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Into the Unknown!: Digital Theatre and Boldly Going Forward with "SOMNIUM"

Andy Head

Rochester Institute of Technology, awhgla@rit.edu

Omen Sade

Dramatic Space, omen.sade@gmail.com

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Into the Unknown!: Digital Theatre and Boldly Going Forward with *SOMNIUM*

Andy Head
Rochester Institute of Technology

Omen Sade
Dramatic Space

With the rapid onset of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, theatres across the world were forced to close their doors and turn off the lights. Safety guidelines that discourage physical closeness, encourage face coverings, and set limits on the number of people in a space are incredibly important to minimizing the spread of the virus. While essential, these regulations also impede how the performing arts have always operated.



Fig. 1. SOMNIUM performing at the 2016 Rochester Fringe Festival

Driven by a desire to overcome these challenges and explore theatre in a new direction, the fall production of *SOMNIUM* at RIT took on a completely new concept. Instead of a more traditional, physical theatre piece as it was originally envisioned, the *SOMNIUM* RIT Team decided to leap into the unknown,

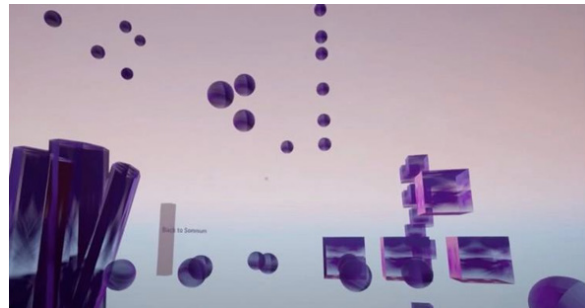


Fig. 2 &3. Early concept renderings of the virtual Dream Sections

and explore a unique blend of devised theatre, film, and 3D game design.

SOMNIUM first premiered at the 2016 Rochester Fringe Festival with five actors constricted to a small raised platform and using only their bodies and several props to tell the story. At its core, *SOMNIUM* follows Captain Lockspeare and her team of scientists as they launch into humanity's collective subconscious to discover the Origin Point of

Dreams. The story is conceived and written by the director, with Dream Sections adapted from the actual recorded dreams of the actors. In its updated form, the play is one part exploration of the human subconscious, one part ode to the classic sci-fi of the 1950's, and one part choose- your-own-adventure, first-person videogame. In this new telling, the audience participates as a character in the drama, as the game features interactivity, exploration, and choice making.

This Frameless talk will discuss the creative process involved with developing SOMNIUM, including the early decision-making process, the restructuring of the production team, the move to online auditions and rehearsals, the rehearsal format and process, the creation of the virtual world of the play, and the finished product.

This talk will be paired with a 3D/VR version of SOMNIUM that audiences will be able to demo during the conference.

Keywords— *digital theatre, virtual environments, VR, interactivity*