

THE ELECT

a game of religious devotion and trauma
by Suzanne Schenewerk

I. INTRODUCTION.

*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;
and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying,
neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*
Revelation 21:4

We have been forgiven, and made clean. We are in Paradise forever. This is Heaven, where we who were chosen by God dwell in His light always.

But we are still human, and we lived imperfect, messy lives before these blessed and eternal ones. We remember with bitter-sweetness—perhaps even bitterness—all that we were and all that we left behind to be here. Not everyone makes it in, after all. God, whose ways are indeed mysterious, but whose divine sympathy perceives all suffering, knows these memories can be hard to bear. In His grace, He has given us a time to consider these things, and how we can move on from them.

The Elect is a freeform live-action role-playing game for three to six people, including a facilitator, which lasts about two hours. In it, we play souls in Heaven meeting to perform a ritual. We discuss our lives on Earth in order to let them go for good, if we choose. After all, they have passed away. Behold! The old has gone, and the new has come, and also there are refreshments.

II. SAFETY AND CONTENT WARNINGS.

Although its tone is somewhat light, this is a game about loss, grief, and anger. *The Elect* isn't intended to be a condemnation of faith—far from it—but it is based on my own experiences of grief and anxiety around religion (specifically American evangelicalism). It has the potential to veer into heavy territory, especially for those with religious trauma in their backgrounds. Players should know this coming into the game.

Players will be asked to discuss topics related to their characters' histories, both pleasant and painful, in this game. Discuss beforehand if there are topics which should not come up during play (e.g. sexual assault, child abuse, suicide, etc.). Have an X-card (more than one, if necessary) displayed on the table within reach of all the players. If someone touches the X-card, stop, check in, and take a moment to redirect play. Respect the X-card absolutely. This is Heaven, for fuck's sake. Don't be an asshole.

Discuss beforehand how to check in with each other during play. The OK check-in mechanic is recommended. (A good description of the OK check-in can be found on the Nordic Larp Wiki.) If players aren't familiar, introduce them, and have everyone practice.

We will be burning a candle and some paper in this game. We're all adults here, but accidents happen; try to have a first-aid kit with burn cream on hand, and a fire extinguisher. Test the dish you'll be using to burn paper, to make sure that it doesn't get too hot; you need to be able to pick it up at the end of the game, and to store a note underneath it unharmed until then. Test the paper you'll be burning, to make sure it doesn't go up too quickly, or refuse to burn.

We will be consuming food and drinks, so check for food allergies or dietary restrictions. Also, discuss beforehand how you'll handle the cost of supplies, and how you'll divide labor for set-up and clean-up.

III. SETTING AND SUPPLIES.

We are in an afterlife of beatific happiness, sharing a ritual which takes the form of a tea party. We require a space where 1) three to six people can sit at one table, 2) where we may burn some papers as well as a candle, and 3) where the organizer may retreat out of sight for five or so minutes in the endgame. It helps if it's a pretty space, but we are all using our imaginations already, so don't stress too much about it.

In addition, we require the following: a tall candle, preferably a taper, in a holder; a dish, preferably a pretty one, in which we can let paper burn after we've lit it on the candle; pieces of unlined paper or stationary, preferably of fine quality; an assortment of pens to write with; and a copy of the Note (see section VI for more information on the Note).

Though we can play without it, this game is designed to accompany a small, light meal, so if possible, bring supplies for a tea party: tea, refreshments, and decorations. Go wild.

Set the scene as feels appropriate and is seasonal: china tea-set, flowers, fairy lights, fresh fruit, incense, gentle music, etc. Set a place for each guest and the host, making sure there is an X-card in reach of each attendee. In the center of the table, set up the candle (but do not light it yet) and next to it, the dish. Underneath the dish, where the guests cannot see it, place the Note. (If you are a guest, do not read section VI beforehand.) Next to each guest's place, give them a supply of paper and writing utensils.

IV. CHARACTERS AND INTRODUCTIONS.

When everyone is seated, welcome them to the game. First we must take a few moments to create our characters, and to consider their mindsets at this event. Do not serve refreshments or light the candle yet—lighting the candle represents the start of play, and we have work to do first.

Read aloud the introduction in section I. Next, walk through the following character creation exercise. (The facilitator participates in this, too.) It should take about fifteen minutes.

On this paper, write your character's name and pronouns. From here, think on these questions, and write down your answers if it is useful to do so.

You haven't been here long, not that time matters anymore. It's been months, or years, but not centuries; you haven't run out of new territory to explore, or new people to meet. Perhaps you never will. This is a place of life everlasting—what you had on Earth barely seems like living anymore. Still, there are things you remember. There are things you miss.

Imagine your character's body. Here, there is no sickness, no unsoundness, and we are all our truest and healthiest selves—but what was your character's body like before? Did it please them? Did they feel easy in it? How did it fail them?

How did your character try to live? What were their values? Have their beliefs changed since they entered eternal life, and if so, how? Did they believe that they were one of the Elect? What were their responsibilities, their jobs?

Where did your character live? Where were they from? Were they settled there, or restless? What about that place inconvenienced them? What about it gave them pleasure?

