

Lauri Lukka

# Wonderworks

A freeform scenario  
for conjuring up narratives



## Synopsis

Role-playing games typically have pre-defined characters and environments. What if they were not given, but were co-created during the game?

*Wonderworks* provides players with structure, rules, and mindset for improvising such an emerging and elaborate narrative with apparent spontaneity. This act of creation is nothing short of magic.

## Game information

Style	A live-action role-playing game in the scenario tradition
Brief	<i>“A game for creating your own game”</i>
Keywords	Emerging narratives, music-inspired, improvisation
Game masters	1
Players	4+ (in groups of 3–5 players, limited by game space)
Duration	4h (2h workshop; 2h game time)
Materials, required	Audio system
Version	11/2024
Disclaimer	This game is demanding and not beginner-friendly.

## Theoretical sidenote and author bio

This game expands on the authors’ previous artistic and theoretical work, which explores the nature of characters, roles, and narrative in role-playing games. This game suggests that role-playing games are a *social process* that do not require pre-defined characters or a game world.

Lukka L. (2022). *Superrealism*. A music-driven embodied role-playing experience of losing and finding oneself. Available at Alexandria.dk.

Lukka, L. (2014). *The Psychology of Immersion. Individual Differences and Psychosocial Phenomena Relating to Immersion*. In J. Back (Eds.) *The Cutting Edge of Nordic Larp*. (pp. 81 – 92). Denmark: Knutepunkt.

Lukka, L. (2011). *The Dual-Faceted Role*. In T. D. Henriksen, C. Bierlich, K. F. Hansen & V. Kølle (Eds.) *Think LARP, Academic Writings from KP2011*. (pp. 152 – 170). Copenhagen: Rollespilakademiet.

*Lauri Lukka* is a Finnish psychologist, and service and game designer. Since 2011, he has designed numerous scenarios, including *Prelude*, *In Dependence*, and *Superrealism*.

## Game structure

This game consists of two sections: workshop and game.

**The workshop** starts with giving the players an overview of the game and its mechanics. Then, the players practice these mechanics. The workshop aims to arouse an open-minded, creative, and collaborative mindset, enabling players to create the game.

**The game** consists of **acts** that have **scenes**. After the Stockholm Scenario Festival 2024, this game was elaborated: three versions are now provided. It is suggested that the game master uses either Theatrical Release and modifies the workshop and game accordingly. Each version has merits and there is no right version per se, as it depends on the group and the game master's preferences.

- **Theatrical Release (US):** 12 scenes, each played 2 times
  - First time: Define (and elaborate)
  - Second time: Define, elaborate, turn
- **Theatrical Release (EU):** 9 scenes, each played 3 times
  - First time: Define
  - Second time: Define, elaborate
  - Third time: Define, elaborate, turn
- **Extended Director's Cut:** 12 scenes, each played 3 times
  - First time: Define
  - Second time: Define, elaborate
  - Third time: Define, elaborate, turn

## Workshop

### Welcome and Tune In

- **Welcome.** Welcome the players.
- **Circle.** Invite the players to join a broad circle.
- **Tune in.** Ask the players to share how they feel right now briefly.

### Game Overview

- **Overview.** Provide the players with an overview of the game that they are about to play. Use the synopsis above if necessary.
- **Structure.** Playing the game requires tuning to its frequency. Therefore, the game is preceded by an extensive workshop. Explain the players of what is to come:
  - **Workshop** (~2h)
  - **The game** (~2h), followed by debriefing (15min)
- **Explain that the game consists of:**
  - **Prelude:** listened together without playing
  - **Act 1**, with 3/4 scenes
  - **Interlude 1:** reflecting and the possibility of changing group
  - **Act 2**, with 3/4 scenes
  - **Interlude 2:** reflecting and the possibility of changing group
  - **Act 3**, with 3/4 scenes
  - **Postlude:** listened together without playing
- **Each scene is played 2/3 times.**
  - **Defining:** The first time a scene is played, it should focus on establishing what the scene is: who are the characters and where they are. Duration: 1–1.5 minutes.
  - **Advancing:** The second time the scene is played, it starts from the beginning. The players should first define the scene, and then elaborate on it, that is, advance the story. Duration: 2–2.5 minutes.
  - **Turn:** The third time, the players again start the scene from the beginning. The players first define the scene, then elaborate the story, and finally conclude the scene with a dramatic turn. Duration: ~3–3.5 minutes.
  - **Similarity.** The scenes *do not need to be identical*. The players can condense and expand the action as necessary.

