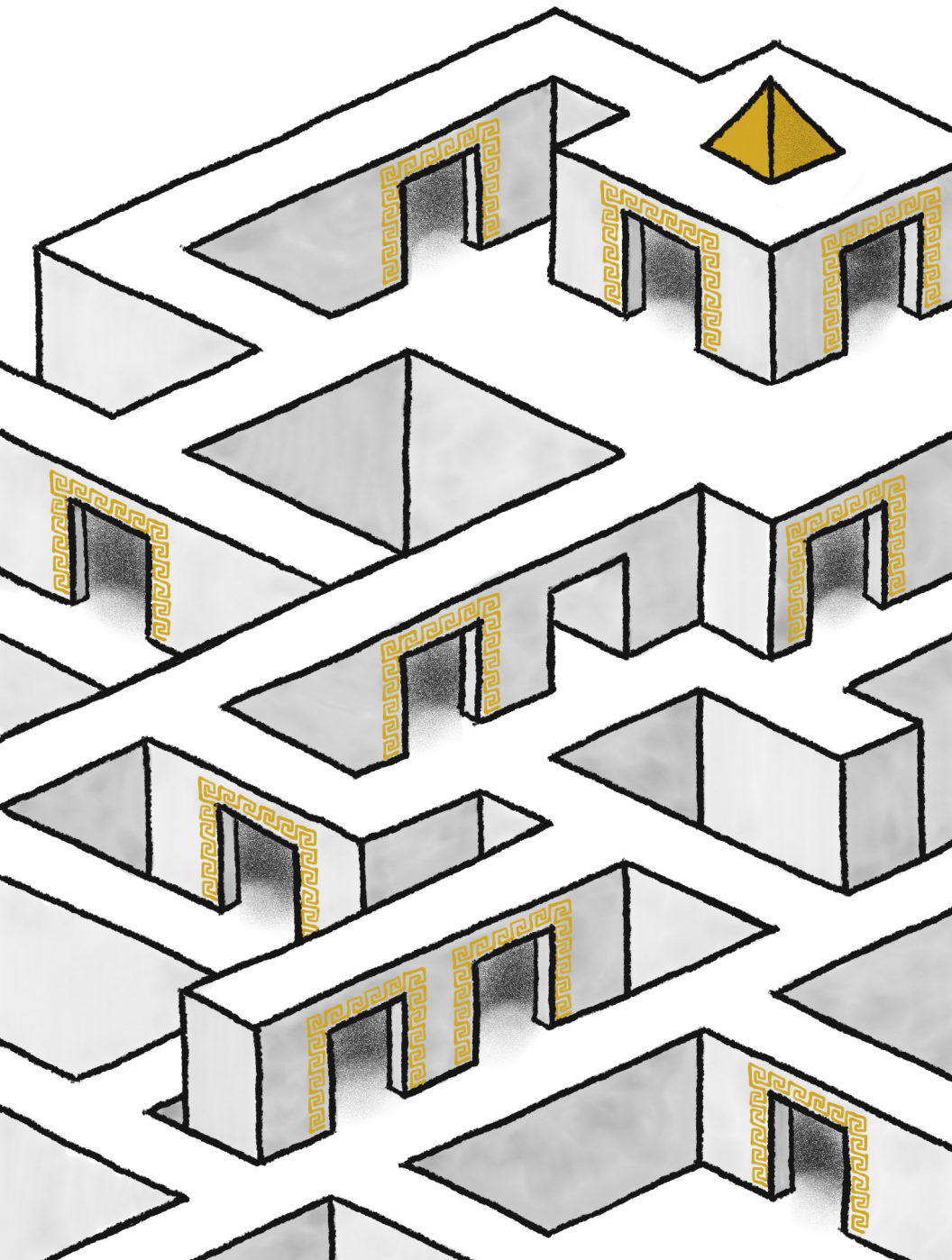


# FORKING PATHS

ISSUE #2

an analog / tabletop / live-action / roleplaying game zine



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## COLOPHON

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special thanks to playtester & explorer patron **Rainbow, the Spectromancer**

**the rules:** wanna hack, remix, or build off my stuff? drop me a line & let's chat!

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Forking Paths is a zine devoted to roleplaying games, storygames, and other forms of emergent narrative. Welcome! This issue's theme: **Lost in Dark Halls**.

