

Gone but not forgotten

By Josh Fox

Introduction

You remember so little. There was a rush of fear, pain, and then the certainty of your own death. Now you're in a dark place. All that's left of what went before is snatched memories and blurry feelings. But your heart is filled with one powerful emotion, surging above all else, colouring all those little recollections. Unless you can let that emotion go, you will stay here forever in this place of shadow.

You are not alone.

Gone but not forgotten is about ghosts. You play people who died with major issues unresolved. Now they are trapped in limbo, haunted by the emotions that dominated their lives. That is where they will stay unless they can achieve closure. Fortunately, the very people those emotions connect with are here with them.

The focus of the game is on exploring relationships, which you develop in play. You'll be playing to discover the truth about why you're trapped here in limbo, and maybe escape to the afterlife. It's challenging to escape limbo, and it's unlikely everyone will make it. Maybe nobody will make it. That's part of the game.

An important aspect of the game is exploring your characters' unreliable memories of their past. The fog of death means that you don't remember everything about your character and may even fail to remember really big stuff. Other players may describe events that involved you or things you did. You need to be willing to accept that to play this game.

Overview of the game

You'll create together a group of people with unresolved issues, who died together. Then, individually, you'll create the unresolved issue for your character, and the conditions to resolve it. You also create a strong memory, and a dominant emotion your character is driven by. You may create some other memories to flesh your character out a bit.

Because your characters are ghosts, they are semi-corporeal. You wear masks, talk in whispers and move slowly, to represent your ethereal state. You may not touch each other. When you become overwhelmed by emotion, though, you may speak at normal volume or louder, and move normally.

Because death has washed away your identity, your memories are vague and unreliable. You start the game only knowing about the ones you created for your character, but as you hear about other players' memories, you respond by saying what you remember – which may not be quite the same as what they remembered. The game will not tell you whose memories are right and whose are wrong.

You each carry a candle. You have around two hours before your candle burns out. If that happens, you will be trapped in limbo forever. But if you can resolve your issue, you can blow out your candle and move on. Maybe you'll all get to move on, maybe some of you won't. It's possible none of you will.

Setup

Preparation

You will need:

- 2-4 players (4 is best)
- A quiet space which can be made dark
- One 2-hour tea light¹ (or flameless alternative) per player, and a dish or such to put each one in
- Print-outs of the game summary [Appendix C] and inspiration tables [Appendix A]

Nice to have:

- Identical masks¹, one per player. Preferably half masks, so they don't interfere with speech.
- Similar clothes worn by the players.
- Some low-key, eerie music to play in the background at a low volume. No vocals.
- Some incense to burn in the room.

Time is short

At the start of the game, light the tea-lights and put them in a dish (or similar). Each of you will carry your candle with you. If it goes out, you have run out of time and will remain in limbo for all eternity. If you resolve your personal issue (see below) then you blow the candle out, and pass to the next life.

If you have only 2 hours for your session, light the candles before you do anything else. If you have longer, you can give yourself a bit more time to roleplay by lighting them after setup is complete.

If you can't get hold of 2-hour tea lights, you can get candles that burn for longer and cut them down. Alternatively, don't worry about getting the candle burn length right, and just set a timer.

Of course, candles will vary in precisely how long they burn for, and this adds to the atmosphere: players are left with some uncertainty in how long they have to resolve their issues. On the other hand, if you have to finish by a particular time, then you should set a timer as well, in case the candles burn for longer than expected. What you must not do is put the timer, or any timepiece, where the players can see them – nor may anyone look at their watch or phone during the game. Not knowing how much time remains is part of the game.

Safety

Read this section out at the start of every game.

This is a tense game where serious issues can be explored. It's an environment where people can get hurt if the wrong material is introduced. Right at the start, everyone writes down on a bit of scrap paper anything they want to be kept out of the game.

Good examples to think about include child abuse, sexual violence, and torture. Remember that these are not just things that someone might bring into the game, they might be things that they remember your character doing. If you can't stomach the thought of that, don't hesitate to ban it.

¹ See materials section at the end of this document for shopping suggestions.

You are free to mention an issue after this point if you realise you forgot something important. Everyone should respect that just as if it had been written down at the start.

