

Dementia

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About:

Number of players: 6-8

Gamemaster: 1

Time: 2 hours

Props: *Blank papers, plastic cups, tictacs, tape, pens, sound system*

Not Necessary but preferably: Chairs

Music:

Theme song: *Just a hole by Death brothers*

Act break 1: Banjo Villa against Tarass Boulba by the Dead brothers

Act break 2: I had a dream by Pussywarmers

Act break 3: Just a hole by Death brothers

Concept:

To discover what is left when we forget who we are. A quiet game about being old and not knowing it, of lost loves, feeling vulnerable, and of family ties.

Dementia is 2 hours long including workshop and debrief.

It can be played by 8 to 6 players. half of which have meta-functions in the game.

The game needs 1 game master.

During the game the players get to experience the feeling of being lost in their own mind and question what constitutes a self when the memories that shapes us are slipping away. This is created by parts of the character being given and taken away from those players who plays the elderly individuals on the retirement home for demented people. This is done by the other half of the players who will take turn playing the employees at the home, loved once from the past and loved once from the present. The fluent transitions between the different parts by the meta-players increases the feeling of confusion in the other players.

Even though the game structurally takes place during 1 day in a facility for old people suffering from dementia, it also contains almost a life-time, since the players will only know what is written on the character slip they hold in their hand. This means that they during a large portion of the game they will act and interact as if they are somewhere completely different, oblivious to the true facts.

The characters are written as concepts shortly presented below, please see the full character further to the back of this document.

The child: A person who lived a family centered life, afraid of changes.

Jazz: A person who married for love but lost it and grew bitter and lonely.

Career: A person who worked hard but therefore lost touch with their family.

Sailor: A person who choose a life on the sea over love and family.

Meta parts:

Head nurse: Drowned by paper work

Intern: Don't really care for working with the elders

Nurse: Want to help but has too much to do.

Volunteer: Makes up for lack of contact with own mother by taking care of the elderly.

Meta-techniques:

Monologue-square- any of the players can at any given time stand up and hold a monologue in a designated space. All players are encouraged to do this atleast once during the run of the game.

Shadows- if the meta-players want to they can also do some shadowing of the demented people to drive the game on.

Character pieces- each of the demented characters is divided in 5 pieces that might be given or taken away at any time during the game.

Schedule for Dementia

0.1 Prepare the room:

Mark a place in the room where the monologue square will be.

Prepare the playlist with the music, check sound.

Prepare plastic cups with water, pills (eg. tictacs or something like that) that can act as medication.

Place the blank papers somewhere visible in the room.

If there are chairs place these in a suitable way.

Make sure you have tape and pen to create name tags.

Make sure you have all the character-pieces.

1. Welcoming and presentation:

Welcome the players. apprx 10-15 minutes.

Present the game:

The game will be played in 4 acts, approximately 10-15 minutes long.

It will start with the elderly being woken in the morning, followed by medication, followed by visiting hours. The game ends with a replay of the first act, it will be the same morning, but this time the players will know the background and full extent of their characters.

Every act is marked by the playing of music.

Meta techniques:

Explain the use of the monologue “square”

The monologue-square is a place where you can let the other players hear your characters thoughts and feelings. Everyone should try to use it atleast once during the game. To use it go in to the square and then hold a short monologue about what your character is feeling and experiencing in that moment. The other players should quiet down and take in what the player in the square is saying before returning to their game.

Explain the function of the meta-players

The metaplayers will have a double function as players and a sort of game masters with the help of GM. They will get a “top-character” which will be a caretaker at the home for the elderly where the larp takes place. Furthermore they will get suggestions of other characters to play, anything from visitors to the memories of lovers and friends, or even abstract feelings. The most important part for these players is to be co-operative. If the other characters treat them as if you are their parents, play along, or if you think it will be more fun, treat them as if they are crazy old people. Or even better, switch back and forth. Let the other players guide you to what they need to make the scene stronger for everyone. This means that the players of the caretakers might not get quite as a immersive experience, but they will instead get to create strong scenes. The metaplayers are also the ones in charge of giving and taking away parts of the character from the the other players. If the metaplayers want to it might also be interesting to act as shadows for the “regular” characters. This is done by acting as the inner voice, whispering suggestions and questions, highlighting emotions in the characters.

Playing style:

Let everything in the room, both the other players and the props be representations of

what you need to make a scene stronger or more interesting. The medicine can be your wedding cake, the blank papers can be your favorite book, or the medical journals. The other players, both the “regular” and the “metaplayers” can be whomever you wish them to be. Remember that you can interact with all the other players however you feel fit. The truth is subjective in this game and what your character feel is the truth IS the truth at any given moment, especially when different worlds collide.