- **Within scenes.** The players have four key mechanics to create the story within the scene.
  - **Defining:** Establishing the shared fiction: who and where.
  - **Advancing:** Elaborating on the established fiction.
  - **Turn:** Creating a dramatic turn to conclude a scene.
  - **Music:** Inspires and helps pace the scene.
- **Across scenes.** Two mechanics facilitate creating a long story.
  - **Time.** Defining the position between two scenes.
  - **Interlude.** Interludes allow reflection of the story and changing groups.

## Golden Rules

Wonderworks has two golden rules:

1. **Do not talk about the game beforehand.** This game is improvised, and created on the spot. To create such an emerging narrative, the game is not planned at all.
  2. **Respect your own and others' boundaries.** The game involves engaging in the creation of a shared fiction, whose content is unknown beforehand. Therefore, it is important to respect your own and other players' boundaries. The general principles are:
    - a. Everything that we do is consent-based.
    - b. You can leave the game at any time.
    - c. Be mindful of your own and others' boundaries. Ask, don't assume.
    - d. Ask the players if they want a specific safety mechanic in their game.
- **Limitations.** The players may have physical and psychological constraints that they would like to share. Some players may not want to play certain themes at all.
  - **Safety mechanic.** Use hands crossed on the chest as an X as a safety mechanic, which indicates that the player wants to take a step back. Feel free to use the safety mechanic players are most familiar and comfortable with, as the practices vary per country.
  - **Recite.** Ask the players to recite the golden rules aloud all together.

## Warm-Up

- **Walking in space.** Have the players walk in space in the way they feel most comfortable. Stretching is encouraged.
- **Greeting.** Have the players greet each other—the more creative the greeting, the better!
- **Bodyguard.** Everyone moves in the space.
  - Each person secretly chooses one person to be their nemesis: they seek to be as far from them as possible.
  - Then, they choose a bodyguard and seek to position a bodyguard between themselves and the nemesis.
- **Circle walking.** This exercise trains the participants' attention. Ask the group to stand in a circle.
  - One person is chosen to lead. They lock eyes with another player, then start to slowly walk toward them.
  - Then, the person who is walked toward locks eyes with another player and slowly walks toward them.
  - That player then locks eyes with another player, and when they do, they start to walk toward them.
  - This way, there is always one person walking in the middle, while players are trying to keep track of who is trying to lock eyes.

## Forming groups

- **Groups.** The game is played in groups of 3–5 players. This group is “everything” for this game, and the rest of the workshop will be done to facilitate this group forming.
- **Distribute.** The players are given a moment to choose their groups in silence, by gravitating to the players they want to play with. You can also use other methods to create the groups as suits the situation.

## Defining: Setting the Scene

- **Definition.** With the groups established, let’s start to practice the core game mechanics. Defining refers to creating game fiction: who the characters are, what their relationship with each other, where the characters are, and what objects exist within the game. The players can define their character, and the shared reality, and make suggestions for other players.
- **Define courageously.** Players are often cautious and not sufficiently specific when defining. For example, the player may point at an object and say: “What’s that!?”. Here, the player avoids making a decision and puts pressure on other players. Better is to say: “Whoa, I have never seen a cobra that big!” Lesson: define actively and courageously.
- **Define with specificity.** Players often refrain from sufficient specificity in defining. They may say: “If it isn’t my friend!”. This defines the other character but does not give anything to react to. Increasing specificity allows for creating tension: “Jack, hi! You haven’t answered my calls, I need my PlayStation back!” Lesson: define clearly by making decisions.
- **Practice: Establishing Agreement**
  - This exercise practices defining and accepting. The established group is divided into two pairs. The pairs seek to rapidly establish a scene by defining their characters, the environment, location, theme, atmosphere, etc.
  - Repeat the exercise two times while changing pairs within the group.
  - **Reflection:** After every exercise, reflect on it with the players. For instance, ask what they noticed or learned, and what was difficult.

