

Ninety Minutes

A game for 3 players about the relationship between a father and a son, and what could be their last chance to meet.

Matteo Turini, November 2012 - v. 1.3

You haven't talked with your father in weeks. Nothing strange, really - several days can go by between calls, and you live a ninety minutes' drive apart, plus you both have lives, anyway.

He never told you anything about what was slowly eating him away. He's a proud man - or maybe he didn't want to have you worrying about nothing.

The hospital just called. A doctor informed you that your father might have one, two hours left to breathe, at most.

You quit everything you were doing, grabbed your keys, and started your car. There's a ninety minutes' drive between you and your father.

Ninety Minutes is a game for 3 players about the relationship between a father and a son, and what could be their last chance to meet.

It was the overall winner of the 2012 edition of the "*Game Chef*" design contest. The theme was "**Last Chance**".

Disclaimer: this version of the game's text has been slightly modified from the one presented to the "*Game Chef*" to include some considerations that I made based on the reviews the game has received in the contest.

The game's not finalized yet; it needs to be tested and handled, some sections will probably have to be rewritten and some others modified, and surely the playtests will reveal some bugs.

There are, in the text, some playtest notes; they refer to procedures that still need to find their final shape.

Lastly, there are no examples, at the moment.

If you try the game, keep all this in mind.

I can be contacted in three ways:

- on my blog about the game's development:

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- at my email address: *mat.turini@gmail.com*

- on the Italian rpg forum *www.gentechegioca.it*

If you play-test the game, I'll be happy to know how it went!

A note: *Ninety Minutes* is not meant to be a "funny" game - it doesn't fall in the amusing side of the fun spectrum. It's designed to engage the players' emotions, dealing with issues that many have faced, and can be difficult subjects to tackle.

Play this game only with people you deeply trust.

The game

In *Ninety Minutes*, the players will narrate the memories of a son who just heard from a doctor about the imminent death of his father - he's in the hospital, and probably has little more than an hour to live.

Obviously, the father, the son, and the entire situation are just imagined by the players, who define through conversation facts that they believe as true for the duration of the game session. It's not much different from reading a book or watching a movie, but in this case the players are both the audience and the authors of the story.

The game follows the structure of a normal conversation: every participant takes their time to talk, says what they have to say, listens to what others are saying, builds up on the others' contribution, and occasionally - and

politely - interrupts to add their say on a meaningful point.

While it doesn't really differ from a normal conversation, the game also features some specific rules to add nuances and give the dialogue a direction.

The game aims at creating and telling the story of the relationship between a father and a son, through their memories.

The game is played while seating around a table, and a full session should take, start to finish, about 60 minutes.

The roles

In *Ninety Minutes*, each player will take on a different role: one will be the **Son**, another the **Father**, and a third will be **Time**. From now on, when talking about a role I'll use the capitalized noun; when talking about the fictional character, I'll use the lower case. (E.g. the role is the Son, the character is the son).

You can freely discuss what roles you want to take. If more than one player is interested in a role, that role will go to the youngest person who wanted it if it is the role of the Son, or to the oldest person who wanted it if it is the Father or Time.

Each of the players has *tasks* which depend on their role, and will carry them out following specific *principles* which always hold true.

The Son and the Father: principles and tasks

The Son must follow only this principle: play the son as a real person, as a young man who basically respects and cares about his father, but with a definite personality which can put them at odds.

In a similar fashion, the Father follows one principle alone: play trying to be a good father. You could be forced to difficult decisions which could put a strain on the relationship with your son - but then again, being a parent is never easy, isn't it? Sometimes, the right decision is the hardest to take.

The Son and the Father both have three tasks:

- say what their character has said or done in a memory (the Son for the son, the Father for the father);
- offer honest answers to Time's questions;

- take a token of the appropriate color when required by the rules and give it to Time.

The rules on *tokens* will be explained in further detail in a bit.

Time: principles and tasks

The story's protagonists are the father and the son (played respectively by the Father and the Son).

Time, on the other hand, acts on the imagined world by introducing events and playing other characters.

The principles of Time are the following:

- make the son feel like his father is oppressive, cold, or detached;
- make the father feel like his son is a source of trouble, frustration or regret;

- let the initial answers of the Father and the Son inspire you, and reincorporate them in the memories;

- offer, occasionally, a moment of peace.

Everything you'll say during the game must follow these four basic principles; in essence, you'll be the player who will try to create frictions between father and son, applying pressure to the things they care about.

Your tasks will be:

- recall a memory;
- define an event during a memory;
- state what was said or done, during a memory, by the characters around the father and the son;
- ask provocative questions to the Father and the Son;
- interrupt a memory;

- keep track of the tokens and the clock.

