

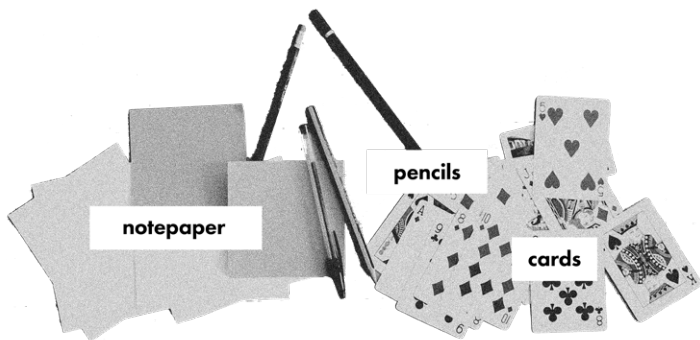
Ithaca

IN THE CARDS

A story game
of doomed travellers
for 2-5 players

You are fellow travellers on a perilous journey trying to make your way home. The goal of the game is to make it back safely. On your journey, you will encounter various challenges and reflect on what draws you home and spurs you on your journey.





This is a GM-less/GM-lite collaborative story game for 2-5 players. A game should take about 1-2 hours, and you will need a standard deck of playing cards, writing implements, and paper or index cards to play.



STARTING OUT

To begin, establish the setting of your journey. Together, describe why your group left home on a quest, how that quest ended, and why your journey back is dangerous. You may also use the following divinings by drawing cards from the deck:

What makes this journey dangerous?





 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a faulty time machine• unpredictable dimensional rifts• a mysterious stowaway	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a fighting retreat• a damaged vessel• threading a warzone
 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ascending the underworld• pursuit through the desert• unnatural terrain.	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• descending the summit• survived the wreckage• a quarantined vessel

CHARACTERS

Next, introduce your characters. Take a deck of cards and remove the Kings, Queens, Jacks, and Jokers. Each player chooses a King, Queen, or Jack to represent themselves. Set aside any unchosen King/Queen/Jack cards and the Jokers, which will not be used.

Describe your name, pronouns, look and your role in the group and write it down on an index card or sheet of paper. You may also use the following divinings by drawing cards from the deck:

Who are you?

 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• scientist• wizard• sapper• engineer	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• sailor• fighter• soldier• security officer
 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• doctor• cleric• medic• cultural liaison	 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• merchant• rogue• scout• captain

CHARACTERS (CONT.)

Remove the Aces from the deck and place them face-down within easy reach of all players. For an easier game, you may flip one or more Aces face-up. Shuffle the rest of the deck and place it in the centre of the playing space.

On each character's card/sheet, pick any 3 Assets from the following list for your character and describe them (the numbers can be used to randomise your Assets by drawing cards):

2	A physical trait that sets you apart; a blessing from birth
3	A treasure gained on your quest; novel and exciting
4	A trusted tool or weapon; heavily used but well-kept
5	A talent you've always been able to rely on; easy and familiar
6	A skill you've honed for many years; hard-won and reliable
7	A memento which has nourished you in your journey; comforting and personal
8	A secret you've discovered and kept; intriguing but dangerous
9	A bond with a fellow traveller; a comrade you can call upon
10	A conviction that guides you and others in difficult times; defining and influential

PLAY

You will play in rounds, with each round having 4 steps.

1. *Challenge*

Choose someone to begin the Challenge as Fate (in later rounds, this should be the player to the left of the previous Fate player). They draw and reveal a card from the deck to the centre of the playing space, adding it to any other previous Challenge cards. The sum of all Challenge cards drawn is the Challenge Value. They then describe what the Challenge is; a difficult situation that the group faces on their journey home.

If you're unsure, use these divinings based on the last drawn Challenge card:

2	Something breaks or is lost
3	Food or crucial resources become spoiled or damaged
4	Illness or fatigue overwhelms some or all of the group
5	Resentment boils over into a fight within the group, a mutiny occurs
6	Unexplained phenomena or supernatural forces impede you
7	The natural world defies you
8	Dangerous wildlife catches you unawares
9	Enemies launch an attack or an old foe reappears
10	Treachery from within, sabotage

Fate weaves the Challenge into the story so far, and invites the other players to elaborate on how the Challenge came to be and what each character's role could be in causing the Challenge or addressing it. Besides the player's characters, there could be other non-player characters on the same journey or in pursuit. Any player may introduce a new non-player character and say how they are involved in the challenge. Fate reminds the players how the Challenge prevents the group from reaching home unchanged.

2. *Response*

Starting with the player to the left of Fate and going clockwise, each player (including Fate) chooses how their character will respond to this Challenge.

