

Reflections at the Witching Hour

An asymmetric game for 2 people about what is on the other side of the Looking Glass.

By: Acata Felton, with enthusiastic consent from Eric Fritz

It's three am - the witching hour. You're tired but you can't sleep. Life is hard right now, and it would be nice to have someone to talk to. You get up to pace the bedroom and catch a glimpse of your reflection in the mirror. What better audience for your late night musings than your own reflection?

This game is a remix of Eric Fritz's "[Awake at the Witching Hour](#)" and Acata Felton's "[Dark Reflections](#)," with a nod to *Alice in Wonderland*. Both games draw on the liminal space between waking and dreaming. This game takes that one step further, offering the opportunity to switch places with your reflection, temporarily, or maybe permanently. You will meet with your counterpart several times over the course of several "nights" (which can either be real life nights, or just separate scenes) and decide whether you can stay and face what troubles you in the real world, or if you'd rather take your chances in the looking glass.

Content and Safety

All of the content warnings for both remixed games apply to this game as well: uncanny valley, malice, haunting, possession, uncertainty, fear, loss, death, and (potentially) suicide. Additional content warning for this game include: entrapment, helplessness, conflicting goals, and anger or desire to do violence.

This game uses "lines and veils" and "X-Card" to calibrate the intensity of the experience. Take care of yourself and remember your health and wellbeing are more important than the game. You can pause or stop at any time, and if you experience concerns beyond the scope of the game, consult a trained mental health professional.

Tone:

This game likely starts out with a sad, stressed, etc tone for "the real" person, and that is likely to evolve into fear and desperation. For "the reflection" the tone is primarily predatory and manipulative.

Requirements to play:

- Time: this game can be played as a one shot, or over the course of several days.
 - 30 min for set up
 - 20 min per scene (adjustable between 2 and 11 scenes)
 - 10 minute epilogue
 - 15 min for debrief and de-role
- Players: 2
- Materials:
 - The 22 major arcana cards from any tarot deck. You can use a deck that has the major arcana numbered, or refer to the table on page 4 when you need to check which card has the higher numerical value.
 - 2 notebooks or pieces of paper and 2 writing implements.
 - This game can be played in person, or over your preferred video conferencing tool.
- Play this game at night (3:00 am is recommended), or someplace dark like a room without windows.
- **If possible:** Wear the same color shirt (e.g. both in black) or a striking accessory (e.g. a red scarf) as the other player to aid the illusion of being a person and their reflection.
- **Optional:** Video Filter for red eyes, unsettling background images, and/or a translucent cloth/fabric (like tulle) you can drape over your camera or face.

Set Up: (20 min)

1. Decide who will play “The Real” (starts in the real world), and “The Reflection” (starts in the mirror).
 - a. **What *IS* The Reflection?** It could be a fae creature. It could be an alien. It could be an eldritch being. The details are left up to the player of The Reflection.
2. Establish any necessary [lines and veils](#).
3. Answer the following questions to help define “The Character”. Have 1 person answer the first question, and have the second person answer the follow up question. Alternate who answers the first question and who elaborates. If you prefer, you can collaborate on the answers instead.

Q: What is your name? Follow Up: Who picked that name, and why?	Q: What are your pronouns? Follow Up: What in your life affirms your gender identity?
Q: How old are you? Follow Up: What does society expect you to be striving for right now?	Q: What is your relationship to your family? Follow Up: Do you share your house/apt with anyone? A bedroom? A bed?
Q: What do you do for a living? Follow Up: Is what you do satisfying to you?	Q: What are you afraid of? Follow Up: What gives you hope or brings you joy?
Ask each other at least 1 more question about “The Character’s” life or world.	

