space

One Night Out is designed to be played publicly, in whatever space that you find yourself in. It could be played in a hotel lobby, in a subway station, in a restaurant, or anywhere else that you might find yourself with time to play out the game. It is important to understand, however, the role that the play space has on the play itself. Two players in the booth of a crowded bar will play differently from eight players in the middle of the street.

There are two rules that must be kept in mind:

The Space is the Space

Wherever you're playing is where you're playing, the characters you're playing are also inhabiting that same space. You can't invent fictional props or people to bring into the game, and your characters should behave as appropriate for the circumstances that they find themselves in.

No Outside Actors

Other people may pass through the play area, but you are not to pull them into the play. If they interact with you, feel free to react in character and direct them away from the play space, but do not engage them first. If people become concerned, you may break

character to explain that you're playing a game.

In addition, the following guidelines may be of use:

Intimacy vs. Performance

The public nature of One Night Out means that you might get attention from those outside of the game. This is perfectly acceptable, as the theatrical roots of the game encourage performance. In addition, more open and accessible spaces will lend the game a more performative air, as will interactions of larger groups. If you're looking for more intimacy, consider playing in a space that encourages privacy and discourages outsiders from listening in. In addition, if you keep interactions largely on a one-to-one basis, you will find that your conversations will blend more into the background. In contrast, a single person addressing a large number of other players will naturally draw attention to the play and make it more of a performance.

Respect for Property

Playing in public also means playing by the rules of the public. Even if you feel it might be in character to do so, do not damage or deface the property of others. Treat objects in the play space with

the same respect you'd show them even if you weren't playing the game.

Limits of Space

It is important to have clearly defined boundaries of the play space, established before play begins. Anything that happens outside of that space is out of

character and out of the game. If you feel uncomfortable and need time, or wish to speak out of character, it is best to do so outside of the defined space. You may also feel the need for a break as the game goes on, or after particularly strenuous moments, and you should feel free to exit the play space to take care of yourself.

Alex

Other Cards:

Hearts- More financial obligations that you have to worry about.

Clubs- More ideas that will help you flesh out your play.

Diamonds- Promises of financial assistance that will help you through your current slump.

Spades- Job advice on finding a job that will help you to live a more stable and productive life.

Goals:

You cannot give the 10 of Hearts to another player unless they promise to help support you.

You cannot give the King of Clubs to another player.

At the end of the game, you gain points as follows:

*You gain one point for every Diamond you have in your hand, plus an additional 5 points if you have the Queen or King of Diamonds.

*You gain one point for every Club you have in your hand.

*You lose one point for every Heart in your hand, and lose an additional 5 points if you still have the 10 of Hearts.

You are a struggling playwright. Your works have been performed in a few fringe festivals, and your friends think that your writing is quite excellent. Nevertheless, you haven't had any commercial success, for reasons that keep you awake at night, forcing you to constantly question your quality as a writer.

Even worse, the bills keep piling up, and if you aren't able to put together \$10,000 by the end of the month, you're going to have to take a major loan or get evicted from your place. You've gotten a few offers of a desk job from friends of your father, but you know that it'd kill your ability to write. It has led to even more restless nights, wondering if you're on the right path in your life.

Compounding matters, you think you've stumbled across a great idea for a play. It's still nascent, unformed and unfinished within the depths of your mind, but the characters and scenes are vibrant, and even a bit of thought brings them into life before your eyes. If you can just put together this one play without being overwhelmed by stress, you think that you might just be able to make a play that will not only get your name out there, but might well be an enduring work of art

You start with these cards:

King of Clubs- This represents your one great idea, the play idea that will change the world.

10 of Hearts- This represents the big, upcoming payment that you're not sure if you'll be able to make, but on which your future rests.

Relationships:

Morgan- helped fund some of your previous plays, but you haven't seen her around much lately.

Piper- the local barkeep, a good shoulder to cry on

Riley- you two went to college together, but you haven't seen her much since she got married

Robin- has acted in some of your plays but has never been particularly reliable

Sam- used to be a regular supporter of your work, but once her partner passed, she hasn't been the same

Taylor- ran with the same crowds with you for a bit, but you never were close

Toni- a regular at Piper's bar, you two have had more than a few conversations late at night over beer, but nothing serious

Morgan

Other Cards:

Hearts- Connections with other people, the comforts large and small they can offer

Clubs- Memories of good times, of the pleasures spent in company of others

Diamonds- More funds that you don't need any more

Spades- The aches and pains and the discomforts brought on by your illness

Goals:

You cannot give any Spades cards you acquire to another player.

You cannot give the Queen of Diamonds to another player until you've decided that they need the money more than anyone else.

