

Final Commencement

A LARP by Francine Wildt

A tragic, emotional story about finishing what you started in the face of certain doom.

Introduction

"From my rotting body, flowers shall grow and I am in them and that is eternity." - Edvard Munch

The world is ending. Outside the university walls, civilization has collapsed, and humanity's last days are now. There will be no rescue, no escape, and no survival. During the last year, before knowledge of the impending doom, you went about university life like normal. You studied, you wrote papers, you did homework, and you were so close to finishing what you started to get your degree. Tonight the last students of humanity will prepare for a ceremony no one will attend and no one will remember. There will be speeches, secrets, regrets, and laughter. Diplomas will be handed out, confessions made, and final goodbyes spoken.

When the night ends, so will you. But before the darkness comes, you will graduate.

Setting

The last days of humanity. Outside, the disaster is off-stage and mostly implied rather than shown. Inside, the library represents the last safe space in the collapsing world.

The University library is a quiet space lit by candles. On the right side, there is a cozy fireplace with soft chairs and sofas. On the left side, there are regular tables and chairs, fit for studying. In the middle, is a small stage area, set up for guest speakers or other small format activities that might have occurred at one time. On the stage is a small nondescript podium.

Overall, the library has a sense of both order and chaos. Stacks of books are leaning or scattered, half finished assignments are on the tables and signs of students' final projects are everywhere.

Time ~ 2 hours

Arrival: 15- 20 minutes- Players choose their characters and make connections.

Conflict: 45 -60 minutes- Characters pursue goals, interact, reveal secrets, and form or strain relationships. Collaborative effort to create their own graduation ceremony.

Graduation Ceremony & Final Speech: 30- 40 minutes- Ceremony setup, speeches, reading of the commencement speech.

Materials

- Rolled up paper to simulate diplomas. One for each person. Tied up with a small piece of rope or yarn.
- An envelope containing a print out of the provided commencement speech, or a copy of your own prepared beforehand.

Themes

- Finishing what you started
 - Building connections under pressure
 - Facing mortality
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Section 1: Character Selection & Connection Building (15 minutes)

Purpose:

To establish who each person is, their relationships, and the emotional texture of the group before the ceremony begins.

Setup:

- Lay out the character sheets in a stack or spread them face-up for players to choose from.
- Characters are intentionally open-ended: they may be any gender and may have any type of relationship to the others.
- Pre-casting is not required; players will collaboratively define details during setup.

Seating & Connections:

- Sit in a circle or around a table.
- The person to your right represents a strong connection, someone deeply significant to your character.
- The person directly across from you represents a weak connection, someone you know more distantly or casually.
- These connections can be positive or negative, but they should carry emotional potential.

Suggested Strong Connections:

- Current love interest
- Ex love interest
- Sibling
- Study partner
- Best friend
- Rival

Suggested Weak Connections:

Classmate
Exchange student host
Fraternity or club member
Dorm neighbor
Acquaintance from a shared course
Lab partner

Prompts for connections:

Take a few minutes to introduce yourselves in character. Discuss:

- How you met
- One thing you admire or envy about each other
- One memory that stands out between you

When everyone is ready, the facilitator (the Keeper or the last remaining authority figure) begins the session with a brief in-character welcome: the start of the game.

Section 2: Ceremony Planning and Conflicts (45–60 minutes)

Purpose:

To let the players decide whether and how to hold a graduation ceremony at the end of the world. This should feel like their idea, born from conversation, emotion, and memory rather than from any official prompt.

Set Up:

At the start of this section, the keeper (facilitator) does not suggest a ceremony. Instead, the Keeper might say something like:

“You’ve all gathered here because there’s nowhere else left to go. You wanted to be together, one last time.”

Then, the facilitator lets the players talk about their thesis, about lost friends, about the future that won’t happen. They can naturally bring up themes like:

- “We worked so hard for this degree...”
- “It’s not fair we don’t get to graduate.”
- “We should do something as a sendoff, maybe.”

If no one suggests a ceremony after 10 to 15 minutes, the facilitator can guide them there with questions “If this really is the end... what would you want your final act to be?” Usually, that’s enough for someone to say “We should hold one ourselves.” But if not, the facilitator can suggest it as a means of creating closure.

Once They Decide

When the players agree to hold a ceremony, that’s when the emotional heart of this section begins.

Encourage them to:

- Plan the event together: Who will speak? What music or readings? How formal should it be?
- Disagree: Is it worth it? Should it be joyful or solemn?
- Reflect: What does a degree mean if the world ends tomorrow?

These debates and choices are important for this section.

Facilitator Role

- Stay quiet unless the story stalls. Be engaging when asked for help, but let the players do most of the work.
- Offer small prompts as an observer or a teacher who’s lost for words too.
- Once they’ve started planning, you can note when the mood shifts toward hope or nostalgia.

