



We Are Ciphers is a 2-player letter writing story game where you play spies that send coded letters through the post.

A BEGINNING

A day ago, a patchy but discernible message managed to arrive safely to you. You decode the following: “Agents, all digital comms has been compromised. I repeat all digital comms have been compromised. Stay clean.” With digital communications hacked, you decide that the best way to share intel is the tried and true system of letter writing. And so, begins your handwritten coded correspondence...and your turn at the game of *We Are Ciphers*.

As a duo, your main objective is to acquire the Prize located inside your target’s vault. The path to accomplishing your goal will not be easy. You must send secrets through the mail using the art of encryption. Be vigilant in evading suspicion, safeguarding secrets, and obfuscating your purpose. With each letter exchanged, you will get closer to the Prize.

STONE: *What is the feel of your story?*

Discuss the tone of your story. Will it be silly and light? Serious and realistic? Or a mix of those?

Stories for Inspiration:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------|
| - Austin Powers | - Citizenfour |
| - Veronica Mars | - Argo |
| - The Da Vinci Code | - Nikita |

SAFETY: *Have fun and take care of each other.*

- Talk about the **X-card** by John Stavropoulos. <http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg>
- If you’re unsure of something, press the pause button and tell your fellow spy.
- If it looks like you won’t be able to write a letter for a while, say so. Keep each other updated.
- Express your joy. If you’re loving all the letter writing/ code making mischief, tell each other so.

HIDDEN IDENTITIES:

To set up the game, answer these questions TOGETHER in any order you wish. If it helps, keep the tone of your story in mind.

1. What type of creature (human, animal, etc.) are you? Start in general terms then go as specific as you want to. What is your day job outside of being a spy?
2. What are your codenames? If you're stuck, consider the following:
 - a. One-word names? Like Sting, Babalu, KitKat, Sage.
 - b. Names that are symbolic of your character's personality? Like Jo Reverie (hopeful), Sloan Steady (relentless), Rye Riot (sarcastic).
 - c. Repetition in names? Like Minor Minor, Doon Doon. Spicy Spice.
 - d. Roll a bunch of letter dice (like from Boggle) to generate names?
3. What is this Prize you desire?
 - ❖ Is it an elixir, potion, recipe, map, amulet, etc.?
 - ❖ What is amazing about it? Does it imbue powers? Like the power of flight, instant teleportation? Or is it a cure for loneliness? Or can it help you create something rare and new?
 - ❖ What is the cost of using the Prize?
4. You both believe that the Prize will make life better.
 - ❖ Why do you both want the Prize? (family/ romantic/ political/ charity/ revenge/ advancement)
5. What is your relationship with each other? (family/ romantic/ political/ friends/ ex-rivals/ business). Start in general terms and then go specific.

Now craft one phrase or sentence to sum up. You can use the formula:

[Relationship] [your codenames] are [occupation or creature-type] who want [the Prize] [amazing thing about the Prize] [reason for wanting it].

Whatever formula is fine as long as you can fit your description into one short phrase or sentence. For example:

Childhood friends Smith and Black are hummingbirds who want the Flower of Palawan with its limitless nectar for their struggling village.

Cousins Malaya and Amihan are bakers who want the recipe for the yummiest cavity-free cupcake so that they can make millions.

SECRETS THROUGH THE MAIL

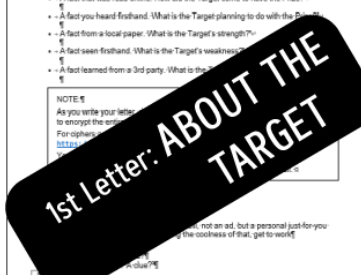
Utilizing different types of ink, codes, and ciphers, you will communicate confidential details.

ENCRYPTION: To code or not to code?

Feel free to use one cipher throughout the entire game or employ a different one for each letter. You can also combine or stack different types of encryption. (You can even skip encryption and just take the risk.)

Here's a link to some encryption techniques: <https://tinyurl.com/WeAreCiphers-Encryption>.

