

Date Dreams

A single-player larp about gay fantasy and gay anonymity

By Alex Sisk

Overview

In this game, players use Grindr (or whatever gay dating app they already use) to imagine abstract, dreamlike characters based on the incomplete, anonymized and exaggerated user profiles on the platform, and then answer questions related to the characters, all without interacting in any way with the people behind the profiles.

A note on the text

I had the idea for this game when thinking about how many people use Grindr with no intention of meeting anyone, and how all communication relies on our ability to imagine other people's inner states even as we cannot access them directly. Many people have played some version of this game whether they know it or not. People are playing it on their morning commutes with the people they recognize, but do not know. This game focuses on a particular aspect of gay culture which is at once anonymous and intimate, emotionally detached and emotionally charged, and which thrives on this form of imagination, as personally identifying information is severely limited by one or both parties. This culture of anonymity developed as a way to create safe spaces in a hostile cultural climate. The space must be respected. Do not consider this game an invitation to invade this space if you do not already belong to it, or as an excuse to judge or mock a culture to which you do not - or do not need to - belong.

Safety

Most safety sections in games are about ensuring the safety of the game's players by giving them tools to communicate and negotiate content. While that will be a part of this section, this game is played in a public space, and like any public game, will need to establish guidelines to ensure the safety of non-players who inhabit that public space. I want to explicitly establish that this game is for people who are already a part of the community this game is about, and should not be taken as an invitation to enter the space by people who don't already belong to it. Date Dreams is embedded in a culture of gay anonymity, and if you aren't someone who already navigates that cultural space, this game is not for you. Do not download Grindr, Scruff, or similar apps just to play this game. The intended audience is people who already navigate

these spaces. Never interact with other profiles in the course of playing this game beyond looking at their profiles, during play. Other people are not on the app to play games, and you shouldn't waste their time. Do not use this game as an excuse to be judgmental or rude to people.

This game is mostly played in your head, so you can control what you do with the information you find and how you want to play with it. However, since the embodied part of this game involves looking at things other people have written on the internet, the content there cannot be moderated. This is another reason why this game is intended for people who already inhabit this space: many profiles on these apps include sexually explicit content, just from the nature of the app's intended use. The biggest way to protect yourself if you're unsure is to not play this game. Like most smartphone social apps, Grindr and virtually all similar apps collect and sell your data: please be aware of this.

Method

Open your usual gay dating app. Do not message anyone at any point in this game. Do not respond to any incoming messages. Do not "tap" any profiles. I suggest turning off all notifications during play. Look at the profiles the app presents on the home screen grid. Ignore profiles that include names and faces, and focus on the anonymized profiles. Anonymized profiles will not have any unobscured face pics, full names, or other identifying information. Look for profiles with pictures of things like landscapes, inanimate objects, closeups on unidentifiable body parts. Begin to imagine that the thing in the profile picture is the owner and creator of the profile. You are looking at the profile of a sentient sunset, or building, or giant floating beard, or naked torso. If there is no picture, perhaps it's a ghost, a void, or another invisible presence. Look at the written profile. How do the things in the profile apply to the thing in the picture? If you're unsure of how to do this, remember that when you normally look at a profile, you are doing this anyway: reconciling the given written information with the visual information to imagine how it makes a person. Do this enough times to give yourself a cast of a few characters you like.

You can interact with these characters by asking yourself questions about them, and imagining their reactions to different situations. What they would do in a place or time, what they would like outside of their stated interests on the app, how they would react in certain scenarios. I encourage you to be creative and come up with your own ideas, but if you're having trouble thinking of ways to interact with these characters in your mind, below are some examples of scenarios, or ways to play with these characters you have imagined.

Scenarios

Matchmaker: these five people have come to you to make matches between them.

- Who goes with who?
- Who is upset with their match?
Who is ecstatic with their match?
- Who gets left out?
- Which match lasts the longest?
- Which match lasts the shortest?

The Cruise: You are all on a week long gay party cruise.

- The ship has everything you would expect a cruise ship to have, including a gym, a pool, a ballroom-cum-nightclub, a bar and grill, and a shuffleboard set.
- Who is most likely to be found at each activity at any given time?
- Which activity do you spend the most time at?
- At the end of the week there is a massive circuit party. Who attends, if anyone?
- Who does not, if anyone?
- Who stays all night? Are they up all night dancing, or are they up all night because no one will leave with them?
- Who leaves early? Do they leave the party because they want to go to bed? Or because they meet someone they want to leave with?

Suitors A-Calling: You are a person of some esteem in the landed gentry, and many suitors seek your affections.

- Five of them have come calling, and you must greet them one by one.
- Each has brought you a gift. What did everyone bring? How do you feel about each gift?
- Do they notice your reactions?
- One caller in particular stands out above the others. Why is it in a good way or a bad way?

Literally Just Clue: While on retreat at a large country estate house, the owner has been killed, and the doors locked! Everyone is a suspect, except you.

- What were you doing that removes you from consideration? Why were you away from the other characters?
- Who does each character suspect?
- To get more information, you speak to each character alone, and accuse each one to see how they react. How does each one react to the accusation?
- Who is most likely innocent?
- Who most likely did it?