## Elaborate: Building the Story

- **Definition.** Defining starts the scene, and elaborating moves it forward. The key to elaborating is using the elements from defining—and reusing elements (themes) from previous scenes to build continuity.
  - **Enjoy!** If defining is ideating, elaborating is playing and toying with the ideas that exist. Enjoy them!
  - **Increasing specificity.** This includes refining and elaborating on them, thus increasing specificity; and growing intensity and suggesting problems with them, which creates tension.
- **Themes.** Advancing elaborates on the story's themes. The themes are recurring topics the story is about. The themes can be manifested through phrases, items, emotions, places, and encounters.
  - **Few is enough.** The key to the themes is that there are not too many of them. Aim to have 2–5 themes in your story, otherwise, they are difficult to remember and keep track of.
  - **Chekhov's gun.** If something is defined, consider using it. Every element in the story should be relevant and irrelevant elements should be removed. However, create sufficient substance early in the game to be used later.
- **Practice: Ancient poetry**
  - **Aim.** The players practice elaboration by creating ancient poems of wisdom.
  - **Groups.** The exercise is done in groups. The group creates an ancient poem of wisdom where each player adds one line to the poem in a circle to create a coherent poem.



## Turning: Creating Dramatic Change

- **Definition.** Defining starts the scene, and elaboration moves it forward intensifying what was established. Turn shifts the act in another direction. The key is suggesting surprising elements—and moving the story forward. Please note that turning can also significantly change the tone of the game. This creates a scene with...
  - Beginning (definition)
  - Middle part (elaborate)
  - End (turn)
- **Indicating the end of the scene.** To help the players pace their scenes, it is a good idea to indicate the scene ending with lights (dimming them slowly off) and music (fading it off). The scene ends when the lights are down and the music is off.

## Drawing it together: Define, elaborate, and turn

- **Overview.** Music provides an implicit emotional tone and story arc. It gives the players inspiration, safety, and something to lean on. However, the players are not required to adapt to the music (unlike in *Superrealism*).
- **Practice: Define, Elaborate, Turn**
  - This exercise gives the group a chance to practice the key mechanics: define, elaborate, and turn. The players do one scene three times:
    - First they **define** the scene (~1 min)
    - Then, they start the scene over: they define and **elaborate** it (~2 min)
    - Then, they start the scene over again: they define, elaborate, and **turn** the scene (~3 min).
  - Alternatively, ask the players to do the scene two times:
    - First, define (and elaborate) the scene (~1.5 min)
    - Then, they define, elaborate, and turn the scene (~3 min)
  - First song to practice: **Open the Light** – Board of Canada
- **Pacing:** The first experiment often highlights how the players increase the intensity too rapidly, which limits their options going further. For instance, when someone insults them, they immediately grab the gun and shoot them. This is unwanted when the intention is to create long stories. Ask the players next to consider growing the scene slowly: they have 9 or 12 scenes in total to ramp up the intensity!
  - Second song to practice. **Cucumber Eyez** – Aydio

## Time: Connecting Scenes Temporally

- **Overview.** Now, the players know how to create a scene. Time refers to defining the scene between the scenes. In other words, the second scene may occur...
  - Just after the first scene
  - Two weeks after the first scene
  - A decade after the first scene
  - A week before the first scene
  - Etc.
- **Practice: Positioning two scenes**
  - In the previous practice (**Cucumber Eyez** – Aydio) the group established a scene. Now, let's practice by creating another scene that connects to the first one. Ask the players to do a scene that...
    - **Immediately after.** The players create a second scene that occurs immediately after the first scene.
    - **After a long time.** The players create a second scene that occurs with substantial delay (months, years, or decades) after the first scene (and perhaps elsewhere!)
    - **Just before.** The players create a second scene that leads to the first scene.
    - **Long time before.** The players create a second scene that foreshadows the first scene—it occurs months, years, or decades before it.

