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THE SOCIETY OF DREAMERS

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who gave me the original idea for this game years ago!*

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Dream

the
Dreamer

the
Mosaic

The Hunt

Metamorphosis

Stranger

Love

Death

Journal

PERSONAL NOTES FROM ANOTHER SOCIETY



This manuscript was found by the leader of our Society, together with the board. It seems to come from a different Society, with goals similar to our own.

THE HUNT

Hunting is one of the most noble activities man can undertake. By showing our mastery over the animals, we mirror the most exalted state of being for man: The control over our inner nature. The outer and the inner are in harmony, in universal resonance. I love the spontaneous hunt, not the organized expeditions the Society sometimes embarks upon. Not to mention the man-hunts.

LOVE

We aren't only seekers; we are also human. Love and bodily excitement are the mightiest portals between body and dream. Often in the history of the Society, there have been romantic liaisons between its members. Some have been perverse, others purely platonic, never consummated. Liaisons with persons outside our Society have, for me, always seemed fraught with danger, disintegration and loss, but not all of us share this emotion.

THE MNEMOSITE

It's rare that the mnemosite shows itself in daylight or in public. Most often, one encounters it in a darkened room, alone. This can be uncomfortable, frightening, when one has no certain understanding or knowledge of its intentions. Or of whether it even has a will of its own – some of us believe they might be ruled by instinct alone. I keep an open mind to the possibility that there might be more than one sub-species of mnemosite. When the mnemosite senses our curiosity, when it hears our call, it will sometimes appear to us. We have not yet ascertained whether it does so voluntarily; sometimes it has seemed confused, other times focused and oriented towards some goal.

THE DREAMER

Some of them don't know they have a mnemosite in them. Others are insane with fear, or believe the creature is somehow part of themselves. I have learnt to show the utmost care in the first meeting with a dreamer. Let them feel they are in control, but pay close attention and note any oddities in behavior and appearance.

DREAM

(All the notes have been crossed out in black ink. First chaotically, then methodically, with a different pen.)

JOURNAL

I keep a meticulously detailed journal of my activities. Every meeting with a new person, every unusual event is recorded. Thus far I haven't shown my journal to anybody in the Society.

METAMORPHOSIS

(The manuscript is nearly unreadable. The only words that can be discerned, are: «Changes in (...) also for the (...) or reality.»)

DEATH

Our scientific enquiries and observations indicate that death doesn't need to mean the end of living. Whatever the case may be, death does occur, and it can be painful and terrifying. The members of the Society have signed a contract to end our lives with morphium, in order to make our deaths the subject of scientific observation.

STRANGER

The members of our Society often encounter people of a sort others would never meet in their mundane, everyday affairs. Fascinating, sometimes frightening strangers. I know not whether they are attracted by an unknown force, or if it is our openness to new phenomena which lets us notice those who others would pass by in silence.

ABOUT THE GAME



In this game, you will play a small group of people who call themselves the Society of Dreamers. They suspect or believe that there are creatures living in people's dreams. The members of the Society call these creatures mnemosites. They know nothing about the mnemosites to begin with.

Everything that is known about the mnemosites will emerge during play.

The game is written for 2-5 players. There's no game master, and no need to prepare anything – beyond reading the rules, of course. Everything else is done during play.

The game is set in Europe in the 1800's. You'll choose what city to play in during the game. Historical facts and details can be used as flavor, but they're not necessary to play the game. If you want to introduce a historical person or specific location, do so, describe it, and don't sweat it if it's slightly anachronistic.

THE INTENTION OF THE AUTHOR

You can play this game however you like, but it might help you understand it better if you know where I'm coming from! My intention is that this game should be played in an exploratory and cooperative fashion. That's probably why it's so interesting to play with strangers! The enjoyment lies in envisioning events that both you and others describe, in following the flow and intensity of the story, in contributing freely, in letting events unfold and in following that unfolding with curiosity. It's not meant for competitive play, nor for supporting one single person's vision above that of the other players.

THE GENERAL FLOW

The game will pass through four different phases. In each phase, every player will be responsible for starting at least one scene. The phases are:

Pregame Act 1, where we see the characters first as children, then as youths. This is how they were before they met each other and formed the Society of Dreamers. The group will reveal the first facts about the mnemosites.

Exposition Act 2, where the Society works as a group to understand how the mnemosite – or mnemosites – are working in the present. The members interact and learn to know each other. More facts are revealed.

