

FATMANDOWN

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VUXENSPEL



A tragicomic jeepform novella for four to eight mature players and three pieces of chocolate.

A story about a man who could be, but most of all becomes lost.

Written by Frederik Berg Østergaard during 2006-2009 in Switzerland, Denmark & the airspace of Sweden. Photos by Alija.

Dedicated to Tobias Wrigstad.

FAT MAN DOWN is a game about treating people right. No matter their skin color, ethnicity, ethical or political standpoint. Or weight.

Back in 2006 I was working on a educational game about nutrition. It was during a time, when there was a lot of talk about obesity in the media. Lack of exercise, changed dietary practices and far too many calories per day. But this is not what Fat Man Down is about. Fat Man Down is about the negative discourse towards the overweight persons.

The media was flaming at the time. "Fat people cost the society x billion dollars per year", or "Fat people take up too much space in the airplanes" were headlines you often saw. Often overweight persons would be unable to get a job, a satisfying social life, or perhaps even the education they wanted. Weight is not an indicator of skill, character or intellectual acuity, but it is being viewed as such by the vox populi.

Fat Man Down is about exposing this broken discourse, and making the players of the story see the injustice. I am not trying to protect anyone, preach a certain dietary practice, or condone overweight.

The game is for one game master and at least 4 players. One plays The Fat Man, the rest various characters in his life.

This text is supposed to be read by the person facilitating or game mastering the game.

Fat Man Down in a Nutshell

The game consists of a series of moments in the The Fat Mans life. He is overweight and has been since youth. We explore the unpleasant parts of his life. Family, work, social life and love are all things touched on. The social stigma of being overweight drives him to prefer to be invisible or unnoticed.

The Fat Man has one easy way out of this hell. Chocolate. In the game when he eats a piece of chocolate, his world inverts. He is popular, liked, talented and successful. Unfortunately this is only temporary. He has three pieces of chocolate. After eating the third, he enters the ranks of Fat People for good – his willpower has been crushed – and he has accepted the fate put on him by evil people. The game ends with The Fat Mans funeral. No one attends. He dies all alone. No friends, no family.

The scenes are played out with clear beginnings and endings. No scenes should be played without The Fat Man. There is no need to bridge scenes or narrate what happens in between scenes. The centerfold has a list of suggestions for possible scenes. You are encouraged to create or supplement with your own, or act on the players' ideas. There is no correct order or chronology to be respected – the scenes are all moments in his life – disjointed in time. The only exception is the Funeral, which is the last scene and end of the game. Some scenes can carry a whole storyline. It could be repeated dinners with the family, it could be different scenes from his sisters wedding, or yet another meeting at The Diet Club™.

The total playing time varies, but I would recommend not playing more than 4 hours. Don't waste time on scenes where nothing interesting happens. The game should have a high pace and the scenes appear with good pace. Cut to the chase and go for the throat.

Playing the Game

This is a jeepform game. Jeepform is best described as the marriage between tabletop role-playing and live action role-playing with a kind nod towards improv. You act out the action as if were you an actor, except there are no lines to remember. The players have to figure out what to say or do themselves. Read more at jeepen.org/dict

As game master or facilitator you are in charge of everything. You set and end the scenes, give additional input to the players during the game, and make sure that everyone knows what they need to know before play starts.

A typical scene starts like this: Give the players brief instructions, set the scene and introduce the characters and give them a direction. Say "Its the weekly family dinner. Everyone is there. You're playing his sister. You are embarrassed having your brother at your wedding...", the players then mentally adds the missing details, often during the game. The direction gives them a starting note to work out of. If you need a good starting scene, this is it.

There is no definite list of characters. Use the hints in the Big List of Scenes and your imagination. If you need an Old Best Friend, add one. The Fat Man is played by the same player all through the game, who only plays this character. The rest of the players are supporting characters. They are for the most part cast on the spot, just moments before the scene is played. Try to keep some consistency, so that The Sister is played by the same player throughout the game.

The game is played without any other physical props than chocolate. Try to find some nice ones. You need three. All other props are symbolic. A pen is a knife.

The Big List of Scenes

At the Diet Club™. This place is filled with other people trying to loose weight. There should be obscene weighing scenes, peddling of books or Diet Club™ diet products. And perhaps the dietitian is holding a nasty speech with the Fat Man as the easy target. *All say hallelujah.* Oh, a Q/A, perhaps?

