Something to Play: Eclipse

This is a game with lots of walking around. Walking-around games are especially attractive when playing with larger groups, as a case in point of the more-the-merrier condition.

This one is based on a game I found in a book called Games for Actors and Non-Actors by Augusto Boal. He called it Eclipse, so we might as well call it that, too.

We begin the game with everyone walking around aimlessly. Sauntering, so to speak, from pillar to post, from hither to thither or yon. At some time, some self-appointed leader-like person (perhaps imagine it’s you) says “find your sun,” meaning that everyone should imagine that one person in the group is their own personal sun. Of course, this fact is never divulged to one’s personal sun. It is merely decided upon internally and then acted upon externally. From that time until the game is over, the goal is to stay in the sunshine. Since everyone, including everyone’s imaginary sun, is still generally milling, whilst everyone is now trying to stay within his or her own personal sunshine, there is ample incentive for even more pervasively general milling.

The leader-like person then suggests that the general millers include a moon in their imaginary solar system. Again, everyone selects their imaginary moon, again internally without outward sign or verbal divulgement. For the rest of the game, the goal becomes to stay within one’s personal ecliptic—positioning oneself so that one’s personal moon is between oneself and one’s chosen sun.

Now, because we have what some astronomers call the “three-body problem,” millers find themselves milling ever more rapidly. Their sun is moving. Their moon is moving. And they are moving, nay, scurrying, perhaps even running amuckly, trying ever so diligently to keep their appointed moon between themselves and their selected sun until the purported leader says “freeze.”
Then, in somewhat amazed breathlessness, everyone points to their moon with one hand, and their sun with another, and those who find themselves uncannily positioned so that their moon is between themselves and their sun can consider themselves “winners.”

They could, you know, lie. I mean, no one really knows who chose whom to be what. But, because there is no point in winning, there is similarly no point in lying. Which is, as a matter of fact, a great relief for all.

Nor is there any particular significance in being someone’s chosen sun or, for that matter, moon. Yet, as the game progresses, the collective imagination becomes so wonderfully vivid that surprisingly merry, interplanetary mayhem unavoidably ensues.

Did you imagine explaining the game, and then playing it? Even if you didn’t, I’ll imagine that you did.