Weaving Act 3, where the threads of the story are gathered, and the group starts to understand how things really fit together. Facts learned earlier are incorporated and integrated into the plot.

Ending Act 4, where the story reaches its climax and we learn the fates of both the characters and the mnemosite.

PLAYING TIME

The minimum time needed to play for four people, from you sit down to explain the game until you've finished the final scene, is four hours.

Decide how much time you have available. You need at least four hours, and that will only work if you're efficient at cutting scenes. Find out at what time you'll be two-thirds through the time you have available – that's when the exposition phase must end. (So if you start at 6.30, and have four-and-a-half hours available, the exposition phase will end after three hours, at 9.30).

Run the scenes listed below at the very least. Do NOT be tempted to skip the childhood and youth scenes! They are vital to the game.

- One round of childhood (one round = one scene for each player) - Act 1: Pregame
- One round of youth - Act 1: Pregame
- Meeting of the Society - Act 2: Exposition
- One round of exposition (after the exposition, you've probably used two-thirds of your time) - Act 2: Exposition
- One round of weaving - Act 3: Weaving
- Final scene - Act 4: Ending

INSTRUCTING A SCENE

In each phase there can be several scenes. They differ a bit from phase to phase, but one thing is always the same: There's an instructor for each scene, and the players take turns being the instructor.

Being an instructor means you do these things:

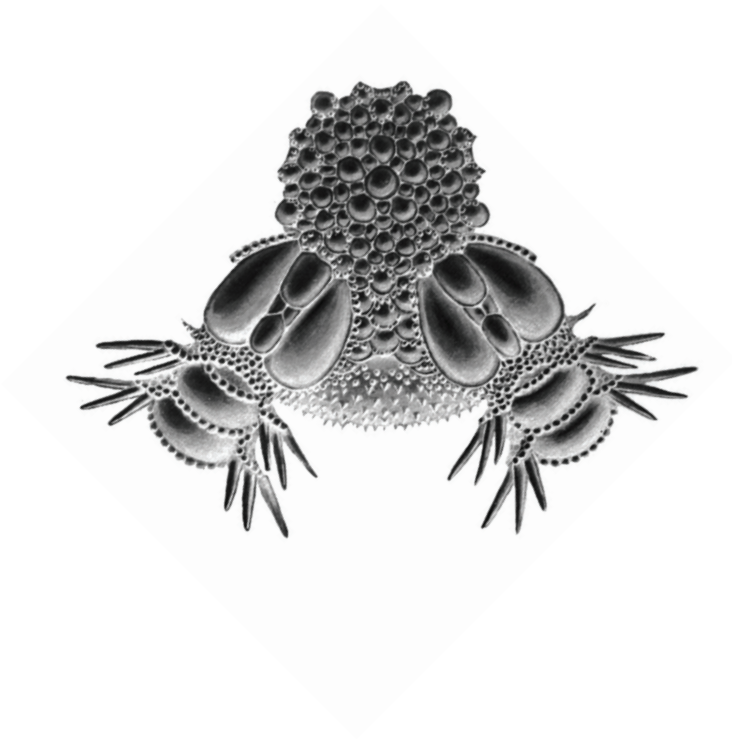
- Take some time to think before starting a scene, if you want to.
- Consider what characters should be present in the scene. All of them? Just one?
- Decide where and when a scene will start, including what the characters are doing at the beginning.
- Set the atmosphere. Be clear about the vibe of the scene. If it's a scene of action, start in medias res; if it's a contemplative scene, speak slowly and softly.
- Get other players to invent and play secondary characters, or do so yourself, if you want to.
- Control the pacing. Ask for details to slow it down. Cut to the action to speed things up.
- Tell the group when the scene ends.

It's important that the instructor follows their own vision of how the scene should start, without having a big discussion with the other players. Starting a scene is not done in committee!

It's equally important that the instructor let the scene evolve naturally afterwards, without interfering or constraining it unnecessarily. Once it's started, it belongs to the group.

WHAT OTHER PLAYERS DO

Players who aren't instructors, will often play their own characters. However, they can play secondary characters (on their own initiative, or when asked by the instructor), throw in interesting details and events, suggest ideas for other players etcetera. Everyone is free to contribute, all the time.

