

AN EXAMPLE EPISODE: NIGHTMARES

What follows is an example of what *Dreamtree* might look like if given a large effects budget. When this episode was conceived in 1985, the morphing and matte effects were expensive indeed. These days the effects are more manageable though still challenging. The goal here is to make *Dreamtree* visually startling in order to compete with other children's television fare.

"Nightmares" was selected as an example episode because they are common children's dreams. Also many parents would be interested in quelling the fears of their kids at night. The material was synthesized from elements frequently surfacing in nightmares (monsters, giants, fears of abandonment, feeling overwhelmed, etc). As you will notice, this episode is not intended for very young children. It is meant to empower the older child by transforming horrifying anxiety into creative excitement. By having guides like Willy and Nilly, the child viewers can harness their own courage, using the twins as helpful allies.

Of course there are other possible structures depending on the intent of the program. My original paradigm was to create a "surreal educational adventure show for kids." The educational aspect was to both appeal to cable television content providers as well as to impart useful information to children. Though the example episode does provide interpretive tools, the ultimate purpose of *Dreamtree* is to get children to remember and share their dreams and to gain a creative will that they can apply to enrich every aspect of their lives. To this end, fictional stories and characters are not essential. Using a talented group of children and their own lives and dreams is also an option. In an open ended program, that tactic would work very well as then members of the viewing audience could mail in their own dreams which could be reenacted by Willy, Nilly and cast. Imagine kids assembling in the treehouse for a "slumber party" and we could watch their dream selves interact. There are endless possibilities given the imaginative topic.

ABOUT WILLY AND NILLY

Working off classical archetypes (i.e. the 'divine twins,' 'Gemini,' etc.), Willy and Nilly are of another realm though they appear as normal children, especially to adults. Other kids instantly recognize the strangeness of the two, further highlighted by their somewhat androgynous appearance. Being twelve, they are older than most of the other children on the show, giving them an additional air of authority but without being overbearing. They are conceived as identical twins but divided by male and female characteristics. Make up may have to be used if the actors do not resemble each other. Much mystery surrounds their parents who are never seen.

Dreamtree episode: NIGHTMARES

By Steve Mobia

An eight-year-old girl named Amanda has a nightmare. In it she is lost in an old house with many empty rooms. The wood grain on the paneled walls resembles sinister faces. She enters a dark wood-paneled unfurnished room. As she moves across the room, she hears a tinkling sound above her head and looks up. Visible only in portions is a huge dark cobweb-covered chandelier made of rod metal and decorated with hundreds of dusty glass crystal tears. Within the shadows of the rod metal design, she sees gargoyle-like creatures with open mouths, glaring down at her. The chandelier sways and begins to slowly turn. Amanda makes her way to the other wall, continuing to look up. The chandelier is so big it fills the whole upper portion of the room so that when it turns, it scrapes the walls, knocking more glass tears off. Amanda shields her head as she looks for the door from where she entered. The gargoyles are now slowly moving, reaching out for the girl as the chandelier moves lower and lower, turning faster and more erratically swaying, scraping against the walls and making a terrible sound. Amanda is taken with panic and screams. She wakes up.

The next morning she has breakfast with her parents. The parents are discussing upcoming plans to move into a new neighborhood. Her mother wants to sell much of their present furniture and buy antique furnishings to match the style of the old Victorian they are moving into. Amanda mentions her nightmare, emphasizing how utterly frightening it was. Her parents shrug it off as being “just a dream.”

While walking to school, Amanda meets a schoolmate, Ted, and they swap nightmare stories. In Ted’s recent nightmare, he is at the beach at dusk, building an amazingly complex sandcastle, full of battlements, towers and bridges. He sees everyone on the beach get up to leave. They put on large coats over their bathing suits as if preparing for cold weather. Ted notices that one wall of the sandcastle is moving. He reaches down and pulls a large flapping fish out of the wall. It repulses him and he drops the fish, which continues to flop on the ground. Concerned about it dying, he takes the fish and runs to the water, tossing it into the waves. Then Ted turns and sees no trace of anyone left on the beach. The sound of bubbling water calls Ted’s attention back to the surf where he sees an enormous scuba diver in mask and wetsuit emerging from the waves. Encrusted with barnacles and seaweed, it’s obvious that this is no ordinary diver—he must have lived under the sea for years. The giant diver unsheathes a long knife and advances toward Ted who tries to run but the sand slows him, giving way under his feet. Ted tries jumping into the air and actually succeeds in going quite high, but returns with agonizing slowness to the beach. The diver is swinging his knife. The waves get wilder and destroy the sandcastle as the tide rushes in. Then the waves pull back, revealing more large fish, dying. Ted makes a dash for the road but finds there is nothing but a steep cliff before him. The giant diver is catching up, swinging his knife. Ted is paralyzed with fear.

Amanda is stunned by Ted’s story and wonders what these nightmares are all about. Ted then tells Amanda about two twins he knows who are interested in dreams.

He says they live a treehouse in a forest just outside of town. Ted and Amanda make plans to get together after school.