## Interlude: Focus and Changing Group

- **Interludes have two parts to them.**
  - **Focusing**
  - **Changing groups**
- **Focusing.** The first minutes of the interlude allow the players to wind down and reflect. You should encourage them to listen to the song, relax, and think about the story that they are creating. Remind them that they are in control.
  - For instance, if the story is too chaotic, suggest turning its “volume down”, taking it more slowly, and keeping with the established themes rather than introducing new ones.
  - If the story appears to go in circles, remind them that they can change the story in any way they like! They can even change the genre or involve new characters. Opening the imagination leads to literally endless possibilities.
- **Changing.** After a few minutes of reflection, the players are given the chance to change groups.
  - One player may choose to leave and join another group. If one player leaves, others cannot leave. This decision is made in silence while listening to the song.
  - No one is forced to leave, but accepting players who have left their groups is mandatory, and they should be welcomed with open arms. The leaving player can join any group, but they should join the groups with a leaving player. If there are no such groups, join as a fourth/fifth player.
  - The arriving player will have to adapt to the created fiction. They should not assume that others adapt to them! The group should try to accommodate the arriving player to their group.
  - **Emphasize that this mechanic is very powerful.** It exists as a backup for edge cases, and players are not supposed to use it merely because it exists.

## The game: Theatrical Release (US)

Section	Notes	Song
<b>Prelude</b>	Players listen to the song in silence	<b>Rain</b> – Kenny Barron & Dave Holland
<b>Act 1: Scenes 1–4</b>		
<b>Scene 1</b>	Each played <b>two</b> times: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define (and elaborate)</li> <li>• Define, elaborate and turn</li> </ul>	<b>Engage Ring</b> – DJ Okawari * Emily Styler
<b>Scene 2</b>		<b>Travelling</b> – James Spiteri
<b>Scene 3</b>		<b>Medianoite</b> – Sangre de Muerdago
<b>Scene 4</b>		<b>I See You</b> – The Phonometrician
<b>Interlude 1</b>	Reflection and possibility to change groups.	<b>Miss You</b> – Trentemøller
<b>Act 2: Scenes 5–8</b>		
<b>Scene 5</b>	Each played <b>two</b> times: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define (and elaborate)</li> <li>• Define, elaborate and turn</li> </ul>	<b>Naranja</b> – Hinkstep
<b>Scene 6</b>		<b>Whispers in the Wind</b> – Eldrvak
<b>Scene 7</b>		<b>Empathica II: Everwinter</b> – Unrequited
<b>Scene 8</b>		<b>Mehr Als Alles Andere</b> – Bersarin Quartett
<b>Interlude 2</b>	Reflection and possibility to change groups.	<b>Carrying Glass</b> – Ryuichi Sakamoto
<b>Act 3: Scenes 5–8</b>		
<b>Scene 9</b>	Each played <b>two</b> times: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define (and elaborate)</li> <li>• Define, elaborate and turn</li> </ul>	<b>Matariki</b> – Koan
<b>Scene 10</b>		<b>Denimclad baboons</b> – Röyksopp
<b>Scene 11</b>		<b>Out Here with Us</b> – Parra for Cuva
<b>Scene 12</b>		<b>Kyoto Rain</b> – The Laszlo Project
<b>Postlude</b>	<b>Listened to in groups in silence.</b>	<b>Olopte's lullaby</b> – Gabriel Parra

