



The Upgrade

by Tobias Wrigstad,
Thorbiörn Fritzon
& Olle Jonsson

Host Manual

The Upgrade! in Short

The Upgrade! is a freeform scenario by Vi åker jeep (We go by jeep). It was first conceived, in a quite different format, during the Swedish con Halmicon in Halmstad, 2004 by Thorbiörn Fritzon and Tobias Wrigstad. It was then revised completely adding a third author, Olle Jonsson, to the credits roll, for Knutpunkt 2005 in Norway.

The game is about our prejudice for participants in reality shows and reality shows. In particular, Temptation Island and the like. Couples sign up to be in the show, are broken up and used to form new couples that date with cameras present and live together in the luxurious Upgrade! resort on some exotic location as far from everyday life as possible. In the end, there is a closed vote by all participants whether they would like to STAY in their old relationships, or UPGRADE to the new one. New relationships where both partners independently votes UPGRADE get to stay together for another week at the UPGRADE luxury resort. The audience may also vote for the "couple of the week", or by popular demand force two people into a couple if enough people believe that they would fit each other. Couples that Upgrade! are rewarded in the spirit of creating good television. Couples that survive the show end up in the "Hall of Faith". Sometimes, they will get a reward.

The story of the game is manifold, much like a larp in the sense that there is one story for each contestant in the reality show: We will look at what happens to the contestants and their relationships as they set sail for the Upgrade! resort and how their lives are altered by all of a sudden becoming caught in the eyes of the public, and possibly humiliated on national TV. We will also look behind the scenes and examine the actions of producers, what goes on when the cameras are off, what the employees at the Upgrade! resort think about the contestants etc.

As a game master, you will play the role of a game show host. We prefer two game show hosts, but the two game masters, that is game is perfectly handlable with just one. The game needs an even number of players, preferably eight, to work, or it is impossible to form couples. If you have an even number of players, you can easily invite one to become a game show host, or let someone double as a partner for two players.

The stories and their outcomes are not scripted. What we provide are a set of sample characters that can easily be replaced by others, a questionnaire-based process of fleshing out your character and creation a relationship and a toolbox of techniques for making the game interesting to some extent tailed to the TV metaphor. If you want to script a story before playing, with the help of your second game master, or the players, or do it by yourself, that is perfectly alright.

The Upgrade! show is broadcast as a daily 60-minute program with a long weekly follow-up show that recaps the most important events of the past week. The game will alter between playing the recording of the follow-up, which includes interviews, questions from viewers and studio audience, and, perhaps most important, the screening of clips from the past week.

The show will start with a recap of the first episode where who should date who was decided using the speed-dating concept as described in this manual.

In addition to playing contestants on The Upgrade! show, the players will also play extras including producers, directors, staff on the Upgrade! resort, etc. Except from the hosts you should not have to play any other characters.

Before the game, the players will read the player manual to familiarise themselves with the techniques used in the game. Following this, they will read their characters, find their partner that they signed up with (may or many not be scripted in the character) and flesh out their relationship by filling out the questionnaires that are included in the game. When this is done, you should talk about the techniques, how to play, answer any questions etc. and then start out with a short exercise. The exercise is a media training exercise with the purpose of getting the players to talk about and present their characters, warming up and learning one or two things about what is interesting to a TV audience. When the media training event is over and done with, the show will start.



The show starts in the studio. All the contestants are there, sitting in couches or equivalent, chatting, flirting, holding hands or actively hating each other as the show has been running for at least a week as this is the weekly follow-up. You, as the hosts, will introduce the show to the viewers and immediately recap to the first time the couples met. This is the

speed-dating scene described in this manual. You introduce this saying something like “this is a clip from last week, when you first met”. The game will then move into the NOW AREA (as described in the PLAYER MANUAL), and the speed dating will be played out there.

In the speed-dating scene is decided who will date who—thus, which couples, called POTENTIALS in Upgrade! terminology, have been dating on the Upgrade! island resort for the past week.

After the speed-dating, you cut back to the studio. You do well by interviewing the couples, getting them to talk about things that happened to them during the week, etc. From this point on, the game is virtually free until the end of the show. Each contestant has picked a clip from the this week that they will present and screen, meaning it is played. The contextualisation with pasts and presents etc. usually takes off pretty good and you may well find yourself playing half of the game in the possible future where couples still date and exes stalk them etc. If you play live, there will be commercial breaks when the camera is off, which may lead to interesting situations when people’s true feelings can be expressed safely. If you don’t play live, experiment with retaking scenes that weren’t good enough, and have short breaks during which the cameras are (supposedly?) off.

You can interrupt the game at any point to play a meanwhile in the kitchen of the Upgrade! resort where the staff gossip about what they have seen, etc. This is a good way of introducing facts and controlling the game. The staff can talk about hearing sound of intercourse, or discovering secret meetings with the couples etc. You can interrupt the game and play a producer meeting two days back in time about the bad ratings leading

to that all screened clips are edited in a more scandalous way. Decide that one contestant’s clip was damaged because his mike was caught in his clothes and force him to take another, play it silent, or what you can come up with. During a break, someones father comes up from the studio audience to talk. Etc. You decide. A good way of adding good stuff is to introduce events like they were recurring features of the show. This manual includes some examples.