After school, Amanda and Ted go to visit Willy and Nilly but get lost in the forest—the paths seem to lead in circles. Ted is embarrassed because he’s been to the “dreamtree” before but the trails change each time. Animals are seen through the bushes but they are not animals usually seen in these parts (a camel, an ostrich, a kangaroo). At last Ted tries to talk to the animals, mentioning that they are lost and looking for a treehouse. To Amanda’s surprise, a parrot appears, riding on an antelope’s back (it is Willy and Nilly in the guise of animals). The parrot says “follow us.” Ted and Amanda follow the odd pair but antelope picks up speed, causing the two children to run wildly after them. The parrot and antelope have disappeared but Ted and Amanda are now at the foot of the “dreamtree.” A window opens in the treehouse and Willy (now a boy again) waves down to Ted. Ted introduces Amanda and they are invited inside. They ascend a staircase that spirals up around the trunk.

Despite it being sunny outside, the interior of the treehouse is dark and cobwebbed. Willy and Nilly cannot be seen. Ted calls out to them saying, “We have some nightmares for you!” One of the dreamtree’s branch tunnels lights up, revealing a cavelike passageway. Ted tells Amanda that the twins like to play games, there’s nothing to worry about. They enter the passage.

Emerging into a stone chamber, they pass a barred window. As the two go to the window, a hairy monster on the other side runs up and thrusts its arms through the bars. The kids back up quickly, falling against a coffin behind them. At first they don’t know what it is they’ve fallen against but Amanda recognizes it as a coffin and they both move away. The coffin lid opens slowly and ravens fly out. While listening to the birds fly off into the distance, Ted and Amanda also notice the sound of approaching footsteps on the stone floor. The sound becomes louder and heavier. Frightened, Ted and Amanda run away down a hall. The footstep sounds turn thunderous with each footfall. The kids escape through a door, which they slam behind them. They are now in a bedroom. Covers are rumpled on the bed. Moans are heard. Bloody hands reach out from under the bed. Some half-human creatures are trying to pull themselves out from underneath. Ted and Amanda hold each other in fear. A closed door behind them begins to slowly creak open. Sinister laughter is heard. They run to the door they entered through but it won’t open. Ted and Amanda panic and scream. Suddenly the room brightens. Willy and Nilly step out of the closet smiling.

Nilly says Ted and Amanda have just been through the warehouse of nightmares where all types of scares are stored. She mentions that each of us has a similar warehouse full of things formed by our worst fears. Willy says that even though nightmares can resemble each other, what they may mean is different for each person. “For instance,” Willy continues, “There was a boy named Kevin who was seven years old...”

While Willy tells Kevin’s nightmare, we see it enacted as an animated cartoon. Kevin wakes up in bed hearing screams. Going to the front door, he finds it open. The lawn outside is full of big holes and in these holes are bear-like monsters. The monsters are grabbing Kevin’s brothers, sister and parents and pulling them into the holes.

Willy, Nilly and the others crawl back from a branch tunnel into the main “trunk” of the treehouse which is furnished in a fanciful art nouveau fashion (the tables and chairs seeming to be alive organic shapes). It is lit more brightly now with sunshine pouring in through windows. They go to a drawing board on which the animated scene with the monsters in the holes is pictured. Nilly says that at this point the boy always woke up so that the dream was unfinished.

Nilly says that it is possible to finish a nightmare, which might keep it from coming back. She asks Ted and Amanda how they would finish the situation. On the drawing board we see animated versions of the different endings. Amanda’s solution is to get big heavy manhole covers and place them over the monster holes. She draws manhole covers on the picture. Ted agrees with Amanda until Willy suggests that he reflect on the situation a little more. Ted then comes up with his own version that involves putting ladders into the holes. He erases the manhole covers and draws ladders. The picture suddenly becomes animated again. Both Ted and Amanda expect the monsters to run out and escape and are surprised when Kevin’s family members climb out of the holes unharmed and a reunion takes place. The monsters have vanished. “That was easy in a cartoon,” remarks Ted, “but in dreams things are a lot more scary.” “Let’s go back into Ted’s dream,” says Willy and the four climb into another branch tunnel.

They emerge from a tiny crawl space in the wall of the sea cliff that is trapping Ted in a recreated scene from his nightmare. Amanda compliments Ted on the vividness of his dreamscape. We see the action unfolding as was first described with Ted running from the giant diver. He comes up against the cliff, turns and panics; but at this point the picture freezes. Ted, Amanda and the twins walk into the freeze frame up to Ted’s frozen panic stricken form. Willy says, “Now Ted, this is your dream. Don’t you think you could have come up with a better ending?” Embarrassed, Ted has a sudden surge of brash confidence, “Sure, I can have fun with it. Watch!”