Who's lost? It could be me, starting work on this issue from the middle and puzzling my way toward the edges. It could be the figures and histories that animate a legend, caught between fragmented or contradictory positions. Or it could be you, tracing and retracing steps during play: inside is *Labyrinthine*, a self-contained storygame for solo or group play that uses custom maze tiles, inspired in part by ancient Greek myth (plus a not-totally-coincidental overlap with the name of this zine itself).

The Minotaur and his infamous Labyrinth cast a long shadow, despite being little more than an interlude in the lives of Greek royals and monarchs-to-be. Chalk part of it up to aesthetics: the allure of the endless maze, swallowing all to wander endlessly within. Labyrinths persist for their literalizing of the human condition — sometimes making the leap from imagination into the real, like the unicursal labyrinths gracing the floors of medieval churches and cathedrals (metaphorical pilgrimages; to Jerusalem, to spiritual bliss) or the older knots, spirals, and mazes cut into turf or laid out with rocks. We're all doomed to die in these halls, bound to our path or free to choose between this door and that in search of a way out, knowing too well the truth that none have escaped before us while alive. Thus, the Labyrinth. Our mortal coil, rendered in stone.

No map defeats the Labyrinth, even in the classical tale. The only hope is help: a gift of yarn, or thread, or string, spun out behind us that we might retrace our steps. What the clew gives us is the power to look back, know our past decisions, and learn from mistakes with the certainty that we are not merely repeating them. In short, experience. Our modern sense of “clue” comes from this same “clew” (meaning a ball or skein of thread) that Ariadne gave to Theseus, so often was that original clew invoked as a metaphor for trying to unravel life's difficult and perplexing situations.

Armed with such a gift ourselves, able to freely plumb the Labyrinth of our own lives, we might at last live up to that ancient Greek maxim, inscribed above the doors of temples and invoked or interrogated by philosophers:

ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΕΑΥΤΟΝ

“Know thyself.”

## OVERVIEW OF THE CLASSICAL MYTH

The game in this issue is by no means designed to only work with a single legend, but this myth was the main inspiration, and likewise gives a good example of the kind of story the game can explore. So as a starting point, the core of the classical myth of the Labyrinth is this:

*The Minotaur dwells within his maze, the Labyrinth, built at the command of King Minos of Crete. Theseus of Athens arrives on the island of Crete intent on killing the Minotaur, and is helped in this by Ariadne: royal daughter of Minos and half-sister to the Minotaur. She promises her aid if Theseus will take her from Crete in his ship, and gives him a ball of thread to unravel and eventually retrace his steps once the deed is done. Otherwise, he, like all others banished inside the maze, would be doomed to wander lost in its halls forever. Thus equipped, Theseus enters the Labyrinth, finds and kills the Minotaur, and leaves the island of Crete with Ariadne.*

In those broad strokes, the encounter with the Minotaur is fairly anodyne. But the above leaves out quite a bit: backstory, context, relationships, history, and historiography — not to mention a host of conflicting details.

Most of what can be layered onto the above summary *surrounds* the

Minotaur, yet leaves the Minotaur a blank slate, absent any motivation or personality. We learn his backstory and how he fits into the lives of others, but little ink is spilled about his own “monstrous” deeds or nature. He is half man, half beast, though even in which combination is unclear; depictions have thus varied over the centuries. Possibly he is murderously violent; possibly he is a cannibal (meaning of humans, of course; there is no Minotaur-kind). All sound like slanders or excuses designed to cast the killing of a misbegotten, unwanted creation in a heroic light.

The Minotaur as a character may be confined to tales of Theseus’ heroic deeds (a Labyrinth he cannot escape even in death) but at least his origin extends outside that narrative. King Minos, though not the Minotaur’s biological father, is the seed from which the creature springs. Gifted by the god Poseidon with a remarkable bull of celestial beauty, white and soft as seafoam, Minos selfishly decides to keep the fine animal for his personal herds, instead of returning it to the deity in sacrifice as was intended. Offended, Poseidon returns the insult indirectly by cursing Minos’ wife, Queen Pasiphae. Stricken with lust for the divine bull, Pasiphae has a cattle-shaped frame custom-built to fit her inside, so that she can satisfy her desire. She mates with the bull,

later giving birth to a half-human, half-bovine child. “Minotaur” is only an epithet or title for the creature (“Minos” the king, combined with “taurus” for bull) and some versions give the Minotaur’s name as Asterius or Asterion, meaning “starry.”