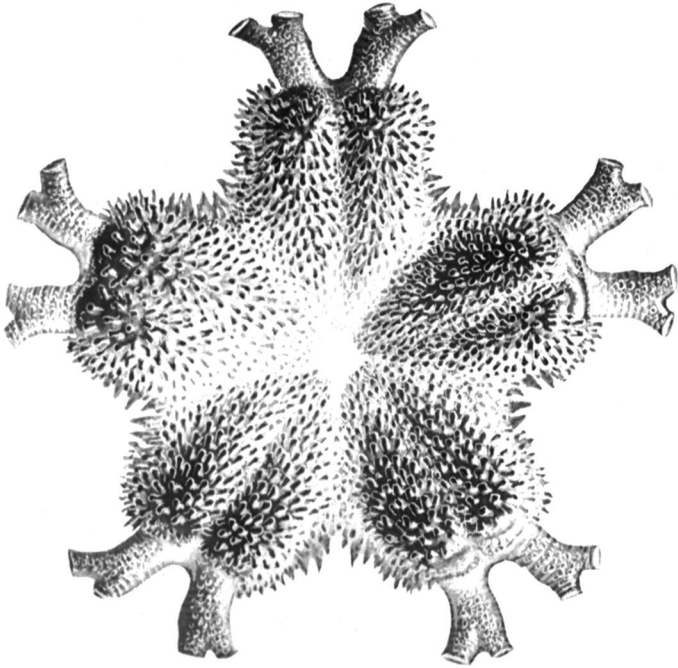


ABOUT MNEMOSITES



I want to repeat and emphasize that nobody – neither the players, nor the characters – are meant to know anything about the mnemosites prior to the game. The game is very much about exploring new territory, so if you preload it by defining what a mnemosite is, you pretty much take away the fun and interesting part.

What is a mnemosite? All you know to begin with, is that a mnemosite is a creature that lives in people's dreams. What do they do? Are they intelligent, or animal-like? Is there one, or many? Are there many kinds? Are they benign, or hateful, or maybe they don't care about humans? Do they have a plan? What is their nature? They can be vastly different from group to group, from game to game.



ACT 1: PREGAME



PRELIMINARY RITUALS

Before the game, you should banish any evil spirits from the room! Do this by making loud noises: Everyone claps their hands and shouts, aiming at the corners of the room. (Yes, you do this for real, physically. Yes, it's part of the game.)

Sit in a circle. Whoever's the leader (probably the person who read the rules first) instructs the others. Something like this:

- «Imagine there's a light shining above your head. You can close your eyes if you want.»
- «In the center of our circle, there's a shining ball, a globe full of colors, creatures and dreams.»
- «Imagine a spoke, like the spoke of a wheel, going from the light above your head to the ball in the center. The spoke is made of white light.»
- «We are all connected to the center. Imagine everybody else's lights, and the spokes connecting them to the shining ball.»
- «Keep that image for a while.»
- «Now I'm going to count down from ten to one. On one, open your eyes.»
- Count down.

CREATING CHARACTERS

Now you need some paper. Give everybody a few sheets, enough to make eight cards and have some left over for notes.

1) Everyone makes: Two cards with a nationality; two with a gender, sexual preference or similar; two with a profession, occupation, lifestyle or similar; two with an age. Put all of the cards together in four stacks and shuffle them. (All nationality cards from all players go in one big nationality stack, for example).

2) Everyone draws one card from each stack. This is what their character will be like when the Society is formed. If anyone wants to, they can discard one card (just remove it from the game), and draw a new one. No trading with other players!

Example: You draw the cards «Polish», «Genderless», «13 years», «Carpenter». You want to play an older character, so you discard «13 years». Your new card says «70 years».

CHILDHOOD

Each player gets exactly one scene for their character.

Now the game proper begins. Take turns getting a scene. On your turn, you get a scene from your character's childhood. The player – the real player, not the character – you've known the longest will be your instructor for this scene. (Sometimes this can be a matter of minutes or seconds! That's all right.)

Tips for childhood scenes:

- Characters are between 0 and 10 years old.
- Maybe you want to show them in their country of origin.
- This is about the character, not the Society of Dreamers. Don't bring in their players' characters.

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- One good way to start is to show the character with their friends or family, in their country of origin. That way we get to see their daily life. Then, after a while, you can let something weird, threatening or dangerous enter the scene. (A disturbed or violent other person? Something that might break up the family? A supernatural event?)

