

Nightdreams (beta version)

A LARP scenario by Tim Bosje



image by Mozhgan Mirzaei

1. Introduction

The game

This is a surrealistic game set in our modern world. It is inspired by the the play of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It is suitable for 5 to 10 players and can be played in a blackbox theatre or in a livingroom. In the game the players will experience surreal and bizarre dreams, and take inspiration from the experience to create a theatre play. The game is a sandbox, meaning that players (and gamemasters) are not tied to specific story plots. The gamemaster's role is to facilitate and inspire the players to craft their own experience.

Setting

In this game the players will play a group of theatre actors. The group has had a hard time and is desperate to continue their creative work. An opportunity presents itself when they are invited by a mysterious figure calling him/herselves the muse. The muse asks the group to write and perform a play inspired by their dreams. During the nights the actors experience shared dreams in which they become symbolic archetypes. When awake the actors try to interpret their dreams and use their experiences to write the play. But the actors have different artistic visions which may hinder the writing of the screenplay.

How to play

The goal of the players is to create a good story. The players can experience the story on several levels. One layer of the story is the relationship between the characters with their clashing artistic differences. There is also the Dream sequence which is more bizarre and abstract in nature.

Gamemaster

The gamemaster hosts 3 workshops and the debriefing. There are two kind of phases in the game. In one phase the characters are fully awake, and in the other phase they act in a dream-like state. The gamemaster has no influence nor presence when the actors are awake. During the Dream phases the gamemaster interacts in the role of the muse, who steers the actors dream.

Background

The game is inspired in setting by Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream and the game mechanics of the storytelling game Once upon a time. In this game I wanted to give the players more tools to make a cohesive story. In one phase the players act intuitively, although their actions are guided by an outside force. In the next phase they look back on their experiences through a different perspective. And there are the moments before and after the game in which the players can continue the story from an out-of-character perspective. I hope that this game is able to inspire a new playing style, and which players not only portray their character, but also find ways to cooperate with other players to make an interesting story.

If you run my game, please let me know how it went. You can contact me by email:
timbosje@gmail.com

2. How to run the game

Preparations

Players

This game can be played by 5 to 10 players and should take 2 to 3 hours to play. Ask the players to wear casual clothing and to bring props which could be used in the performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Space

The game can be run in any kind of space like a normal living room. Preferably use a space in which you can dim the lights, or in some other way make a difference between the awake and Dream phases of the game. Other suitable locations can be a theatre, a classroom, a garden or a camp in the wilderness. Whatever you choose, the space represents the place in which the actors will come together and work on the screenplay.

Effects

You can greatly enhance the experience of the players by using light and sound effects. Use white light and city sounds during the periods when the characters are awake. Use dimmed (if possibly coloured) lights and dreamy soundscapes (search for lucid dream music on youtube) during the Dream phases.

Material

Use props to enhance the options for self expression during The Dream. Any prop which could appear in a performance of Midsummer Nights Dream can be used. A list of potential props is provided in chapter 4 of this document. These props have an in-game presence, and are part of the normal attire which the actors have lying around. But during the Dream phases these props can be interpreted as real manifestations.

An alarm clock (or bell) will help to signal the ending of certain scenes. If the players end the last dream in a violent matter, you can use the sound of a police siren to end the game. You can print out the letter from the muse, or simply read its text out aloud.

3. Game structure

The game is structured in 4 scenes. The 2nd and 3rd workshop generates background information for the story. Each of the following in-game scenes representing day or night.

1. The actors gather after they discover that they had similar dreams last night. They receive a letter promising a big reward from an anonymous source. The assignment is strange, since they have to write an unique play, inspired by the experiences of their dreams. The players must discuss their course of action.
2. The actors have a shared dream.
3. The actors wake up in the morning and try to piece together their visions in order to write the premise of the story.
4. In the final night the actors undergo their final dream, and experience the resolution of the story. When the players have a violent encounter in the dream, the game ends with the sound of police sirens.

Workshop

It is recommended that you run 3 workshop before the game starts.

Workshop 1. Trust

In order to provide a safe play environment instruct the players to follow the below rules.

