

Fake News

A short larp about spin, by Mo Holkar

A game for 2-6 players, lasting an hour. It can be run with a separate facilitator, or one of the players can facilitate. You will need pens and paper. Cut out the character descriptions, and the news cards. Stack the news cards face down in numerical order, so that Card 1 is on the top.

Fake News is a light-hearted and fun game to play, although it examines serious issues. It illustrates a real-world phenomenon and somewhat parodies it.

Introduction

Read this out to the players:

"The setting of **Fake News** is a fantasy realm that is under the rule of a tyrannical despot. The characters are the ruler's spin team, working hard to make their reign acceptable to the subjects by putting a regime-favourable take on a succession of current events.

"During the course of the game, the players will work their way down a stack of cards which contain the next story that they must come up with a way of spinning as fake news; their powers of invention being more and more called upon, and their cognitive dissonance ever stronger. An overall storyline will develop and build to a climax."

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Choose a character (5 minutes)

Charnoth You are a hardened old cynic who has served a succession of rulers in a similar role. You've seen it all, and spun it all. You are not sure if: you really have the stomach for this any more.	Velusar You are an acolyte of the despot, put into this department to make sure its messages are kept on the right track. You are not sure if: the despot really is all that wonderful.	Haggi You are an enthusiastic young believer in the new regime, eager to help it succeed. Working here seems like the ideal form of service! You are not sure if: you are any good at this job.
Falloni You desperately needed a job. Any job! So you ended up working here, despite no obvious aptitude or suitability. You are not sure if: you'll be sacked tomorrow. And, probably, executed. Or eaten.	Desnet You are secretly a traitor, working for the old regime and trying to undermine the despot. But your treachery is so subtle that it has never had any perceptible effect. You are not sure if: you might be gradually coming to admire the despot after all.	Albera You are a pragmatist, wanting what's best for the realm. At the moment, that seems to be supporting the despot's regime. Or so you feel. You are not sure if: you might be doing more harm than good.

When everyone's chosen, each player introduced themselves to the others, with name and a sentence or two of description (not including any of the secrets or 'not sure' bits).

Describe the despot (10 minutes)

Each player should in turn verbally answer one of the rows of this table, and have their answer agreed by the others (revise it if not), then write it down:

What sort of person/being/creature is the despot?	
What is their gender and/or sexuality (if that has any meaning in the context)?	
What is their name?	
What are three of their superhuman capabilities? (These should be awesome, but not godlike.)	
What is known about their humble yet somehow destiny-shadowed upbringing?	
What improvement have they promised to the people of the realm?	

The news cycle (5 minutes per card)

The first player is the one whose character name is earliest in the alphabet. After that proceed clockwise around the table. The first player turns over the top news card, and you as a group deal with what is written on it (see below for details). Then the next player turns over the next card; and so on. When you reach the bottom of the stack of cards, the game ends.

Dealing with a card

- The player who turned over the card reads it aloud, and places it face-up so everyone can see it.
- Each player then quickly, in silence, jots down a sentence or two that suggests how the news story on the card can be 'spun' to make it sound good for the despot.
- Once all have done this, each reads out their sentence.
- Together as a group, led by the player who turned over the card, you mash up these ideas and come up with a joint solution to present to the realm's subjects.
- The player who turned over the card writes the solution down on the back of the card.
- Everyone makes private notes about which of the others might secretly be a traitor.

The endgame (5 minutes)

After dealing with the last card, the despot's regime falls, and the despot is killed.

Give each player a voting card to complete - with these, they will determine the fates of their characters after the despot's removal. Note that they should vote for what they think *will* happen, not what they think *should* happen. They should ignore any characters who weren't used in this run of the game.

Tally the votes together and establish and discuss the majority outcomes for each character. If there are ties, design an intermediary outcome by mutual agreement.

News cards

(1) Twenty-three key advisors and supporters of the old regime have been executed by being eaten alive. All residents of the capital were instructed to come to the main square to watch this taking place.	(2) The despot has built a giant golden idol in their own image, saying "This shall be your new god." Reaction from the religious community has been mixed, at best.	(3) The neighbouring country of Ishigg, your traditional friend and ally, has severed diplomatic relations and built a wall along the border – after the insulting language that your despot used about Ishigg's monarch.
(4) The people are inventing scurrilous folk songs about the despot's private life and preferences. They are infernally catchy; and often witty, in a crude sort of way	(5) Harvests have failed across the realm, and people are desperately reverting to old ways to try and placate the nature spirits.	(6) A people's hero, known only as 'The Squashed Fly', has been robbing the despot's tax caravans and distributing their money to the poor.
(7) The despot spent time touring a hospital for sick animals, giving them sweetmeats and other treats. They also announced a grand international sporting event for the coming summer.	(8) The prophet Jo'fan, a renowned soothsayer, has predicted doom for the realm before the year is out, 'unless a mighty tree is toppled.'	(9) A well-armed rebel army, financially backed by neighbouring states, is advancing on the capital. It is picking up massive popular support as it comes.

Voting cards

For each of the characters, including your own, circle the letter indicating whether you think they will be (a) executed, (b) kept on by the new regime to do a similar job, (c) encouraged to retire to a life away from politics, or (d) seen as a hero of the revolution. Charnoth: a b c d Velusar: a b c d Haggi: a b c d Falloni: a b c d Desnet: a b c d Albera: a b c d	For each of the characters, including your own, circle the letter indicating whether you think they will be (a) executed, (b) kept on by the new regime to do a similar job, (c) encouraged to retire to a life away from politics, or (d) seen as a hero of the revolution. Charnoth: a b c d Velusar: a b c d Haggi: a b c d Falloni: a b c d Desnet: a b c d Albera: a b c d
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