

DRAGONFLY

A TWITTER STORYTELLING MICROGAME OF SPEAKING FOR THE DEAD

Designed by Steve Dee for Game Chef 2015

“A dragonfly larvae lives entirely in water, breathing water. When it enters metamorphosis, it is forced out of the water into the air, air it thinks it cannot breathe. It thinks it is going to die. Once it transforms, it can never enter the water again – or it will die. So too is the barrier of life and death. We know now that there is another life waiting for us. And unlike the dragonfly, we now have a way to speak to those who have crossed over whether in ancient times or yesterday.”

- quote from the Dragonfly web portal

Dragonfly is a very, very simple story-building game designed to be played by anyone with a twitter account. Currently the official account for the game is @DeeEffNet so you can join up and play right now. Of course, you could also start your own game on another feed or even probably play it without Twitter – but Twitter lets us play it with the whole world.

The website dragonflythegame.wordpress.com will contain these rules and directions to the twitter account, while also pretending to be an in-setting artefact.

The setting of the game is that it is the near future and we have discovered an incredible fact about our existence: like a dragonfly nymph what we think of as dying is in fact transformation. When we “die”, our material bodies stop operating in this universe but our consciousness lives on in another universe. We do not and perhaps cannot understand this other world but it is possible, when we are quiet and still, for our subconscious minds to reach across the barrier and communicate between these two realities – albeit in a limited form: through our dreams.

In the past, various shamans and mystics have used trances and narcotics to help the process, somewhat unreliably. Science and technology has now made everything more reliable.



A small intelligent device was developed which, when attached to a headband or hairclip, can be worn while sleeping (or in similar subconscious states). The device activates when a certain part of the brain becomes highly stimulated – which we now know occurs when a dream state is receiving information from a “dragonfly” consciousness. (The company that makes the technology, CDesign, uses the dragonfly/nymph analogy to avoid any conflict with religious or spiritual concerns.) The device then begins emitting a low-frequency wavelength found to help stimulate memory while also logging the time and duration of the event on your smartphone or similar device within range.

It’s been deduced that the dreams we have that we never understand are in fact memories of people from “beyond the barrier”. With no context in our own lives, they are inexplicable. The other problem is the dreams are scattered across many dreamers. Whether it is because our subconscious truly is shared or some other artefact of the communication process, no one person gets all one memory. That’s where Twitter comes in. Simply send a description of your dream to the account @DeeEffNet and it will be forwarded to all the other ‘dragonflies’ following it. They can then add in elements of their dreams that occurred at the same timestamp, allowing them to piece together the story to completion.

What is gained? A picture of a human that (we assume) once lived on this earth. A memory that would otherwise be lost forever. A glimpse of another person’s humanity. A story heretofore untold.

The rules of how this is accomplished are very simple, but they do need to be followed so things don’t fall into pure freeform. It is a shared storytelling experience conducted one tweet at a time.

The moderator of the designated account (for now assumed to be me and anyone else given access to @DeeEffNet) controls the story. Anyone else playing in a given story can reply to that thread. This way, if there are multiple suggestions for a part of the story, the moderator can choose which one they prefer and forward it onwards, so there is no confusion or doubling up – followers of @DeeEffNet will only see the continuing story (albeit in reverse unless they use storify).



The first post of a dream-story always begins with the phrase “***I awoke, dreaming of...***”

The last post of a dream-story always ends with the phrase “***and they are remembered.***”

Every post that is intended to be a submission to the story (after the start) must begin with the phrase “***I dreamt...***”.

Players should not attempt to start a new story (using “I awoke”) until the current story is concluded. Any such attempts will be ignored by the moderator.

Each post, including the first, should provide some concrete element of fact, followed by a mystery. Then every subsequent post should provide an answer to the mystery posed by the previous post, and then create a new mystery, something unknown or unseen or questioning about the new fact. The last post will end all mysteries, and then conclude.

An example might be:

“I awoke, dreaming of a man on fire, but why was he not burning?”

“I dreamt of a man made of steel that would not burn but who made this statue?”

Note that the mystery of WHY the man or statue is on fire has not been addressed. It can be addressed as a side issue, but the posters must answer the question posed first and foremost. For example:

“I dreamt of a statue made by men who hate, burned by men of love, but where did the statue stand?”

The mystery need not be so direct or open question, of course, or even be phrased as a question

“I dreamt of a statue burnt by rebels – perhaps this man was a revolutionary?”

followed by



“I dreamt of the Roman eagle – maybe he was a revolutionary in Rome? Or a plundering vandal? Or something else?”

and then

“I dreamed of screams and violence, Rome burned not with revolution but despair. But Rome burned many times over its reign.”

Finally, the first post must include a number, generated randomly. Look at the next numbers you see and add the last digit (counting 0 as 10) to 7. On Twitter, a good source of numbers is to look at the most recent post on your feed and check the number of Favourites and Retweets that post has received. You can also use the timestamp, or the number of followers, or anything similar. Or look at the next licence plate or receipt you happen across. Numbers are everywhere.

This number (the sum) will be between 8 and 17 and becomes the length of the story. The first post will include this number and every subsequent post by the moderator will post the next number in decreasing order. The last post will be number 1 (post 0 can be used if any things still need tidying up). This way people have a sense of how long the story is going and where their post may come in the narrative order, helping them know when to introduce new ideas, and when to close towards a conclusion.

If a certain period of time passes without any suggestions from players, the moderator can continue the story themselves. For small numbers of players, to eliminate frustration from having your ideas not selected, you could agree beforehand to take turns.

Why isn't this just a parlour game? Certainly it is much like a parlour game or theatre-sports activity of narrating one sentence at a time. The difference is we're doing it on Twitter, which means it can happen all over the world, with complete strangers, and asynchronously. The story can happen whenever anyone has a moment, and new stories – new memories – are born every day.