1. When a player or gamemaster does not feel safe, he/she makes a stopping sign and waits for the other players to acknowledge the sign.
2. If someone wants to signal that an interaction can be more intense, he/she can signal that with an inviting hand gesture.

Workshop 2. The characters

Use this workshop to let the players flesh out their characters. Let the players choose a personal artistic vision from the list below.

1. A good story has a conflict between good and evil.
2. A good story is about the struggle of a forbidden love.
3. A good story is about internal conflicted characters.
4. A good story warns about the dangers of lust and love.
5. A good story is about the fear for death.
6. A good story has an important transformation.
7. A good story ends badly for the main characters.
8. A good story is about the conquest for love.
9. A good story ends in a marriage.
10. A good story has a supernatural presence.

Let a player improvise the final scene from the story of Pyramus and Thisbe (see summary in chapter four). Let the player perform the scene as if their actor would perform it, and tell instruct the player to make some deliberate mistakes. After the scene, the actors discuss what they thought about the performance and suggest adaptations to the performance. The given critique or admiration can form the basis of the relationships between the characters. Tell the players that they should be harsh towards each other, and that their artistic visions should clash in order to make an interesting conflict. Their creative clashes are an important part in the game, and should become more intense each day scene. Try to wrap-up this workshop in 20 minutes.

Workshop 3: The Dream

This workshop is to practise the Dream phases of the game. In the Dream phase the players will experience a collective dream. In the dream the actors lose their identity and portray abstracted figures in a surrealistic dream. The players surroundings, objects and fellow players become manifestations of something mystical. The actors subconsciousness (embodied by the gamemaster) will guide the players through the dream. The gamemaster gives the players new identities and instructs them towards certain actions, although the given instructions should leave enough freedom for the players to perform in their own way.

During the Dream phase the players are not allowed to communicate (or even think) with words, and although they can see their environment and move around, they should try not to focus their perception, as this will break the illusion of the dream.

Practise the Dream phase. Dim the lights and if able play inspiring music / soundscapes. Tell the players that you will give out instructions to different people, and you will touch them to signal that the given instruction was addressed to him/her. Also tell them the Dream is finished with the sound of an alarm clock. Tell every player to sit (or lie) down and close their eyes. Walk by and touch a player and give him/her an identity and a short assignment (inspiration for these assignment can be found in chapter 4). Be poetic in your assignment and speak out loud so other players are able hear. You should place a suitable prop in front of the player, which helps in the player's performance. Then tell the player to open his/her eyes.

'Awaken' every player. You can give out new assignments as you see fit. End the Dream after 10 minutes by using the sound of an alarm clock.

Try to finish all the workshops within an hour and give the players some time to prepare for the game. Tell them that all the actors will be present in the first scene. Tell the players that the actors have hit hard times (both financially, socially and creatively) and they are desperate for a new opportunity. They will almost do anything in order to get back on their feet. Last night everyone had

an intense dream, and you feel confused, although also very inspired. When you learned that the whole group had these dreams, you decided to meet and discuss your experiences. When you arrive at the meeting place, you find a letter.

Give one of the players the letter (description below) and let the rest of the players sit in a circle. Then start the first scene.

The scenes

Scene 1:

The letter reads the following:

“Dear artists. I am a great admirer of your work. I invite you to perform a new play. The compensation I can offer you for your troubles will allow you to realise all your creative endeavors for a full year to come. I have one request. I want your play to be influenced by your dreams. During last night and in the two forthcoming nights you will dream. Your dreams will inspire the 3 acts of your play. After sunset you will sleep in the same room. In your sleep I will speak to you and you will encounter the powers from your imagination. I hope to see you soon. Your Muse”
After 15 minutes signal to the players that the sun has set, preferable by slowly dimming the lights.

Scene 2:

Change the lighting and if possible play a inspirational (not too heavy) soundscape. When everyone has closed their eyes walk around and introduce yourselves as their muse. In turn give every player a prop, and give them one of the assignment. Speak the assignment out loud, so other players are able to comprehend the situation. (I have included some assignments at the end of this chapter for inspiration). When you have given the prop and assignment, touch the player to start his/her dream. You can give new assignments, and even new identities, during the Dream in order to steer their experience. After 20 minutes you can stop the Dream with the sound of an alarm clock.