Questions?

2. Workshops

ca 10 minutes

Circle:

Ask the participants to sit down on the floor in a circle. Do a quick turn around the room and ask two questions:

A. What is your greatest fear with growing old?

B. Describe an early positive memory?

ca 5 minutes

Divide the parts:

Let the players choose if they want to play metaplayers or ordinary parts. Let the ordinary players choose one of the concepts, “the child” “Jazz” “The career” or “The sailor”, they do not get to read the characters. Let the meta players choose which one of the different meta-characters they want to play. Give the characters tape and pen so they can make up names and put name tags on themselves.

Instruction to the metaplayers:

Soon you will get to read through all the different character slips, divide the characters between you so you are responsible for 1 of the players and giving them their character slips. It is suitable to swap and give new pieces in the breaks between acts but it can be done at any time. If you feel like the player seem to be stuck give them a new piece of the puzzle or swap them completely. Try to tune in to who and what the other players are talking to at any moment and answer as you feel fit.

5.25 minutes

Physical destruction:

The four (or three) players that will play ordinary parts are asked to walk around in the room to the sound of the theme song Just a hole by Death brothers. As they walk around GM is instructing them how to move, taking away some of their mobility by

saying “You can’t lift your left feet” “you can’t bend your right knee” and so on. By 2.30 they should be so immobilized that they are lying on the floor with their eyes closed. Instruct them to lie there and wait til the music is quiet. They will be woken up by the meta-players and handed a character slip when the music is over and then go straight into playing the larp.

Meanwhile this exercise is going on the metaplayers have time to read through the different character sheets and divide the players between them so that they are responsible for 1 character each when it comes to handing out the character slips, and of course waking them when the music is over. This is done by walking around and waking them up in the character of the care-takers, introducing them to the game as if they are waking the patients up at the home.

3.Larp

Act 1.

ca 15 minutes. Morning. (starts with the end of Just a hole by Death brothers and with the wakening of the elderly characters by their caretakers)

Act 2 ca. 15 minutes Medication. (starts when the GM plays Banjo Villa against Tarass Boulba by the Dead brothers)

Act 3 ca 15 minutes Visiting hours. (starts when GM plays I had a dream by Pussywarmers, tune down the music by 1.30)

Act three ends with the start of Just a hole and the care takers puts the elderly to bed, they lie still on the floor til the music is finished when they once again are woken by the care takers.

Act 4 ca 15 minutes Morning. The act and the larp ends when the theme song Just a hole starts playing again. This time the whole song does not have to be played but can be tuned out by 2.30

4. Debrief

ca 40 minutes

Ask the participant to form a circle. Go round the room with the following questions:

- A. How do you feel right now, summarize with 1 word.
- B. Is there any strong impressions you want to share right now?
- C. What do you fear the most with growing old, has this changed?

D. Does anyone have anything they want to share right now?

E. Anything you would like to change with the game? *(If there is time please hand out paper and pen and ask them to write down any criticism they might have.)*

My experience from the trial run is that the game can wake a lot of fear and hard emotions so it is good to take the time to let the larpers talk about their experience.

Thank you for playing Dementia!

Written parts:

A. (The child)

Five years old, it's summer, the smell of fried pork oozing over the kitchen, but you can't find your way there, can't find the kitchen. You remember your mother's voice when she hums, the sound of fat sizzling in the pan, where is she? It's lonely, and you are afraid and just want to be in your mother's arms, smelling her smell, feeling her heartbeat through a flowery blouse. No one holds you anymore.

It's your honeymoon and this is the furthest away from home you ever been. It scares you but is at the same time exciting. You have a brand new car, and the windows are open so you can feel the wind in your hair. Beside you sits the one you love, the one you will do everything to support, to make happy. They wanted to go far away, and even if you are scared you are happy you agreed, the memories you will create! Kisses in the sunset, the feeling of bodies towards each other in the darkness. Peace. This is happiness you think, true happiness and nothing can ever spoil this golden moment in time.

You are alone with the children again. And it angers you that this is how it always ends up. You always have to take responsibility and the children is screaming in a heart-wrenching pitch. There is nothing you can do to quiet it and in one horrible moment you pretend that you put your hands around the little fragile neck and squeeze. The next moment you are overwhelmed with love and guilt. You have ice cream for dinner that night.

You watch them up there by the altar, so happy and so involved in each other that no one else exist in the world but them in that moment. It is hard to believe that your child is old enough to go off and marry and have children of their own. As you look at your spouse next to you in the pewer you can't help to wonder if you look as old and worn as they do. Is the best over already, is only ailment and aging what is left for you now? You should be happy for your child, sharing their big moment but all of the sudden all you want to do is cry over all the youth you had but now have lost. You want to be young again, like them, with the life before you.