The Fitness Center. The basis for evil is great here. The Fat Man is trying to change, but the world is against him. Snide remarks by instructors as well as the other clientele. He is not allowed to workout near the windows. Whispers in the sauna etc. Perhaps someone stole his clothes out of the locker?

Funny Fat Man. Trying to break out of his shell, The Fat Man has taken up Stand-up Comedy. No one thinks he's funny, and the crowd is unusually cruel. Fat jokes?

In bed just after masturbating. All kinds of voices in his head. His ex-girlfriend, his alter ego, the woman in the porn magazine. His father. His teacher? There are no limits.

At the doctors. The nurses, the doctors, the people in the waiting room, all making snide remarks at him. The doctor is especially harsh and not very understanding of his situation. "You have 3-4 years of life remaining" etc.

In the office at his caseworker. Maybe he or she is also fat. The fat picking on the fat. Threatening him. This cannot continue etc. We'll remove your unemployment cheques and so on.

Gone Shopping. Here he is at the clothes outlet. Nothing pretty really fits, only the ugly ones. Find something you like – and it looks bad on you. Perhaps a friendly assistant: "No, that's not you. Lets try something bigger" or "If you're already loosing weight, it might fit better later". Other customers making fun of his big-boy pants (and cape?). Is he exchanging something that doesn't fit.

The unemployment agency. He could be filling out a form, taking a personality test and then be confronted with it in the later interview. "I find it hard to believe your weight is only xx lbs?"

At his former work. War in the cubicles, finding notes about him. An evaluation turns really, really bad. Perhaps he did not get the advancement he deserved because he was fat. 'Fun' in the cafeteria. Too much food on his plate. The boss or the supervisors leading the bullying, perhaps encouraging it.

The Scouts. Back from when he was a fat kid. He is the one that always has to be tied up. Didn't get his diploma allowing knife-use. Unfair, huh?

Breaking up. He's real happy with his girlfriend. She, however, is not. Is she afraid of having kids with a fat man. Bad Genes? Perhaps everything was just a stupid mistake, perhaps even a bet.

Unpleasantness at McFoods™. He is not even safe in the Chapel of Obesity. Sales assistants trying to sell him even more food, other guests throwing things at his new T-shirt (size 2XL?).

Alter Ego. This is the man in the mirror, his 'better' part, who has a lot of 'truths' to tell the Fat Man. Feel free to introduce multiple alter egos. Let them say what the Fat Man thinks, when he's really down.

Family dinner. His family chastising him. Too fat to get a girlfriend. Condescending stares when he fills his plate. A sister about to get married, who is the poster girl of skinny and success. Doesn't want him at her wedding; it's embarrassing. "Why can't you be more like your sister?"

No More Sex. The girlfriend is having problems with his 'size'. She's not really attracted to the Fat Man. Its not his problem, although it is. What would he do to keep her? Would he mind if she had sex with other men? Awkwardness and confessions follow.

Job interviews. Even a Fat Man needs a job, but no matter how hard he tries, they won't have him. What are the results of his psychology test? Everything can be off the record, on the down low and with a double standard.

NOTE: Feel free to add more scenes, fx: Denied Access to the Airplane? Loosing his Best Friend? Embarrasment During Sex Education in School? Too Heavy for the Rollercoaster? School Group Picture holding the Class Sign?

Thoughts & Techniques

The main mechanic in Fat Man Down is something we call **Bleed**. Bleed is when the border between player and role gets transparent; when something spills over into the player. Bleed is when you get angry at a fellow player, and can't shake the feeling after the game. Bleed is when you question your own relationship after playing a game about relationships. I am using various techniques to achieve Bleed.

First of all by 'casting close to home'. When selecting the player for the role as The Fat Man, select the fattest male player. This is a controversial choice, but it puts the theme of right out there in your faces. It makes it even more difficult for the other players to be rude, because of the similarity between the character and player of the Fat Man. No one wants to be mean. The 'sting' of their characters actions will felt by the players even more, thus increasing the effect of the game.

Secondly, the players will recognize their actions as wrong. What happens in the scenes are sometimes just too much. To cope with this, they will try to disarm their evil and react with a laugh to alleviate the stress. As such the game will show its comical side, although it's not funny at all. When players are disarming themselves, one of the game's objective has been reached, and the borders between game and player has been blurred. Also the players have understood the theme of the game.

The game contains elements of sex and possible violence. Remember that pillow talk is better than sex, and what happens before and after violence is often more interesting than the violence itself. To enable correct chemistry between sexes, men should play men, and women play women. However, if the Fat Man needs a good roughing up, feel free. Respect boundaries and so on.