During play, you should feel no compunction about calling a halt if the game touches on something you can't cope with. To do so, simply say "cut" and the group will pause play to allow you to take a break and let everyone know what material they need to avoid introducing. Alternatively (and only if you feel comfortable continuing) you can say "brake" to indicate the situation is one you aren't comfortable with and call on players to change direction and/or reduce the intensity.

If nobody has touched on banned material, and nobody has called cut or brake, it's everyone's responsibility to focus and stay with it. This is a game that's meant to be intense and challenging. The presence of the rules above should mean you're able to push people's buttons safe in the knowledge that they have a safety net if it's needed.

Who are you?

To start with, you need a very broad idea of who your group are and how they relate to each other. You're looking for a concept that will allow for complex relationships, betrayals and hurts, hurts that could persist after death. Good examples include:

- A family
- A group of lifelong friends
- Lovers (maybe a couple, perhaps two pairs of lovers, perhaps a polyamorous group)

You also need to create the event which caused you to die at the same time. You won't necessarily remember it, but it's a good idea to all have the same concept in mind. Good examples include:

- Car crash
- House fire
- Natural disaster

There are more examples of group concepts and causes of death in Appendix [A].

Choose a group concept and then each of you come up with a niche that your character occupies. For example, if you chose a family as your group concept, niches you might pick include:

- Father
- Mother
- Eldest child
- Middle child
- Youngest child
- Someone's boy/girlfriend
- Grandchild

Note: you shouldn't spell out in detail the nature of your relationship to the others. Perhaps you're actually an adoptive parent; even so "father" or "mother" is fine. Perhaps you're the child of one of the parents by another person – you don't decide that now. These are broad niches that tell you what sort of relationship issues might be appropriate to introduce. The rest will emerge in play.

Your key memory, unresolved issue, and emotion

*"Thy vengeance haunts the silent grave,
Thy taunts insult the ashes of the brave"*

– Mary Darby Robinson, Ode to Envy

You need to create a key memory, an unresolved issue, and an emotion that is dominating you in the afterlife. You can do them in either order, and the details of how you do each are described below. If you're stuck, you can look at the inspiration tables in Annex [A].

You do not tell the other players about your memory or issue, even if it involves them. You don't consult them, either. The fog of death means that there may be major events from your life that you don't remember at all.

Each character has one clear and distinct memory from their life, something with a strong emotional overtone. Perhaps something traumatic. You decide which of the other characters were involved – at least one. You may also include characters who aren't present with you in limbo. Decide what happened, describing a few sensory details and the emotion(s) you felt. Keep your memory short and simple, and try to describe it from your character's perspective rather than attempting to say what objectively happened.

Example: Elin decides she wants her character to have a memory of her father beating her mother. She describes a memory of lying in bed at night, in the dark, listening to her father's growling voice, a violent thumping and crashing, and the sobs of her mother. She also describes lying awake for hours afterwards, her tears soaking her pillow.

Each character has an unresolved issue that they need to address if they are to move on from limbo. These come in two kinds:

- A question that they need to answer. *For example, you need to know who your real father is.*
- Something they need another character to say or do. *For example, you need your lover to admit that she cheated on you.*

Make it a major issue that could drive someone to keep a strong grip on life long after their body stops breathing. It might well relate to your memory. For the issues of the first type, you needn't decide who you'll get the answer from. For issues of the second type, you will need to decide who the target of your issue is.

Finally, decide on an emotion that is dominating you in limbo. It should be a powerful emotion. Good examples include fear, hate, anger, and love. Make it one that follows logically from the memory and/or unresolved issue.

What your character knows

Your character should not take long to realise that they are dead. They do not, however, know that they must resolve their issue if they wish to leave limbo.

Even so, they know the injustice that burns in their breast, or the regret that fills their heart. Your character may not know the rules of the game, but they are driven to play it nonetheless.

Additional memories

Once you've created your key memory, if there's time, noodle around thinking of a few other memories you might have. These don't need to be emotionally powerful or traumatic – in fact it's better if they aren't. Make them about everyday life, memorable events or little snapshots of your past. Don't invent too many of these – definitely no more than three. As before, keep them short and simple and focus on what your character senses and feels.

Once again, don't tell the others about your memories, and don't consult them even if they were a part of them.

