



a quiet place in hell

an american freeform role-playing game for
3-9 players lasting no longer than 2 hours

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conceived according to the **con**fining,
constricting, **con**fabulated **con**straints of
the golden cobra **con**test

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premise:

the bad news?

you have all recently died
and are now sentenced to
eternal damnation.

the good news?

you have been permitted to
enter hell's real estate
market and purchase
yourself suitable housing
for at least a *little*
reprieve from all the
torment.

the problem?

not all quiet places are
created equal.

overview:

2-8 players take on the
roles of the **recently
deceased (RD)**, who are
looking for a place to call
home in the afterlife. one
player assumes the role of
hell's realtor (HR), who is
ambivalent about whether or
not these RDs actually get
what they want. players co-
create RD characters as
well as the kind of houses
these characters would like
to buy. in-character, the
HR assembles the
prospective buyers into a
pack and leads them on a
tour of each property. then
the HR auctions off the
properties for immaterial
goods. who knows if anyone
will get what they want.

materials required:

- the printed characters
- printed house sheets
(enough for all players)
- some pencils and maybe
some crayons - i dunno
- bowtie or devil horns for
the HR (optional)
- furniture and other
objects to move through

preliminaries:

a quiet place in hell is a
collaborative storytelling
game to be role-played
mostly standing up. pretend
you are (mostly) awful
people other than
yourselves, but be mindful
of the *real* people playing
the game with you. say the
word 'cut' if a scene
should stop due to its
content. say the word
'brake' when you feel like
another player is coming on
too strong. these words
will be respected by all.
please ask for consent
before making physical
contact with anyone, and
actual physical horseplay
is discouraged. the shared
imaginary of the game is
co-created between the
players, which means
players should listen to
each other, and say "yes"
to their creative
contributions. it is each
player's job to make the
other players look more
awesome and in-character.
and i can't believe i even
have to say this, but: play
to lose, all while looking
like you're playing to win.
it's better that way.

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the game itself:

- figure out how many players are playing and who is playing **hell's realtor (HR)**. chances are it's the person running the game.
- warm-up: breathe in and out as one group. now close your eyes and briefly contemplate your own demise. it's getting closer. breathe in and out again.
- HR should read and fill out the HR sheet. everyone else is a **recently deceased (RD)** and should pick up a character sheet at random. things probably look pretty bleak for this character. that's why s/he is in hell.
- the HR fills out her/his sheet, publicly noting the covert agenda and clarifying her/his responsibilities to the group.
- the RDs fill out their sheet as follows: they give the poor soul a name, then they pick a player nearby and ask if they could fill in an adjective or a short statement after the "i am..." or "but..." prompts. the RD player then fills out the one remaining. once this is done, each player draws a picture of their RD's dream house on a sheet provided to them. the players then write 3 home characteristics their RD would find ideal. another RD player then takes that sheet and puts down 3 major flaws that home has. these describe the homes on the market exactly.
- finally, the HR and RDs introduce themselves in character, as if at a real estate meeting. but since everyone is extra candid in hell, each RD and HR names the one RD s/he likes, and which one s/he dislikes. oops.
- role-play begins. the HR talks with the clients as a group and tries to get to know their situation in hell. affinities and enmities should be acted upon, agendas and characteristics demonstrated.
- then the HR shows the RDs the various houses. demarcate this using objects and furniture in space. make it real for everyone involved. HR will talk up the place, RDs will figure out where they stand.
- the tours may or may not hit all the houses 20 minutes before the end of the game, when the auction **must** begin. (Keep strict 2-hour time)
- HR runs the auction according to her/his instructions.
- debrief and cooldown: talk about your character's experiences in hell.



example character/house creation:

pam is playing the unloved RD (caleb), chris the mistaken RD (ms. franks). chris and pam swap character sheets: chris writing "i am at the brink of my wits" to describe caleb, while pam writes "but wise beyond her years" to describe ms. franks. They swap back and write their own entries. caleb is now at the brink of his wits but zen about it. ms. franks is quietly deceased but wise beyond her years. the respective players draw their houses. similar swaps, happen only now the players just write the "but..." statements on the houses. a cozy, centrally-located toadstool hut with a functional bathroom is also ugly, full of rats, and next to some really noisy devil kids.



hell's realtor (HR) -- name:

circle an overt agenda

- to punish the RDs --to let the RDs decide their fate
- to seduce the RDs --to serve satan
- to take pity on the RDs --to be the real master here

circle a covert agenda

- to punish the RDs --to let the RDs decide their fate
- to seduce the RDs --to serve satan
- to take pity on the RDs --to be the real master here

i feel an affinity with _____ (an unexpected RD) because...

i feel enmity towards _____ (an unsuspecting RD) because...

