

410[GONE]

BY FRANCES YA-CHU COWHIG



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PLAY SERVICE
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410[GONE] was originally produced by Crowded Fire Theater (Marissa Wolf, Artistic Director) in San Francisco, California, on June 10, 2013. It was directed by Evren Odcikin; the set design was by Evren Odcikin; the costume design was by Keiko Shimosato Carreiro; the sound design was by Sara Huddleston; the lighting design was by Stephanie Buchner; the prop design was by Devon LaBelle; the video design was by Wesley Cabral; the animation design was by Goose Manriquez; and the production manager was Stephanie Alyson Henderson. The cast was as follows:

TWENTY-ONE..... Cindy Im
SEVENTEEN.....Christopher James Cortez
OX-HEAD Michael Uy Kelly
THE GODDESS OF MERCY..... Charisse Loriaux
THE MONKEY KING.....Alexander M. Lydon

CHARACTERS

TWENTY-ONE — 21-year-old female. Chinese-American.

SEVENTEEN — 17-year-old male. Chinese-American.

OX-HEAD — Very tall and official-looking.

THE GODDESS OF MERCY — A secretly sadistic lady.

THE MONKEY KING — A sneaky fucker.

PLACE

A closet in the Land of the Living.
The Chinese Land of the Dead.

TIME

Now.

NOTES

The Land of the Dead resembles a disco, arcade, or pachinko parlor. It contains a claw-footed bathtub, a dance-game console, and seven telephones that light up instead of ringing. The Land of the Living is a closet suspended over the Land of the Dead. Ox-Head wears the long flowing robes of a magistrate and stands beneath the closet, guarding the boundary between the living and the dead.

The Goddess of Mercy wears a white ruffled dress and black stiletto boots. A paper Burger King crown is bonded to the Monkey King's forehead. It is the source of all his pain. Both wear Chinese opera makeup.

Objects in the Land of the Dead are larger than they might appear in the Land of the Living. They might also be pixelated.

In arcade dance-games such as DanceDance Revolution (DDR for short), players follow multi-directional arrows on a screen by dancing on a floor console. In the game of Mercy, two players grab each other's hands. On "go," each attempts to bend the other's hand, with the goal of inflicting pain. When a player can no longer stand it, he or she cries "mercy" and is defeated. In Bear-Ninja-Cowboy, two players stand back-to-back, take three paces away from each other, whirl around, and assume the posture of a bear, ninja, or cowboy. Bear beats ninja, cowboy shoots bear, ninja kills cowboy.

TEXT TO INCLUDE IN PROGRAM NOTES

WELCOME TO THE CHINESE LAND OF THE DEAD

“The Earth’s Deepest Retreat”

Whether you are an ancient spirit desiring rest and recreation or a tortured ghost seeking the solace of oblivion, your hosts will provide an experience free from the turbulent memories of previous lifetimes. Please take a moment to acquaint yourself with their personal histories:

The Goddess of Mercy [*Guan Yin*]: Her presence calms those who suffer, for she looks without judgment and does not believe in vengeance. Long qualified to enter Heaven, she chose to remain in the earthly realm until all beings have been liberated from the excruciating cycle of birth and rebirth.

The Monkey King [*Sun Wu Kong*]: Born from the loins of a rock and fertilized by the grace of Heaven, *Sun Wu Kong* (Monkey Aware of Emptiness) can transform into every form of existence. As punishment for erasing his name off the roster of the living and dead, the simian imbecile was banished to a mountain in Shandong Province for reeducation through labor.

Ox-Head [*Niu Tou*]: The bearer of the Soup of Forgetting, Ox-Head is the first person you will encounter as you cross the Bridge of Desperation, that great architectural wonder spanning the chasm between the agony of life and the rapturous void of death.

Thank you for choosing the Chinese Land of the Dead. We appreciate your business and hope you find your experience forgettable.

POSSIBLE PRE-SHOW SPEECH

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Land of Shade! As you turn off your phone and note the location of your nearest emergency exit, please take a moment to recall the face of a loved one you are about to forget. Thank you for dying! We know your karmic weight is of utmost concern and look forward to judging you in the near future. Have a nice stay!

410[GONE]

One

Twenty-One sits cross-legged in front of the closet. She records a video conversation with her laptop.