After each scene, the group may have revealed a fact – see below.

IN OR OUT OF CHARACTER?

When a scene has started, if your character is in focus, you'll want to act and talk in character most of the time. However, if you want to bring in some element or give a short instruction - «my mother is dead», «hey you, play my brother» - just do so and move on. Avoid out-of-character discussion and debate!

FACT CARDS

After the scene, the instructor decides whether you – the group of players – have learned something about the mnemosites. If so, he/she writes it down on a card. These cards are known as fact cards. There can only be one card for each scene, and the instructor has final say about whether and how to write a card. Anyone can suggest that a fact was revealed, and how it should be worded, but these are just suggestions; it's the instructor's call.

Example: In a scene at a Kyoto temple, the young girl Tsuno steps across a red line and faints, seeing a vision of a thin, hairy, animal-like face. The instructor writes a card saying «They live beyond the red line».

It's entirely up to the group to let facts about the mnemosites emerge in play, in scenes. Only after a scene has ended should you start thinking about whether the group learned a new fact.

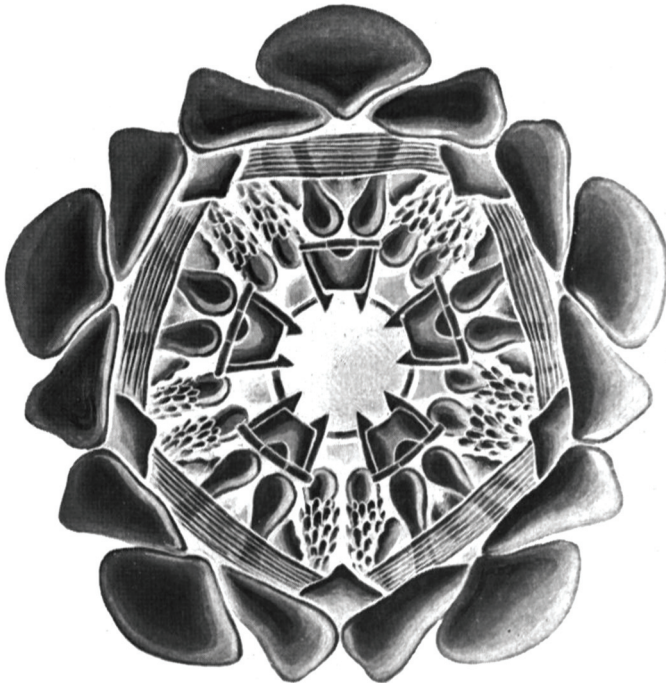
YOUTH

Each player gets exactly one scene for their character.

After everyone's had one childhood scene, everyone gets a scene from their character's youth. This time, the player you've known the shortest will be your instructor.

Tips for youth scenes:

- Characters are between 11 and 20 years old. (Obviously, they can't be older than their starting age).
- You can follow up on themes, characters and/or events from the childhood scene.
- Again, it's best not to bring in other players' characters. We want to see their personality and situation develop before they meet the Society.
- After each scene, the group may have revealed one fact.



ACT 2: EXPOSITION



THE FIRST MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF DREAMERS

The first meeting is one single scene.

It's time for the group to find out which character is most likely the Society's leader. Discuss briefly which character is most likely to have spent time investigating mnemosites and dream phenomena. That character will be the one who first gathers the Society.

The leader will be the instructor for the First Meeting scene. Here, he or she officially forms the Society. The player should take a few minutes to think about how to play it out. These are some things that need to be done:

- a) Decide where and when. This will probably affect the rest of the game. What European city are you in, and what time of year is it?
- b) Describe the goal of the Society: To find out more about the mnemosite, and to take action based on the facts you discover.
- c) Describe a Dreamer – a person you, the leader, knows is infected or possessed by a mnemosite. They're not present at the meeting! To find out about the Dreamer, draw a card from each stack to determine who they are – age, nationality, gender, profession. The instructor can discard one card and replace it with another, if desired.
- d) Unveil the board. This belongs to the leader and the Society. How did you get it? From another Society, at an antique store, as an anonymous gift, as an inheritance...? Make up a little story about it. It comes with a few pages of personal Notes from a previous owner.

The board and the notes exist for the Society mostly as curious items. For the players, they're a game tool to set scenes.

FURTHER SCENES

Each player will start at least one scene. If you have time, do more.