Never forget to follow your principles while carrying out your tasks. Make the father seem distant, make the son seem troublesome.

When you *recall a memory*, you will start to create a scene that the son remembers while travelling to the father's hospital. The rules for doing this are presented later in the text.

When you *define an event from a memory*, you will tell the Father and the Son something that happened in the memory and involved the father and/or the son.

In a similar fashion, when you *state what was said or done by other characters*, you will basically interpret any character that isn't the father or the son.

When you *ask a provocative questions* to the Father and the Son, you will try to shed a light on an interesting side of the character, or give it more depth. The Father (or the Son, depending

on who you're asking) will offer an honest answer. Ask questions about what the father or the son knew or felt at a certain moment of the memory.

You can *interrupt a memory* at any time you feel that the relationship between father and son has been further explored - but make sure that the Father and the Son don't have anything else to say.

Whenever you have your say, remember to finish off by asking the Father or the Son: "What did you do then?"

The rules for the *tokens* and the *clock* will be explained in detail below.

NOTE: one of Time's principles is to let the answers given by Father and Son inspire them and to reincorporate them in the memories. The best way to do this is to present events that allude to them, propose similar situations, but never reveal them clearly.

For example, if the Son's answer to the question *"What's the worst trouble you've ever gotten yourself into?"* were "I had a car accident while drunk," and if the memory they were playing at the moment involved a car travel, with the father, Time could bring in an even in which a police car altd the son for speeding, for not stopping at a red light or for a dangerous maneuver.

As Time, cross the answers of Father and Son to have fresh starting points.

The setup

In the imagined world of the game, the son is driving to the hospital where his father is being treated, about 90 minutes away. During this trip he remembers scenes from the past, memories which involve his father, which the players will recount.

The game structure is based on these memories.

To play, you will need to read these instructions, and to prepare some objects:

- 10 tokens, 5 of which should be dark red, and the other 5 opaque white. You won't probably ever need them all together, but you never know. Personally I like the glass beads you can find in comic stores, or hobby and craft shops;
- three blank pieces of paper - two sheets of printer paper will be fine. Divide one sheet in half and cut it in two smaller parts;
- 6 post-its, preferably white;
- a mug and a match;
- three pens or pencils, one per player (and an eraser, if necessary).

Time, take the larger piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Draw a line lengthwise down the center of the larger piece of paper, then mark a series of notches labeled as multiples of 5 from 0 to 120 (0, 5, 10, 15, 20, ... 110, 115, 120).

Leave some space under the line, write the number 90 below and circle it. These are the minutes the son has to reach his father before he draws his last breath. Time, remember to leave some space around the number, because it might change - you may have to erase and write it again.

Father and Son, each of you take a smaller piece of paper, a pen or pencil, and 3 post-its.

Divide the tokens in two groups by color and put them at the center of the table, where everyone can reach them. Put the eraser there as well, if you have it - although I suppose you already figured out that bit on your own.

Starting the game

Initial questions

While Time draws and writes on their sheet, both the Father and the Son take their smaller piece of paper and use it to mark down some questions and their answers.

The answers must be short and to the point - keep it to a few words, and do not say them aloud. You won't need to name people, just the relationship you had with them and the reason behind your answer.

The Father writes out these questions, and their answers:

- *What would you have accomplished, if the events of your life hadn't decided differently?*
- *What's your greater remorse or regret?*

- *Who was your life's greater disappointment, and why?*

The Son, instead, writes out these questions, and their answers:

- *What did you swear you'd never do, and still ended up doing?*
- *What would you never confess, even to a friend?*
- *What's the worst trouble you've ever gotten yourself into?*

Some of these questions are really personal. You don't have to answer with your real life experience - you can simply answer as the imagined son (or father) would.

The tricky thing here is that you'll never have to say if something is real or imagined, not even after the game - so, if you wish, you can use the answers as an outlet of your experiences.

When you're done, hand the two sheets to Time, who will be the only one to read them both: the Father won't be able to read the Son's answers, and vice versa.

The memory triggers

Time, read the questions and answers to yourself.

Father and Son, take your 3 post-its and write on each of them a location or an event (e.g., *the son's 10th birthday*, or *fishing at the national park*, or *selling the family business*), fold them, put them in the mug and stir them; these triggers will be used to create the memories and start the narration.

As soon as the mug is full and Time has read the questions and answers, Time can begin recalling the first memory.

NOTE: avoid triggers that recall events in

which the son was younger than 10 years old.