At the end of the game, you gain points as follows:

You gain one point for every Heart or Club you have in your hand, plus an additional 5 points if you have the Queen or King of either suit.

You lose one point for every Diamond you have in your hand, and lose an additional 5 points if you still have the Queen of Diamonds.

You're dying. There's really nothing to it, but you only have a few months left before you pass on. There's no miracle cure, no risky procedure. You've seen every doctor, and with your money, you could see literally every doctor. Now is the time to put things in order. You're feeling pretty good today, the medication has eased your pain, and so going out to see your friends one last time is the best you can hope for today.

You used to work as a lawyer, and the money was good, and you felt confident and satisfied in your work. Now, though, you find that the money is nothing but a burden. It's a reminder of the years you've spent working, when you could have been spending it with friends and family. So, you've decided that rather than waiting until you've passed, you'll give out your money now, so that you can see others enjoy their inheritance, and remove the burden from you.

You start with these cards:

Queen of Diamonds which represents the bulk of your wealth, which you intend to give away.

9 of Spades which represents your illness and the knowledge of your impending demise.

Relationships:

Alex- you think she has some talent and you've put some money into getting her plays staged in the past

Piper- the owner of a local bar you used to go to with your friends, but that you never really got to know

Riley- an old friend for years and years, you helped her get her first job, but she's been busy since the divorce

Robin- you used to hang out fairly regularly, but it was hard to keep up with his hobbies

Sam- you were friends with her partner, and grew distant after her partner's death

Taylor- your doctor, works too hard, but refuses to give up

Toni- her mother works for the same firm that you did, and you've met a couple times, she always seemed nice, but distant

Piper

Other Cards:

Hearts- Your personal connection with others, and the spark of energy to keep you going

Clubs- Managerial advise to help run the bar more smoothly

Diamonds- Little things that add up to increase your stress levels

Spades- Specific understanding of other people

Goals:

You can't give the 10 of Diamonds to another player unless you've found some way to share the stress of your job with someone else.

If you provide someone with valuable advise that helps them with their life, you must give that player the King of Spades

At the end of the game:

You gain one point for every Club in your hand, and an additional 5 if you have the Queen or King of Clubs

You gain one point for every Heart in your hand.

You lose one point for every Diamond in your hand, and lose an additional 5 if you still have the 10 of Diamonds

You run the local bar. It's not easy work, and the hours are long, but it's rewarding in its own way. You get to know the people that come through, and it's a fairly sizable population that migrates through the space. The old stereotypes of the all knowing bartender aren't exactly true, but you've seen enough, heard enough, experienced enough to have an insight, more than others you've come across. You're always happy to lend a ear to those in need, and maybe help things get a bit better for them. You're also a pretty good manager, and your bar turns out a steady profit.

However, you're also something of a micro-manager. You like to intercede personally whenever possible, and the late hours and your tendency to fill in missed shifts makes it hard for you to have much of a social life. But that's less important, you have a duty to the community and to your employees, and you intend to do it well, because there's really not anyone else who can do it for you.

You start with these cards:

King of Spades which represents which represents your personal insight into others

10 of Diamonds which represents which represents the mounting stress of your work

Relationships:

Alex- comes around to the bar from time to time, talks a big game about her plays, but seems to have trouble finding the spark of inspiration

Morgan- an old regular that you haven't seen in some time, but never knew well

Riley- used to be more regular, and you sense the mounting stress since the divorce

Robin- always comes into the bar, and tries to convince you to try some new fad diet or time management scheme

Sam- used to come in a lot with her partner, they seemed like they were going to stick together forever, but hasn't been by lately

Taylor- a doctor and a busy one at that, you've heard more than a few tales of things gone bad after she's had a few drinks

Toni- a sad sort, quiet and distant, like she's always stuck in her own head

Riley

Other Cards:

Hearts- Affection towards others around you, and the strength you get from their bonds

Clubs- Ideas on how best to manage your time

Diamonds- More responsibilities, at home, at work

Spades- Confidence in your own abilities

Goals:

You cannot give the King of Hearts to another player until you've decided that person is willing and able to share in your life and your love.

You cannot give the 9 of Diamonds to another player.

At the end of the game, you gain points as follows:

You gain one point for every Spade in your hand.

You gain one point for every Heart in your hand.

You lose one point for every Diamond in your hand besides the 9 of Diamonds.

If you still have the King of Hearts, you lose 5 points. If you no longer have the King of Hearts, you gain 5 points.

You are a single parent, having separated from your partner two years ago. You love both of your kids, and they provide you with inspiration to face the rigors of the day, but it can also be stressful managing a household by yourself after a long day of work, and it often leaves you unable to pursue the things that you like doing. You rarely get to go out, you feel uncomfortable making waves at work, and you never get enough sleep. Still, your love for your kids is enough to sustain you in those darker moments.