From this point on you'll be using the board to set up scenes. Take turns being the instructor (see the notes above on how to be an instructor!) On your turn, the other players will use the board to select a scene type for you. When they have, you should read the corresponding section from the «Notes from another Society» out loud for the group. These notes are meant as inspiration for your scene.

(If the scene selected is «Dream», there are special rules for that – see below!)

Now, take a little time to think about how to set the scene. In the meantime, the players can do something silent, with a focus on the game. Here are some suggestions:

- Write a letter to the Society or one of the characters. It can be from friends or strangers, persons or institutions, even a different Society. The letter should state where it's from and when it was sent. Hand out this letter when you think it'd be fitting.
- Write a journal entry for your character, either from the past or recent events. This can be read aloud in a «Journal» scene if you want.
- Draw something from a recent scene. Or draw your character.
- Close your eyes and meditate on dream imagery.
- Run the scene as you like, bearing in mind the suggestions for instructors given earlier.

During the scene, if the group reveals any facts about the mnemosite (whether the characters know or not), you can write one fact on a card and put it on the table for everyone to see. There can be at most one new fact in each scene.

USING THE BOARD

In case you've never used an ouija board before, it works like this: Put an object on the board – a coin, a big lens, something not too small. Everyone puts one finger on the object. After a while, it's supposed to start moving all by itself... and end up on one of the spaces.

However, if you need to give it a little push to get things going, that's all right. Don't wrestle for control, though. And don't plan anything before starting! It's meant to be sort of a silent, democratic randomizer. When the object stops on a space, that means you've selected that scene!

DREAM SCENES

In a Dream scene, one of the characters will enter a Dreamer. A Dreamer is someone possessed by a mnemosite – either the one introduced in the first meeting of the Society of Dreamers, or someone else who's appeared in the course of the game. It can easily be one of the characters.

You, the instructor, decide who's going to do the diving. Set the scene as usual – describe the surroundings, who's present, the atmosphere. You (or the group) should establish how the dive will be performed. Is the group using new, ground-breaking technology? Occult rituals? Drugs? Surgery?

Once the character – the dream diver – has dived in, the player should close his or her eyes. You describe a dream image that shows the dream diver's surroundings.

Now the scene proper starts. One of the other player says what the dream diver should do in the dream. The diver answers what he or she sees happen in the dream – how the landscape changes, what other dream creatures do, etc. In other words, the dream diver never describes their own actions, and the other players don't describe the dream.

Example:

You (establishing the first dream image): You're standing on a hilltop, looking down over a lush valley. The rain is soft on your eyelids.

Player 1: Go down into the valley.

Dream diver: I feel the raindrops getting heavier, the forest grows thick and dark.

Player 2: Bend down and look at the undergrowth.

Dream diver: My back is elastic, as if my spine has become rubber. There are tiny, pearl-like flowers among the green foliage.

You: Look closer at the flowers.

Dream diver: I can see my own reflection, and that of something large behind me.

The dream dive ends... when someone ends it. Perhaps the diver, perhaps one of the other characters, perhaps even the dreamer or the mnemosite.

As always, you, the instructor, decide when the scene is done.

THE EXPOSITION PHASE ENDS...

...when you've used half the available time. By now, you probably have 10-15 fact cards, depending on how long you've played and how fast you go through your scenes.

PAUSE!

Take a 15-minute break! Go somewhere else, talk to other people about practical, non-game-related things.

ACT 3: WEAVING



Each player will start at least one scene. If you have time, do more.

FACTS ABOUT THE MNEMOSITES

Now the leader of the Society should read out every fact card aloud to the group. This can be done in or out of character – that’s up to the player!

The group can, if they want, summarize the major elements of the story so far: Who are the major factions or characters? What do they want? What unresolved questions should be answered at some point?

FURTHER SCENES

Once again you’ll be taking turns instructing, using the board to set scenes. The difference is that now you’re not revealing facts, you’re reincorporating them.

Before the start of each scene, the instructor chooses a fact card that the players can focus on. If the fact is reincorporated and used in a fitting way, as judged by the instructor, the card is given to whoever reincorporated it in the most satisfying and atmospherically appropriate way. Don’t make a big deal out of this – just pay attention during the scene, and use your own good judgement to decide whether and to whom to hand it out.

