

The World's End

Take a moment to remember your friends and your family. All of your loved ones, pets, distant relatives and school chums.

Now stop.

Forget about them.

They're gone.

You can't find them. You can't save them. You will never see them again. Ever.

The sooner you reconcile yourself to that, the better off you'll be.

The rest of us too.

If this is your first time, then I am sorry. This is a tale of the world's end and such are rarely full of joy and merriment. But enough, let us prepare.

Dig up a deck of playing cards and spread them out on the table. Separate the face cards, put the Kings and Queens in one pile, the Jacks in another. Discard the Jokers - I recommend burning them; their brand of humor no longer has any place. The Kings and Queens become the forces that shape destiny.

In black, sew the eyes of the King of Spades shut - he is now **the Sinner**.

In red, reveal the blood upon the sword of the King of Clubs - he is now **the Murderer**.

In black, fill in the of the Queen of Hearts and blacken her rose - she is now **the Widow**.

In red, color the cheeks, lips and fingernails of the Queen of Clubs - she is now **the Lady**.

In black, darken the stave of the Queen of Spades and in red color her hair - she is now **the Witch**.

In black, fill in the crown, hair and upper vestments of the King of Diamonds - he is now **the Headsman**.

In red, color the regalia of the King of Hearts - he is now **the Corpse**.

In red, color the eyes of the Queen of Diamonds, in black show her claws, in white, erase the top half of her ostentatious symbol and, in red, draw in the other half of an hourglass at each - she is now **the Spider**.

Once the cards are dry of their secundines, you may begin. Spread the forces in your hand and have each other player draw two - they may not look at the cards until they have chosen. Write down the cards that you receive, you must remember them. From now on these two forces are your ambit and those acting on them will be appealing to you.

The Sinner watches over the evils of the flesh, speak to him when you act selfishly, with greed or lust.

The Murderer is all of wrath and violence and naught else.

The Widow remembers her love and will only speak to you of yours.

The Lady charms all she meets and will aid in you in doing the same.

The Witch divines the true nature of things, knowledge is her price.

The Headsman knows only his duty and will see it through to the end.

The Corpse - it is said that only the good die young, pray you need not sacrifice yourself as he did.

The Spider lies, schemes and manipulates those around her to achieve her goals.

Once this is done, gather the forces together and mix them up. Take four and shuffle them into the main deck, then deal eleven cards and a Jack to each player, face down. Jack shall be your constant companion until the tick of the clock. You must seek gather his suit into

your hand by trading cards with the others.

Take the clock down from the wall and sever it from its source of power. Time is at your mercy. Set the hands of the clock at five minutes to midnight. The end draws near now, and there is little that can be done. Draw the curtains. Lock the doors. Unplug the phone. Make sure there is no one else in the house. It is time to begin.

Tell us then, how it was that the world ended. Tell us of the men and of the women.

Of the towns and shops.

Of the broken vials and the marching armies.

Of famine and death and their companions.

Of hearts broken and lives lost and a world led down the path of ruin.

It is through the actions of people that it came to pass. You know of one such and you shall speak as them until the clock's hands meet again - tell us their name. They have wronged another already, tell us who, and why. All must do this and one must keep a of the ties of blood, love and duty thus spake.

In matters of cards, the Ace of Spades is as of the hand of God; whomsoever holds it shall reveal it to all, replace it in his hand, and tell the beginning of the tale. Draw upon the record for participants or create more anew - though all must be bound to one known to us as before, with blood, love, duty or through the wrongs one man can do upon another. New names shall be writ on the record, for they shall not be spared when judgment calls.

Always you, and only you, shall speak as the one whom you first described. The others will speak as those whom they meet, slay, lie with, or otherwise encounter. Tell of their actions, how they strive and struggle. As you do, you will make an appeal to one of the others - to the forces they control - when you act in accordance with their motivations or through their means. They shall judge how strongly allied your actions are with their quarter and pass you cards from their hand equaling one, two or, for the deepest alignments, three. Never shall cards be thus passed that belong to the Jack with whom they already abide.

After each appeal is answered, one of the others will speak and make an appeal and thus shall it continue. As the story is told you will seek to gather Jack's court to you, and to match them with any one of the four forces that are unleashed in the world. When this done, whether you seek the trade or answer to it, you must declare yourself to the others and show them your complement - it is time for the act to close.

You will all lay your cards before you, a reckoning is to be had. If your hand is found in want, ill fortune will befall you. The ascendant force, found in the only hand of eleven consonant cards, shall act on each of the players in accordance with their lack. If only one or two cards are missing from their suit, minor ill fortune will befall them; if three or four cards, then a disaster of great proportions will occur; and if 5 or more cards, then the wrathful force shall bring down a great calamity. When the time comes, the others shall judge the severity of misfortune and their assessment must be upheld. Notate this portent, that it might not be forgotten, it must come to pass before the end of the next act.

Additionally, should your hand contain one of the other forces, you must repay your failure to it. The forces act in concert or in solitude, and you may find yourself to many. Notate these debts, that they might not be forgotten. During the next act the other who stands for that force must call in the debt. He tells of how that force acted upon you to advance the oncoming doom.

Five times will you shuffle, appeal and trade, for after the fifth, the forces, once multifarious, shall be in want to complete the deck. The five forces thus chosen reveal the fate of this world. Each has their own part to play in this end of days and each will tick the hand of the clock forward once. The chiming of midnight has ever been destined for the world's final moments.

During the first act, you introduce the principals and show the world how it once was. At its conclusion, the first force ascendant sews the seeds of coming doom and shows them to we who observe and recount. Place it in the center of the table, immediately beneath the clock, at the head of the forming cross.

During the second act, the dramas we have seen blithely continue, though forces beyond their control begin to show their ties and the seeds of the end have been sewn. At its conclusion, the second force ascendant tips the hand of fate to a single soul who rarely comprehends the true severity of what he has seen. Place it beneath the first; it is the crosspiece of the forming cross.

During the third act, the seeds will grow and tremors in the doomed Earth will be felt by all, Cassandra may speak, but few will listen. At its conclusion, the third force ascendant nurtures the apocalypse into full bloom and displays it to all. Place it beneath the second, at the base of the forming cross.

During the fourth act the coming armageddon weighs upon the people, they will scramble to make amends or to make peace, some will square up and continue grimly forward. At its conclusion, the fourth force ascendant tips the world over the brink. Place it to the dexter of the crosspiece, as one arm of the forming cross.

During the fifth act, the world is in flames and will stand no longer - speak of the endings, closure to be had and threads left hanging from blood and flame. At its conclusion, the fifth force ascendant snuffs the flames and the world is still again. Place it at the sinister of the crosspiece, completing the forming cross.

As you place the ascendant force, one of the others shall tick the clock. Excepting the fifth act, mix the remaining forces and draw out four at random to shuffle into the next act; also mix and re-deal the Jacks. Do these things as you tell the climax of each act together, the worsening of the storm and its impact on those helpless before it. All may speak at this time, together or in turns, until the force has had its way.

Open the curtains and let the light in. Plug in the phone again. Set the clock. It is done and probably for the best. If you have learned anything, best to remember if you can.

Thus has it come to pass that all that was and all that was built and all those who lived did come to their end.

But was is this? A remnant of the past? A shred of life sheltered? A seed to be nurtured and possibly bought to bloom?

Perhaps.

But that must be a tale for another time, for midnight is come and this tale is now told.