You can create further memories during play, whenever you need them. But start off by using the ones you created at the start.

Gameplay

Starting the game

Before you start, make sure everyone is clear what the play area is. Because the game takes place in darkness, that will generally be a room; but you should define part of the room as an area for people to go to if / when they have left limbo.

Put on your masks, if you're using them, and switch the lights off.

You begin the game by lying down on the floor. Place your candle nearby, but not close enough that you might accidentally knock it over. Wait for several seconds before beginning play.

You wake up in this shadowy place, with these others, and an emotion burning inside you. When you are ready, pick up your candle and get to your feet.

Playing the game

Everything you say, say as your character. Everything you do, do it as your character. Simply say what you think they would say, responding to what others say and do as appropriate. You can walk around freely within the play area.

The shadow of death

"The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?"

– Edgar Allan Poe

- Death left you a shadow of what you were. Your personal appearance is blurred and indistinct, as entropy wears away at what remains of you. Your body is insubstantial as morning mist, and passes through anything you touch (except for your candle, of course). The environment of limbo is grey and ill-defined, and deadens the senses.
- Darken the room, so that it's hard to see people clearly. Draw the curtains or dim the lights.
- Wear a mask, to hide your face. The masks should ideally be identical, so it is hard to tell each other apart. If you are able, you could enhance the effect by all wearing similar clothes (style, colour, etc). Try to avoid masks which cover your mouth, as it makes it hard to hear you speak. *Alternatively you could wear face paint, or hide your faces behind hoods or dark glasses.*
- You may not speak louder than a whisper, move faster than a slow walk, and your body movements should be slow and languid, unless you are howling with emotion (see below).
- You may not touch any object or person. Of course, your character may not immediately realise this. If you want to indicate that you are *trying* to touch something or someone, wave your hand over it or them slowly.

Practical issues

You may find some aspects of this game turn out to be impractical for some reason. Maybe one of you has a hearing impairment and whispering won't work for them. If so, work around it. The darkness, candles, whispering and so forth are all for atmosphere. They don't trump the needs of your group.

Also be mindful of safety. Keep the room free of clutter and trip-hazards, and remove anything flammable.

The fog of death

Death left you half a person. Your memories are fragmented and indistinct. Your emotions are powerful and volatile.

- When someone tells you about an event they remember from your life, you remember it. You may, however, remember the event differently, in large ways or small; and you may remember extra details or additional events connected to that one. Make a snap decision and say what you remember out loud. In turn, this may trigger the same process for other characters. You'll end up describing what happened a little at a time, perhaps agreeing with each other or perhaps diverging.
- When reacting to other people's memories, err on the side of accepting what they say and building on it. You can opt to remember things differently if your instincts tell you that's what you should do – but do not do this flippantly. What you should never do is completely ignore what the other person said, flatly denying its truth – tweak it or twist it, by all means, but your memory should be recognisable as related to their memory.
- Whatever you describe, that's your memory. Don't worry about whether it's true – it seems true to you.

What really happened?

Your memories, even the key memory, are fallible. They may differ from those of others. Even your unresolved issue isn't a trump card. Not only do other players have the right to describe events differently, the game will never tell you who was right, not even after the game has finished. There is no final truth.

Example: David reveals his key memory, when he tried to confess his love for Susie and she interrupted their conversation to take a call with her accountant. He describes how he was venting his emotions and she coldly took the call. Susie thinks for a moment and says she remembers him saying he wanted to talk about something, but that he said it "wasn't really important". Then her lawyer called about her divorce. She had to hear what her lawyer had to say, and said could it wait until later. After that it just slipped her mind.

- At the start of the game you create a dominant emotion. That feeling is with you at all times, colouring everything you hear and everything you say. It is not overwhelming – fear does not make you a quivering wreck, anger doesn't make you fly at everyone you meet. Rather, it is omnipresent. Let it influence your interactions, but don't descend into parody.
- You may change your dominant emotion at any time. You should mainly do this in reaction to significant revelations or expressions of emotion from others. But never do this lightly.
- At times it may feel appropriate for your character to be overwhelmed by their emotion. If someone says or does something which would elicit the same emotional reaction that is currently dominant, that is a particularly appropriate time. For example, if you are dominated by fear and someone speaks to you in an aggressive way. If that happens, you may decide that you are *howling with emotion*. When howling with emotion, you may move at a normal pace, and you may speak at a normal volume – indeed, you may find it appropriate to raise your voice. When you howl with emotion, you may not conceal your feelings, nor may you lie or otherwise present a facade. You must roleplay as open a portrayal of your character's inner thoughts and feelings as you can.