- If you choose to face the Challenge head on, describe one of your character's skills, traits or Assets that your character is relying on to tackle this Challenge and then draw a card face-up into a stack in front of you. If you draw a 9 or 10, the Challenge also provides an opportunity to you in the form of a new Asset. You may link it to one of your existing Assets. Say what it is and write it down. Then discard the card and draw a new one. Before drawing, you may choose to Risk an Asset on this Challenge to draw two cards instead. State what Asset you are Risking and describe how your character acts in a courageous or desperate manner using this Asset. You may only Risk an Asset once per Challenge.
- If you choose to focus on something besides the Challenge, mark one of your Assets as Exhausted and flip an Ace over face-up. Do not draw any new cards. Describe what your character does instead of addressing the Challenge directly. This should involve them losing something in the process but also gaining something else that is useful for a future Challenge. An Exhausted Asset could mean it is lost, damaged or otherwise no longer reliable. This should tie into any other past Challenges or explore aspects of previous Reflections.
- If you choose to run from this Challenge and abandon your journey, then you never make it home. Discard all the cards in your stack.

Once everyone has chosen a response, Fate may then also choose to intervene. To do so, Fate may swap any one face-up Ace with the top card in any player's stack (the one most recently drawn). Aces always have a value of 1. The swapped card is shuffled back into the deck. Once Fate has chosen, move to the Resolution step.

3. *Resolution*

As a group, describe or play out a short scene focused on how your characters resolved the Challenge:

- If the sum of the cards in your personal stack has an equal or higher value than the total Challenge Value, or if Fate intervened to swap an Ace into your stack in this Challenge, you acquit yourself well. Describe what amazing feat you accomplished and the Assets you relied on that helped your group against the Challenge.
- If the sum of the cards in your personal stack has a lower value than the total Challenge Value, you lose something or are harmed in the process. Mark one of your Assets as Exhausted. If you had Risked an Asset, you also lose the mark an additional Asset as Exhausted. Describe how you either lose those Assets or how they were irreparably changed in this Challenge.
- If you chose to abandon your journey, describe why and how your character abandons the group and what they go on to do. You never make it home. Every other character describes how your leaving affected them. You may leave the game or stay to witness the end. You may still help in describing Challenges.

3. *Resolution (cont.)*

Check if any characters died or became lost, and if you have reached home:

- If the sum of all the cards in your stack is over 21 or all your Assets are Exhausted, your character is now dead or otherwise lost in the process of addressing this Challenge. Describe how your character died. Each surviving player describes how this loss affected them. Give your character card to a surviving player. It is now their character's responsibility to bring your body, ashes, or some memento of you home. You may haunt this player if they agree to it (Stand behind them; you may comment on their character's choices or offer advice; you may peek at the current top card of the deck at any time but you may not directly describe what the card is).

If all characters are dead, then you have failed on your journey home. Describe how your ghosts haunt this place.

- If the sum of the cards in any player's stack is exactly 21, or only one player survives, then your journey is over and you have reached home.
- Otherwise, you survive the Challenge, though maybe with some losses, and continue your journey.





Once you've finished your descriptions and scenes, move to the Reflection step.

4. *Reflection*

You will now discuss, describe, or play out short scenes that focus on an aspect of home that motivated your actions during the Challenge, or that the Challenge reminded you of, or are thematically linked to the Challenge. These could be set before, during, or after the Challenge itself.

Use the following prompts, based on the newest card in either your stack or the Challenge:

How does home sit heavy on your heart?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the future• stability to plan and build once you get home• things you're looking forward to doing at home• a goal you have
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• loved ones• friends and family• people and pets waiting for you back home• bonds you've made
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• something you've learned about yourself or your companions on this journey• how you're changing from the person you were when you left home• something you've gained
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• your past, legacies, and traditions• what you learned and carried with you from home that you want to maintain or has kept you going• something you've lost
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If your newest card is Even: Focus on a positive tone for your reflection (<i>hopeful, excited, thankful</i>)• If your newest card is Odd: Focus on a negative tone for your reflection (<i>dread, fear, anger</i>)	


If more than one player has the same prompt, those players may carry out their Reflection together. They may play out a shared scene where their characters address the prompt together.

If you have reached home in this round, describe instead what each of you do when you reach home: what you eat, who you see, where you go. If you carry another player's character card, describe also what you do with their remains or memento. If they were haunting you, they are now laid to rest and cease haunting you.

If you have reached home, you may additionally describe or play out a short scene that focuses on any one aspect of home that meant the most to your character now that they have reached home.

**Repeat rounds until either
everyone is dead
or you've reached home.**





Special thanks to Jeannie, my home and
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