4. Pick an **ongoing, stressful or uncertain process** that is happening in “The Character’s” life. E.g. trying not to get fired at work, caring for an elderly parent in decline, going through a divorce, etc.
5. Decide how many scenes you want to play out; the more scenes, the longer the game. You can play as few as 2 scenes, or as many as 11, but each scene should be expected to take ~20 minutes.
 - a. Whether you play this game as a one shot or over a series of nights, each scene represents its own nightly encounter.
6. Build your “Haunting Deck”, keeping all cards face down unless otherwise noted:
 - a. **If you are playing remotely, only 1 player should do this.**
 - b. Find “The World” (# 21) this will be your “stop” card. Set it aside for now.
 - c. Shuffle and pick at random 2 tarot cards per scene you plan to play, then remove one card. (e.g: 2 scenes = 3 cards, 6 scenes = 11 cards).
 - i. Alternatively, you can pick which cards you want, and then shuffle them together.
 - d. To create randomness in who draws “The World” card (which gives that character the final decision on which world they want to stay in permanently), take **one** card from your deck, and mix it up with “The World” card (turn it over at this time), until you don’t know which one is which. Place these 2 cards on the **bottom** of your deck.
 - i. If you wish to have some randomness in how many scenes you will play out, you can instead shuffle “The World” card with 3 or 5 other cards and place those at the bottom.
7. Practice Mirroring:
 - a. Physical and auditory mirroring is an important mechanic of the game. Take your time with this; it is important for establishing the fiction of the game.
 - b. Have one player lead to start. Move your body slowly, giving your partner time to follow you. As you practice, you will be able to mirror faster movements. Switch once you both feel comfortable.
 - c. Practice speaking and repeating words next. Stick to short phrases or pause in the middle of longer ones so the other person has time to respond. Switch practicing this skill too.

Safety During the Game

Both players have access to the “X-Card” at any time. If your fellow player brings up something that you are not okay with having in game, you can cross your arms in front of your face and/or say “X-card”. This rescinds the previous statement. Your partner should make a new statement, taking the narrative in a different direction than the previous statement.

How to Play: (20 min per scene - 40 min minimum, 3 hr, 40 min maximum)

1. Each scene of the game represents one night of a 10 to 15 minute encounter between “The Real” and “The Reflection.” Scenes happen over consecutive nights, whether you are playing them in real time, or all in one go.
2. Set an alarm for 3:00 am, or your agreed upon starting time.
3. Turn on a single light. Each player draws a card from the top of your deck, and compares the number value. Record the card you drew, and set it aside (do not return it to the “Haunting Deck.”)
 - a. If you are playing remotely, each player should turn on a light, and whoever has the Haunting Deck should draw first for themselves, and second for their partner.
4. Draw inspiration for your character’s starting thoughts and mood from the card you drew.
 - a. You can interpret the card yourself, or use the reference guide on the next page, or both. If you are particularly comfortable reading tarot, you can alternately use the upright meaning for the character currently in the real world, and the upside down meaning for the character currently inside the mirror.
5. Play through one 10-15 minute game of “Dark Reflections” for each scene.
 - a. For this first scene, play all 3 Parts.
 - b. At some point during the scene, the player who drew the **lower** numbered tarot card **must** introduce a **negative** development to the ongoing situation of concern. (e.g.: Your boss scheduled an important meeting for tomorrow, the nurse called with bad news, the lawyer called with terms you cannot accept.)
 - i. Neither “The Real” nor “The Reflection” is surprised by the development (since both are one “character” that experienced this thing today), but your fellow player probably will be.
 - c. At any point during the scene, the player who drew the **higher** numbered tarot card **may** decide to switch places (real world vs inside the mirror) with the other. A character may attempt to persuade the other to agree to a switch, or to not make a switch, but the player with the higher number makes the final decision.
 - i. Even if you switch places, “The Real” remains “The Real” and vice versa.
 - d. At the end of the scene, each player should jot down 1 or 2 sentences about or how their character feels about what happened in the scene.
 - i. Alternatively you can record ~60 seconds of audio.
6. If you are playing all scenes back to back as a one shot, take a 5 minute break at this point. If you are playing the scenes on subsequent nights, stop here and use 5 minutes at the start of the next session to review your notes from the last session.
7. For the second scene:
 - a. Skip part 1, and divide the time between Parts 2 and 3.
 - b. The character with the higher tarot card may now introduce a negative **or** positive development.
8. For any subsequent scenes, spend the full time in Part 3.
 - a. Both positive and negative developments are allowed.
 - b. When someone draws “The World” this will be the last scene. They also get the last say on switching places. It is possible for the Real to remain trapped in the mirror while their Reflection takes over their life.