## The game: Theatrical Release (EU)

Section	Notes	Song
<b>Prelude</b>	Players listen to the song in silence	<b>Rain</b> – Kenny Barron & Dave Holland
<b>Act 1: Scenes 1–4</b>		
<b>Scene 1</b>	Played three times: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define</li> <li>• Define, elaborate</li> <li>• Define, elaborate, turn</li> </ul>	<b>Engage Ring</b> – DJ Okawari * Emily Styler
<b>Scene 2</b>		<b>Travelling</b> – James Spiteri
<b>Scene 3</b>		<b>Medianoite</b> – Sangre de Muerdago
<b>Interlude 1</b>	Reflection and possibility to change groups.	<b>Miss You</b> – Trentemøller
<b>Act 2: Scenes 5–8</b>		
<b>Scene 4</b>	Played three times: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define</li> <li>• Define, elaborate</li> <li>• Define, elaborate, turn</li> </ul>	<b>Naranja</b> – Hinkstep
<b>Scene 5</b>		<b>Whispers in the Wind</b> – Eldrvak
<b>Scene 6</b>		<b>Mehr Als Alles Andere</b> – Bersarin Quartett
<b>Interlude 2</b>	Reflection and possibility to change groups.	<b>Carrying Glass</b> – Ryuichi Sakamoto
<b>Act 3: Scenes 5–8</b>		
<b>Scene 7</b>	Played three times: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define</li> <li>• Define, elaborate</li> <li>• Define, elaborate, turn</li> </ul>	<b>Matariki</b> – Koan
<b>Scene 8</b>		<b>Denimclad baboons</b> – Röyksopp
<b>Scene 9</b>		<b>Out Here with Us</b> – Parra for Cuva
<b>Postlude</b>	Listened to in groups in silence.	<b>Olopte's lullaby</b> – Gabriel Parra

## The game: Extended Director's Cut

Section	Notes	Song
<b>Prelude</b>	Players listen to the song in silence	<b>Rain</b> – Kenny Barron & Dave Holland
<b>Act 1: Scenes 1–4</b>		
<b>Scene 1</b>	Played three times: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define</li> <li>• Define, elaborate</li> <li>• Define, elaborate, turn</li> </ul>	<b>Engage Ring</b> – DJ Okawari * Emily Styler
<b>Scene 2</b>		<b>Travelling</b> – James Spiteri
<b>Scene 3</b>		<b>Medianoite</b> – Sangre de Muerdago
<b>Scene 4</b>		<b>I See You</b> – The Phonometrician
<b>Interlude 1</b>	Reflection and possibility to change groups.	<b>Miss You</b> – Trentemøller
<b>Act 2: Scenes 5–8</b>		
<b>Scene 5</b>	Played three times: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define</li> <li>• Define, elaborate</li> <li>• Define, elaborate, turn</li> </ul>	<b>Naranja</b> – Hinkstep
<b>Scene 6</b>		<b>Whispers in the Wind</b> – Eldrvak
<b>Scene 7</b>		<b>Empathica II: Everwinter</b> – Unrequited
<b>Scene 8</b>		<b>Mehr Als Alles Andere</b> – Bersarin Quartett
<b>Interlude 2</b>	Reflection and possibility to change groups.	<b>Carrying Glass</b> – Ryuichi Sakamoto
<b>Act 3: Scenes 5–8</b>		
<b>Scene 9</b>	Played three times: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define</li> <li>• Define, elaborate</li> <li>• Define, elaborate, turn</li> </ul>	<b>Matariki</b> – Koan
<b>Scene 10</b>		<b>Denimclad baboons</b> – Röyksopp
<b>Scene 11</b>		<b>Out Here with Us</b> – Parra for Cuva
<b>Scene 12</b>		<b>Kyoto Rain</b> – The Laszlo Project
<b>Postlude</b>	Listened to in groups in silence.	<b>Olopte's lullaby</b> – Gabriel Parra

## Debrief

- **Ending.** Turn on the lights, turn off the music. Thank the players for the game.
- **Within groups.** Ask the players to share their thoughts briefly within the groups they played the game in.
- **All together.** Ask the players to join a circle. Have the players each share one (brief) thought about how they feel right now.
- **One clap.** The game ends with one, and only one, synchronized hand clap by all the players.