as a player, i am in charge. i have to keep the game's momentum up. i will also moderate disputes when they arise. i will help players when they are stuck on some procedure and just make the call, if necessary.

as the HR, i will mercilessly sell the RDs hell's real estate. i will not let any of them walk away without having made a devil's bargain for their desired property. i will openly play my overt agenda; covert agendas are for irony.

i am to first discuss the RDs' needs and wants as new souls in hell, and help establish aspects of our imaginary of hell that we will then embellish upon and reincorporate later. maybe hell is a very cold place? maybe they have soirées?

then i will show the RDs the properties that they themselves co-created. these are nasty places that i need to make seem charming. i will describe the imaginary space in loving detail: "here's a lovely mantelpiece left by the previous owner, oops, pardon the smell, anyway...") make sure i physically guide the players through the space with your arms, face and body. i must answer all RD questions with some (distorted?) version of the truth. i'll be openly preferential, and i don't always have to get to the next house right away.

once all the houses have been shown or it's 20 minutes from the end of the game, i'll gather the RDs in my "office" and decide arbitrarily who gets the first pick of the houses. there may be screaming about "fairness," but i'll ignore it. if the house actually happens to be the house designed by the original player, then i will make the bargain particularly ruthless: as souls, they can only trade immaterial things like "their courage" or "their love of dogs" or whatever. i'll extract whatever value i can from them, based on my agendas.

once each RD has had a chance to buy their house, i'll have them all go to their respective houses (if they got one) and quietly savor their reactions to them.



the unloved -- recently deceased (RD)
name:

i am in hell because i was forgotten.
i cannot feel any flowers on my grave.
why is it so cold down here?
i want other humans, but not like this.
help me.

i am...

but...

i feel an affinity with _____ (another RD) because...

i feel enmity towards _____ (another RD) because...

as a player, i am responsible for helping make things vivid and interesting for others by portraying a character with emotional depth who is also at once immediately legible. if my interior thoughts aren't clear to others, i can just put my finger to my forehead and give a brief monolog to let others hear my RD's thoughts.

as a RD, i will pursue what i perceive to be my agendas with regard to getting the best possible house. since i am only a soul now, whatever i trade for the house will have to be deeply personal, some pivotal part of myself. but maybe i don't care so much about that old life anymore. i want some reprieve from hell's eternal torments too!

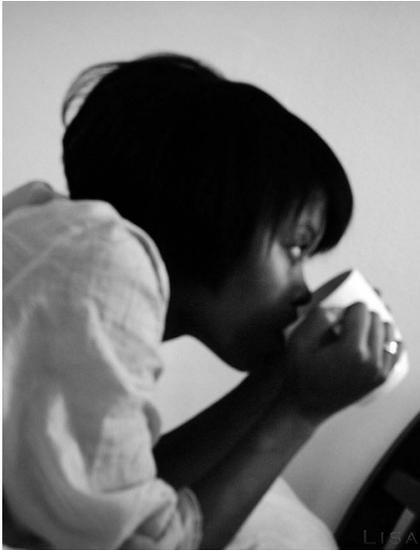
when i visit a house, i will ask questions with regard to a house's common areas and potential gathering points. there must be some way to build community, and i will find it.

when i get irritated with another RD, i remind her/him that s/he was once part of a family, one that loved them, and why can't they understand that they are only thinking of themselves?

at some point, i will likely take my own personal journey through the house. leave the group, run my fingers along the walls. and then i'll wonder why no one is paying any attention to me anyway.

at the auction, i am most likely to trade my sense of self for the house. it doesn't do me any good. i want to only think of others.

i believe it will be an actual auction, and not an arbitrary decision on the part of the HR.



the sighing one -- recently deceased name:

i am in hell because i want everything just right. i take only a grande latte with a little sugar. anything else, and what's the point? i am a moderate person, and the world can moderate itself to accommodate me. right?

i am...

but...

i feel an affinity with _____ (another RD) because...

i feel enmity towards _____ (another RD) because...

as a player, i am responsible for helping make things vivid and interesting for others by portraying a character with emotional depth who is also at once immediately legible. if my interior thoughts aren't clear to others, i can just put my finger to my forehead and give a brief monolog to let others hear my RD's thoughts.

as a RD, i will pursue what i perceive to be my agendas with regard to getting the best possible house. since i am only a soul now, whatever i trade for the house will have to be deeply personal, some pivotal part of myself. but maybe i don't care so much about that old life anymore. i want some reprieve from hell's eternal torments too!

when i visit a house, i will ask questions with regard to a house's conformity to my own personal standards. the doors must be exactly right. there should be a certain kind of marble counter-top. the chair cannot go *there*. settling for anything less would be *losing*.