Minos orders a prison built to confine the Minotaur and hide the shame his pride brought down upon his royal house, though in some versions he takes this course only after consulting the Oracle at Delphi. The legendary inventor Daedalus is given the task, designing the confounding corridors and branching passages that make the Labyrinth: a prison so vast and twisting it has no need of jailers, locks, or even doors. Some sources involve Daedalus earlier too, as designer and builder of Pasiphae’s cattle-shaped frame. (As a historical aside, the name “Labyrinth” may derive from the *labrys*, a ritual double-headed axe tied to female religious orders on Crete. If that’s the origin, Labyrinth would essentially mean “house of the labrys.” Labrys imagery in the ruined Minoan palace of Knossos led archeologists to theorize that its sprawling halls and rooms might be the genesis of the mythical Labyrinth, though other historians dispute the association.)

The circumstances that later brought Theseus to Crete sprang from the tense relationship between Crete and Athens, and in some tellings involved another of Minos’ children. Several stories cite the tribute as owed due to

an Athenian defeat in war at the hands of King Minos. Sometimes woven into that war, or a cause all its own, is that Minos’ son Androgeus was killed in Athens after winning too decisively in athletic games hosted by King Aegeus. Tellings involving this aspect further diverge on whether jealous Athenians killed Minos’ son after his victories, or if Aegeus himself took insult and killed Androgeus. In either case, Minos calls down a curse on Athens, which becomes stricken with plague. Desperate for relief, they ask the Oracle’s advice, and are told to do whatever Minos demands. King Minos’ war against Athens (or his demand of tribute in place of a war campaign, or his price to lift his curse) then is the result of his grief and vengeance for his son’s murder.

His demand is for seven young men and women at an interval of years; sources disagree whether the tribute was offered every seven years, every nine years, or each year. Likewise, some sources say the tributes were chosen by drawn lots, or that the demand was for the seven strongest men and seven most beautiful women. Their fate was to be banished into the Labyrinth, either to die of starvation in endless wanderings, or be devoured by the flesh-eating Minotaur.

Enter Theseus: heir of King Aegeus of Athens, fresh off a series of heroic labors (in much the same vein as Heracles). Though the king’s trueborn son, he was raised far from Athens,

and accordingly had a chip on his shoulder to match his outsized bravado. On the third occasion of the human tribute due to Minos, Theseus volunteered himself as part of the Athenian offering, promising to slay the Minotaur and break Athens free of the obligation once and for all. To signal news of his defeat or victory, Theseus told his father he would bring a white sail in addition to the tribute ship's customary black sail. If he should succeed and live, he would fly the white sail. If he failed and died, the returning ship would bear its usual black sail.

Upon Theseus' arrival in Crete, the story gains little more detail than in



the summary given earlier, though several variations emerge. Ariadne's string is possibly on a spindle instead of in a ball; the idea for it might be a suggestion from Daedalus, who, as an Athenian himself, is equally eager to see Theseus to victory. Theseus is sometimes given extra insight into navigating the Labyrinth by Daedalus, who as its builder tells him to take no turnings and follow every stair that leads down in order to find the Minotaur. (As interpreted by Robert Graves, the clew given by Ariadne is magically enchanted, and unrolls itself at Theseus' feet to lead him to the Minotaur directly.) In some versions, Theseus enters the Labyrinth unarmed and strangles the Minotaur, who is found sleeping. In others, he smuggles a sword under his tunic while posing as an unarmed tribute, and after finding his quarry, fatally stabs the Minotaur in a fight.

Minotaur defeated, Theseus leaves Crete with Ariadne at his side. His ship makes a landing on the island of Naxos along the return to Athens, and differences in the story spring up once again. Ultimately, Theseus leaves Ariadne behind on the island of Naxos: either she is forgotten on the island while sleeping, then happened upon by the god Dionysus whom she marries; or Dionysus appears to Theseus and demands Ariadne as a wife; or it is revealed that Ariadne had sworn herself to be Dionysus' wife long ago, and the promise must be upheld. In each version, Theseus sails

on toward Athens without the one who aided him against the Minotaur.