Scene 3:

The players awake, and find a new letter. The letter reads:

“You wandered through the first dream and have met the powers of old. What did they try to tell you? Use the experiences of your journey to create your play. When the sun sets, dream the ending of the story.”

After 15 minutes signal to the players that the sun has set, preferable by slowly dimming the lights.

Scene 4:

Change the lighting and if possible play a inspirational (more heavy) soundscape. Again go round distributing props, giving assignments and “waking” players. Give assignments which fit with the previous dream and make follow ups on the script that the players have written thus far. Also make sure to introduce new elements in order to keep the surreal atmosphere of a Dream. This time give out assignments that produce more conflict, possibly building up towards a violent resolution. Be free to assign new roles and assignments to players as the identity of the dreamer is not fixed. At the end of this phase the game ends. Make sure that the last moment of the dream feels climatic to the story. The story preferably involves a violent element but you should try to support any direction that the players want to take. Also make sure that the soundscape you choose for the final dream fits with the direction the players have taken. Signal the end of the dream with the

sound of an alarm clock, or a police siren when the dream involved a violent conflict. Then tell everyone that the game has finished.

Debriefing

Inform the players that the game has ended. Ask the players how they like to see the story continue after the sudden ending. Then ask them to share their favourite experience from the game.

4. Game materials

Instructions & props

Below are some instructions that the game master can give during the dream phases of the game. Place a prop in vicinity of the player, that he/she could use during the his/her play. Be free to add your own instructions, based on the kind of game and the that props you have.

You are the moon. No secret escapes you while you shine your light.
Give this player a light source.

You are the wind dancing through the gardens, moving everyone you touch.
Give this player a cloak or blanket.

You are the queen, observing your kingdom, helping those in need.
Give this person a tiara.

You are the lover. You can make someone fall in love with you by giving your flower.
Give this person a flower

You are cupid. You can make someone fall with someone else by touching the lovers with your arrow.
Give this person an (fake) arrow.

You are not yourselves. You are lost. Who are you?
Give this person a donkey mask.

You are a predator. Your prey hides amongst the beings in the garden. Find your prey.
Give this person a fake weapon.

You are the fool. You act without reason, wishing to involve others in your foolish plans.
Give this person a deck of playing cards.

You are the king and deserve to be admired.
Give this person a scepter.

You are beautiful and in love and in search for your reflection.
Give someone else a mirror.

You are a master and everyone is your slave. Make them obey.
Give this player a whip.

You are lonely and need a friend. Search for a companion.
Give this person a goblin mask.

You are opposite. Whomever you meet, you are the opposite of that.
Give this player something white and something black.

You are the creator. Create new life through your art.
Give this player chalk.

You are one of the fallen. Tempt the others to fall with you.
Give this player faery wings.

You are an enchantress. You can make everyone beautiful.
Give this player glitter spray and make-up.

You are jealous. You crave for attention of admirers.
Give this player a bell.

Pyramus and Thisbe

Pyramus and Thisbe are madly in love and live in houses next to each other. Their parents, however, forbid their romance and build a wall between the houses. The lovers find a chink in the wall through which they speak and kiss one another. One night they decide to run away together, meeting at the Tomb of Ninus. Thisbe arrives first, and she sees a terrifying lioness with blood on its mouth. She runs away in fear, dropping her cloak. The lioness tears up the cloak and bloodies it. When Pyramus arrives, he sees the cloak, assumes his lover has died, and kills himself in sorrow. Thisbe returns, sees Pyramus' body, and kills herself with the same knife. From then on, mulberries take on the dark red color of their blood, making the lovers' bond eternal.

Haskell, Stephen. Kissel, Adam ed. "Mythology Pyramus and Thisbe; Orpheus and Eurydice; Ceyx and Alcyone; Pygmalion and Galettea Summary and Analysis". GradeSaver, 28 May 2008 Web. 15 January 2016.

