

BURIAL BY ASH

The ash falls outside, silent. It muffles the sound and the sky. Eventually it'll cover everything. It hasn't quite yet. Maybe by morning.

The world started ending months ago. This shouldn't come as a surprise. It doesn't mostly, or the ones who are surprised have the shame to hide it. We all saw it coming. There was just nothing we could do. People mostly carried on with their normal lives until they couldn't anymore. Until the ash or the ghosts stopped them from pursuing routine, the normalcy of going to work and going home, until this was all that was left.

The power went out today, and no one expects that it will come back on. You have candles and friends for tonight, and you're not sure what you'll wake up to tomorrow. You're not sure you'll wake up at all. Some of you are already ghosts and the rest of you might as well be. It's so hard to tell the difference. Ghosts can't talk about the future at all, but none of the living want to talk about it much either. Maybe you become a ghost not in one moment, but by imperceptible degrees. It's inevitable either way.

Rules:

- Ghosts can't talk about the future.
- Light one candle for each player.
- Blow out a candle every time the silence grows. Blow one out every time a question goes unanswered. Blow one out whenever you want to scream, but don't.
- The firestarter may relight one candle, once during play.
- When there are no more candles lit, say goodnight. The game is over.

What you need:

- Printed and cut slips of ghost prompts and the firestarter prompt
- A small bag or container to put the ghost prompts in
- As many candles as there are players
- A lighter
- A bathroom with a mirror
- A room with a table
- A deck of cards
- 2 hours (might take longer with higher player numbers)
- 4-10 players

Characters:

Funny but oblivious

Artistic but morose

Reliable but uptight
Kind but overworked
Interesting but disconnected
Empathetic but unstable
Engaging but self absorbed
Curious but inconsiderate
Invested but explosive
Sweet but easily manipulated

What is your secret you haven't shared with the group?
What is the hope you can't let go of?

Questions to answer as a group:

What was an activity you all enjoyed doing together?
What was the fight that almost broke your friend group apart, but didn't?
What was the last time you all were together, before the world started ending?
What was a challenge you overcame together?
Why did you all gather here tonight?

Assigning roles:

Use a deck of playing cards. Set aside the same number of cards as there are players. Some of these should be spades, for the ghosts, some of these should be diamonds, for the living, and one should be a heart card for the firestarter. Spades should take up fewer than half of the cards.

Everyone draws one card. They now know if they are starting play as alive, as a ghost, or the firestarter.

Everyone closes their eyes.

The firestarter opens their eyes and removes the firestarter slip from the center of the table. Once they are done reading it they close their eyes and knock on the table.

The ghosts open their eyes and draw a slip of paper from the bag in the center of the table. They take the time to read it. Once they are all done, someone knocks on the table and everyone may slowly open their eyes. The bag of slips should then be moved to the bathroom.

The Firestarter:

You have something small left to give. Even as the light is dying you carry a flame within you, wavering and tentative, but there nonetheless. Once during play you can inspire hope, give comfort, and change the atmosphere of the room. You can do this through words or a gesture,

perhaps a song. The method is up to you. When you feel inspired you may inspire others. When you feel that you have given the room some new hope or comfort, relight a candle that has gone out.

Ghosts:

You are consumed by a memory of a time before the end of the world started. Focus in on it. Try to bring it into being.

You can remember what your hope was, but you can't feel it anymore. Shouldn't you be able to feel it?

You remember the fight that almost broke your friend group apart. Everything that's come after has just been a veneer of apologies, that wound still festers.

What was the day leading up to your death like? That day still echoes through you, pulling you away from the present moment.

If you're already dead why are you still afraid? Shouldn't you have stopped being afraid?

How did you die? You can feel the echoes of it, chasing themselves through your body. You can't let anyone else feel like this.

You've been absorbed by the ash. You can finally be in this moment, finally be free of tomorrow and all it's worry. Who wouldn't want to share that?

You're slowly losing your memories and you've already lost your future. You're being pulled into one single point, destined to only exist in the moment. You try to hold on to what came before.

You've had this secret for so long and it weighs heavy inside you. It's somehow more real than everything else. You don't know if releasing it will destroy you or make you light.

You don't really remember why you're here. If you keep acting on instinct no one will notice. No one will see that you're fading into nothing. That you are already empty.

The Candles:

Play begins after your characters have been made and your roles have been assigned. Turn off the light in the room where you all are gathered. Pick up a candle and light it. Pass the lighter on. Once each player has lit a candle, place the lighter back on the table. Play begins.

Once the last candle has gone out there is no more light. You all will go to sleep, not knowing what tomorrow will hold. Say goodnight. The game has ended.

Taking a minute:

When being with everyone becomes too much, go to the bathroom. Spend a minute alone. Look at yourself in the mirror. Ask yourself these questions:

Who am I?

Why did I come here?

Why do I still exist at all?

If you find answers, return to the main room, to your friends and the light. If you leave questions unanswered choose one option.

- 1) Become a ghost. You fade away, you draw a slip from the bag. Act on this new information.
- 2) You blow out a candle when you reenter the main room.

The Silence:

The silence is a character in this game, the invisible adversary. None of you will play the silence, but all of you are responsible for the silence's presence in the game. The silence is the weight of all the things left unsaid, the silence is the weight of your fears, the silence is the unacknowledged doom you all face. Sometimes, when it might seem easy to lie, or to fill the quiet with something meaningless, the silence will rear its head. The silence is the force that makes it difficult to pretend that everything is all right. When you are playing, feel for the moments in conversation where the silence looms. You must fight against those moments, but also you must sometimes admit defeat. Let the silence have space and weight in the game. Let the things that go unsaid have the meaning of the things that do get spoken. The silence is what will allow time to pass in this game. The silence will blow out your candles, one by one.

Safety:

Use the ok check in and the open door mechanic. Discuss before play if there are topics that you are interested in having in game and topics that you don't want to happen in game. It is your responsibility to look out for those you are playing with, and check in with them if you think they're not doing well. If you feel comfortable reaching out to someone without using a mechanic it is fine to do so. If you need help reach out in whatever way works best for you. At the end of the game, make space for a discussion about feelings that came up during play.