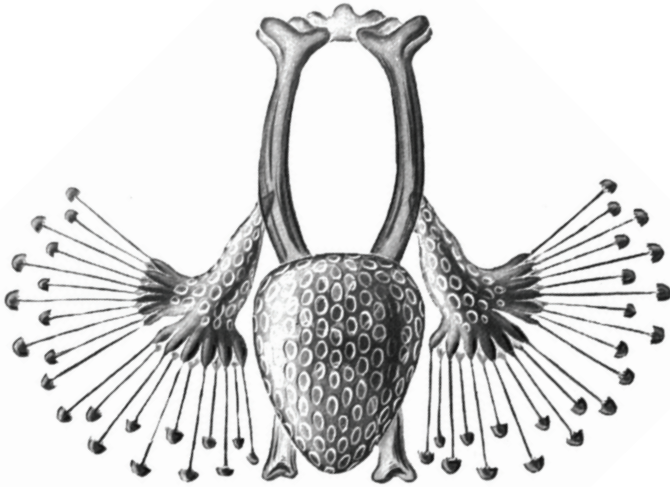
Sometimes you might want to run a scene with only one character present – that doesn’t mean the other players can’t reincorporate things! Perhaps a secondary character run by one of the players says or does something especially fitting, for example.

If the instructor finds it particularly appropriate, he or she can hand out two cards in one scene, but the instructor can also decide not to hand out any cards.

Remember: The instructor can use time to think before the start of the scene, and the players have things to do while they wait!

THE WEAVING ENDS...

...when all fact cards have been reincorporated.



ACT 4: ENDING



This can be one or several scenes; the instructor decides.

THE CLIMAX

Now it's time to go for the climax, if you haven't already reached it (if you have, the ending scene will probably be more of an epilogue). The player with the most fact cards on their hands will be the instructor from now on.

The instructor decides whether to play a few more scenes. When he/she thinks it's about time, you play out a final scene. During this scene, or possibly in an epilogue (instructor decides), these questions should be addressed:

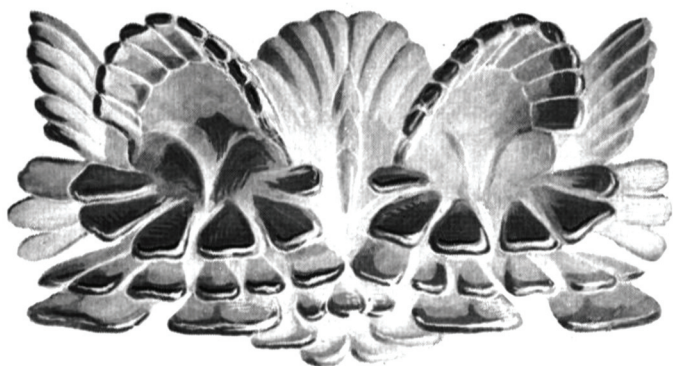
A) What happens to the mnemosite?

B) What happens to the characters?

It's pretty much impossible to give any strict rules for the final scene. When I play, it's often ended with the group meeting and interacting with the mnemosite – a final confrontation, be it a battle or a questioning session where the mnemosite asks the characters what they want. Whether the instructor wants to include his/her own character or not, and how, is entirely up to them.

ENDING RITUAL

Sit around talking after the game for as long as you like. When you're done, before you leave the room, do the spirit banishing ritual again – clap your hands, make loud noises at all corners of the room. Now it's all cleared out, you can leave the room!



STYLES OF PLAY



WHAT'S A STYLE OF PLAY?

A «style of play», the way I mean the term, is a way of playing – a collection of attitudes, assumptions, techniques that define how a group usually plays together. Every group has their own style, and some are very different from others. Even when playing a completely straight and well-known role-playing game like D&D, some groups may design the world and scenarios together while others follow the GM's single vision; some will play competitively and strictly by the rules while others do cooperative improv; some will be all about the action while others are all about the exploration.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR THIS GAME?