You lived a long and a full life. It has meant happiness and it has meant sorrow. Your brothers are dead now, the love of your life also but your children still lives even if they rarely comes to visit you now a days. Maybe it frightens them. The grandchildren you once hushed to sleep are all grown up and are way to busy to visit an old relative. Still you aren't unhappy with what you made, a family, a good job, retirement funding enough for a nice retirement home and the care you need. You wish it could be like when you were a small child, taken care of. A summer when you bruised your knees and someone blew away the bad and kissed your soft chin. Now your chins are wrinkled like winter apples. You are alone and afraid and hungry for the love and affection that once was a part of your life.

B. (Jazz)

Your father has said that you cannot go out and you have screamed over the unfairness, slammed the doors but nothing helped. You have been banished to your room like one of the stupid fairy tale princesses that always end up locked in towers. You tear your notes into a hundred tiny little pieces, into small small snowflakes that falls in the air. Just to realize that punishment awaits, and clean up the small pieces of paper with the tears of humiliation burning behind your eyelids.

It's the happiness that shakes your whole body, every little pore because the one you love has said yes and you are going to get married and build lives together. It is a long way there, you have to afford a small apartment but if you both work hard enough it will work out! You are 21 and have your whole life in front of you and every saturday you go out dancing, the rhythm of jazz fills you, makes you happy and moves your body. It is the sound of being in love.

When you look at that little life lying in your arms it seems impossible that you were a part of creating something so perfect. Such tiny little fingernails, such perfect eyelashes. You know that this will change everything now. This is what will be your pivotal point, the centre around which the world circles. The love you feel is a mix of fear and peace, it is a feeling unlike any other, like being perfectly in tune with the music, like two bodies moving like one, on the edge of a cliff, risking to fall out into the air at any moment.

You are having a screaming match again. You don't even know why you are angry anymore, what set it off. Was it the dirty dishes or the late nights at work or that your child is failing in school? It doesn't even matter anymore, all that matters is the feeling of loneliness you feel every night you lie in your king-sized bed with the backs towards each other. The feeling of drowning even though you are on dry land. The only way you can connect is through the tears and the screaming and the throwing of cutlery, so you do, but feel like it just makes you more invisible.

The years went and your love withered away and died and transformed in to bitterness. You argued about nothing, then you did not argue anymore. Laying next to each other in silence. Maybe it would have been better if one of you had dared to talk about what was happening between you. But you were way too polite. You had a son, but your home was a cold place and he disappeared as soon as he could and you became even more lonely. Polite strangers passing each other in the night, bound together of tradition. You hid in your work but not even a career could save you from the feeling that you never became what you wanted to be. Now you are all alone. The memory of the times when you still were happy is bittersweet and the only way to handle the loneliness you live in, the echoing chambers of your heart. You grew cold and angry, empty and aggressive. To see the young ones who have their lives ahead of them cuts you like a knife. They do not deserve happiness anymore than you did, so why is your life so empty and pointless? Why do you not have any love to warm you on the cold autumn of age?

C. (The career)

The shameful tears are burning behind your eyelids because you know Mother will disapprove when she sees the report card. She will be cross because she expects you to excel in everything you do, and nothing less than extraordinary is good enough. And now that horrible B is engraved by the teachers pen and you don't know what is worse, her disappointed looks when she finds out or the scolding words.

It's your honeymoon and you are lying in a hotel bed by the mediterranean sea. The door is open and a cool breeze calms the hot skin. You feel someone elses body next to yours, the warmth of breath in your neck, you think that maybe this is happiness as you sneaks out of bed and look out over the turquoise waves outside the window.

It's alot to do at work right now, and where is your brief case with all your important papers? It was here somewhere but now you can't find it to save you life. You do not have time for this shit, if you don't find the papers until the board meeting tomorrow you will be fired and what are you to do then? Your family depends on you, and you can't let them down!

You sit crying opposite your best friend. They look out through the window. Tired of hearing you complain about your disappointment and your cracking marriage. This time it's really broken though. You feel the shattered ruins of what was supposed to be the fairytale marriage and it ended up being irritation and conflicts. As you sit there knowing that you should be quiet but unable to stop let the bitterness flow out between your lips you feel like you failed your children, your spouse, your aging father and yourself. At the same time you feel free for the first time in your life. The feeling of freedom and guilt melt together.