On the other hand, you wonder what it might be like to have someone else to share your life with, to have a partner going forward who can help carry the burdens that your life has played on you, to give you the greater freedom needed to explore your own goals. It can't just be anyone though, you need someone who is willing to accept your kids too, someone who understands that they're becoming part of a family, not just part of a relationship.

You start with these cards:

King of Hearts which represents the love you hold for you kids.

9 of Diamonds which represents your responsibility towards your kids.

Relationships:

Alex- went to college with you, and you hung out a bit, but she was always more of the artsy sort

Morgan- one of your best friends, though it's been hard finding the time to keep up

Piper- the owner of the local bar, a good sort, though always busy

Robin- you've met a few times through your ex, she seemed smart but flaky

Sam- a childhood friend, you were the first person she called after her partner died

Taylor- you've met a couple times at the bar, didn't talk much

Toni- lives in the neighborhood, doesn't seem to work, but you've come to trust her after she looked after your kids a couple times

Robin

Other Cards:

Hearts- Your connection and bonds with other people

Clubs- More ideas, more distractions

Diamonds- Grounding in your profession, the understanding of the need for stability

Spades- Deeper understanding of the world and yourself

Goals:

You may not give the 9 of Clubs to another player until you've decided on a course in your life, in a single driving passion to drive you forward.

You may only give the Queen of Spades to someone who you've helped come to a profound personal decision.

At the end of the game, you gain points as follows:

You gain one point for every Diamond in your hand, plus an additional five if you have the Queen or King of Diamonds.

You gain one point for every Heart in your hand.

You lose one point for every Club in your hand, and lose an additional 5 if you still have the 9 of Clubs.

You instruct philosophy at the local community college, but you're not particularly enthused about it. Then again, nothing enthuses you for long. You much prefer to try many different things, rather than focusing on a single one. You've started a handful of books, you have a kayak that you've never used, you have innumerable hobbies that you've invested a few weeks into, then abandoned once you've grown tired of them. You don't have relationships, you have flings, and for the most part, you are content with this. Still, you often wonder what things might be like if you actually focused and got work done.

You do have friends though, and those connections, however occasional, ground you in the moment. The future might be uncertain, but for the moment, there's still plenty of joy to be found in these momentary distractions.

You start with these cards:

Queen of Spades- Which represents the understanding you have into the world

9 of Clubs- Which represents your inability to focus on a single idea and desire to pursue multiple projects to the detriment of all

Relationships:

Alex- wrote some plays you acted in, when you tried acting for a bit

Morgan- you've known each other for a while, but there's been something off with him lately

Piper- owns the bar you go to, a bit stubborn but always willing to listen

Riley- you knew her spouse, and met a few times, but not enough to get much of an impression

Sam- when you were on an art binge, used to go to galleries with you and her partner, was always very enthusiastic

Taylor- don't know her very well, have only met a couple of times at the bar

Toni- kind of moody, quiet, a friend of a friend

Sam

Other Cards:

Hearts- Memories of your partner that are too painful to reconcile

Clubs- Ideas to fuel your thesis, if you ever get to it

Diamonds- More financial security, more time to recover

Spades- Wise words and comfort to help you heal

Goals:

You cannot give the 9 of Hearts to another player until you feel prepared to move on with the help of that person.

You cannot give the King of Diamonds to another player until you feel confident that you'll be able to take care of yourself.

At the end of the game, you gain points as follows:

You gain one point for every Spade in your hand, plus an additional 5 if you have the Queen or King or Spades.

You gain one point for every Club in your hand.

You lose one point for every Heart in your hand, and lose an additional 5 points if you still have the 9 of Hearts.

You were living a comfortable, happy life for a long time. You lived with a kind and supportive partner, who saw to your financial needs while you pursued your doctorate. The two of you were engaged in the local community, volunteering in your free time and attending the local art scene.

Tragedy struck two months ago, when your partner was killed in a car accident. You nearly broke down for good at the funeral, but since then you've begun the slow path towards healing. For the first time since your partner's funeral, you've allowed yourself to go out and be social, but the pain of your partner's death still drags at you. Your needs are seen to, as you were the sole beneficiary of your partner's will, which led to a large windfall of cash.

Your thesis remains almost finished, but you're not sure if you can find the will to complete and present it. That part of your life is so entrenched with those now painful memories, and so you find yourself lost, seeking to find something to cling to.

You start with these cards:

King of Diamonds- This represents the financial security inherited from your partner.

9 of Hearts- This represents your mourning over your partner's death.