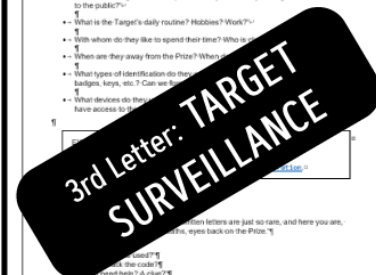
The 1st Letter: OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE
Sender: Agent 1
Micro-mission: Send a letter about the Target to your fellow spy.
Ensure your letter includes who the Target is. You can additionally use any of the following prompts to help you write more details.
• A fact that was read online. How did the Target come to have the Prize?
• A fact you heard firsthand. What is the Target planning to do with the Prize?
• A fact from a local paper. What is the Target's strength?
• A fact seen firsthand. What is the Target's weakness?
• A fact learned from a 3rd party. What is the Target's secret?
NOTE
As you write your letter, think about how you might use the Prize to help you. For example, you could use the Prize to help you get to work.
NOTE
Players, if you get stuck, speak up. Tell the other player. Sure, excel and test your skills, but get all of that is asking for help too. This is a collaborative story game, and it's meant to be fun. So, spy hard and play well.




The 2nd Letter: CATCHING A GLIMPSE
Sender: Agent 2
Micro-mission: Send a letter about the Prize to your fellow spy.
You can use any of the following prompts to help you write.
• A memory about the Prize. First sighting/First interaction? The last time with the Prize? The closest you've come to being with the Prize, etc.
• A dream about the Prize. What did it look like/ smell like/ sound like? How did you feel when you saw it? Was there anyone else there?
• A hope about the Prize. What will it look like/ smell like/ sound like? How do you feel about the Prize? Ask Agent 1? What do you want to do with it?
• An idea about the Prize. Where do you think it's safe/guarded? How old is it?
• A concern about the Prize. How do you think it will change over time, and how do you think you can help?
NOTE
Players, if you get stuck, speak up. Tell the other player. Sure, excel and test your skills, but get all of that is asking for help too. This is a collaborative story game, and it's meant to be fun. So, spy hard and play well.




The 3rd Letter: GOT EYES ON YOU
Sender: Agent 1
Micro-mission: Send a letter about your surveillance on the Target.
Feel free to use any or as many of the following prompts.
• What is the Target's favorite spot in the city? In the day? At night? Is it accessible to the public?
• What is the Target's daily routine? Hobbies? Work?
• With whom do they like to spend their time? Who is their best friend?
• When are they away from the Prize? Where do they go?
• What types of identification do they use? License, keys, etc.? Can you see them?
• What devices do they use? How do they use them?
• What access do they have to the Prize?
EXTRA MISSION
Let the other agent know you got their mail. Text a photo of the envelope or letter. Take heed. Be sure to obstruct any sensitive material or obfuscate the facts.




The 4th Letter: COAT AND HAT
Sender: Agent 2
Micro-mission: Send a letter about an opportunity to get closer to the Prize.
Feel free to use any or as many of the following prompts.
• A purposeful encounter with the Target. Did you make contact? What did you use (alias, fake job, fake hobby, etc.)? Did you acquire a contact?
• A possible way in. With whom did you make contact? Are they someone who could be allies? What do they know?
• A diversion. What distraction did you use to get closer to the Prize? A diversion? A diversion? A diversion?
• The wrong package. What was the package? Was it a diversion?
EXTRA MISSION
Let the other agent know you got their mail. Text a photo of the envelope or letter. Take heed. Be sure to obstruct any sensitive material or obfuscate the facts.
Page Break



The 5th Letter: CANT STAND LOSING YOU
Sender: Agent 1
Micro-mission: Send a letter about an attempt to capture the Prize.
Ensure your letter describes what attempt you made. Did you capture the Prize? You can additionally use any of the following prompts to help you write more details.
• A story approach. Did you have a clandestine meeting with a contact close to the Target? Where they helpful? In what way?
• An unexpected event. Where did that bystander come from? Who were they? Are they on our side?
• A risky gambit. Did you go against the agreed plan? What was the plan? What couldn't you pass up? Is your cover blown?
Recipient: Agent 2
Micro-mission: Decipher Agent 1's letter.
Thank goodness for the US Postal Service.
Page Break



