

Monsters Under the Bed

by Jakob Weisblat

Intro

This is a LARP for 5-8 players, about a child and the monsters that live under their bed. During the day, those monsters inhabit the child's stuffed animals, and listen to the child talk about their life. At nighttime, those monsters come out and scare the child, uncovering their fears.

Each player is a stuffed animal during the day and a monster under the bed at night. Players take turns playing the child.

This game can be run GMless, with one player volunteering to act as a facilitator of sorts. That player will experience mild spoilers and should read each section of this document as they go, to avoid spoiling too much. The italicized text should be read aloud by this player; the other text are instructions to be followed but not read aloud.

Supplies

- 50 or so index cards, plus writing implements for each player
- Masks, as many as there are players
- 2-3 flashlights

Pregame

Introductions. Name, pronouns, what were you afraid of as a child, what your favorite childhood thing (toy, stuffed animal, etc) was.

Safety discussion. Ok-checkin, freeze. Waking up. Open door. Does anyone have themes they want to set off limits? Game should be pretty light, but let me know or tell the room, just in case. How do people feel about touch?

Fears. *Everyone is afraid of things, and especially all children are afraid of things. We're going to spend a few minutes figuring out what the child we're going to tell a story about is afraid of.*

Fears in this game take the form of "What if... _____" written on an index card. Does everyone have 5 or 6 index cards?

I want everyone to come up with three fears. You can talk to someone sitting near you to figure out what you think would be most interesting. Fears can be either something that might happen or something that might be true. Be creative. Some examples:

- *What if my brother is a vampire?*
- *What if I got lost in the woods?*
- *What if there was no more orange juice?*
- *What if nobody loves me?*
- *What if the aliens came?*
- *What if the monster under the bed decided to eat me?*

When you've decided on some fears, **write them each on an index card.**

Shuffle all of the fears to make the **nighttime pile**. Add "What if I was a child again?" to the bottom of the pile.

Emotions. *Next, each of us must decide on an emotion to focus on. When the child is feeling that emotion, it's your job to be with them. Offer them a hug or smile at them. When you're a monster under the bed, you're going to be trying to elicit that emotion in the child.*

Hope, happiness, fear, sadness, anxiety, comfort, pride, anger, etc. Most of us should choose "negative" emotions, but not all of us need to. Take a minute to talk to the people around you and figure out what emotion you'll choose.

Stuffed Animals. *What stuffed animal are you inhabiting? Is it a tiger? a mouse? a sandwich that for some reason has a smiling face sewn onto it?*

*Decide on a name for your stuffed animal. Is it something cute? Something that was written on your tag when you were bought from the store? Something that you earned? Something from a book or TV show? **Write your stuffed animal's name on one side of an index card as your nametag, as well as your emotion.***

Now we're going to practice nonverbally comforting the people around you for a few moments. Partner up. One person will start out as the stuffed animal and the other as the child. The child will say something like "I'm sad" and then the stuffed animal will offer some comfort to them. Smile at them, or make a funny face. Or maybe offer them a hug. Whatever it is that your stuffed animal does. You might like to incorporate touch, if that's something your both comfortable with.

Switch who is who, and repeat the same exercise. This time the child is happy.

Monsters. *Decide on a name for your monster. Is it something scary? Something mysterious? Something unintelligible? Something that shows you have a heart? **Write your monster's name and pronouns on the other side of the nametag, as well as your emotion.***

Now we're going to practice being monsters. Monsters wear masks so that they can be scarier. Put on a mask now.

Practice scaring the person on your left. Make a scary gesture or face, or pretend you're going to eat them. Whatever it is that your monster does.

Take off your masks, but save them for when you resume being monsters.

Mechanics. Assemble the evening pile from the list of events in Act I and Act II, using 2 times as many total events as there are players. Put a card "ACT II" between the Act I and Act II cards, so everyone knows to pause and let you read the act two script when you get there.

Before we begin, let's go over a few mechanics details. When it's your turn to be the child, you should put on the child nametag, take the card from the top of the evening pile (gesture to the evening pile), walk out of the room, wait a few seconds, and enter as the child. The card will give you some context around which to talk to your stuffed animals. Tell them about your life. Some time may have passed since the last scene, but you're still the same person as the last person to play the child was; try to maintain some continuity. When you're ready to go to sleep, turn out the light and lie down (or sit if that works better for you) on the bed.

When the child has gone to sleep, the monsters put on their masks. The player who played the child last will be the lead monster, and they draw 2 cards from the nightmare pile and choose one. They briefly discuss the nightmare with the other monsters, then the monsters turn on their flashlights, the lead monster sets the scene, and the nightmare begins. A few of the monsters will have flashlights; they can use them to dramatic effect if they want. The nightmare will continue until either it logically ends, or the child wakes up with a start. To symbolize waking up with a start, make a gasp and go wide-eyed. This will be the signal to the monsters to turn off their flashlights and go back under the bed where they belong.

Does anyone have any questions?

We're about to start actually playing, so let's take a five minute bio break.

Prologue

Before we begin, we're going to establish some shared facts about the child, in order to make the first parts of the role play easier. A different person should answer each question

- *What does the child like to do in their spare time?*
- *Where do they live?*
- *They have a sibling. Older? Younger? What's their name and pronouns?*
- *How easily do they cry?*
- *What is their favorite toy outside this room?*
- *Are their parents nice? Mean? Hands-off? Overprotective?*
- *Do they have a nightlight?*
- *What are the child's name and pronouns?*

Act I: Child

Write “The Child” on a nametag and hand it to the first player of the child.

The youngest player will play the child first, if they’re comfortable with that. Everyone else, please put your nametag on the stuffed animal side, and sit down on the bed.

Let’s begin.

Play through about half the nightmares before moving on to act II.

Act II: Teenager

Cross out the word “child” on the child nametag and write “teenager”.

Proceed with the alternating nightmares and daytime scenes.

At the end of act two: *Now we’re going to skip forward a few more years to one more scene.*

Act III: Coming Home

Cross out the word “teenager” on the child nametag and write “adult”.

Let the scene play out. When they go to sleep:

As you sleep, you dream once more of the monsters under the bed.

Nightmare card is “What if I was a kid again?”

Debrief

Turn the lights on. Give people a chance to take a bio break if they need it. Real name, the monster and stuffed animal you were playing, a moment you found impactful or memorable, something you want to thank someone for.

Credits

This game is inspired by Raph D’Amico’s *They Say You Should Talk to Your Plants* and Chad Wolf’s *Small Monsters*.

Thanks to Andi, Antonio, Emma and one more person for playtesting this game.