Relationships:

Alex- when things were better, you and your partner went to see some of her plays

Morgan- a friend of your partner, seeing her reminds you of those times

Piper- owner of the local bar, always seemed a bit lonely to you

Riley- has always been there for you, the very first person you called after your partner died

Robin- you used to go check out art galleries with her, but her interest soon moved on

Taylor- you used to volunteer at the hospital that she works at, was always very busy

Toni- met her with some other friends, she was pretty quiet though

Taylor

Other Cards:

Hearts- Connections with other people that offer you comfort and strength

Clubs- Individual studies that might be of use, or inspiration for methodology

Diamonds- Connections with other doctors in oncology, that can help you with specific problems

Spades- Specific patients that have been brought to the forefront of your mind

Goals:

You cannot give the 10 of Spades to another player unless you feel comfortable sharing the weight of your job and your stress with that person.

You cannot give the Queen of Clubs to another player.

At the end of the game, you earn points as follows:

You gain one point for every Club and Diamond in your hand.

You gain 5 points if you have the Queen or King of Hearts.

You lose one point for every Spade in your hand, and lose an additional 5 if you have the 10 of Spades.

You are a doctor, working at the local oncology clinic. The hours are long and the pay isn't great, but you're doing good work. You're helping sick people, and while you can't save everyone, you do your best to help everyone that comes through. Still, every loss hits you hard. Every person that comes through your door that you know won't see the end of the year, every time your best efforts prove to be in vain against the cancer ravaging the patient's body, weighs upon you, drags you down.

So you study every technique available, you spend your nights in research, trying to find new ways of approaching the diseases that you encounter, in the hope that if you're just a bit better it might make the difference in someone's life. The pressure leaves you isolated, though, and without someone to lean on, you're starting to feel like you might begin to crack. But you have to keep going, because there are so many people who are putting their lives in your hands.

You start with these cards:

Queen of Clubs which represent the sum of your education and knowledge.

10 of Spades which represents the growing stress of your job.

Relationships:

Alex- is a writer or something, you don't really know her well

Morgan- one of your current patients, she's tough and seems unwilling to go down without a fight

Piper- owner of the local bar, a good person to talk after a bad day

Riley- you've met a couple times at the bar, didn't talk much

Robin- don't know her very well, have only met a couple of times at the bar

Sam- you remember seeing her volunteering at the hospital, was always cheerful to both you and the patients

Toni- run into her at the bar a few times, always seemed troubled by something

Toni

Other Cards:

Hearts- Affection and admiration for others around you

Clubs- More little things that you find loathsome about your self

Diamonds- The funds and resources that you've been given by those around you

Spades- Wisdom and experience, the ability to look at yourself and know that things can get better

Goals:

You cannot give the 10 of Clubs to another player unless you've opened up with that person, and managed to share a portion of your pain and have that person understand and welcome you.

You cannot give the Queen of Hearts to another player until you've found someone who you think that they can return your affection.

At the end of the game, you gain points as follows:

If you give the Queen of Hearts to another player, you gain 5 points.

You gain one point for every Heart in your hand.

You gain one point for every Spade in your hand.

You lose one point for every Club in your hand, and lose an additional 5 points if you still have the 10 of Clubs.

You suffer from depression. It's been hard finding work, it's been hard finding the energy to look for work, but your parents are supportive. You have friends, but their support only goes so far, and you don't want to lean on them. You know they have problems of their own, and in the big picture, your problems aren't that bad. Really, you just want to be there for other people. You don't know how you can help, always, but you want to. You want to reach out to them and give them everything you have, because they're so much better than you and deserve your love so much than you do.

It's pretty easy to feel alone, though. It's much easier to just stay behind, to let the world move on without you. You're not planning on doing anything extreme, you're just hoping that soon enough you'll be forgotten, that you'll be left behind. But, there's a part of you that knows that this isn't the right way to feel. You remember being younger and full of life and vitality, of engaging in so many things, and having fun. You don't find many things fun right now, and you know that's a problem. You've thought about therapy, but that's really expensive, and you don't want to put a burden on the people you love.

You start with these cards:

Queen of Hearts- This represents the love you feel for everyone around you, that sense of wonder at your peers.

10 of Clubs- This represents your deep abiding self-loathing, that belief that you don't deserve to get better.

Relationships:

Alex- you two have talked down at the bar a bit, but you've been wary of opening up

Morgan- a co-worker of your mom's, she always seemed nice, but distant

Piper- owner of the local bar, one of the few people who seems willing to listen

Riley- you've looked after her kids a couple time, they're a bit rambunctious, but it was actually pretty fun

Robin- have met a couple of times through other people, seemed a little weird

Sam- met her once after being dragged out of the house, she talked a lot

Taylor- run into her at the bar a few times, always seemed troubled by something