

Oneiroi

Children of the Night

Background

Where do dreams come from? Why does it happen that we sometimes delve into the sweetest illusions and other times, the scariest nightmares? People have been asking this question for centuries and millennia and have come up with fascinating stories. The German word for nightmare, "Albtraum" stems from the idea that fairies sit on the sleeping person's chest, causing discomfort (that could be healed with tomatoes, weirdly). In the middle ages, the church believed that dreams were the devil's temptations. But our story dates even further back, to the ancient Greeks: The battle between Morpheus and Phobetor.

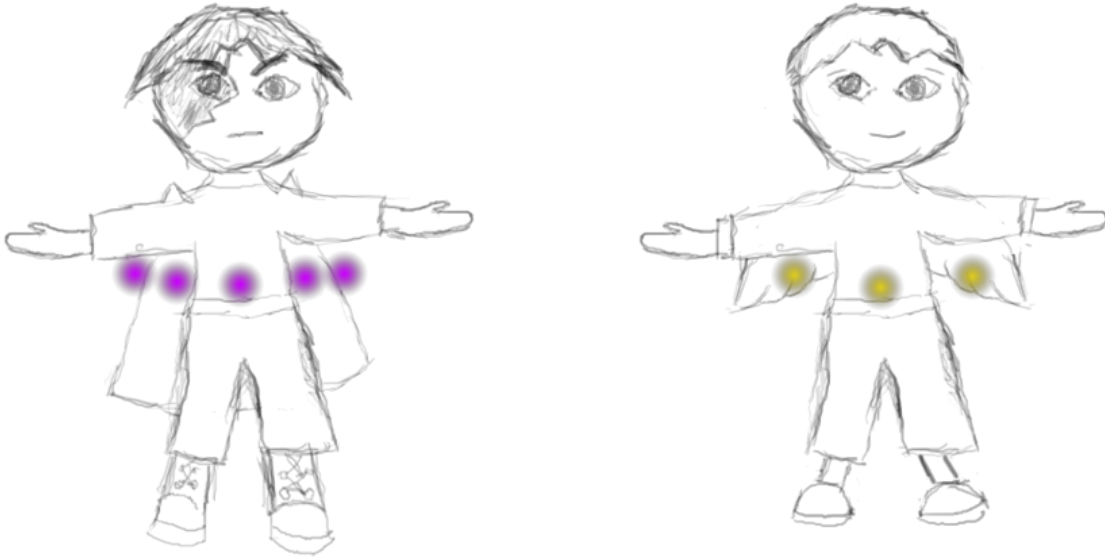
Morpheus and Phobetor are both members of the Oneiroi, children of the night, architects of dreams. Morpheus represents the beautiful dreams, while Phobetor is the personification of nightmares. On the mountain top of the Olymp, Morpheus summons the true dreams, while Phobetor gathers the deceptive ones. Set up against each other, they fight over human control.

Game Mechanics

Our game seeks to bridge action and strategy games while still being accessible to console players. This premise decides most of our options if they are not decided in connection with the theme "Dreams".

Resulting from the story, our game is best played as a two-player game, where all action takes place on one main screen and one map, displayed from a bird's eye perspective. Each player is represented by:

1. Either Morpheus or Phobetor. This is the player character.



Phobetor and Morpheus, the player characters, carrying dreams.

2. Dreams. These are tiny little orbs under the player's command. Each player has his/her own dreams: Morpheus controls the good dreams, and Phobetor controls the nightmares.

Furthermore, there are humans scattered around the map.

A game is designed to be fast-paced and expected to take about five to ten minutes.

Core Game Mechanic

In one sentence, the core game mechanic is: Strategically capture and defend resources (humans) with dreams, in order to generate more dreams.

Player Actions

A player can issue the following actions:

1. **Rally/Release** - This button attracts nearby dreams in a certain radius or releases them to go their way. Dreams are rallied one by one, closest one first such that the player can control how many dreams to rally. Once rallied, dreams circle around the player character.
2. **Throw** - Morpheus/Phobetor picks up a rallied dream. The player can select the direction and force (up to a certain limit) to throw a single dream somewhere.

Also, both Phobetor and Morpheus have one special skill.

- **Morpheus: Build a wall** - While pressing this button, the player exchanges rallied dreams for a stationary wall. The wall is drawn behind the player while moving. Morpheus and his dreams can still move through, but Phobetor and his dreams can't. A wall is automatically destroyed again after a fixed amount of time.
- **Phobetor: Speed boost** - The player exchanges his rallied dreams for a temporarily faster walking speed.