Due to haste, exhaustion, grief over separation from Ariadne, or simple thoughtlessness, Theseus mistakenly flies the black sail meant to herald his defeat and death when he eventually return to Athens. Seeing the sail in the harbor from far off, bereaved King Aegeus throws himself from a cliff into the sea below (the sea that now bears his name, the Aegean). Theseus, Aegeus' only heir, thus becomes king and sets Athens on the path toward democracy... or so the Athenians' version of their founding myth goes.



At the baseline, there's the **heroic reading** of the myth: a warrior travels to another land, slays a monster, and frees his people of a burden. There's conflict in this version of the tale, but its morality is pretty black & white.

Then there's the **political reading**: an Athenian travels to Crete, the former regional power, and kills a creature linked to Cretan royalty (as well as part bull, a major Cretan religious symbol). Thus, an Athenian upends the old order before returning home to become the founder of a new era.

For the ancient writer Plutarch, many conflicting stories are attempted to be reconciled, to map the myth onto a **plausible history**. The human tributes

from Athens are not to be killed by a monster, but are intended as slaves; the Labyrinth is a mundane prison that temporarily houses the tributes, instead of a mysterious maze; the defeated foe is Minos' cruel general named Taurus, who Theseus defeats or slays in the arena; and so on.

Viewed through a **social lens**, there's the themes of transgression present in Pasiphae's relationship — perhaps the Minotaur's origin was a simple affair of passion resulting in a child, recast with fantastic elements to sully her reputation or that of the king. The stories that give the name "Asterion" or "Asterius" for the Minotaur lend this interpretation extra weight, especially as both names appear as names for other Cretan royalty (including King Minos' own father). Likewise, the "monstrous" label could be the sad legacy of a child with a birth defect or other visible disorder. Equating abnormal bodies with monsters or villainy is a tale as old as time. And as for Ariadne, her sought-for independence is vanishingly brief.

Using any of these approaches as a way to reinterpret a familiar myth or story is perfectly at home in *Labyrinthine*. The inspirational sources disagree about events, their meaning, their consequences or causes, and so on. Give yourself equally as much freedom when playing! And if using a character or situation plucked from an existing story, keep or change as much or as little as you want.



# LABYRINTHINE



*Labyrinthine* is a storygame (i.e., a narration-heavy storytelling game) for one to four players, lasting one to three hours. Using prompts on maze tiles, you'll tell the story of a protagonist worthy of myth as they make choices and handle consequences. You won't explore just one series of events from beginning to end, though: you'll traverse many branches, returning to earlier decisions to make new choices and see how events play out from there.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

- ♦ A set of all 52 maze tiles
- OR
- ♦ A 52-card poker deck + this zine

## RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

- ♦ 30+ glass stones (aka glass beads, pebbles, gems, etc.) or similar tokens
- ♦ Pens or pencils
- ♦ Notecards, index cards, or other paper
- ♦ A 52-card poker deck (can be the same deck used instead of maze tiles)

Instructions for making a set of maze tiles are on page 14. If you're using a deck of cards instead of a set of the maze tiles, remove the jokers and any other inserts. You'll also need this zine as a key to see which cards correspond to which prompts and maze layouts. Whenever the rules reference using the tiles in some way, follow the same steps with the cards. (Having a deck of cards is handy to use with the oracle, too, even if using actual maze tiles.)

The maze tiles have six different layouts, with a different type of prompt for each. The amount of each type of tile is in parenthesis.

- Cross* (12) a cross-shaped intersection, offering an open-ended choice.
- Branch* (9) a T-shaped junction, presenting a decision between opposites.
- Hall* (9) a straight corridor, describing how something continues or increases.
- Turn* (9) a corner, prompting an unexpected change or twist of fate.
- End* (9) a stopping point, noting the circumstances of death, demise, or other ultimate fate.
- Shrine* (4) an octagonal room with four exits, home to an especially significant (and ambiguous) prompt that represents a destiny fulfilled.

A single character, the **protagonist**, is the focus of the game. (Even in group play, there's still only one protagonist.) You could invent them from whole-cloth; pick them from the myth of the Labyrinth or another legend; or, in true Greek fashion, consult the oracle on page 23 and let fate decide. That oracle is tailored to this game, so it's what I recommend using if you're at all unsure who you want to be. A little background, some notable qualities, and recent circumstances are plenty to get started. If, like me, you get stuck on names, you don't need that either!