Ted picks up one of the dead fish on the beach and walks back to his frozen double. He dissolves into his double and the action starts again. Ted turns, bends over and looks back between his legs. He shouts to the diver, “I know you, you’re one of the giants!” The diver’s apparatus changes into a football uniform, the mask into a football helmet. Ted hikes the fish back through his legs. The fish morphs into a football. The giant is now a quarterback about to pass the ball to Ted, also now dressed in football garb, who is running back to receive the pass. Leaping a little too forward, Ted trips and falls. The ball returns to being a dead fish and hits him in the head as he falls in the sand. “Hey Ted, don’t you think this is a little ridiculous?” shout Willy and Nilly who are now seen standing “at the sidelines” dressed as cheerleaders. Amanda is watching from a set of empty bleachers that have materialized at the beach. Ted stands and looks back to the diver who has returned to his original threatening frozen position. He walks back to the others.

“Sure you can change a dream that way if you want and it was good that you were not afraid of the diver anymore,” says Nilly. “But maybe that diver was trying to tell you something,” suggests Willy.

“Yeah, he was saying he wants to kill me,” Ted remarks. “Maybe not,” Nilly observes. “Let’s go back to the cliff.”

Again we see the freeze frame of Ted turning in panic. Willy, Nilly, Amanda and Ted are dressed as before. Nilly asks Ted what his feelings were about the dream. Ted closes his eyes. We see a brief fragment of the dream where the sandcastle was washed away and the dead fish are left behind. "Everything around me was dying," Ted observes, "The weather was turning cold. The only thing alive was..." We see the diver emerging from the stormy sea.

Willy whispers into Ted's ear, "Your fear. Your fear of the unknown." Ted is in tears. He tells about his cousin Mark who he used to make sandcastles with when he was younger. This cousin had just died recently of leukemia and Ted had been to the funeral within the last week. "Everyone has strong feelings about death," Willy says, "but we must face them to keep on living."

Determined to change the dream, Ted melts into his frozen double and the action starts again. He turns to face the enormous diver, "I'm not going to run from you anymore! I know you're a part of me. This is *my* dream!"

The diver brings up his knife. Ted shouts, "You can't hurt me," then turns around for the twins to back him up but finds himself alone with the giant. Ted shouts at dark diver, "Say something!" The diver doesn't reply. A fierce wind comes up. The diver's movement seems to have halted. As the wind howls, the diver's wetsuit begins to fall apart as if it is made of black fabric. It becomes apparent that there is no body inside, the giant is now a pieced together wooden framework covered in tattered black fabric.

Behind the spread feet of the wind-battered giant, a tranquil beach scene appears. A young boy is sitting making sandcastles. Ted, now more captivated by the appearance of his dead cousin than by the raggedy giant, walks through underneath it, between the feet. On the other side, it is sunny again and his cousin Mark welcomes him. Ted is stunned, "But you're supposed to be dead, Mark."

"But you're supposed to be afraid," is Mark's sly reply.

"You mean, afraid of that thing?" Ted gestures to the giant, which creaks then collapses on the sand behind him, becoming a pile of sticks and cloth. Willy, Nilly and Amanda are seen smiling in approval behind the pile.

Mark tells Ted, "Remember, I can visit your dreams. We can still have fun." Ted looks down and admires the sandcastle. "The looks pretty good Mark—but there's one problem; it's too close to the water. The tide's coming in, look out!"

They both run playfully as a small wave washes away the castle. When Ted turns back to look at the water, he is with Amanda and the twins. Mark has disappeared. They all watch the ocean for a melancholy moment, then Willy says, "Let's go back to the treehouse."

They re-emerge from a branch tunnel into the main treehouse interior. Amanda describes her chandelier nightmare to the others. Ted tells Willy and Nilly that Amanda is moving out of town soon. The twins are inquisitive and want to know how she feels about the place she is moving into. Amanda answers that she visited the house and had not liked it—it being cold, old and away from friends and familiar surroundings. She says her family is taking another trip to the house on the weekend. Ted asks if he can come along. Amanda says she'll ask her parents and invites Willy and Nilly too.

The weekend arrives and Amanda, her parents, Ted and the twins enter a modest sized Victorian home. The twins immediately notice an old iron chandelier in the living room—much smaller than the one is Amanda’s nightmare but obviously similar. They wink at each other.

Later, when alone together, the twins talk to Amanda about her situation and stress the adventure of moving into a new place, making discoveries and meeting new people.

In her sleep that night, she re-experiences the nightmare of the lowering chandelier. However, this time at the peak of its spinning, Amanda reminds herself not to wake up and to face the hideous gargoyles. As she reaches upward, the chandelier begins to transform into a carnival carousel. The glowering gargoyles become animals on the merry-go-round and the dark room in now enlarges, permitting a colorful crowd of children to enter. They jump on board the whirling carousel that is now close to the floor. Among the crowd of kids are Willy and Nilly who beckon to Amanda “Hey come on up,” they say, boarding the ride.

“Who are all these kids?” questions Amanda. Nilly shouts back as she whirls past, “They’re your friends, if you want them to be.” A joyful surge runs through Amanda and she jumps onto the spinning platform—getting a seat on a golden antelope. There is a blur of animals and children in motion.

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