The 6th Letter: SPIES LIKE US
Sender: Agent 2
Micro-mission: Send a letter about a decision made.
Ensure your letter explains what decision you've made. How are you feeling now about your partnership with Agent 1?
Use any or as many of the prompts below.
• You recently feel differently about the Prize. What triggered these feelings?
• What did you just discover about a contact close to the Prize? How do you feel about Agent 1?
• Where you supposed to meet Agent 1? Did you? What was the situation?
• What impressed you by Agent 1?
Recipient: Agent 1
Micro-mission: Decipher Agent 2's letter.
Thank goodness for the US Postal Service.
Page Break



Here are two sample ciphers.

As a bonus, here's a cipher template. Simply decide what you will fill the blanks with: a symbol, a letter (lowercase), or word.

Example:

PLAINTEXT:

"Met with Target's niece"

	1	2	3	4	5
a	A	B	C	D	E
b	F	G	H	I	J
c	K	L	M	N	O
d	P	Q	R	S	T
e	U	V	W	X	Y

CODED:

c3a5d5 e3b4d5b3
d5a1d3b2a5d5d4 c4b4a5a3a5

GRAPH SUBSTITUTION CIPHER

	1	2	3	4	5
_____	A	B	C	D	E
_____	F	G	H	I	J
_____	K	L	M	N	O
_____	P	Q	R	S	T
_____	U	V	W	X	Y

* For a more difficult encryption, you can stack or combine this with backwards writing or another type of encryption.

To use the pigpen cipher, swap out the shape the letter sits in to represent the actual letter.

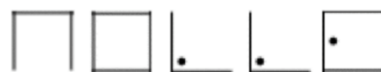
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
└─┘	┌─┐	└─┘	┌─┐	└─┘	┌─┐	└─┘	┌─┐	└─┘	┌─┐
K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
┌─┐	└─┘	┌─┐	└─┘	┌─┐	└─┘	┌─┐	└─┘	┌─┐	└─┘
U	V	W	X	Y	Z				
<	^	v	>	<	^				

Example:

PLAINTEXT:

"Hello"

CODED:



PIGPEN CIPHER

A	B	C	J	K	L
┌─┐	┌─┐	┌─┐	┌─┐	┌─┐	┌─┐
D	E	F	M	N	O
└─┘	└─┘	└─┘	└─┘	└─┘	└─┘
G	H	I	P	Q	R
└─┘	└─┘	└─┘	└─┘	└─┘	└─┘
	S			W	
	┌─┐			┌─┐	
T		U	X		Y
	└─┘			└─┘	
	V			Z	
	┌─┐			┌─┐	

The 1st Letter: OUT OF THE CORNER OF MY EYE

Sender: Agent 1

Micro-mission: **Send a letter about the Target to your fellow spy.**

Ensure your letter includes who the Target is. You can additionally use any of the following prompts to help you write more details:

- A fact that was read online. How did the Target come to have the Prize?
- A fact you heard firsthand. What is the Target planning to do with the Prize?
- A fact from a local paper. What is the Target's strength?
- A fact seen firsthand. What is the Target's weakness?
- A fact learned from a 3rd party. What is the Target willing to trade for the Prize?

NOTE:

As you write your letter, decide how much you will conceal in code. Do you want to encrypt the entire message, or just parts of it? You decide.

For ciphers and other ideas on how to encrypt your letters, see <https://tinyurl.com/WeAreCiphers-Encryption>.

*** Embrace the fun. Write a letter you would enjoy receiving yourself.

Recipient: Agent 2

Micro-mission: **Decrypt Agent 1's letter.**

But first, rejoice! You received a letter, not a bill, not an ad, but a personal just-for-you letter. After a moment or two of simply feeling the coolness of that, get to work.

- What cipher was used?
- Was it a combination of different encryption types?
- Can you crack the code?
- Do you need help? A clue?

NOTE:

Players, if you get stuck, tell your fellow agent. Definitely excel and test your encryption skills, but make sure you ask for help too. This is a collaborative story game, and it's meant to be fun. So, spy hard and play well.