To choose the **primary player**, who narrates most from this protagonist's point of view, either decide among yourselves or pick the player who was most recently underground. Any other players will play as the **Fates**.

Each maze tile notes a suit of cards, which loosely corresponds to the themes of prompts on the tiles:

- ♣ *Clubs*: Fate, possibility, growth
- ◇ *Diamonds*: Value, reward, objects
- ♥ *Hearts*: Society, relationships, emotion
- ♠ *Spades*: Prowess, judgment, ruin

Authority over those suits is divided based on the number of players.

*1 player*: The suits aren't divided (all falling to the single player), but pick one suit as your protagonist's Ideal and another suit as their Instinct.

*2 players*: The primary player picks one suit as the protagonist's Ideal and another as their Instinct. The two unchosen suits go to the lone Fate.

*3 players*: The primary player picks one suit as the protagonist's Ideal and one as an Instinct. The two Fates divide the other suits between themselves.

*4 players*: The primary player picks the the protagonist's Ideal suit and their Instinct, but keeps only the Ideal in terms of narration rights. The three Fates divide the three other suits between themselves.

When a tile is placed, the player with authority over its suit has additional rights or responsibilities. And if the

tile corresponds to a protagonist's Ideal or Instinct, there may be additional procedures as well. Those rules are covered later, but generally: the Ideal grants the protagonist more flexibility with matching tiles, whereas the Instinct will rear its head in the form of unexpected endings.

As the last step of setup, the primary player chooses or draws one of the twelve Cross tiles. The situation and choice on that tile is the starting point for the protagonist, and the **Origin** tile for all the paths you'll explore with them. Place that tile in the middle of the playing area, then make sure all the others are shuffled together well (including the Crosses) and put them in a face-down stack nearby.

You're ready to play!

The story begins with the first prompt. The primary player narrates the scene or situation corresponding to what's on the Cross tile — even if they don't have authority over the suit of this first tile. They might narrate in the first-person, using "I" statements:

*"I'm the Queen of Athens, and my messengers bring me news that my rival Sparta is vulnerable..."*

Or in the third-person:

*"Messengers arrive in the throne room of the Queen of Athens, telling her of recent misfortune that has befallen the rival city of Sparta, leaving it vulnerable..."*

Either one, or a combination, is fine! (For the Fates: avoid using first-person

statements anytime you're narrating about the protagonist; second-person "you" statements are best instead.)

After narrating for a bit, the primary player brings the protagonist to the choice they've made. To find out what follows after that choice, they draw three tiles from the stack, lay them out face-up, then choose one tile from among the three. The chosen tile is placed alongside the current tile, connecting to an unused exit, and all tiles not chosen are put into a face-up discard pile. The chosen tile is placed in any orientation that maximizes the number of other usable exits. (If the stack to draw from runs out of tiles, shuffle the discard pile, place it face-down, and continue as before.)

Next, the player corresponding to the suit on the new tile narrates how events from the prior choice develop in light of the new prompt (for a Hall, Turn, or End) or details how the new situation comes to pass (for a Cross,

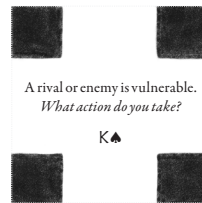
**Cross** and **Branch** tiles make clear which part of the prompt should be narrated by the player who controls a suit (regular text), and which part is exclusive to the primary player (*italics*). **Shrine** tiles are special: the player with the corresponding suit should describe the appearance of the shrine itself, but the primary player has full authority over the written prompt (hence why it's entirely in italics).

Branch, or Shrine). The primary player will narrate the protagonist's response to events, make their choice if any, draw three new tiles and choose one, and play will continue in this cycle. A basic example of those steps is below.



