

Dream a Little Dream, by Joe Beason

Introduction

This LARP is about confronting (or avoiding) a personal issue within the course of a dream. One person will take on the role of the Sandman (facilitator), helping guide the players through the game. During play, the other players will take turns as a Dreamer, plagued by a Regret, who has a dream one restless night, and as Masks who give voice to the Regret and help play out the dream. Will the dream help? Harm? Just be a weird story told to friends the next day? Only the Dreamer can judge. (Suggestions for playing without a Sandman, or to allow the Sandman to have a dream as well, can be found in the appendix.)

Number of players: 4-8. The upper bound is porous, but more people = more down time and chaos.

Time needed: The larger the group, the longer the session. Allow 30 minutes to set up, then 15 for each player. A pair of people can play in under an hour.

Play space: a room large enough for acting out the dreams, with an area for the Dreamers' Bed.

Materials needed: a mask for each player (including the Sandman). It can be as simple as a paper domino mask printed from a template, or something more elaborate, but should be easy to take on and off, and comfortable enough to wear throughout the game. Items evocative of bed, or sleep, are nice: maybe one or more pillows, a teddy bear or blanket. Paper and pens.

Set-Up

Touch Boundaries: Before the game begins, the Sandman should lead a discussion on touch boundaries. The game can be played with no physical contact at all, or can include whatever level of touch everyone is comfortable with.

Safety techniques: The Sandman should then go over any safety techniques the group will be using (OK Check In, Cut/Brake, Open Door, etc.).

Tone: Dreams can be silly, weird, disturbing, sexy, scary, etc. Talk about the overall tone(s) people would like to see (or not see), or if they'd rather leave it up to each individual Dreamer. Dreamers will have an opportunity to further limit or direct the tone of their own dream.

Lines: The Sandman will ask everyone to write down content they don't want to see in any dream (hard lines) on a scrap or sheet of paper. Because of the nature of dreams, people might want lines around things they might not normally consider, such as body horror or being chased. Dreamers will have an opportunity to set additional lines for their own dream; this step is for the group as a whole. The Sandman will also ask players to add something on the same scrap about their own sleep style: preferred conditions, a detail of their usual sleeping space, a bedtime ritual. The Sandman should also write down answers to these questions! Then the

Sandman will gather up the answers and read them to the group. If possible, the Sandman should write out the hard lines somewhere everyone can see them (whiteboard, taped to wall, etc.).

The Dreamers' Bed: Each Dreamer will begin and end their dream in the Bed. It should be a place where each Dreamer can lay down, sit or stand. It can be a chair or chairs, a sofa, an actual bed, or simply a spot on the floor. It can be made up with bedding and other objects associated with sleep (pillows, blankets, teddy bears, CPAP machines), or left bare. Make sure it's comfortable for all of the Dreamers, taking into account mobility issues and personal preferences. If convenient, make the Bed the center of the playspace.

Motifs: each Dream will start with a dream Motif, randomly drawn from a set created by the players. Each player writes down on a scrap of paper the words "Dream a Little Dream of" followed by a common type of dream. Some examples: flying, falling, naked in public, being chased, losing teeth, visit from dead loved one, unprepared for test or presentation, dying, unexpected parenthood, having sex, etc. Feel free to talk as a group about types of dreams, especially if people are stuck. Also feel free to hard line types of dreams (no loose teeth for me, thanks). The Sandman will collect and hold on to the Motifs.

Dream Journals: each Dreamer will write down the following on a sheet of paper:

- The player's name (just so the Sandman knows which is whose)
- Optionally, any hard lines for their own dream, above and beyond the group lines.
- Optionally, additional tones they'd like to avoid above and beyond the group's choices, or a specific tone they'd like to pursue within the group's choices.
- The name and a short description of their Dreamer, perhaps with their pronouns.
- A brief description of where the Dreamer will fall asleep: on the couch in front of the TV, in a motel room, on a bus. Maybe add a detail or two: trains in the distance, too warm, streetlights through the curtains.
- Finally, the Dreamer's Regret. It can be a past mistake, a current problem, a worry about the future, an opportunity lost. It may be embarrassing, haunting, sad, painful (keeping in mind the group's established tones). Whatever the case, it's something that disturbs their sleep, if not every night, then this night. Include one or two concrete images: an amusement park, a childhood pet, scissors, Mom.

When everyone has written down their answers, the Sandman will collect the Journals, and the dreams will begin.