Dreams

When dreams of opposing factions meet, they neutralise each other and both disappear. Dreams are not directly controlled by a player, but can only be directed by rallying/releasing/throwing them.

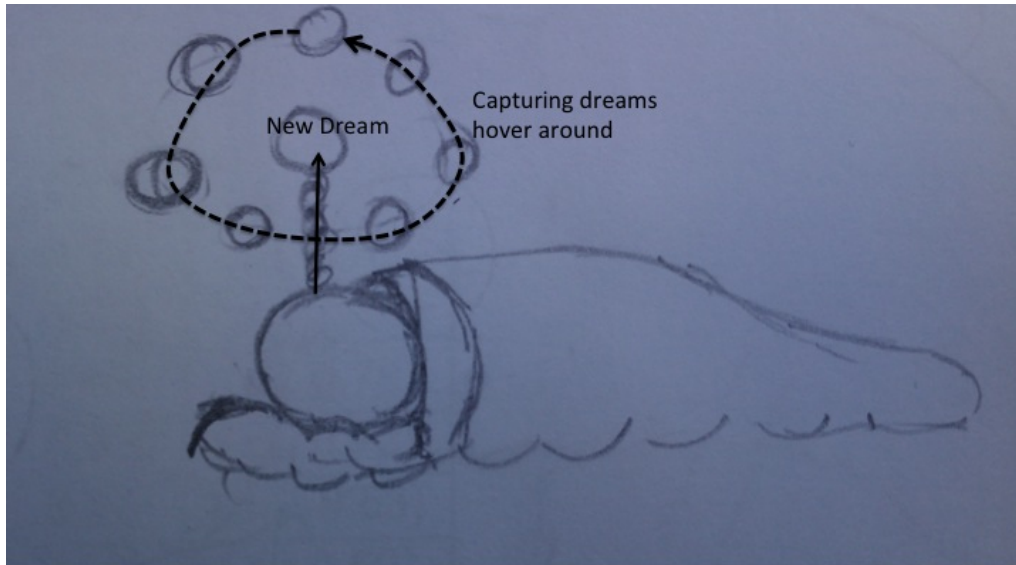
Un-rallied dreams are somewhat autonomous in that they automatically try to act on the thing nearest to them in a certain small radius: If there is an enemy dream, they gravitate towards it (even if that dream is rallied by the other player). If there is a human, they try to make it fall asleep (good dream) or awake (nightmare).

The player can override this behavior by rallying the dreams, forcing them to circle around the player figure. A player can walk around with rallied dreams, thereby carrying dreams around. The more dreams he/she carries, the slower he/she moves.

If a dream doesn't find anything to do in its action radius, it sits around idle.

Giving the dreams some autonomous freedom is in line with the popular wisdom that dreams do what they want.

Humans, Capturing



Sleeping human producing new dreams

Around the map, there are several humans, either awake or asleep. They can be made to fall asleep by Morpheus' good dreams being near them, or awoken by nightmares from Phobetor.

Once a human is asleep, it continues to produce good dreams for Morpheus. These dreams are produced directly at the sleeping human and also start circling around it. If however a human is surrounded by too many dreams, they interfere with each other and the generation of new dreams is slowed down. This imposes a penalty for over-exploitation.

Phobetor tries to wake up sleeping humans by throwing or releasing nightmares near them. Nightmares capture humans similar to good dreams, but after a short period of time the human awakes releasing a fixed number of nightmares.

To capture humans from Morpheus, Phobetor will have to first neutralize Morpheus' nearby dreams and vice-versa. Morpheus also captures awake humans by spending a dream to make them fall asleep.

In the beginning, some humans are asleep and some are awake. Whoever manages to either awake all humans or make all humans fall asleep succeeds at dominating all human dreams and wins the game.

Assessment

Gameplay-wise, our core principles are to

- make a game with strategic depth, but
- keep it short, fast and simple in order to appeal to casual players.

In more detail, this means that our game and all mechanics should be learnable in a single game of about five minutes, and it should be engaging enough to warrant a rematch. It should be clearly the case that the better and more experienced player wins a game, but at the same time a loss should not be discouraging and it should not take long to become the better and more experienced player.

We try to find a good balance between action-oriented gameplay and strategic gameplay and reward quick thinking.