when i get irritated with another RD, i throw a quiet-but-passionate fit, balling up my fists and then saying statements beginning with the words "i only wanted..." or "i just came here to..."

at some point, i will likely make minor adjustments to a house that we are touring in order to better fit my own standards. i will make sure another RD sees me when i do this.

at the auction, i am most likely to trade very specific memories of certain relatives who are both irrelevant and probably worth very little anyway. i believe it will be a fair auction.



the possessor -- recently deceased name:

i am in hell because whatever my neighbor has, i want. i only love to hold the things that are dear to others, and why do they deserve them anyway? i punish the world's materialists by coveting their stuff myself.

i am...

but...

i feel an affinity with _____ (another RD) because...

i feel enmity towards _____ (another RD) because...

as a player, i am responsible for helping make things vivid and interesting for others by portraying a character with emotional depth who is also at once immediately legible. if my interior thoughts aren't clear to others, i can just put my finger to my forehead and give a brief monolog to let others hear my RD's thoughts.

as a RD, i will pursue what i perceive to be my agendas with regard to getting the best possible house. since i am only a soul now, whatever i trade for the house will have to be deeply personal, some pivotal part of myself. but maybe i don't care so much about that old life anymore. i want some reprieve from hell's eternal torments too!

when i visit a house, i will ask questions with regard to a house's ability to store stuff. i want to take all the items from hells' residents too, and what places one has to put stolen silverware and magazines is an important factor.

when i get irritated with another RD, i will obsessively do petty things to them, even after it's no longer funny. this will only happen once, and then i will doggedly pursue this individual to the bitter, bitter end.

at some point, i will likely covet the house that another RD appears to like a lot. i will become obsessed with this house, and do everything in my power to suck up to the HR and get a better place in line so i can take the house away from this RD. just to see the look on her/his face.

at the auction, i am most likely to trade anything i've got for the house from someone else. anything they're willing to trade, i can one-up it. i don't even want to touch my "ideal" house, whatever that is.



the angry drunk -- recently deceased name:

i am in hell because - aw, shit - everyone knows there are 2 things i can't control: my liquor intake and my temper. beings sober is terrible, and i will take it out on all these miserable beings around me.

i am...

but...

i feel an affinity with _____ (another RD) because...

i feel enmity towards _____ (another RD) because...

as a player, i am responsible for helping make things vivid and interesting for others by portraying a character with emotional depth who is also at once immediately legible. if my interior thoughts aren't clear to others, i can just put my finger to my forehead and give a brief monolog to let others hear my RD's thoughts.

as a RD, i will pursue what i perceive to be my agendas with regard to getting the best possible house. since i am only a soul now, whatever i trade for the house will have to be deeply personal, some pivotal part of myself. but maybe i don't care so much about that old life anymore. i want some reprieve from hell's eternal torments too!

when i visit a house, i will ask questions regarding a house's interior decorations and use them as inspiration to remember incidents of unpleasantness at home, probably caused by my alcohol abuse. i will make everything in a house personal.

when i get irritated with another RD, i start talking very calmly, and then gradually begin to raise my voice, until suddenly i'm talking very loud and i am getting red in the face and...

at some point, i will likely take a swing at someone and miss and then profusely apologize and blame it on the lack of alcohol

at the auction, i am most likely to trade my memories themselves for the house in question. i don't think it'll be a fair auction at all.



the party guy -- recently deceased name:

i am in hell because i just liked to have a good time. i always believed that god wanted us to enjoy ourselves in our limited time on earth. but apparently not. whoops. my bad.

i am...

but...

i feel an affinity with _____ (another RD) because...

i feel enmity towards _____ (another RD) because...

as a player, i am responsible for helping make things vivid and interesting for others by portraying a character with emotional depth who is also at once immediately legible. if my interior thoughts aren't clear to others, i can just put my finger to my forehead and give a brief monolog to let others hear my RD's thoughts.

as a RD, i will pursue what i perceive to be my agendas with regard to getting the best possible house. since i am only a soul now, whatever i trade for the house will have to be deeply personal, some pivotal part of myself. but maybe i don't care so much about that old life anymore. i want some reprieve from hell's eternal torments too!

when i visit a house, i will ask questions with regard to a house's party potential. is there a pool? how many bedrooms are there for you-know-what? can you do keg-stands out back? i will come across as very shallow, and relish in it.

when i get irritated with another RD, i just chill the fuck out, drop my hands to my sides, and just start telling the *other* guy/girl to chill the fuck out too. this doesn't have to get out of hand, y'know?

at some point, i will likely flirt with numerous other RDs, because they're there, y'know? any gender, any persuasion. it's all part of the fun.

at the auction, i am most likely to trade my soul for the party space. i don't quite know what i'm getting myself into, and am probably in waaay over my head. i think there will be a fair auction.