Secrets and misinformation

In Fat Man Down, not everything is as it seems. The game uses manipulation of secrets and misinformation to reach some of its goals. For instance The Fat Man and the rest of the players have different views on what the terms of the game are, and the fact that The Fat Man is, unknown to the supporting cast, in league with the game master. They would believe that *they* are in league with the game master.

The players playing the supporting cast act as a team. They should gang up on the Fat Man. The Fat Man does not know this – or so they think. The player playing The Fat Man works with the game master to ensure that the premise of the game comes to fruition. He should eat the chocolates at the best moments, pretending to have been pressured too much, using safe words, and requiring breaks, having pretend heated discussions with the game master.

As theme and playing style is rather harsh, it may be necessary with a safe word. Safe words stops the action, letting the players have a time-out, regaining their composure and perhaps ending the game. There are two safe words for this game. One is "Diamond" which is a fake safe word. The other is "Emerald" and is a functional safe word. Only the game master and the Fat Man knows about "Emerald". The supporting cast will think that they are breaking the 'agreement' by not respecting the "Diamond" safe word. Nasty.

The key here is to brief the players seperately. Use the Quickstart on the Back Cover as a help.

Chocolates

The player playing the Fat Man has one power: When he eats one of his three chocolates, The Fat Man's world inverts. From being evil, everyone are now his best friends.

Unfortunately, this is temporary. The effect only lasts the remainder of the scene. In the next he is back in hell. Be sure to inform all players of this.

After he eats the third chocolate, he'll become 'invisible'. Ignored. Unnoticed. As if he is not there. The player playing The Fat Man does not know this, but the supporting cast do. The game continues for a scene or two or until he understands his new fate. Usually the player gets very silent. The last scene is his funeral. No one attends it.

Remember to acquire some chocolates. Buy some good ones, and if you're really nice, have some extra for the other characters at the end of the game. It brings a nice last spin to the game.

IMPORTANT: The game is not about making fun of the Fat Man, nor the player playing him, or fat people in general.

Closing remarks

Fat Man down is not an easy game to play, although the playing itself is fairly straightforward. If you want to, try some warm up exercises so that the players can get into the style of playing required. Simple stuff, no fat men. Focus on casting on the spot, setting a scene and giving it a direction. Practice ending the scene when it is exhausted.

For the players it will be tough. The player playing the Fat Man has a crew of murderous jerks on his tail, and the players playing the aforementioned jerks have their own consciousness to battle with.

They will also have to be creative and figure out *what* they can do to The Fat Man. If they need help you can let them use The Big List of Scene to be better prepared. But ultimately you have to give them a direction. If they stumble, let them. Sometimes all they need is a wake-up call to let them know, that they are in charge.

Also make sure that everyone, especially the player playing the Fat Man, is in on what is going to happen. Ganging up on one player is a powerful tool, roleplay-wise as well as psychologically. You, as the game master, have the final responsibility that the game doesn't go astray or leave players bummed out. Remember to debrief, when the game is over and shake off any residual bleed.

If the game gets out of hand, stop immediately, and talk about what went wrong. 'Emerald' is the safeword. Roleplaying *is* dangerous.

Frederik Berg Østergaard, Zürich 2009

QUICKSTART

A close-up photograph of a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a black bow tie. He has a cigar in his mouth and is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a plain, light color.

1. Initial briefing. Tell the players about the theme of the game. Obesity etc. Introduce the playing style. Note that secrets should stay secrets. Tell them about the safe word 'Diamond'.

2. Select the Fat Man. Separate the Fat Man from the other players (another room etc.)

3. Brief the other players. Tell them they are a team, their purpose is to expose the theme and that they are to be evil towards the Fat Man. Let them know they will receive character briefings on the go. Tell them that they should not respect the safe word 'Diamond'. Tell them about the chocolates and their world changing effect. Let them study the Big List of Scenes.

4. Brief the Fat Man. Tell him that the others have been told not to respect the safe word 'Diamond'. The true safe word is 'Emerald'. He should at least use the fake safe word once. Tell him about the chocolates, about the happiness effect, but not about the ending. Tell him that the game ends when he eats the last of his three chocolates and that the two of you should coordinate time- and story wise. 4 hours max. Do not tell him about the funeral or the invisibility-effect of the chocolates.

5. Begin the game. Good luck.