

2022
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Superrealism

**A music-driven embodied
role-playing experience
of losing and finding oneself**

In a remote country house, you hesitate. The esoteric new-age self-development seminar is about to begin. Promptly, the escalating ceremony leaves your ego behind. Together, you look for the mystical Mountain across curious, associative, symbolic, and synesthetic planes. Do the participants ever meet the Blackbird? Do they find the present?



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Synopsis

In a remote country house, you hesitate. The esoteric new-age self-development seminar is about to begin. Promptly, however, the escalating ceremony leaves your ego behind. The spiritual pilgrims begin to hungrily explore the associative, symbolic, and synesthetic planes of remedy. Whisper! Mumble! Cry out!

Far in the distance, the Mountain grows and growls. To find its heart, the pilgrims need to traverse surrealist scenes of avant-garde innovation. Gratefully, they are aided. The music of the world is their wind, their bodies are the wings. Pace! Skip! Swirl!

Yet, the path is uncertain. Will the pilgrims ever find the Blackbird of the Ridge, the infinite emotional expression of self-dissolving unity, the moment that they could call the present?

SUPERREALISM is an experimental music-driven game about looking for and finding. The game is played without verbal expression through embodied expression.

Game information

Style:	Live-action role-playing game in the scenario tradition
Keywords:	Embodied expression, experimental, music-driven
Game masters:	1
Players:	6+ (upper limit defined by the game space)
Duration:	3.5h
Recommended outfit:	Flexible that allows movement.
Materials needed:	Printed game materials (this document) Characters (an appendix) High-quality loudspeakers and music list 2-5 rolls of tape Rocks, preferably fist-sized, one per player Egg shaker, one per player Blindfolds, one per player

This game is for experienced players and game masters

The game is experimental, designed to evoke strong feelings, and some players may not be comfortable with embodied expression. The players should be given sufficient information before the game to allow them to opt-in. The game is very demanding to run. It requires an in-depth understanding of player safety and the vision of the game. Only experienced game masters should run the game with considerable preparation.

Theoretical sidenote

Many role-playing games are about immersion into a role and making meaningful decisions through the narrative. This game breaks this fundamental. The players are invited to dissolve their characters and *express* the narration the game master guides them through. Considered from a role-play theoretical point-of-view, the game pushes the boundaries of gameness asking: 1) If the character of the player is dissolved, are they still playing a role-playing game? 2) Where do meaningful experiences arise? While these questions are of lesser importance than the experience the game produces, they may open new avenues in reflecting the experience and the design.

Acknowledgments

The writer would like to thank everyone who participated in the playtests of Superrealism in the fall of 2022, and the players in Stockholm Scenario Festival.

Writer bio

Lauri Lukka is a designer, researcher, and clinical psychologist. Since 2011, he has designed numerous scenarios including Prelude, The Desperate, Mikodine XA, and Forgiveness. He is particularly interested in crafting experimental scenarios that explore the medium. Lauri writes on the psychology of games and works on his Ph.D. on therapeutic digital games for mental health at Aalto University, Finland.

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Before the game

An overview of the game experience

- **Overview (20minutes).** To begin, the players are given as much information about the game as possible: the more they know about the game, the better the experience will be. However, the game concept is new. To understand it, it will be first explained on a high level, then workshopped, and practiced.
- **Workshop (45 minutes).** The aim is to warm up and gain a sense of the key mechanics of the game.
- **The game (1h 25 minutes to 1h 40 minutes).** The game consists of roughly 20 scenes.
- **Debrief (20 minutes).** It is important to leave sufficient time for debriefing. However, more comprehensive debriefing is warmly welcomed.