When the show is over, the contestants get to vote whether to stay or upgrade. If both contestants in a potential couple vote upgrade, they get to stay on for another week together. If two contestants in an original couple vote stay, they both get to stay for another week, but not with each other. If necessary new couples will be added from the waiting list and the show goes on. In all other cases, the couples are out of the show. As mentioned above, you can imagine the audience voting on "most favoured couple", "hunk of the week", etc. As soon as the voting is done, the game is over. It is usually good to end the game right after the vote, unless you are interested in scenes like "You voted upgrade, but I voted stay! I'm so miserable!" But that is your decision.

Make sure to discuss the game afterwards. What worked, what didn't work. How could the game be improved, etc. What were the difficulties. Also, think about why you played like you did. Where do your images of these characters come from? Discussing and analysing a game is important, but don't overdo it, and don't take it too seriously.

Comedy, Tragedy or Drama?

The Upgrade! can be played like a comedy, a tragedy, a drama or what have you. Playing it like a comedy is the easy way out, but is not to be looked down upon. The important thing is to discuss this with your players and agree on the style of play before playing. An interesting exercise is to change style after half the game. Most of our examples can be read both as comical or tragical—it is really much all in your head. As long as you agree on how the game should be played it is going to be just fine.

Idle Players and How to Play

You have read in the player manual how the game is supposed to be played: the physical space divided into three areas. A good idea, if you have the necessary space and furniture, is to separate the studio from the NOW AREA. This way, the contestants can remain seated when they are looking at the clips instead of clearing the area for the players who are supposed to be in the clip.

When a contestant's clip is about to be screened, the hosts should first ask a few questions about the clip to give the player ample opportunity to telegraph information about the clip to the other players. This will help all the idle players to create or avoid supplemental scenes, etc. For example, if Erkki says "This clip shows how my proposal to Ritva was interrupted twice by Mauri", Mauri's player will know that he should enter and mess things up at least twice. A less revealing statement would be "This clip shows how I was saved by the bell by Mauri". Now, Erkki can lead Ritva up on stage, play the Proposal, and Mauri's player will hopefully understand that he should interrupt at the right time.

Clips will regularly only contain two characters, with occasional extras, etc. The idle players will watch and offer supplemental scenes. The interplay between the regular scenes and the supplemental scenes is a core game technique. Unless there are supplemental scenes, things will be boring and uninteresting. Try to encourage the players to flesh out other players' characters in supplemental scenes, even make up scenes of your own to show everyone where it's at!



Scenes and Possible Scenes

Here is a description of scenes mentioned above and possible scenes to throw at the players if convenient. They are also meant as inspiration for you to create your own scenes for you own games.

Media Training

In this scene, every couple is visited by a pair of media trainers, that will help the couple prepare for the reality of a TV show. The media trainers will read a short character description and be supplied a short list of activities for the training session. The scene will then be played once for each couple and each scene will take one item off the list until all items are covered. Each time, another couple will play the media trainers and the rest of the players will offer perspectives in the other areas, etc. At this stage, it is OK to have too many supplemental scenes, since we also have the pedagogic goal of introducing techniques to the players.

The media training scene is a training scene in many respects. The in-game goal of the scene is to teach the characters how to behave on TV. In addition to what was stated before, the off-game goal is for you to accommodate yourselves with the techniques we will use. During this scene, it is not only OK but encouraged to stop, go out of character and ask a question about what happened, what would have happened if this or that was changed, and so on. We can even repeat a scene if desirable. Think about what happens and why at this stage.

The Japanese Bath

In Japan, men always come first. Women second. You could easily turn this scene around gender-wise, but do play on the gender thing as that is just the kind of show the Upgrade! is. In the Japanese bath, the women will wash the men. Who washes who is randomly assigned as long as the original couples are avoided. The idea is of course to build tension. Isn't my partner a bit too close with that what's-his/her-face? Maybe seeing your partner rubbing some sensual oil on the half-naked body of your rival is going to get someone's blood pumping? Remember, the goal is good television. Naturally, be careful with all events like this one if you are hoping to tone down the comical side to the game.

Tips and Tricks

Concentrate on one couple at a time. Idle players should watch so that they are able to launch supplemental scenes.

Timing is essential. It is not a bad idea to abruptly end a scene in a way that suggests something that did not really happen. If Erkki gives Päivi a massage and the screen softly fades to black and then shows the morning next day, it suggests secret sex regardless of what really happened.

When suitable, have an off-camera scene. For example, the camera team's night off enables the couples to meet in the bar for drinks without supervision and fear of doing something that will be shown on national TV. How does this affect their interaction? Also, it is VERY GOOD to have a few scenes that brings all the characters together, not to mention the effect of seeing someone else enter the room, hand in hand with your partner. Don't start with such a scene, though. The players have to form couple relations before it is interesting to toss them together. Also, the players should not be led to believe that they will be "served" with pre-made scenes. This is their game—they are the producers, audience and contestants.

It is a good thing to have an explicit goal or a theme for each scene with a couple. For example, if the producers decide on a bungee jump challenge for Erkki and Päivi, the theme is obviously testing their relationship. Offering them money etc. will

encourage Erkki to force Päivi into jumping even if she doesn't want to, just to get the money.

If you want, the game can continue for more than one week. Maybe give the contestants a day off, etc. Have a producer meeting to decide next week's events. Maybe choose a theme for the upcoming week. If this sounds very loose, good! There are no good guidelines that we can give here—if your game is good and it feels like people are interested in continuing, you probably have enough inspiration and adrenalin to keep rolling without our support.