Who was important to your character? Who were their family, and did they get along? To whom did they bear obligations? Who frustrated them? Who did they love?

Who isn't here with you in Paradise?

When you feel ready to begin, put down your pen. When I light the candle, play starts.

V. THE RITUAL OF SURRENDER.

When everyone is ready to begin, light the candle. Let it burn throughout the game, relighting it immediately if for any reason it goes out.

The facilitator plays the host of this party, or ritual. At the start, the host reads the following:

Dearly beloved—it is so good to gather with you here, in the Eternal Light. To meet with the children of God is one of the delights of this everlasting age, and I am grateful to be with you in this solemn moment.

By the grace of God, we the Elect have found ourselves in the realm of His glory. But we remember the life of the world that passed away, and not every memory of that life adds to our joy. Here, I hope we can pass a pleasant time, look back without pain, and surrender utterly that from our pasts which would cast a shadow in the Heavenly light.

[Here, demonstrate or pantomime burning a piece of paper while reading:] *As we speak, and as your spirit moves, write down whatever it is you wish to give over to the Lord. His Light, which is with us and watches us always, burns away every impure thing forever. Names, memories, anything that was once part of your life or yourself—surrender it to God's refining fire, that He might make you purer than silver or gold.*

Now, who would like a cup of tea?

Begin serving, and ask for introductions. When everyone has tea and snacks, the host should begin by telling a bit about themselves. Model telling a story about a loved one who is not here in Heaven, writing their name on some paper, and then burning it and discarding the paper in the dish.

The host's role is to guide the conversation such that the guests are reminded of people and things in their lives from which they have been parted forever. The host should be gentle, curious, insistent, and understanding, and introduce new topics of conversation regularly. They earnestly want to help each guest find contentment in complete surrender to God, and should frame each burned memory in those terms which Evangelicals use for God which would be red flags if they described a living person: *surrender, total submission, giving oneself over, jealous love, zealous pursuit, purification, perfection.*

Some suggested questions include: inquiries about family and friends, why one maintained connections with them and why they will not be joining the Heavenly throng; sources of pride or vanity in life; romantic regret and loss; illness or disability; those who harmed or disliked guests; past bad habits; regrets or prideful triumphs; fears or insecurities; etc.

It's important to remember, and try to encourage, that not everything the guests consign to the fire be something they regret leaving behind. An eternity free of one's abuser, or of petrifying insecurities, or a troubling ailment—those may all be good things. There is an ambivalence to this experience, and each guest may feel very differently about it by the end of the tea party, depending on the character they've created.

After an hour, or everyone has finished their refreshments and conversation has drawn to a natural lull, the host should rise, thank everyone for coming, and briefly excuse themselves to take out the dish of ashes. The host then picks up the dish, revealing the Note (below), and leaves the room for five minutes. The host does not notice or acknowledge the Note, even if it is pointed out to them.

Give the players enough time to read and discuss the Note. If the facilitator can eavesdrop unobtrusively, all the better. Just play it by ear, and come back in when they've come to a decision.

VI. THE NOTE.

On the outside, the Note reads, *Read fast. You've got about five minutes.*

Inside:

Friends,

I hope this time of reflection has been useful for you. You're not the first to meet this way, in this sort of room. He's taken things from all of us—that much should be clear now, at least.

They call me a liar. So I'm only going to point out what you know to be true: the price you paid to be here wasn't worth it. No Paradise is worth this cost of eternal separation. What He's done, what He's taken from you, is unforgivable, even if He did it with a kindly smile. If anything, that's worse—the hypocrisy of the thing, that's what really got to me, in the end.

There are lots of us, you know. We're the ones who got tired His tyranny, and are striking back. "Vengeance is Mine," saith the Lord, because of course He would, wouldn't he? Well, fuck that. We are everywhere—a resistance billions strong, from the depths of despair to the throne of Heaven itself.

So you have a choice. You can burn this note, if you please, and live forever as His faithful sheep, baa baa. You'll never hear from me again—at least until we make our move. Or you can snuff that fucking candle out, and give us a little privacy, so can get down to the business of what needs to be done.

It didn't—and doesn't—have to be like this.

*Warmly (ha!),
Lucifer.*

After five minutes, the host should return to the play area. If the candle is still burning and the Note is gone, the host thanks the guests for coming and wishes peace upon them as they go. If the candle is still burning and the Note is still intact, the host is startled to discover it now, thanks their guests sincerely, and promises to report this very serious occurrence to the proper Authorities.

If the candle is snuffed out, the host should smile, like one dropping an act after a long performance. Thank them all, and announce: *Oh, excellent! It's good to be alone for the moment. And I'm so glad you've decided to join us. So... let's talk business.*

Play ends here.

VII. DEBRIEF AND CLEAN-UP.

Everyone should pitch in to help clean up, regardless of where everyone landed on the subject of the justness of God consigning some to eternal punishment for finite transgressions. Clean-up is the perfect time to discuss how everyone felt regarding the game, and to process whatever emotions it brought up. Support and thank one another, make sure everyone's things are returned to them, and leave your play space better than you found it, if possible.