

zuzannah

play sheet



Name.....



First Touched.....

.....

.....

.....

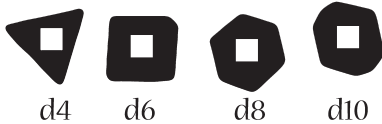


Family.....

Friendship.....

Leisure.....

Money.....



Scenes

- 1. When it was that you tried to see zuzannah again.
- 2. Why you found zuzannah.
- 3. What you did with zuzannah when you found her.
- 4. How it turned out, you and zuzannah, that is.

Humiliations

-
-
-

zuzannah is the creative work of gregor hutton, and is published by BoxNinja, Edinburgh, UK. BoxNinja.com · malebox@boxninja.com © 2007 Gregor Hutton



zuzannah

a game

written in a short amount of time about meeting someone in four parts, the ashcan edition by gregor hutton



Bernstein: *A fellow will remember a lot of things you wouldn't think he'd remember. You take me. One day, back in 1896, I was crossing over to Jersey on the ferry, and as we pulled out, there was another ferry pulling in, and on it there was a girl waiting to get off. A white dress she had on. She was carrying a white parasol. I only saw her for one second. She didn't see me at all, but I'll bet a month hasn't gone by since that I haven't thought of that girl.* – Citizen Kane (1941)



zuzannah is a role-playing game about a mysterious woman and her enigmatic smile. It is, ideally, for 3-5 players. The players all role-play middle-aged men chasing zuzannah. Through play they try to find her, and perhaps themselves.

Play progresses in discrete scenes and there is a defined endgame. The game is meant to be played through in a single session and it is not an on-going or long-term social engagement. Zuzannah, I hope, is varied enough that repeat play is not only possible but is fun.

Dice. This game uses dice, each player will need one of each of the following dice: d4, d6, d8 and d10.

Character creation. There is no GM, there are only players. To play zuzannah each player will need a character, which is created by following these steps.

1. Name. Write down a name for your middle-aged man. Suggestions are names like Bruce, Reginald, Larry, Pierre, John or Carlos. They should reflect names typical to the group, but no character should use an actual player's name.

2. First touched. Now write down where your middle-aged man first saw zuzannah, examples are through the window of a subway carriage, temping at your office, on the internet, working at a cafe or behind the wheel of a car. Players should take it in turns to read out how this happened. Everyone should be getting a better idea of the enigmatic zuzannah with each passing description. Build on the descriptions and do not flatly contradict something introduced.

3. Characteristics. Your middle-aged man is described by the following characteristics, and in play you will allocate each one of your dice to only one of the characteristics.

- Family
- Friendship
- Leisure
- Money

You only reveal the strength of your characteristics when you use them in play. So, for the moment don't allocate values to them, just be aware that they exist.

4. The reveal. Write down a hidden "reveal" about the character to your right, this is a connection between your two characters. It should (i) be negative in some way about your relationship with him, and (ii) aligned specifically with one of the characteristics. This connection is revealed when you use this characteristic on your turn. It forces the player to your right to be involved in the scene. The reveal should be something that you feel is morally reprehensible, for example "cost me my job (Money)" or "hit on my wife at a party while drunk (Family)". Or worse.

Play. Play proceeds in an anti-clockwise direction, with each player taking a turn. To see who goes first everyone should dice off, each using whichever die they prefer. The highest rolled value goes first. Then play begins.

On your turn you frame a scene, that is introduce the surroundings, who is there and what you are doing. All the other players can drop into your scene if they choose to do so, and declare themselves to be nobodies (just anyone, a bank teller, a waiter, a passing person, etc.) or somebodies (a known friend, colleague and so on). There is then some role-play.

Note that no one role-plays zuzannah, she is always just off screen. The game focuses on her effect on other people and what she has done, and had done to her. At some point there will be a rolling of dice to determine the outcome of a scene, and any time is good for that, really. The person who rolls the highest wraps up the scene with an outcome and play then passes to the next player.

Scenes. Scenes have defined meaning, and progress as follows.

1. When it was that you tried to see zuzannah again.
2. Why you found zuzannah.
3. What you did with zuzannah when you found her.
4. How it turned out, you and zuzannah, that is.

A scene about what. Pick a characteristic that this scene is about, say Family. If your "Reveal" for the player to your right involves the characteristic, in this case Family, then you must declare this at the start of the scene. That player is now compelled to be in the scene with their own character. They will also have to choose a die value for that characteristic too if they have not already done so.

Choose a die. The player whose turn it is, and a compelled player if there is one, must choose a die size at the start of the scene. If a compelled player has already succeeded in using his die, and it would normally be unavailable again, then in this case only they are allowed to use it again. Once chosen cross it off the sheet and write it in the line next to the characteristic.