Example: When Susie tells David that he said it "wasn't really important", it plays right into his dominant emotion of Self-Pity. He decides he will howl with emotion. David sinks to his knees suddenly and cries out loud "all these years, I could never bring myself to tell you!"

Leaving limbo

When your issue has been resolved, you may blow out your candle at any time. Doing so signifies that you have accepted your death and moved on to whatever waits beyond. Before doing so, you may take off your mask (if you have one) and say a closing sentence or two – and in so doing, you make speak at normal volume (or raise your voice, if you wish). After that, your character is gone. Remove yourself from the central playing area and watch silently as the rest of the game plays out.

Equally, you may choose to stay a little longer and try to help the others move on. But beware – if your candle goes out by itself, you remain trapped in limbo even if you have resolved your issue.

Example: Lisa apologises to Shanice for stealing her brilliant ideas and using them to make herself famous. She acknowledges Shanice's brilliance and admits that her whole reputation was effectively stolen from her. Shanice's issue is resolved, but she decides to stay and try to help Lisa move on. If Lisa resolves her issue, they can both blow out their candles, but if the candles burn out they will both be trapped in limbo forever.

If your candle burns out

"We die only once, and for such a long time."
– Moliere

If your candle burns out, you will be trapped in limbo forever. Your character immediately realises this and may speak one or two anguished sentences at normal volume (or louder, if you feel moved to do so) before returning to being limited to whispering. You may continue to interact with the other characters.

Example: After two hours of trying to get his tormentor to admit their guilt, Sajid's candle burns out. He points his finger at his tormentor and shrieks "I will never forgive you. May you burn in hell for eternity!"

Ending the game

The game ends when either everyone has blown out their candle or all their candles have burned out. (Or, if you're using one, the timer goes off.)

Switch the lights on and blow out any candles that are still burning.

If you have time, you may wish to discuss the game. Talk about what your character thought was going on, what your issue was and whether you resolved it. Talk about how you feel about the outcome for your character and the others.

About the author

Josh Fox is a game designer, blogger, pig-wrangler and father. He is currently focused on designing games that help you to collaboratively create stories full of secrets and mysteries. You can find Josh's writings and his games, most of which you can download for free, at www.blackarmada.com. If you played this or any of Josh's other games, email Josh – josh at vapourspace dot net – and tell him how it went.

Appendix A: Inspiration

Group concepts

<u>Group</u>	<u>Causes of death</u>
Family	Car/train/plane crash; fire; bombing; natural disaster
Close friends	As “family” plus: suicide pact
Spiritual group	As “close friends”
Lovers	As “close friends”
Band	As “close friends”
Soldiers	As “family” plus: killed in action; executed
Criminals	As “soldiers”
Aid workers	As “soldiers” plus: struck down by disease
Explorers/nomads	As “aid workers” plus: slain by wild beasts; killed by the elements

Unresolved issues, memories and emotions

<u>Unresolved issue</u>	<u>Memory</u>	<u>Emotion</u>	<u>Examples</u>
The repentant Needs <u>either</u> forgiveness <u>or</u> blame from the person wronged [perhaps after revealing the full scale of wrongdoing]	The act of betrayal or wrongdoing	Guilt/ Regret	Infidelity Spy Traitor Snitch Bully Betrayal Stole idea Abuser
The wronged Needs acknowledgement and/or apology from wrongdoer <u>or</u> to know reason for wrongdoing <u>or</u> to have suspicions confirmed	Witnessing/first hearing of wrongdoing	Anger/ Fear Pity	See <i>repentant</i> plus: Friend of victim
The carer Needs the cared-for to say they can <u>or</u> can't cope without them	Time when cared-for was totally dependent on them	Love	Parent Lover Lieutenant Muse Mentor