Your grandchild comes and visits you once a week and tries to have a conversation. It is hard to understand that this grown adult is the same child you cared for when your own baby had grown old and important and gotten a career. Your marriage broke when the children were young, but that was probably for the best, otherwise you'd never met the other loves in your life. Behind you is a string of pearls made of romance and love. But every pearl fell off the string, disappeared into life in a hectic hunt forward. Towards what? Now you are at the end station, waiting for the train that will bring you silence and peace. Sometimes you dream of it. The comforting feeling of the heavy cold earth embracing you as you sleep. Other times... Other times you wish you could live your life again, to fully appreciate the moments you ran through.

D. (sailor)

You are a small child with your hand safely snuggled in your mother's. You go along the harbour, and look at the big ships lying there, larger than life. You laugh excitedly and point with a chubby hand. One day, you think, one day will you leave and see every corner of the world. But your mother drags you on because you are in a hurry and she has no time for your childlike joy.

The air tastes of salt and freedom and diesel, anywhere you look the view stays the same, blue against blue. Sky and sea and the translucent shimmering horizon ever moving away. This is happiness, you think, standing by the rail of a ship moving towards eternity. This is your job, your life. A lover in every harbour, never contained always on your way. Nothing ties you down or forces you to be chained to home and monogamy and children. The day you leave the sea you will leave a piece of your soul.

So it happened again. Once again you sit here having the familiar conversation and once again you know you will have to make your lover disappointed. They want you to commit, to become something you cannot be, a safe place, a harbour for their insecurities. And once again you have to break their heart, like so many other hearts before. For a moment you wonder if it would be worth it, to give up your freedom to have love and security. Would that make you happy?

It is a growing feeling of discomfort, you know deep inside what it means, that this is the beginning of the end but you don't want to acknowledge it. Just another turn on the sea, one more adventure. The salt breeze comforts you, the neverending sea makes the pains go away, but you know it is a passing comfort. The only thing you can think of doing is to write it down, document every passing feeling, fleeting moment, every sunrise and storm. It will be your testament, keep you company when all this have passed.

Your body is scarred by the years at sea, the deep wrinkles in your face, the ink telling stories on your skin, eyes no longer seeing very well, worn down by the strong reflexions of light in water. It was a hard life, and now your body creaks like an old ship. The stories you keep even if truth and fantasy mingled long ago. Maybe it does not matter anymore. When your body couldn't take it anymore you went ashore, found yourself a small apartment and filled it with memories. The loneliness didn't bother you, with your kind of life you are never truly alone. But you did feel trapped. Trapped in a body that no longer could take you where you wanted to go. To go grocery shopping was like climbing Kilimanjaro. For a while you pretended that you were on an adventure in the wilderness, but then your body could not take that either. And you ended up here, in this prison where every second becomes an hour. A place without any horizons outside the window, just grey concrete walls.

Meta player 1 (Head nurse)

You used to do this because you loved people, because you wanted to help. You used to do this because of the feeling you got when one of the elderly got lucid, if only for a moment and you knew that you helped them to wake up for a while. But now, with the cut backs and the ever-growing workload that feels very far away. You wish you could spend time with the patients but there is budgets to keep and journals to file and the time just does not stretch far enough for both caregiving and paper-pushing.

Meta player 2 (the intern)

It's your first job and even if you don't hate it you don't really like it. The elderly scare you sometimes when they act out or talk strangely, and all you ever wanted was some extra cash for beer. Instead you spend way too much time locked in a place where everyone is just waiting to die. You try to be kind, to help the patients when they are scared or agitated but somehow you never really seem to know what to say to help them calm down, and every day when your shift ends you feel like you are let out of a prison cell.

Meta player 3 (the nurse)

You try, you really do. Try to be there for them, listen, comfort, engage. But there is just so many hours in a work shift and there is only 1 of you. Between helping the intern with the practicalities and the head nurse with the paperwork, the feeding, walking, bedding, and medicating it is hard to find the time to be human. You try. Try to activate the patients and hold their hands when they are afraid, but however hard you try in the end there is so many elderly to care for, and you feel utterly alone. At least they have the ghosts of their past to keep them company. You barely have time for a present life of your own.

Meta player 4 (the volunteer)

You come twice a week and you help taking care of the elderly. You take them for walks, hold their hands, and listen to their stories. It makes you feel like a better person, like you actually contribute to the world. The fact that you have not spoken to your own mother in over ten years is something you choose not to focus on. It has nothing to do with your work here! After all, you just want to be there for some poor souls who are all alone in their old age. You just try to make a difference.

Suggested functions:

The child's mother

Sailor's loneliness

Jazz lover

Career's boss

The child's children

Sailor's lover

Jazz father

Career's friend

The child's spouse

Sailor's mother

Jazz grand child

Career's Father

Grandchildren visiting

Children visiting