

On the Other Side

By Kate Hill and Chris Dragga
Fact Box

Players: 8 or 10

Length: 1 Hour of Play, plus time for orientation and debriefing

Setting: The woods between life and death

Materials needed: Scissors, printed instructions, safety pins

Theme warnings: This game deals with death and grief.

Overview

You have found yourself in the woods that span the border between life and death. You have heard that this happens sometimes, every generation or so, to those who are seeking others. Here, they are given one hour to find the person for whom they are searching, no matter where they live, no matter whether one or both of them has passed. Now you are here, free to cross the border in your quest. Will you find what you desire?

In this game you will play either a spirit who has passed on or a living person. Everyone will be given a role, along with a description of who you are, who you are looking for, and what your ultimate goal is when you find them. As you search, you can traverse the border between life and death numerous times during a game. This happens naturally and calmly; you may barely notice it. At the end of the hour, though, your character will be stuck on their current side of the border and your ability to communicate with the other side will be forever lost.

Preparing before the game

This game should ideally take place outside in a space where players can disperse widely. We recommend a sparse woodland during the day. If this is not possible, choose a space—either indoor or outdoor—where players can converse without fear of eavesdropping.

Before beginning, cut out the character descriptors (“You are”, “They are”, and “Goals”) and the “Living/Dead” indicators from the second sheet. Place the “Living/Dead” indicators in a container together. Then, place the white-shaded attributes from each of the character descriptors into separate containers, and do the same for the gray ones (either use different containers, or keep them separate and be prepared to reuse containers).

Decide on a sound that will signal a transition between life and death (described further in the Playing the Game section); it should be relatively common for the setting, but noticeable. If playing in the woods, we suggest birdsong. Alternatively, if your chosen environment is too quiet, have one of the players set their phone alarm to irregular intervals spaced three to five minutes, and use that noise to signal the change.

Once all of the players have gathered, one player reads the Overview section to the players. Each player then draws from the container of “Living/dead” indicators. Based on their selection, each player should choose a description of their character, a description of whom they are seeking, and the goal of their character from the appropriate set of containers. Finally, the players should pin their living/dead indicator as a badge to your clothing.

Next, brief all player on the following safety mechanics. Have two players demonstrate these safety mechanics in practice and then get the players in pairs. Have them take turns practicing the mechanics of Consent, Cut and Largo for one minute each.

The following Safety Mechanics will be in play during this game:

1. The Door is Always Open: If a player needs to leave or reenter a scene, they should be allowed to with no questions asked.
2. Cut: If any player wants to end a scene for any reason, simply saying Cut and holding up a palm will end the scene immediately.
3. Largo: Players can say Largo anytime during a scene. This lets the other players know to lower their intensity and repeat the scene in this fashion.
4. Touching with Consent. Touching in this game is allowed, but consent must always be sought.

Before you touch someone, ask “May I (do whatever touching action)?”

After they pick their description, split the players into two groups, one living and one dead. The players should then each choose a name and answer the following questions:

- What has occupied your daily life?
- Why are you so driven in your search?
- You know one other character in your group. Who are they, and how do you know them? Do not answer this question with someone who chose you to answer it.

Finally, each player should choose a place to start, apart from all the others. Once each player is situated, begin the game.

Playing the Game

During the game, you should seek to talk to many people, discover who fits the characteristics you are seeking, and convince them of your goal. During play, you cannot discuss your character’s description or the description of the character you are seeking directly, though you can discuss your goal openly. You can talk to people on your current side of the border in public, with as many as you would like. However, if you desire to talk to someone on the other side, both of you must separate yourselves from others and talk out of earshot of anyone else.

When players from opposite sides of the boundary converse, they should listen for the sound decided upon during set-up. If it occurs at least once during their conversation, the two players must switch sides at the end of the conversation and indicate this by exchanging badges.

The game lasts one hour. The player who read the overview and led set up should set their phone alarm to sound at fifty minutes, then fifty-five minutes and finally an hour after the start of the game.

The player will then announce to the rest of the group the time remaining. Once one hour has been reached, characters will remain on their current side permanently. Communication between the two sides ends. Players will be given a few minutes to play out any remaining scenes or discussions that occur as a result of this last change. After this, the game ends.

Debrief

After the game ends, gather all players into a circle. Have players remove their badge and lay it on the ground. After this, guide them in a few deep breaths, as they center themselves back into reality.

Have players go around the circle. Give them each the opportunity to share:

- Something that they want to take with them from their character or the game.
- Something that they want to leave behind from their character or the game.

Players do not have to share if they do not wish. Once everyone has had a chance to speak, have everyone take a few deep breaths again and go get something to eat!

Character Descriptions:

You are: Trusting and Impatient	You are: Thoughtful and Passionate
You are: Impetuous and Quick-Witted	You are: Soft-Spoken and Nervous
You are: Short-tempered and Loyal	You are: Logical and Kind
You are: Empathetic and Incisive	You are: Judgmental and Reserved
You are: Open-Hearted and Blunt	You are: Evasive and Wry

They are: Thoughtful and Passionate	They are: Trusting and Impatient
They are: Soft-Spoken and Nervous	They are: Impetuous and Quick-Witted
They are: Logical and Kind	They are: Short-tempered and Loyal
They are: Judgmental and Reserved	They are: Empathetic and Incisive
They are: Evasive and Wry	They are: Open-Hearted and Blunt

Wants to bring parent back	At peace with death and needs to convince partner of this
Wants to be assured child is safe	Wants to finally apologize to friend on other side
Needs blessing of partner to move on with life	Wants to return to life to see new child
Wants to reunite with a lost friend	Wants to bring grandparent to other side to end battle with cancer
Wants to join partner in death	Wants to find child they gave away at birth

Living	Living	Living	Living	Living
Dead	Dead	Dead	Dead	Dead