Most games are written from one of two basic assumptions:

- A) That everyone shares the designer's style of play, or that...**
- B) The game will easily support all styles of play.**

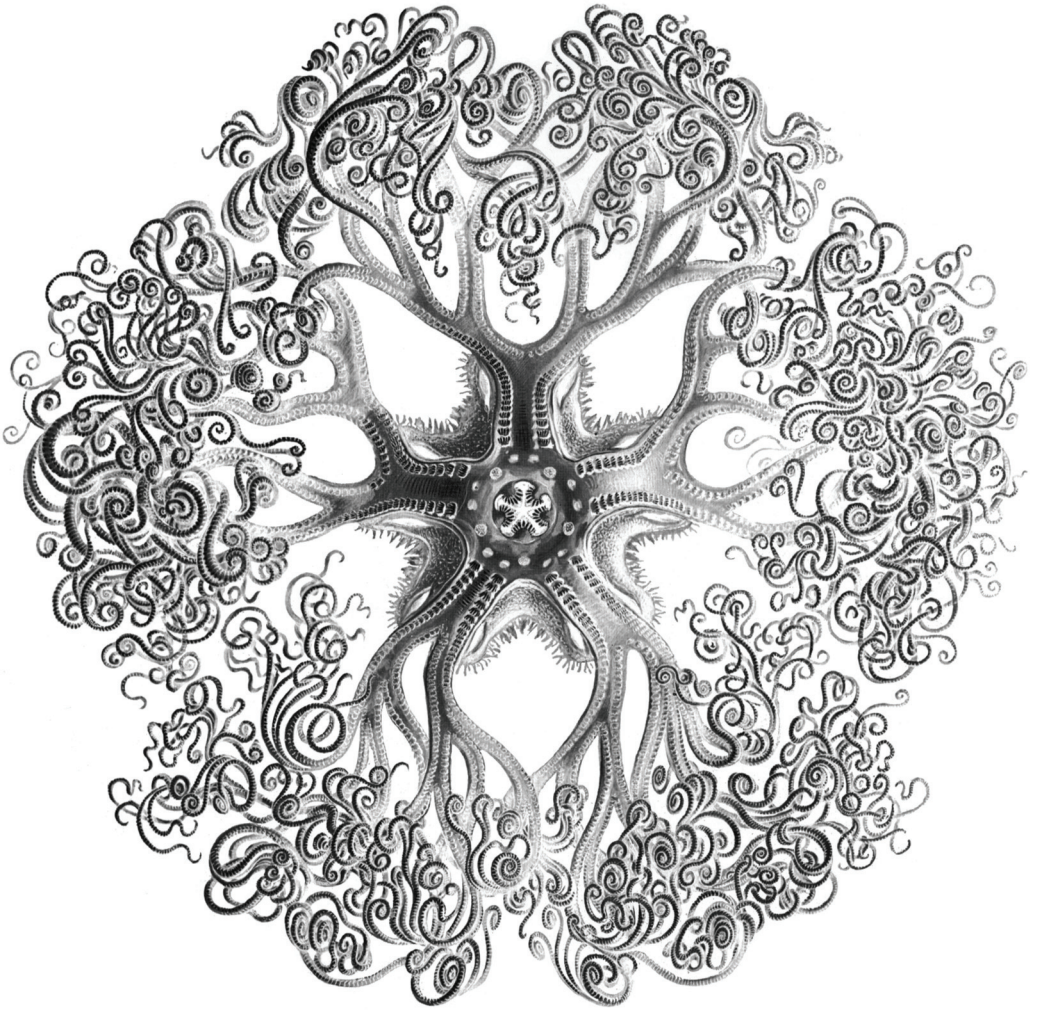
Both are obviously untrue. When writing this game, I obviously have a specific style in mind, and this game won't easily support all other styles. Of course, I expect you (the reader, the group) to do whatever you want with it; but just so you'll know where I'm coming from, here's how we've been doing it while playtesting. This game works with that style. I've written it as a style guide; they're not hard-and-fast rules, but they are a guide for successful play.

STYLE OPTION: MULTIFORM

I usually play this game just sitting around the table and talking. But sometimes I've played with groups of larpers (live-action role-players), and we've multiformed the game – made it a cross between tabletop and larp. What you do is sit around the table between scenes – when you write cards, set scenes, use the board etc – and then get up and play out the scenes as they occur. It makes for more physical drama, and is highly recommended.