The 2nd Letter: CATCHING A GLIMPSE

Sender: Agent 2

Micro-mission: **Send a letter about the Prize to your fellow spy.**

You can use any of the following prompts to help you write.

- A memory about the Prize. First sighting/ First interaction/ The last time with the Prize/ The closest you've come to being with the Prize, etc.
- A dream about the Prize. What did it look like/ smell like/ sound like, etc.? What did you feel when you saw it? Was there anyone else there like the Target?
- A hope about the Prize. What will be the first thing you'll do once you get your hands on the Prize? Ask Agent #2 what they'll do with it.
- An idea about the Prize. Where do you think it can be found? How do you think it's safeguarded? How old do you think it is?
- A concern about the Prize. What worries you about it? Will something about the Prize change soon? Is someone else trying to capture it? Is there a cost to using and having the Prize?

Recipient: Agent 1

Micro-mission: **Decrypt Agent 2's letter.**

But first, rejoice! You received a letter, not a bill, not an ad, but a personal just-for-you letter. After a moment or two of simply feeling the coolness of that, get to work.

- What cipher was used?
- Was it a combination of different encryption types?
- Can you crack the code?
- Do you need help? A clue?

REMINDER:

Players, if you get stuck, tell your fellow agent. Definitely excel and test your encryption skills, but make sure you ask for help too. This is a collaborative story game, and it's meant to be fun. So, spy hard and play well.

The 3rd Letter: GOT EYES ON YOU

Sender: Agent 1

Micro-mission: **Send a letter about your surveillance on the Target.**

Feel free to use any or as many of the following prompts.

- What is the Target's favorite spot in the city? In the day? At night? Is it accessible to the public?
- What is the Target's daily routine? Hobbies? Work?
- With whom do they like to spend their time? Who is close to them?
- When are they away from the Prize? When do they visit it? Are others around?
- What types of identification do they seem to have on them at all times? ID cards, badges, keys, etc.? Can we forge any? Does someone have a similar ID?
- What devices do they use? What do we need to hack them? Does anyone else have access to them?

EXTRA MISSION:

Decorate your letter and envelope.

For ideas, visit <https://tinyurl.com/WeAreCiphers-Decoration>.

Recipient: Agent 2

Micro-mission: **Decrypt Agent 1's letter.**

And yes, celebrate first! Personal handwritten letters are just so rare, and here you are, getting another one. After a few breaths, eyes back on the Prize.

- What cipher was used?
- Was it a combination of different encryption types?
- Can you crack the code?
- Do you need help? A clue?

EXTRA MISSION:

Let the other agent know you got their mail. Text a photo of the envelope or letter. Take heed. Be sure to obstruct any sensitive material or obfuscate the facts.

The 4th Letter: COAT AND HAT

Sender: Agent 2

Micro-mission: **Send a letter about an opportunity to get closer to the Prize.**

Feel free to use any or as many of the following prompts.

- A purposeful encounter with the Target. Did you make contact? What cover did you use (alias, fake job, fake hobby, etc.)? Did you acquire a password or ID?
- A possible way in. With whom did you make contact that is close to the Target? Are they someone who could be allies? What do they want?
- A diversion. What distraction did you cause? What were you able to intercept or obtain? A fingerprint? A password or ID? A map?
- The wrong package. What wrong intel did we have? What did we interpret incorrectly? Was any part accurate? Did you discover the correct data?

EXTRA MISSION:

Decorate your letter and envelope.

For ideas, visit <https://tinyurl.com/WeAreCiphers-Decoration>.

Recipient: Agent 1

Micro-mission: **Decrypt Agent 2's letter.**

And yes, celebrate first! Personal handwritten letters are just so rare, and here you are, getting another one. After a few breaths, eyes back on the Prize.

- What cipher was used?
- Was it a combination of different encryption types?
- Can you crack the code?
- Do you need help? A clue?

EXTRA MISSION:

Let the other agent know you got their mail. Text a photo of the envelope or letter. Take heed. Be sure to obstruct any sensitive material or obfuscate the facts.