Overview

- **Questions.** All questions are welcome at any point.
- **Non-verbal embodied expression.** In many games, the story is played through dialogue. Today, we play without words. Rather, we express ourselves with bodies, voices, movements, breathing, and dance. All players may not be familiar with this – no worries, we will go through this in the workshop.
- **The story as a narrative of songs.** The story of the game is told through a series of connected scenes, each taking the duration of one song. In total, there are roughly 20 scenes, and each song takes roughly 2-8 minutes. Each scene begins with a game master's instruction that sets the frame for interpreting the song. Then, it is the emotion, theme, and mood of the song that guides you through the scene, where the pace of the game adapts to the song.
- **Dramatic arc.** The story creates a dramatic arc that starts neutral and goes deeper and to darker themes. However, the game will end on a positive note: the players are brought back from the depths.
- **On autonomy.** Each scene consists of a description and a song that also suggests certain emotions. However, the player is not expected to feel or not to feel something. Rather the description and the song are suggestions that give a structure that is interpreted together: the players have autonomy within these boundaries. They can go deeper into the emotions if they want to, or step back when needed. Thus, the players are in control of their experience.
- **Additional info.** In some scenes, the players will be given additional information to guide the scene.
- **Group over the individual.** The interpretation of the scenes is done together. In the game, we are playing not only as individuals but also as a group, and we should listen, adapt, and be inspired by others. We will practice this before the game.
- **Influences.** The game is influenced by improv, contact improvisation, 5Rhythms, Authentic Movement, and mindfulness. Yet, the game provides you with characters, an overarching story, and props to guide you through the story.

- **The props.** Throughout the game, there are four key themes and props that are used:
 - **Stone.**
 - **Egg shaker.**
 - **Blindfold.**
 - **Character.**
- **Usage of the props.**
 - **Safety.** Be mindful of the floors with the stone and move carefully when blindfolded.
 - **Given out.** The props are given out and introduced to the players throughout the game. The story guides their usage.
 - **Stimuli.** The props give you something new to explore through the game. Feel free to improvise with them.
 - **Characters.** Note that also characters are props. The players are invited to play different characters throughout the game. The character they choose at the beginning of the game is merely a starting point.
- **Summary.** The game is played by interpreting the instruction and the songs that weave together into a story as individuals and, vitally, as a group.
- **Safety considerations.** The game is experimental and experiential. Therefore, it is important to go through safety considerations explicitly.
 - **Voluntariness.** The players participate in their game voluntarily and may leave the game at any point without an explanation.
 - **Boundaries.** Players are encouraged to keep their **own and others'** boundaries in mind. This game may intentionally push them, and the player is responsible for being mindful of them.
 - **Breaking.** Some games use explicit mechanics to signal to others that a player needs distance, for instance. I have not found these mechanics very flexible and easily used. Therefore, I suggest emphasizing mindfulness of one's own and other's boundaries and respecting them. The players can use any way to signal them and take distance when needed. However, playing cultures vary significantly, and introduce additional safety mechanics that fit the group and your practices.

Workshop

- **Importance.** The workshop is a vital part of the whole game experience. Its key aim is to learn the key mechanic of the game: how to create scenes through description and song together. In the workshop, this is broken down into three components:
 - We **listen to** others in the group
 - We **interpret** the game master's scene instructions
 - We **adapt** to the music.
- **Listening to oneself.**
 - The players walk in the room freely. Invite the players to focus on themselves and to walk in a way that feels comfortable to them. The players are free to stretch while walking. It is important to pay mindful of oneself. Some principles to observe:

- **Improvised.** There are no steps to learn.
 - **Observe.** Observe your inner process.
 - **Non-judgmental.** Thus, there is no right or wrong.
 - **Expressive.** The aim is to express yourself, the music, and the story.
- Now, two songs are played. The players are encouraged to adapt their movement to the song, being mindful of themselves.
- **Ibrahim Maalou – True story** (2-3 minutes)
- **Q'antataita – Puentes** (2-3 minutes)
- **Others.** The players are now encouraged to walk into the room and pay attention to others, meeting them with their eyes.
- **Simultaneous stopping.** Walk together and the players are asked to stop at the same time without anyone particularly initiating the stop. Repeat 4-5 times. Encourage the players to turn their attention to the group.
- **Human knot.** Go in a circle. Each person takes one random person by the hand with her right hand and does the same with their left hand. Without speaking, the players try to untangle themselves without breaking contact with their hands.
- **Theater machine.** Next, we will create a machine that consists of different parts that interrelate. Each part has a simple movement. The parts are added one at a time. The exercise is repeated 1-2 times.
- **Interpretation of a song.** Next, we are creating different scenes without talking, merely by expressing ourselves. I will give you music and a short description of the scene for you to interpret. You have full two minutes to create the scene—you do not need to hurry.
 - **Define.** In the scene, you can define your character by a certain behavior (fishing, playing with the ball, cooking).
 - **Invitations.** Each behavior allows others to participate and complement it: a child invites a parent, for instance. Invite – and be invited by others.
 - **Trying out.** Let's try it out, it will make more sense after the description.
 - *On the pier of a small coastal town. The families are gathered to say farewell to those who are leaving, perhaps never to return.*
 - Note to GM: Adjust the descriptions of each scene to fit your style.
 - **Scene 1: Carter Burwell – The book**
 - **Reflection.** How was that?
- **Pacing.** One thing many groups notice is that they go too directly to something. It is important to leave room for growing a certain emotion or behavior, otherwise, you will maximize it too soon, as the song only continues to grow. This we will practice next.
- **Interpretation with progress.** Now that we know how to create an ambiance, we will make it more dynamic. To do this, you need to listen and adapt to the changes in the song. How the scene begins is not the same as how it ends. The duration of the scene is 2.5-3 minutes: take your time, enjoy the music, and collaborate. Allow the scene to grow gradually.
 - *In the engineering workshop, studious clockwork-makers are working with minute details. The work is studious, engaging, and detailed. Yet, through the scene, they*

grow more and more worried. Will they get the work done in time? Will they make the deadline?

- **Scene 2: Einaudi – Einaudi:Experience (stop 3min)**
- **Making sounds.** While there is no talking in the game, we can make sounds. We can use our feet, hands, and our voices.
 - **Rain.** Let's try making rain. The players are instructed to make rain by tapping their hands on their thighs. First, the rain is droplets, then it grows more intense, and to full flow. Finally, the rain quiets down.
 - **Hymn.** Next, let's try using our voices. The players are encouraged to move in the room and harmonize with others, to see how it feels.
 - **Scene 3: Enya – Boadicea**
- **Contact.** As we play together, we may well take also physical contact with each other. Pay mindful of others' capabilities and boundaries.

Recap

- **The flow.** The story of the game consists of scenes with a duration of a song. In the scenes, you combine
 - The verbal introduction and instructions that may also invite you to adapt new characters and use the props
 - The song that may itself evolve
 - Adapt and interpret with the group around you
- **Questions.** Questions before the game?
- **Break.** 10 minutes.
- **Note to the GM.** An appropriate duration for the scenes depends on the experience and playstyle of the group as well as its size. Pay attention to the pace of the game correctly cutting the songs when needed.

The game

- **The setting.** The setting of the game is that the characters have arrived at an experimental new-age ceremony in a remote country house. They do not know each other before the game.
 - **Starting character.** Spread the characters on the floor. Allow the players to browse and choose one that fits them. Some players may not recognize all the advanced words in the descriptions – a good opportunity to collaborate. Next, you can choose your characters. However, this is only the beginning. You may be asked to adopt other characters during the game. Remember, the character is only the starting point in the game.
 - **Tape rolls.** Attach tape rolls to a wall. Instruct that the players are to use that wall and the tape rolls in the game – this saves some hassle in the game.
 - **Fold into the pocket.** When everyone has chosen a character, fold the picture and put it in your pocket or elsewhere where it is available.
1. **The waiting room**
 - a. Ensure everyone has their character with them folded in a pocket.
 - b. The game begins with the players lying on the floor.
 - c. **Max Richter – Flowers of Herself**
 - d. Slowly, the expectant travelers wake up in a lounge, waiting for the departure. Around them is a room full of strangers, and other pilgrims, equally expecting the unknown flight.
 - e. (1-2min) In their pockets, they find their passport photo. They take the time to feel how it moves them.
 - f. (3-4min) Amongst the strangers, they make the effort to get acquainted. Using the pictures to introduce themselves to each other, one after another. Equally, it is an effort to prove that this is, in fact, me. It is me: someone that had forgotten in their sleep. It is me!
 2. **The wall of faces**
 - a. **Detektivbyrå – Life_Universe**
 - b. Now that everyone is accounted for, they are amongst friends. To bless their journey, the pilgrim and the travelers make up an altar: in a slow dance, one by one, they attach their pictures to the wall. It is a portrait. Finally, they gather before it in a holy mass.
 3. **The hymn**
 - a. **Daft Punk – Overture**
 - b. As the altar is finished, the pilgrims gather in front of the serene beauty. They harmonize their voices in a hymn.
 4. **Story of the Mountain**
 - a. **Glass: Aguas da Amazonia – Metamorphosis I**
 - b. As their voices reach their peak, the waiting room disappears and the reality around them crumbles away. Do you hear it? The wind in the trees. It is picking up, moving through the autumn leaves that softly bend with the wind. It is light and gentle, and the rays of the sun pass through