Progress. You may only use each characteristic for a scene successfully once. After it has helped you win a scene then it is done. So, if you choose a Family scene and succeed then subsequent scenes must be based on a different characteristic. You may only progress to the next type of scene by being successful at a scene. Should you fail then the next time it is your turn you attempt to follow on from where you failed before and try to succeed again. The framing and role-playing should continue in light of the earlier scene and its outcome.

Beginning. So, everyone begins at the first scene type "When it was that you tried to see zuzannah again." And then if successful the next scene available will be the "Why you found zuzannah" scene. And so on. The final type of scene may only be attempted once, and if failed brings about the end for your character in the story, tell everyone how it didn't work out for you with zuzannah. Fate has declared against you.

Scene types. The following types of scene are available. Here I list the type of characters other players will role-play in them, and what you will do in them.

Family. These scenes revolve around using, or working against, your family in your quest for zuzannah. Typically the other players will play your wife, siblings, kids, parents or in-laws if they are somebodies in the scene.

Friendship. These scenes revolve around using, or working against, your friends in your pursuit. Typically the other players will play your colleagues, long-time friends, neighbours or pals who have your best interests at heart.

Leisure. These scenes revolve around using your free time, hobbies, sports, associations and public information in your quest for zuzannah. Typically the other players will play bowling buddies, internet forum posters, fellow sports fans, or police and the forces of law when opposing you.

Money. These scenes revolve around using your job or wealth in your pursuit of zuzannah. Typically the other players will play your boss, bank manager or people dependent on your money or occupation, such as clients but not family.

Playing a scene. Platform, and tilt. Then roll. By this I mean the player whose turn it is should frame the scene initially, and describe their character's progress towards their goal for the scene. This is the platform. Another player should now join the scene, whether compelled to do so with their own character because of a reveal, or by simply introducing themselves as a nobody or somebody. They importantly introduce a tilt to the scene. A tilt is a problem, a spanner in the works, a disagreement. Play proceeds with free role-playing, and other players dropping in if they want, until someone says "let's roll" to see the outcome.

How to roll dice. Only those in the scene may roll dice to determine the outcome. Indeed, they may choose not to declare a die type and roll. If that is the case they say so when we get to the roll. If someone wishes to take part in the roll but has not entered the scene when the roll is called, they then enter immediately and introduce a character to the scene. The dice are then rolled. Further players may not now join the scene after that last intervening character.

A player does not have to declare a die type, they may wish to keep their options open for their own later scenes. If they declare they write the die type on their sheet. The players who have declared their die types roll them. The highest value rolled wins. Ties are failures. So a d4 always has a chance, albeit a slim one.

Winning. If the player whose turn it was wins they narrate their success and cross off that scene as completed. On their next turn they progress to the next level of scene. If they lose then they describe their failure, and are aided in the detail by the other players. If they fail though, they do have one option: humiliation.

If you succeed at a Family scene, say, then your Family die cannot be rolled again on another player's Family scene, though you may role-play in those scenes. The only exception is if you are compelled into a scene, in which case you can roll.

Humiliation. You can humiliate yourself three times before your story is over. When you have failed a roll the player whose turn it is can choose to humiliate themselves in some way, for example crying in front of their wife and kids about how much zuzannah means to them. Heavy. After this you get a reroll to see if you can win the scene with some better luck. It doesn't always work out. Note that you may only humiliate yourself once per turn.

End game. If someone successfully wins the final type of scene (How it turned out, you and zuzannah, that is) then they get to describe that scene and its successful outcome, everyone else then has to describe their unsuccessful outcome, be it divorce, unfulfilled desire for zuzannah or whatever. And no de-protagonization here, in other words don't narrate in something that directly addresses or affects someone else's character or outcome. It's possible that you all will fail. Having role-played through the scenes maybe that will be appropriate.

Inspiration. Movies: Citizen Kane (1941), Lost In Translation (2003). The following games: It Was a Mutual Decision, My Life with Master, Acts Of Evil, Spione, Sweet Agatha and Know Thyself. People: zuzannah herself, all those times.

Further reading. Go read "Play Unsafe" by Graham Walmsley to see what I mean by 'platform, and tilt'. It is an excellent read about using improv in gaming.

Questions for you. Is there a definite for-sure-win advantage to going first, or last, or somewhere else? I hope not. Do the rules and procedures make sense, and are they fun? Does the game flow to a winning end? If not, does it feel suitably smooth mechanically in getting to an end? Is it as awkward, thematically, as I desire? What did your group's zuzannah turn out like? What did you think of all the middle-aged men at the end? Did any sympathetic characters emerge through play? Do you have any suggestions for changes or improvements?

Questions for me. Address them to malebox@boxninja.com.

Gregor Hutton
Edinburgh, Scotland
December 2007