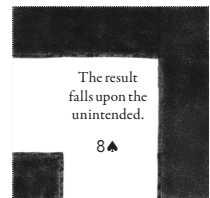
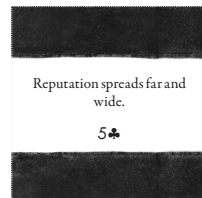
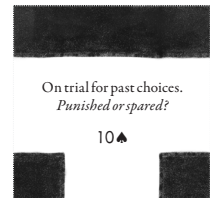
*Jess, the primary player, draws K♠ as the Origin tile to start play. For the*

*prompt, they describe how a rival, Sparta, is vulnerable. Their narration proceeds until they make their choice clear: the action their protagonist, the Queen, takes is to seize the moment and attack.*



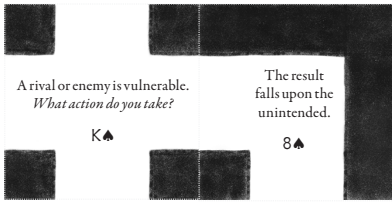
*prompt, they describe how a rival, Sparta, is vulnerable. Their narration proceeds until they make their choice clear:*

*With the choice made, Jess draws three tiles from the stack. They must choose one of the three to use.*

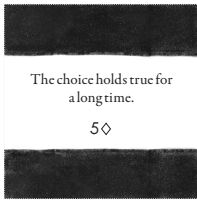
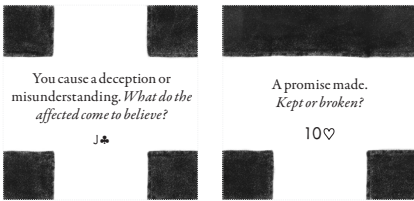


*Jess chooses 8♠, a Turn tile. The new tile is placed connecting to the Origin tile; the other two are put into a face-up discard pile. One of the Fates is in charge of spades, so that Fate interprets and narrates how the prompt connects to*

what was narrated before. “On your order, the Athenian army lays waste to the city of Sparta, slaying all found within its walls. In the aftermath, the bodies of visiting royals from Knossos are found among the slain. Your messengers soon bring word that King Minos has sworn to avenge his dead children.”



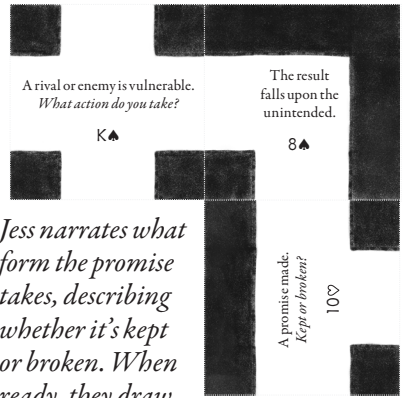
Before moving on, Jess has the chance to describe how their protagonist reacts to this development. “I set off for Crete immediately, headed to the royal palace at Knossos, in hopes of cooling Minos’ anger...” After finishing their narration, another three tiles are drawn to find out what happens next.



Jess chooses 10♥, a Branch tile. Hearts is one of their suits, so Jess narrates the prompt as well as the choice made.

When placing the Branch tile on the exit from the Turn tile, Jess orients the tile to maximize the number of exits for future tile placements. In this case, that

means turning the tile so that its exits mostly point away from other exits/tiles.



Jess narrates what form the promise takes, describing whether it’s kept or broken. When ready, they draw three new tiles to choose from, and keep playing to find out what happens next.



Invent as many details, intervening events, and so on as you like around each prompt. If you’re not sure how to fit in a prompt, or connect an idea, ask questions to clarify previous details. Narrating each tile should take about 2-3 minutes, with an extra minute or two during group play since more folks are adding detail. Spending more than five minutes narrating a single tile is probably too long!

Wait until the protagonist is ready to exit a tile before drawing the next three — in particular, make sure they are committed to a course of action on tiles with a choice-based prompt. The primary player places a glass stone (or other token) on the current tile once they’re ready to move on. This leaves a

handy trail of breadcrumbs when you need to refer to past tiles, especially as branches grow more complex.

Placing an End tile stops the current story with a death or other definitive end. (If the labyrinth's shape means another type of tile must be placed with all its exits blocked, treat it as an End, too.) After narrating the End, the primary player returns to *any previous decision point with an open exit* along the path that just ended. It could be a choice immediately before the ending that just happened, or all the way back at the start! Wherever you return to keeps the same lead-up established by tiles before that point, only this time the primary player will make a different choice. Pick up any extra glass stones not along the path between the Origin tile and the current tile. When the new choice is narrated, draw three tiles as usual, and keep following the new path to see how things go differently.