The unrequited

Needs to know whether or not their feelings are reciprocated

First sight of their love

Fear

Best friend
Shy admirer
Groupie**The seeker**

Needs to know the truth about a mystery in their life

When they realised they were different

Fear

Orphan/adoptee

The overlooked

Needs acknowledgement of their skill, talent or contribution

When they worked hard for no reward or praise

Anger/
EnvyUnderling
Lieutenant
Rival
Partner**The abandoned**

Needs acknowledgement and/or apology for lack of help

When needed help and didn't get it

Anger/
FearNeeded...
...rescue
...to be believed
...love

Appendix B: Materials

Candles

<http://www.amazon.com/ANLENG-Superior-Quality-Tealight-Candles/dp/B0133LE7JW>
(50 for \$11)

<http://www.amazon.com/Coghlan-8674-Emergency-Candles/dp/B0000ANBU2>
(8-10 hour candles, two for \$3.50 - cut them up to make 2-hour candles)

<http://www.otherwisetrading.co.uk/house/1housecandlelessinglesmall.htm>
35p each

Flameless candles

<http://www.lights.com/premium-flameless-candles-with-timer-remote-p-37290.html>
Flameless candles with a 2-hour timer, 4 for \$28

<http://www.amazon.com/Champagne-Flameless-Candles-Paraffin-Operated/dp/B00UV4BL12>
Flameless candles with 2-hour timer, 3 for \$21

<http://www.lights4fun.co.uk/i/q/CA13852/3-slim-battery-operated-wax-led-pillar-candles?gclid=C1z5zau43sgCFYhAGwodiQIGhg>
Flameless candles (no timer), 3 for £4.99

Masks

<http://www.partycity.com/product/white+domino+mask.do> (white)
<http://www.partycity.com/product/black+domino+mask.do> (black)
Domino mask, \$0.99 each

<http://www.partydelights.co.uk/keywordsearch.aspx?KWSearchText=white+eye+mask> (white)
<http://www.partydelights.co.uk/keywordsearch.aspx?KWSearchText=black+eye+mask> (black)
Eye mask, £0.75 each

Appendix C: Game summary

Gone but not forgotten is about ghosts. You play people who died with major issues unresolved. Now they are trapped in limbo, haunted by the emotions that dominated their lives. That is where they will stay unless they can achieve closure. Fortunately, the very people those emotions connect with are here with them.

Preamble

1. Light your candles and/or set your timer at the start if you have a hard time limit.
2. Read out the safety text and write down anything you want banned from the session.

Setup

3. Choose a group concept and a cause of death.
4. Choose your role in the group – but keep it broad, don't worry about specifics.
5. Each of you, privately decide on an unresolved issue, a key memory and a dominant emotion. These three will probably be connected. Inspiration tables are available if you are struggling to come up with something.
6. If there's time, come up with up to three other memories – again, keep these to yourself.
7. Keep your memories short and simple and focused on your character's perspective.

Game play

8. If you haven't lit the candle and/or set your timer yet, do it now. Turn off the lights. If you're using masks or other props, you should put those on before starting.
9. You must speak no louder than a whisper, move no faster than a slow walk, and keep your movements slow and languid.
10. You may not touch each other, or any object besides your candle. You may indicate you are trying to touch something by waving your hands over it slowly.
11. When someone describes a memory, make a snap decision whether you remember it and, if so, whether your memory differs. Say out loud what you remember, if anything. Err on the side of accepting their memory, and don't deny the memory outright.
12. Whatever you decide is what you remember – don't worry whether it's true.
13. Roleplay your dominant emotion as though ever-present but not overwhelming in its power. Let it influence and colour your interactions.
14. You can change your dominant emotion in response to events.
15. If you feel it appropriate, e.g. when events really play into your dominant emotion, you may *howl with emotion*. You can briefly speak at normal volume or louder, and move at normal speed. When you do this, you cannot lie or conceal your feelings.
16. If your candle burns out you are trapped in limbo. You may speak a couple of anguished sentences at normal volume or louder, then continue the game.
17. If you resolve your issue, you can blow out your candle. When you do so you can take your mask off (if you have one) and say a couple of sentences at normal volume or louder. Then leave the play area and watch the rest of the game silently.
18. You don't have to blow out your candle, but if it burns out after you resolved your issue, you are still trapped in limbo.

End game

19. Once all candles are out, the game is over. Discuss what happened if there's time.