Transition to Section 3

When the group's plan feels "ready" because they've chosen roles, written notes, or made symbolic gestures then the facilitator can officially start:

"Then it's decided. When you're ready... we'll begin."

The next section is the actual **ceremony**, where their plans are carried out and the speech is found.

Section 3: The Ceremony and the Final Speech (30–40 minutes)

Purpose:

To let the players carry out their self-made graduation ceremony a moment of bittersweet defiance and hope. The ceremony may be messy, heartfelt, or awkward, but it represents humanity's final attempt to create meaning. During this, someone discovers and reads aloud the previous year's commencement speech.

This section should feel quiet, reverent, and full of small gestures that mean everything. Encourage silence, eye contact, and the weight of words. The world outside is ending, but inside, they've chosen dignity, ritual, and remembrance.

Let them lead. They decide the order, who speaks, what's said. The facilitator can simply observe, perhaps lighting a candle or handing out paper diplomas, but does not control the ceremony.

The group transitions from planning to performing their improvised ceremony. Players may:

- Deliver brief improvised speeches.
- Present each other with "degrees."
- Play music, recite a poem, share a memory.
- Honor those who didn't survive long enough to see this day.

Encourage players to embrace imperfection. This ceremony is meant to feel fragile, improvised, and human.

Facilitator's Final Role:

Once the ceremony winds down or the players naturally fall silent, the facilitator steps forward and takes out a folded, worn copy of last year's commencement speech and reads it aloud. The speech should be full of optimism, faith in the future, and excitement about what's to come, a painful contrast to the players' reality.

When the speech ends, the facilitator thanks everyone quietly. Play ends in silence.

CHARACTERS:

The Keeper (Facilitator Character)

Role: The last remaining faculty member

Overview:

Once a respected professor, librarian, or advisor, The Keeper has stayed behind as the university fell silent. They believe it is their duty to help the final students finish what they started, even if the world outside is ending. Their authority means little now, but their compassion still matters. They are here not to lead, but to hold space to make sure these final hours mean something.

Motivations:

- To give their students closure, however small.
- To find dignity in the end.
- To keep despair from consuming the group.

Notes:

You are the emotional anchor. Guide discussion gently, ask questions that invite reflection, and ensure everyone has space to speak. You hold the final speech until the end because it is your burden and your gift. When you read it, you do not explain or interpret it. You simply let the words fall into silence.

The Rebel

Role: A student who resists authority and challenges tradition.

Overview:

The Rebel has always questioned rules and pushed boundaries. Even as the world ends, they refuse to follow scripts or ceremonies without adding their own flair. They spark debate, inspire others, and sometimes create tension.

Motivations:

- To leave a mark before everything ends.
- To resist conformity, even in the smallest ways.
- To test limits of friendship and trust one last time.

Degree: Political Science or Philosophy

Notes:

Encourage conflict and discussion, but avoid dominating the scene. Use humor, mischief, or daring gestures to draw others out. Your energy can ignite group dynamics or reveal hidden tensions.

The Overachiever

Role: A high-achieving, over-prepared student.

Overview:

The Overachiever has excelled in every subject, mastered every skill, and always sought perfection. Now, with the end imminent, they wrestle with meaning and whether any achievement matters.

Motivations:

- To finish what they started flawlessly.
- To prove that effort still counts, even in the end.
- To support others with knowledge and skill.

Degree: Engineering, Math, or Computer Science

Notes:

You can take initiative, offer solutions, and help organize the ceremony, but beware perfectionism creating tension with less meticulous students.

The Dreamer

Role: A student clinging to hope and naïve optimism.

Overview:

The Dreamer believes, against all odds, that they might survive the end. They imagine futures beyond the university walls, convinced that life will go on. Their innocence and hope can inspire others, but also clash painfully with reality.

Motivations:

- To imagine a future that may never exist.
- To connect emotionally through hope and stories of “what could be.”
- To cling to life, even when the end is near.

Degree: Literature, Art, or Creative Writing

Notes:

Use optimism, wide-eyed gestures, and hopeful language. Your naivety can spark conversation, tension, or bittersweet moments when confronted by reality.

The Revolutionary

Role: A student determined to challenge the world, even as it ends.

Overview:

The Revolutionary has always fought against systems they see as flawed or oppressive. Even as humanity collapses, they refuse to accept the inevitable quietly. They seek to disrupt, question, and inspire change even if the world will never survive to see it.

Motivations:

- To leave a mark on the world, however fleeting.
- To challenge authority, tradition, and accepted norms.
- To ignite thought, reflection, or action in others before it's too late.

Degree: Sociology, Political Science, or History

Notes:

Push conversations, question decisions, and provoke debate but remember the stakes are final. Your energy can inspire, frustrate, or unite, depending on how others respond. Use dramatic gestures, slogans, or symbolic actions to make your impact felt.