The Dreams

The Sandman stands beside the Bed, with the other players in a wide circle (or semicircle) around it, wearing their masks. The Sandman will remind everyone about the group decisions regarding touch, tone, lines, etc. Then the Sandman will choose one of the Journals, and lead that Dreamer to the Bed with gestures or by the hand as comfort and the touch boundaries

allow. This can be done silently, or with quiet words. Nothing too loud: it's bedtime! As they move to the Bed, the Dreamer should take off their mask and give it to the Sandman.

The Dreamer readies themselves for sleep while the Sandman stands beside the Bed and reads their Journal out loud, making sure that all of the Masks understand the contents. Then the Sandman will tell the Dreamer, "Sleep eludes you." The Masks will all raise their hands, and begin voicing thoughts the Dreamer is having, usually about the Regret. The thoughts can be questions, statements, feelings, but they are all nagging, keeping the Dreamer from sleep. Masks can build obsessively on previous statements, or go racing off on a tangent. They can go turn by slow turn, or talk over each other.

When a Mask is done voicing thoughts, they should lower their hand. When all hands are lowered, the Sandman will say "Sleep finally comes." The players should be silent for a few or several beats while the Sandman randomly picks a dream Motif. When ready, the Sandman reads it aloud. At this point, the Dreamer rises from the Bed, and begins to act out their dream. The action of the dream begins with the motif, but can move on from there. Use the Regret, or studiously avoid the Regret. The Dreamer should tap Masks to play roles in their dream: people, objects, sensations, moods. The Masks can also step in at will, adding content to the dream, but focus should remain on the Dreamer. A particular Mask may find themselves fading into the background, perhaps to loom large again. The dream ends abruptly when any player (Dreamer, Mask or Sandman) raises their hand and says "Just a dream". Every player follows suit, raising their hand and saying "Just a dream". As the players do so, they return to their positions at the start of the dream: Dreamer in the bed, Sandman beside, Masks around. The Sandman returns the Dreamer's mask to them, repeating the phrase "Just a dream", and leads or gestures them back to the circle of Masks.

The Sandman picks the next Journal, and begins anew. Repeat until everyone has had a dream.

When the final Dreamer is back in the circle of Masks, pause for a few or several beats. Then when the spirit moves them, each Mask will take turns removing their mask, and making a statement about their dream, beginning with the words "When I woke up, the only thing I remembered was..." and, and if they like, maybe a thought or two about their Regret, or the coming day. The Sandman can then remove their own mask, thank everyone for playing, and move on to any debrief activities they think appropriate.

Options for play

Everyone's a Sandman - For small groups that don't need or want a facilitator. The Set-Up steps are done collectively. Pick somebody to read off the lines and sleep style notes. Everyone writes a Journal. Pick someone to be the first Sandman. When the first dream is over, the Sandman and Dreamer will walk back to the Dreamer's place in the circle. The Sandman will take the Dreamer's place as a Mask, and the Dreamer, now the new Sandman,

will pick the next Dreamer. (Picking the next dreamer by simply moving to the left or right is the easiest method, but who ever heard of a straightforward dream?)

The Sandman Dreams - For groups that want a facilitator, but also really want the Sandman to have a chance to dream. After taking the last Dreamer back to the circle of Masks, the Sandman takes their position in the Bed, reads their own Journal out loud, and begins to dream.

Archetypal masks - If someone has a particularly distinctive mask, consider using the type of mask to represent a recurring archetype across the dreams. Imagine Snow White troubling everyone else's sleep for a change...

Trapped: the Dreamer may not call "Just a dream!" Only the Masks and Sandman may.

In Your Face - have the Masks physically approach the Dreamer as they voice the Dreamer's thoughts.

Walk-through: the group may find it helpful to review or rehearse the key phrases and flow of the dreams. A good time for this is after the Journals have been collected. An outline:

- 1 - The Sandman picks a Dreamer, leads them to the Bed, and reads their Journal out loud, then says "Sleep eludes you"
- 2 - The Masks voice intrusive thoughts. When they are done, the Sandman says "Sleep finally comes".
- 3 - The Sandman reads a Dream Motif, and the Dreamer rises from the Bed and begins to dream.
- 4 - The Dreamer can tap Masks to play out roles, and the Masks can enter at will.
- 5 - The dream ends when someone says "Just a dream!". Everyone repeats the statement as they return to their places.
- 6 - The Sandman guides the Dreamer back to their place in the circle of Masks.