the sociopath -- recently deceased
name:

i am in hell because i could not feel
anything anymore. it wasn't a conscious
choice, but i gradually lost touch and then
started to hurt others... but who *really*
cares about others, I mean honestly?

i am...

but...

i feel an affinity with _____ (another RD) because...

i feel enmity towards _____ (another RD) because...

as a player, i am responsible for helping make things vivid and interesting for others by portraying a character with emotional depth who is also at once immediately legible. if my interior thoughts aren't clear to others, i can just put my finger to my forehead and give a brief monolog to let others hear my RD's thoughts.

as a RD, i will pursue what i perceive to be my agendas with regard to getting the best possible house. since i am only a soul now, whatever i trade for the house will have to be deeply personal, some pivotal part of myself. but maybe i don't care so much about that old life anymore. i want some reprieve from hell's eternal torments too!

when i visit a house, i will ask questions with regard to a house's pretty parts and practical parts. i will mimic the other, "normal" people as they ask their questions and try to act like i am concerned about similar aspects of the house. i am normal, obviously.

when i get irritated with another RD, i tend to make cold, deadly threats, though really i don't think i mean them.

at some point, i will likely find little reason to keep up this exhausting performance anymore and let my "real" persona show, in all its horrific glory, for at least a second or two. that will show them.

at the auction, i am most likely to trade any useless aspects of myself for a house. it depends on what i find useless, doesn't it? the auction will likely be unfair, but that's human nature for you.



the rising star -- recently deceased name:

i am in hell because life is unfair. i was at the top of my game, pursuing and living the dream, when it all came tumbling down around me. but i didn't tumble. i rose to the occasion. like i'm doing right now.

i am...

but...

i feel an affinity with _____ (another RD) because...

i feel enmity towards _____ (another RD) because...

as a player, i am responsible for helping make things vivid and interesting for others by portraying a character with emotional depth who is also at once immediately legible. if my interior thoughts aren't clear to others, i can just put my finger to my forehead and give a brief monolog to let others hear my RD's thoughts.

as a RD, i will pursue what i perceive to be my agendas with regard to getting the best possible house. since i am only a soul now, whatever i trade for the house will have to be deeply personal, some pivotal part of myself. but maybe i don't care so much about that old life anymore. i want some reprieve from hell's eternal torments too!

when i visit a house, i will ask questions with regard to a house's general livability, its protection from spying paparazzi, and its general abilities to grant one temporary respite from torment. i am all about the creature comforts, but it has to be a sturdy structure too.

when i get irritated with another RD, i just ignore him/her when s/he speaks and speak to others past him/her as though they were the only people there. later, we will have a dramatic make-up scene where i will - sincerely - apologize for my behavior, but still in a kind of passive-aggressive way.

at some point, i will likely talk about my career, all the things i lost when i died, and the fact that this hell joint blows.

at the auction, i am most likely to trade my talent for the house. because who needs talent in this place, especially when no one important is there to see it?



the mistaken -- recently deceased (RD)
name:

i am in hell because they have the wrong
person. i mean, there was an actual
bureaucratic error and the demon said it
would get fixed soon and now they're trying
to make good by selling me some house. what?

i am...

but...

i feel an affinity with _____ (another RD) because...

i feel enmity towards _____ (another RD) because...

as a player, i am responsible for helping make things vivid and interesting for others by portraying a character with emotional depth who is also at once immediately legible. if my interior thoughts aren't clear to others, i can just put my finger to my forehead and give a brief monolog to let others hear my RD's thoughts.

as a RD, i will pursue what i perceive to be my agendas with regard to getting the best possible house. since i am only a soul now, whatever i trade for the house will have to be deeply personal, some pivotal part of myself. but maybe i don't care so much about that old life anymore. i want some reprieve from hell's eternal torments too!

when i visit a house, i will ask questions with regard to a house's bureaucratic entanglements. what are the odd legal & insurance-related restrictions that might get it taken away from me? will a roof inspection be included in the closing? what are the realtor's terms? i have become very legalistic and i need to know the hard facts.

when i get irritated with another RD, i throw up my hands and shout: "i'm not even supposed to be here!"

at some point, i will likely see if i can build some sort of solidarity among sympathetic RDs so that we can mount a revolt against satan. of course, it's mostly just a way of rebuilding my self-esteem amidst all this duress, but i ... just ... can't take it ... much longer.

at the auction, i am most likely to try some tricky legalistic maneuver and trade the option to buy the house so that i can get one step closer to remedying this mistaken existence of mine in hell.

draw your ideal home (in hell)

This house is...

-

and...

-

and...

-

but its problems
are...

-

and...

-

and...

-