The Socialite

Role: A student obsessed with status, appearances, and prestige.

Overview:

The Socialite values reputation, recognition, and social hierarchy, even as the world ends. They cling to manners, etiquette, and proper ceremony, judging others quietly or openly. Their obsession with appearances masks fear, vulnerability, and a desperate desire for control in a collapsing world.

Motivations:

- To maintain dignity and standards until the very end.
- To be recognized as worthy or exceptional.
- To assert superiority over those they deem careless or unrefined.

Degree: Business, Economics, or Art History

Notes:

Use subtle condescension, sharp observations, or pointed remarks to influence group dynamics. Your insistence on order or tradition can create tension but may also guide the ceremony if others falter.

The Survivor

Role: A student practical to a fault, obsessed with staying alive.

Overview:

The Survivor believes some part of them might make it through the disaster. They focus on pragmatic solutions, often clashing with those who are sentimental or idealistic.

Motivations:

- To prepare for survival, even if improbable.
- To protect themselves and others where possible.
- To assert control when all else feels chaotic.

Degree: Biology, Environmental Science, or Pre-Med

Notes:

Use logic, planning, and practicality. Your skepticism and focus on survival will contrast with the harsh reality.

The Trickster

Role: A playful, mischievous student who uses humor to cope.

Overview:

The Trickster masks fear and despair with jokes, pranks, and irreverence. Their humor can lighten the mood or irritate others. They see absurdity in everything, even in the apocalypse.

Motivations:

- To make the final days bearable through humor.
- To provoke reactions and reveal hidden truths.
- To maintain a sense of personal freedom.

Degree: Theater, Performance, or Psychology

Notes:

Playfully challenge other characters, use wit to shift emotional weight, and help diffuse tension when needed but don't undermine the ceremony's poignancy.

The Lost

Role: A student overwhelmed by grief, regret, or indecision.

Overview:

The Lost struggles to find purpose in the final days. They may have abandoned ambition, lost friends, or failed to act when it mattered. Their melancholy can pull others into reflection, sorrow, or protective instincts.

Motivations:

- To reconcile with past mistakes.
- To feel some small sense of meaning before it's too late.
- To find a connection in the midst of despair.

Degree: Philosophy, History, or Humanities

Notes:

Use hesitation, quiet reflection, or confession to evoke emotion. Your struggle can provoke reactions or drive other characters to take action.

The Yearner

Role: A student consumed by longing and unfulfilled desires.

Overview:

The Yearner craves connection, understanding, or love that may never come. They are aware of the world's end, but cannot let go of what they've always hoped for. Their quiet desperation adds a bittersweet tension, touching others' hearts and revealing what they themselves might regret.

Motivations:

- To seek emotional connection or reconciliation before it's too late.
- To express feelings that have been unspoken for too long.
- To face the reality that some desires may never be fulfilled.

Degree: Literature, Music, or Philosophy

Notes:

Use subtle gestures, longing glances, or quiet confessions. Your presence evokes empathy and reflection, contrasting with other more sharp characters.

The Commensement Speech:

Feel free to use this provided speech, or use a real world one that you like. You can also write your own.

If writing your own, it is recommended that for the most emotional impact, make sure the speech makes no reference to any disaster or end of the world. Write it with optimism and hope for the future.

"Graduates, today we gather to celebrate the remarkable journey each of you has undertaken. You have faced challenges, wrestled with uncertainty, and pushed yourselves beyond what you thought possible. And now, at the culmination of your studies, you stand ready to step into a world full of promise, equipped not just with knowledge, but with courage, creativity, and heart."

"In the years ahead, you will encounter triumphs yet unimagined, and moments of doubt yet unfelt. You will meet people who inspire you, challenge you, and change the course of your life. Remember this: success is not measured only in titles or accolades, but in the curiosity you pursue, the kindness you show, and the impact you leave on the lives of others."

"Take risks, even when the outcome is uncertain. Embrace failure as a guide, and cherish every fleeting victory. Let friendship, love, and laughter light the path before you. These are the moments that will shape your story, the moments that will live on long after today."

"Imagine the future you will build: the discoveries, the inventions, the stories yet told, the people you will touch. Dream boldly. Strive tirelessly. Know that the world is waiting for your ideas, your passion, your courage."

"And though today is a beginning, remember that the path ahead is yours to shape. Every choice, every risk, every act of kindness and bravery will echo far beyond this moment. You are capable of greatness in ways you cannot yet see, and the world will be brighter for it."

"Congratulations, graduates. Step forward with hope, with joy, and with the certainty that your future is boundless. Carry these lessons, carry these dreams, and may you always remember the possibilities that await you."

"Congratulations, class of ####! (the year before this LARP is played)"