the canopy. Do you hear the song the wind sings? Do you hear what the wind tells you...

- c. Once, there was a humble soul, watching the eternal fields of grass. Their hair blows in the wind. What they wanted was so far, far, far away from the village that burned behind them that the humble soul asked the wind to take them away.
- d. At that moment, the very heart of the earth granted the wish. The words of the young soul became the wind, their hair became the wind, and their body as well. They became a soft breeze in the autumn... Flying across the landscapes, the spirit saw their village far down below, waving them farewell as they soared across the sky, and flew towards the mighty mountains far in the distance.
- e. You see it as well. The great Mountain is far in the distance. The mountain you long for, where you may meet the Blackbird. It is then you begin the arduous, strenuous trek through strange landscapes, terrains, and jungle... (~10 minutes, adjust as needed)

5. The trek

a. Talamasca – Day Dreaming

- b. The journey started as a curious adventure, but the Mountain seemed not to move closer to the pilgrims. Soon, the adventure turned more monotonous, and the pilgrims fell into their minds as they walked, into a trance. They continued to walk until they all collapse from exhaustion...

6. Finding the rock

a. Kammarheit – The Starwheel

- b. As you again emerge into consciousness, you find yourself at the Mountain—deep within the Mountain. It is where the sullen and deformed dark dwarves live mining the mountain, and eating it from within, one rock at a time. You consume the rock, leaving behind vast, empty halls. You, the dark dwarves, are lonely creatures. You work together, but each to their end, searching for the rock. Their rock. They want to find the rock. To celebrate the rock. To own their rock.
- c. // Halfway through the song lay out **the rocks** across to be found.
- d. Today was the day that they would finally find what they were looking for: their rock. This was the first joy they had experienced in years, but it soon turned to something else as the dwarves heard the whisper of the rock. They listened intently to learn its name, its spell, its secrecy, the forbidden words.

7. The work

a. UNKLE – Celestial Annihilation

- b. Having learned the name of the stone, the dwarves become a slave to them. They follow the orders of the stones. They moan and murmur the names and swallow them. Working to obey the command of the stones, the stones work the dwarves to the flesh and bone. The stones want to be stacked, piled, and constructed, again and again. Somewhere the Highlord of pain, Neon Metal, was overwatching the dwarves.

8. The gatherers

- a. **Olafur Arnalds - Momentary**
- b. On the mountainside, old couples are gathering the last frozen berries from the rocky ground. The year has been tough for the couple, and winter is soon upon them. Yet, they support each other in their quest, finally withdrawing to the small hut on the side of the mountain as the evening draws near.

9. The candle

- a. **Olafur Arnalds – Nyepi (choir version)**
- b. Inside the cabin, a candle sits between the two elderly. It is flickering, and the two are crouched to watch its small, intense, flame. It is their last candle, and after it burns, there are just the two of them in the darkness. Their voices seek the flame. They give thanks to the flame, for being there.
- c. // Halfway through the song share **the blindfolds**
- d. Yet, the candle is rapidly burning out leaving behind only darkness.

10. Losing each other

- a. **Dead can dance – Host of seraphim**
- b. The darkness around them became deep and uninviting. So deep that it pulled the two unwillingly apart.
- c. As the two lost each other, they no longer knew where they were. Where are they? They were looking for something, but only found other grasping hands, other flailing hands.

11. The egg

- a. **Ryan Teague – Recursive iteration III**
- b. Then, they feel it. Something is watching them in the dark. They need to be very, very, very quiet not to stir it.
- c. // Share **the shakers** with the players individually
- d. From the darkness, their seeking hands finally found something. Yet, it was not a stone, but something else.