The memories

To recall a memory, Time draws randomly one of the post-its from the mug and reads it out loud.

The player (either Son or Father) who did not write the post-it will imagine and describe a situation inspired by the trigger, adding details they deem interesting.

Then the other player, the author of the trigger, adds more detail, building on what has been said.

These details can be of any kind: the feelings of your character, contextual information, minor ongoing actions.

Once you've established the initial description of the memory this way, Time will speak.

Following their principles, Time can ask questions, add events to the memory or move other characters.

From now on, the players continue their conversation by following their principles and carrying out their tasks, contributing to the description of the events of the memory.

It's important to pay attention to the fact that, given the preminence of improvisation during the game, it's a good thing not to have preconstituted ideas about a scene or a memory trigger, but build instead your contributions to the conversation on what the other players say.

NOTE: before drawing the first memory trigger, Time, ask the Son some small details about the weather and the traffic of the road he's traveling on to reach the hospital. At the end of each memory, recall these details, for example noting how the rain, that was strong a moment

ago, is now a light shower, or affirming that the train of thought of the son is interrupted by the honk of a car who wants him to accelerate.

The tokens

As you talk and describe what happened in the memory, the Father and the Son will underline some important moments with tokens.

Tokens are either white or red. Only the Son can use the white tokens, while the red ones will be mostly used by the Father.

When the Father or the Son takes a token from the central pile, they give it to Time.

The white tokens

The Son takes a white token whenever:

- the father shows to the son an explicit and sincere sign of affection;

- the son obeys the father, even though their opinions differ.

The red tokens

The Father takes a red token whenever:

- the son shows anger or embarrassment for his father's actions;
- the father chooses prior commitments over his son.

As soon as the memory ends, Time puts all the tokens back in the central pile.

Violence

In a memory, the relationship between the father and the son can become strained. One of the two can act on an impulse, maybe exerting their force.

Violence does not imply physical wounds alone - a strong tug at the arm, screaming and pushing, or a slap, are all violent acts.

Whenever one of the two characters enacts violence on the other character, the player of the victim of the violence must describe what happens - that is, how he is subdued.

If the description somehow involves one or more of the initial answers given by the player of the other character (the violent one), Time takes a red token.

If Time doesn't notice, the violent character's player should let them know.

Once the description is over, the memory immediately ends.

Interrupting a memory

A memory can be interrupted in two ways:

- Time decides to put a stop to it (see the principles and tasks section above);
- one of the two characters acts violently against the other (see the Violence section above).

If Time interrupted the memory, they must forward the clock by 25 minutes. So, as you start from 0, after the 1st memory the clock moves to 25.

If the memory was instead interrupted through violence, Time advances the clock by 15 minutes.

Then, Time counts the white and red tokens they received. For each white token, the clock advances by 5 minutes; for each red token, the maximum time (the one that starts at 90) goes up by 3 minutes.

The clock

As explained above, the clock advances at the end of every memory.

If at the end of the memory (after Time has properly forwarded the clock and the maximum time) the clock hasn't reached the maximum time yet, you can recall a new memory. You can recall a maximum of 4 memories.

If the clock reaches the maximum time by the end of the 3rd memory (or even the 1st or 2nd, but that's unlikely to happen), the son receives a phonecall from the doctor, telling him that his father has stopped breathing before he could reach him.

If the clock reaches the maximum time at the end of the 4th memory, as soon as the son reaches the hospital the doctor tells him that his father is having a crisis.

If at the end of the 4th memory the clock hasn't reached the maximum time yet, the son gets to the hospital in time for his last chance to talk with his father.

The final questions

In all three cases, at the end of the last memory Time returns to the Father and the Son the sheets with their initial questions and answers.

The Father now writes this question, and answers it: *"What makes you proud of your son?"*

The Son now writes this question, and answers it: *"In which aspect, growing up, you've ended up resembling your father?"*

They shall not tell their answers to the other players.

The last scene

After writing out the answers to the questions, if the father's still breathing, the players can play a last scene with the final dialogue. This scene is completely free: the characters can say all they wish.

If the father has had a crisis, only the son can speak, but the father will hear him.

If the father stopped breathing before the son could reach him, neither the father nor the son can speak. The Son can tell, though, if he wants to see the father, and what he does.

When Time feels that the final scene has been completely played out, they close it with a silent gesture of the hands. If the father was still alive, he has another crisis, the doctors rush for a last attempt at saving his life, but they fail.

The Father and the Son take all their sheets of

paper and the post-its, they fold them, and put them in the mug without revealing their contents.

Time lights a match and sets fire to one of the sheets.

Wait for all the paper to burn.

The game is over.



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