STYLE GUIDE FOR NORDIC DREAMING STYLE

- 1) Listen to everybody. When someone talks, imagine what they're describing. Do not interrupt to make things go the way you want them to.
- 2) Your idea is a starting point that the group will grow into something larger, better and different. Throw it out there! Do not try to find the best idea. Specifically, do not discuss alternatives to try to find the «best» one.
- 3) When it's been said, it's true. Do not try to retroactively change what others have described.
- 4) Push the other characters. Give them surprises, force them into danger and confusion.
- 5) Keep the dream. Accept that strange things happen with no explanation. Accept that there are rules in the game world that we're not going to comprehend. Do not try to explain everything.
- 6) If you want to break the rules of the game, talk about it. Do not, for instance, cut a scene when you're not the instructor, or skip a phase without consulting the group.
- 7) We are all equal. You are the same as the others. Do not fight for your individual ideas. You will kill the game.
- 8) Accept your own ideas. Sometimes, what comes out of your mouth will be scary, or prejudiced, or something that you don't want to show to others. It's okay! Do it anyway.
- 9) Let things be serious when they are. Don't start throwing in jokes – even if others laugh, it can easily ruin the atmosphere.
- 10) When someone's thinking, let them. Wait until they're done.



DESIGNER'S NOTES

I hope you enjoyed this game! I've played it many times, with many different people, and so far, it's just been getting better and better. By now, a dozen societies seem to live inside me. Where their mnemosites are, I have no idea.

It's been a long journey, getting the game into its final form. In one version, it had a game master. In another, there was an abstract, association-based maze navigation system for dream dives. Several versions had point systems for fighting the mnemosite «threat». In one, there were pre-made cards for locations, scenes, objects found in dreams. At one point, the rules were all hidden in different envelopes, opened as play progressed.

What a mess! And all those beautiful little ideas I ended up not using, just lying by the wayside, twinkling in the sun.

I guess you can say I've been using an iterative design process. Very shortly after receiving the idea for the game, I had a playtest document ready, and tried it out. After that, it's been play, rewrite, play, throw everything away, simmer for some months, rewrite from scratch, play, rewrite, play, rewrite. Sometimes an old idea that I'd abandoned would be brought back because I missed the feel it gave to the game.

So what you have in your hands now is the result of an intuitive, darwinistic process. It's based on practice and discovery, on discovering emergent effects of rules and changes in rules. I know how every bit works, and why it works – but I only know because I've tried them out. And thought about them. Theory is part of design, but it's got to be your own theory; and you only get your own theory by thinking and playing and listening to a lot of people.

Everything's a spiral, a huge dynamic system that lets you grow if you let it. Interact. Little systems latch on to big ones in unforeseen ways.

Are those abstractions useful to you? They are to me. They're part of my dreamer, I think. They're my mnemosite.

Sweet dreams.

TWO BONUS GAMES



These two tiny role-playing games are both meant to be played in 15 minutes. They're not just artsy-fartsy thought experiments; they've both been played out several times. Ideal for conventions, waiting time before some big event, warm-up before a game, getting to know strangers etc.

THE ORC IN THE WELL

This role-playing poem is playable in many forms – including two-player and forum variants. No preparation or game master is needed.

There's an orc sitting in a well. It can't get out. The orc looks up at the sky. A bird flies past.

You, the players, will take turns telling this orc's story, from different points of view. The game lasts 15 minutes. It covers approximately the same amount of time in the orc's life.

When it's your turn, you narrate something. You can do a short or long narration, whichever you like. You have to choose between narrating the **EXTERNAL**, the **INTERNAL**, or something from the **PAST**. External narration is about stuff that happens to or around the orc. Internal narration is about the creature's thoughts and emotions. Narrating the past, you can narrate anything you like.

Note that none of these modes focus on what the orc does. It can be about what the orc has done in the past, or what's being done to the orc, or how the orc reacts mentally... but action isn't the main thing, really.

Players take turns, starting with the player to the left of whoever explains the rules. The first narration should be external.

After fifteen minutes the game is over. The last narration should be external, too.

FIVE CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN IDENTITY

This role-playing poem works very well in larp form. It takes 15 minutes, and requires a game master. No preparation is needed.

The players play characters that know they're characters in a role-playing game. This is all the characters know to begin with - they haven't been assigned an identity yet. They can talk to each other, but not to the players or game master (in other words, players are in character the entire time). The characters are free to speculate in what sort of characters they are, what sort of game it is etc.

After a while (3-5 minutes) the game master assigns the first character an identity. After that, he/she gives the other characters their identity as he/she sees fit, by saying «You're the little sister» or similar. It's usually a good idea to wait at least a minute or two between each identity assignment.

The identities are:

- *mother;*
- *little sister;*
- *the dead dog;*
- *God;*
- *God.*