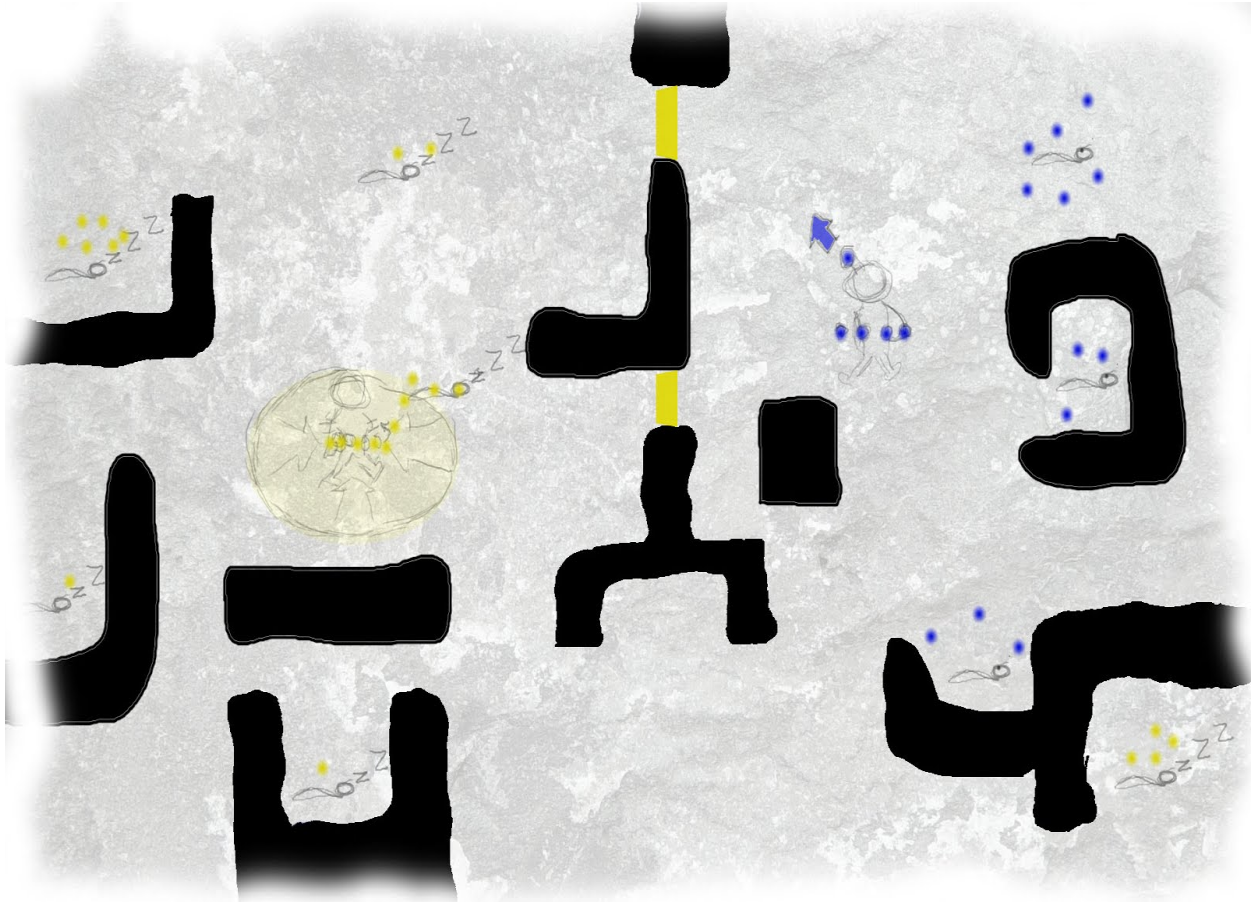
Conflict arises from not having the time to do all the things you want to do, so you need to focus on one thing. For example, in a typical game situation your human x might be under attack - do you defend x? Do you launch a counterattack somewhere else? Do you first harvest dreams from your humans or go with the few dreams you have already rallied?

Players need to interact since Phobetor can only awake Morpheus' sleeping humans and Morpheus can only put to sleep humans woken up by Phobetor.

Players cannot run in circles and follow each other because Morpheus can cut off Phobetor with a wall. Therefore Phobetor has to look for a currently weak spot in Morpheus' defense, similar to fencing.

Players cannot simply farm their humans since the game goal is to capture all of them. Players need to play offensively, especially Phobetor who can only get new nightmares by awaking previously asleep humans.

Asymmetric Gameplay since both player characters have different strengths that must be used in a tactical way to win.



Overview of the game scene. Morpheus (yellow) is harvesting dreams by rallying, Phobos is throwing a dream. Morpheus has tried to block Phobos at the top of the screen with his two walls.