The 5th Letter: CAN'T STAND LOSING YOU

Sender: Agent 1

Micro-mission: **Send a letter about an attempt to capture the Prize.**

Ensure your letter describes what attempt you made. Did you capture the Prize? You can additionally use any of the following prompts to help you write more details:

- A dicey approach. Did you have a clandestine meeting with a contact close to the Target? Were they helpful? In what way?
- An unexpected event. Where did that bystander come from? Who were they? Are they on our side?
- A risky gambit. Did you go against the agreed plan? What made you go off book? What couldn't you pass up? Is your cover blown?

Recipient: Agent 2

Micro-mission: **Decipher Agent 1's letter.**

Thank goodness for the Postal Service. Another handwritten mail has arrived safely.

The 6th Letter: HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

Sender: Agent 2

Micro-mission: **Send a letter about a decision made.**

Ensure your letter explains what decision you've made. How are you feeling now about your partnership with Agent 1?

Use any or as many of the prompts below.

- You recently feel differently about the Prize and Agent 1. What triggered these new emotions?
- What did you just discover about a contact close to the Target? Does it change the way you feel about Agent 1?
- Were you supposed to meet Agent 1? Did they show up? How do you feel about that situation?
- What impressed you by Agent 1? How do you feel about them since then?

Recipient: Agent 1

Micro-mission: **Decipher Agent 1's letter.**

Thank goodness for the Postal Service. Another handwritten mail has arrived safely.

Epilogues: OUT IN THE OPEN

Bring your story to some sort of conclusion.

TOGETHER, answer as many of these questions below as you would like. You can write letters, talk in person, or communicate via digital devices.

- Where is the Prize now?
- If you do have the Prize, was it worth it? In what way(s) did it perhaps cost too much?
- If you don't have the Prize, how was the whole operation still a success?
- Do you still write to each other?
- Is there anything left unsaid?

HELLO

My name is J. I hope you enjoy playing *We Are Ciphers*. I wrote it amidst Covid-19. May you use the game as a way to have fun, stay creative, and distract yourselves. If you hack it in any way, I'd love to hear about it. If you have any questions or want to share your experience, email me at motherof1000s@gmail.com.

CAN WE PLAY THIS ONLINE?

Yes, you can. To play online, break the game up into different video chats. The first part of the game is story building, and you'll do that on a video call. Once you come to the letters, take turns writing your secret messages offline. Whenever it's your turn as Agent 1, simply send your coded message digitally to the other player. And then as the active Agent 2, you can decipher it. You can even share with each other your decoding process at any time. Keep doing this until you reach the Epilogue, which is just another video call.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ken Davidson- Thanks for the game jam. It's my first, and I love the sentiment behind it. I do believe that through our creativity we can do our part in helping the ailing United States Postal Service. Or at the very least, we can celebrate the art of letter writing.

Christian Yetter- It's been weeks since I shared with you my promising premise and my messy multi-layered ideas. I had no game back then. Your encouragement was a great boost. It took a while but I finally figured out what the spies are up to and where they are going. Thanks for the safe space and generous feedback.

Tomer Gurantz- I truly appreciate your patience and love. For one thing, it can be a real pain hearing about the same thing for weeks as well as hearing about details that change so often. As a fellow game designer, thanks for your feedback during different phases of design. You've been a tremendous help. Thank you for working with me regarding health (mental and physical), family topics, and everything else while I write and make art. Iniibig kita.

And finally, **N**, thanks for your sweet sweet hugs! Mahal rin kita.

ONE LAST NOTE

During the course of making this game, I learned that there's a real risk that the USPS will go bankrupt with no chance of federal support. If it becomes privatized, there is a huge chance that prices will rise and an even bigger risk that access to postal services will be taken away. This will leave communities especially those in rural areas already without internet and other vital resources more isolated. Will they still be able to receive medicine, vote-by-mail ballots, and other essentials?

If you want to help, visit https://store.usps.com/store/results/stamps/_/N-9y93lv and purchase stamps and other products. You can also write to President Trump and others who oppose helping USPS. If you're on social media, post about this topic with the hashtag #SaveThePostOffice. And of course, write those lovely letters, coded or not.