12. The rhythm

- a. **Curawaka – Noku Mana**
- b. Finally, they can sigh in relief. They have lost the Beast and its heavy breathing. Now, they listen to the rhythm, the pulse within the egg. The soft rhythm of the soul. With it, they comfort what they have found, and it comforts them in return.
- c. (2-6 minutes) Their shared ritual blesses them with sight. They find another person, and with them, the other helps them see. Slowly, they help each other see by removing the blindfolds.
- d. // **The blindfolds** are removed

13. Relax

- a. There it is. The perfect silence. There is so much to listen, to in that silence. (~1min)
- b. **Kent – Då Sin By För Alltid**
- c. Yet, it doesn't last long. The deep dwarves hear it again, the call to work. Call to march. One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four.

14. Neon Metal Attacks

- a. **Röyksopp – Bounty Hunters**
- b. It is the attack of the master of the dwarves, the Neon Metal. The compulsion. The anger. The purge.
- c. Then, they fixate on the pictures on the wall. Those useless caricatures. They are worthless, insignificant, cheap, despicable, meaningless, and false! One by one, they pick the false idol, and rip them into little pieces, throwing them across the room.
- d. // **The characters** are ripped from the wall.
- e. (5min) Celebrating on the grave of the inferior trash. The only thing left is the raw emotion.

15. The regret

- a. **Tom Holkenborg - Survive**
- b. After the purge, someone is watching all the broken pieces. Condemning the mess that has been made. That picture is never coming back. And with the picture, they have lost their name, their countenance, their faces. Can they fix the broken pieces? It doesn't work!

16. The burden of worms

- a. **Kjartan Sveinsson – Teil I**
- b. There is no going back. They feel the commands becoming heavier on them, tying them to obey.
- c. //The players tie **the blindfolds** as shackles around their wrists
- d. Like the broken pictures, they are defeated and worn out. From the frozen earth, the stones emerge. A burden to carry eternally. Each burrowing in their stone. With the stone, are melting into the ground like the broken pieces around them. Without energy, they fall to the ground, and through it, into the soil. They are reduced to worms, in the deep layers of the earth. Writhing, they are leaving the pictures far behind them, an attempt to forget.
- e. // **The stones** are used again

17. The dying heart

- a. **Michael Giacchino – Locked out again**
- b. As they have buried themselves down, under the ground, beneath the mountain, and even deeper into the very core of the earth. Together, they find the heart of the earth. It is barely beating... It is made of their stones.
- c. The worms comfort the very earth, the weeping heart of the mountain whose death would be the end of all beauty. To keep it warm, the worms gather the broken pieces of the pictures, to give solace to the heart.

18. Warhammer

- a. **Two steps from hell – Victory**
- b. Thousands of miles above, the slaves of Neon Metal work within the mine. The deep dwarves strike their anvils. Their hands, feet, and mouths are dry, and strike their anvils in compulsion, breaking the rocks. Obeying the command.
- c. Yet, now something is different. From deep within the earth, they hear and feel a beat. And each strike no longer forges a chain, but breaks them free! With each strike, there is a release.

- d. // **The blindfolds** used as shackles are removed.

19. Sunrays

a. **Roberto Cacciapaglia - Seconda Navigazione**

- b. The dwarves have left their anvils, and for the very first time, they step out of the mountain. The skies are clear, and the sun is bright, brilliant, and intense, blazing its golden glory. The soft breeze caresses the treeline and the skin of dwarves that have emerged from beneath the ground.
- c. Within one of those trees, there is a lonely egg. Sitting, all by itself with no sign of the mother bird. Then, the Blackbird flies into view.
- d. The dwarves feel the wind under their hands, and that faint beating grants them their wish. Their hands become the wings, and their feet become their tail, and they fly oh so high. They soar above the landscape, higher and higher, and the Blackbird flies with them.

Debrief

- **One sentence.** Ask each player to share one thought about the game.
- **Discussion.** Give room to reflect on the experience of the game.
- **Clap.** End the experience with one synchronized clap.