Epilogue:

After the last scene, exchange your notes with your partner. Read through what they recorded, and then collaborate on a brief epilogue for the uncertain situation (e.g.: Did you actually lose your job? Has your mother passed away? Did you rent out a new apartment since your spouse kept the house in the final agreement?)

After the Game:

1. You may wish to do this debrief and de-role the next day, at a more normal time, if you have been meeting for scenes at 3:00 am. Otherwise, take a quick break. Get up and stretch, and shake your body out a little.
2. Turn on the lights in the room, open the shades, or otherwise light the space.
3. When you are ready, (re)join your partner. Take turns sharing a little bit about how the game felt for you. Did anything about the experience surprise you?
4. Observe one thought or trait you share with “The Character”. Likewise observe one way in which you differ.
5. Share a genuine compliment with your partner.
6. Do a brief centering exercise, either alone or with your partner. One example is available in the Appendix (borrowed from “Awake at the Witching Hour.”)

Inspiration Table for Mood, based on Tarot Draw.

Card #	Card Name	If you are: "The Real"	If you are: "The Reflection"
0	The Fool	You are curious about the world in the mirror.	You are curious about the real world.
1	The Magician	You wonder if "The Reflection" could help you.	You are eager to offer "The Real" an escape.
2	The Priestess	You feel your agency waning a little.	You feel inclined to try to cheer up "The Real".
3	The Empress	You feel refreshed from an act of self care today.	You are sooo bored.
4	The Emperor	You are angry at "The Reflection" for some reason	You are bemused by "The Real."
5	The Hierophant	You resent the similarities between you two.	You are enamored of the similarities between you.
6	The Lovers	You feel like "The Reflection" is your only friend.	You are suspicious of some person in "The Character's" life.
7	The Chariot	You are convinced that "The Reflection" has forgotten they are just a reflection.	You are convinced that "The Real" does not understand your value.
8	Justice	You wonder about the morality of all of this.	You crave feeling the wind on your skin.
9	The Hermit	You wish "The Reflection" would leave you alone.	You feel nostalgic for days gone past.
10	Fortune	You wonder if your previous impression of the other was wrong. (initial impression if first scene)	
11	Strength	You feel helpless and hopeless.	You relish your strength to move forward.
12	Hanged Man	You remember a sacrifice made on your behalf.	You dwell on something long lost.
13	Death	Remembering a loss brings heavy sadness.	You see an unexpected path forward.
14	Temperance	You tried something new and found it pleasant.	You are worried "The Real" doesn't trust you.
15	The Devil	You tried something new and found it unpleasant.	You wish you could escape "The Real."
16	The Tower	Your despair is all encompassing.	Your joy is almost manic.
17	The Star	You feel resolved to take a particular action.	A smell brings fond memories.
18	The Moon	You wonder if you are imagining "The Reflection".	Your paranoia is getting out of hand.
19	The Sun	You have a plan; it's gonna be great.	You have doubts about "The Real's" plans.
20	Judgment	You want to see (more of) the mirror world.	You want to see (more of) the real world.
21	The World	Your last chance to switch; what will you decide?	

Appendix 1:

This game encourages you to contemplate frightening and stressful topics and might leave you in an uncomfortable mental state. A simple example of a centering technique is provided here:

Choose an item that makes you happy and sit in a comfortable position where you can look at it. Breathe with slow measured breaths in and out, trying to breathe in for the same amount of time you breathe out. As other thoughts enter your mind you can acknowledge them, let them pass, and bring your focus back to your object. Do this for several minutes.