TWENTY-ONE. Hey. I keep sending you emails, hoping my words will seep into the collective consciousness of cyberspace and reach you. But my letters have started to bounce, and the only answer I get back is, "SYSTEM ERROR: MAILBOX FULL." When I try chat-messaging you, it says, "USER HAS GONE OFFLINE." I've called your cell so many times to hear you promise you'll get back to me as soon as you can. Now it says, "I'M SORRY, THIS MAILBOX IS NO LONGER IN SERVICE." I'm worried you might be getting my messages, but can't understand them because you don't speak the language of ones and zeros. So I bought you a book on binary code and will send it as soon as I figure out how. I compiled a questionnaire I'd appreciate you answering at your earliest convenience. Please write neatly and staple additional pages to the back should you run out of room in the space provided. QUESTION ONE: If you were born in America but your blood is Chinese, what language should my letters be in? TWO: If I want to make you more sandwiches, should I send bread and condiments separately, or assemble them myself before sending? THREE: What came first, kissing or killing? I found the detective kit you left me under the Halloween costumes. The magnifying glass, the specimen swabs, the fingerprint tape, and evidence bags — they're all there. Waiting to be used. I am pleased to report that after substantial deliberation, I have decided to take your case. I didn't win the Rose Hill Junior Sleuth competition three years in a row for nothing. I will take this mystery and make it my bitch. I will find you. We will grow old together. I promise.

Two

The Monkey King watches the Goddess of Mercy play a dancing game against a female avatar inside a screen. The Goddess of Mercy follows the Monkey King's instructions.

MONKEY KING. Triple North. South-West. Double East. East-West. South. South. North.

GODDESS OF MERCY. Are we there yet?

MONKEY KING. Double West. South-North. East. East. West.

GODDESS OF MERCY. Mortals shouldn't take more than one hundred steps in their lifetime.

MONKEY KING. South-West. Double North-East. West. West. *(The Goddess of Mercy stumbles. The avatar freezes.)*

GODDESS OF MERCY. Money-grubbing, goose-pimpled, faceless son of a turtle fart!

MONKEY KING. Control your emotions, or they will control you. *(A phone lights up.)* She who depends on herself will attain the greatest happiness.

GODDESS OF MERCY. One ... two ... *(The Monkey King answers the phone.)*

MONKEY KING. Chinese Land of the Dead. How may I direct your discomfort? *(Listens.)* Please hold. *(The Monkey King makes a throne with his body. The Goddess of Mercy sits in it and takes the phone.)*

GODDESS OF MERCY. Hello? *(Listens.)* This is she. *(Listens.)* If you jump off that roof, you'll be forced to repeat your death every day *ad infinitum* and never get reincarnated. It'll be *Groundhog Day* for your soul. *(Listens.)* Good mortal. Pain may not be optional, but suffering is. Remember the Second Noble Truth: Your unhappiness is caused by your cravings. Translation: You are making yourself miserable. SO QUIT IT! Stop wanting. Stop needing. Stop yearning. Stop pining. If you want to be more than toe-jam in your next life, count your blessings and look on the bright side. *(Hangs up phone.)* Stupid mortal. *(The Goddess of Mercy weighs the phone in her hand. A greedy smile spreads across her face.)* Harvest time. *(She hands the phone to the Monkey King. He unscrews the receiver and pulls out a large crystal.)*

410[GONE]

by Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig

3M, 2W

Where do we go when we die? In Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig's dark and dazzling 410[GONE], that all depends on how you play the game. The stakes couldn't be higher when a young woman goes in search of her lost brother in the Land of the Dead — a dominion ruled by the Chinese Goddess of Mercy and the Monkey King, where time is suspended, and an arcade dance console holds the key to transmigration. On this fantastical journey into the underworld, a sister and brother must face the ultimate question: If there is no love without pain, what does it mean to love?

"Death is a video game in Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig's quirky cross-cultural afterlife drama 410[GONE]. The idea might provide some comfort to a modern Chinese American youth newly arrived in the Chinese Land of the Dead, but it's easy to see why it's put the age-old Goddess of Mercy in an eternally foul mood ... Cowhig is a distinctively original writer with a brash, at times provocative style and a wit that can sneak up and catch you off-guard." —**SFGate.com**

"... mesmerizing ... This is a smart, funny play that, for all its edgy games, turns out to be a modern riff on Orpheus and Eurydice in which coming to terms with loss and trying to understand death turn it into a much more conventional (but no less moving) drama." —**TheaterDogs.net**

"410[GONE] re-organizes and layers familiar Asian American dramatic elements (traditional folk elements, etc.) and typical American experiences (fast food, etc.) to expose, but never define, Twenty-One's grief, Seventeen's spiritual dilemma, and a relationship between a brother and sister ... Frances' bricolage of imagery creates a cultural frame that is so emotionally accurate one forgets its critical role in creating the experience ... If you cry at this play, don't worry. It's just because it hurts so good." —**Hyphen Magazine**

Also by Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig
LIDLESS

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