When you're narrating along a new path, you can include or ignore anything established on a previous path. For example, if the path that just ended uncovered your birth parent was actually a deity, that needn't also be true on the new path. Only the details established along the path between the **Origin** tile and the **current** tile must remain true.

There are two important additions to the core gameplay steps described so

far, both involving how a protagonist's Ideal and Instinct affect the game. The first affects End tiles: specifically, those that match a protagonist's **Instinct**. If one of the three tiles drawn face-up is an End matching the protagonist's Instinct, the primary player *must* choose and play that tile. This is the unexpected ending mentioned before! If there happens to be more than one End matching the Instinct drawn at the same time, the primary player can choose between them. Lastly, ignore this rule when leaving the Origin tile.

The second relates to tiles matching a protagonist's **Ideal**. Whenever new tiles are drawn, the primary player can opt to save one matching their Ideal to use later. If they do save a tile, draw a replacement from the stack so there's still three to choose from. A saved tile is an extra option during future draws, and can be played instead of choosing a drawn tile. (*Unless* one of the three drawn tiles is an End matching the protagonist's Instinct, as described above. That rule trumps this one.) The primary player can keep up to one saved tile at a time. If they want to save a different tile before using the one they already have, the old tile is discarded. And when the protagonist reaches an End, the primary player discards any saved tile they may have.

Fates can each save one tile matching a suit they control, too! However, they have to wait until *after* the primary player makes their choice to claim one. (In other words, the Fates can only

snatch tiles from unused ones already headed for the discard pile.) Whenever the primary player draws tiles, a Fate can offer their saved tile as yet another option. Fates can change a saved tile the same way the primary player does.

For homemade sets of maze tiles made with the type of cardstock that a copier or home printer can handle, the tiles may be difficult to shuffle well. If that seems to be an issue, there's an optional rule you can use: the **rule of three**. If all three drawn tiles are the same type (like all Crosses, all Ends, etc.) the "rule of three" allows the primary player to discard all of them and draw three new tiles in their place, if they wish.

The best time to end *Labyrinthine* is whenever the primary player feels like their protagonist has reached a fitting end. That could be after exploring the very first path, or after reaching all nine possible End tiles. It's up to you! If the group is starting to feel restless, it's probably best to follow the current path to an End, and wrap things up.

For groups, players should take turns once play ends sharing which of the protagonist's various paths was their favorite. I recommend taking a picture of the labyrinth you created as a memento, too! Given how many different ways 52 unique cards can be arranged, in all probability your labyrinth will be the only one with its exact configuration ever made.

## RELATED WORKS

A selection of stories and novels about mazes, and of lost wanderers searching for meaning or an ultimate escape that will not come:

"The Library of Babylon"

"The Garden of Forking Paths" and

"The House of Asterion"

by Jorge Luis Borges

"Watson's Boy" by Brian Evenson

*The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco

*House of Leaves* by Mark Z.

Danielewski

Labyrinth myth details drawn from *Bibliotheca* by Pseudo-Apollodorus and *Parallel Lives* by Plutarch.

Games that inspired or influenced the design of *Labyrinthine*:

*Life on Mars* and *Fall of Magic* by

Ross Cowman

*The Quiet Year* by Avery Alder

*Microscope* by Ben Robbins

*In a Wicked Age* by D. Vincent Baker

*A Penny for My Thoughts* by Paul

Tevis

*Becoming* by Brian Engard

*Polaris* by Ben Lehman

*Labyrinthine* also draws on ideas from *In Ruins*, an unfinished game by myself & Josh Gearheart.

For a game specifically devoted to exploring life as a minotaur, seek out *The Clay That Woke* by Paul Czege.

The puzzle picture-book *Maze* by Christopher Manson is good, too!

# MAZE TILES FOR LABYRINTHINE

The maze tiles can be directly copied out of this zine (consider this my express permission being granted, for any copy shops that might need it!) or printed from the standalone PDF of tiles. If you have this zine, but no copy of the print-at-home PDF for the tiles, let me know — contact info is on the inside front cover. I recommend using

cardstock if you can (or better). I used 110lb weight cardstock for my own set. When making copies or printing, make sure the tiles are printed out single-sided, so the backs of the tiles are blank. Once printed, cut the tiles apart into squares, color in the heart and diamond symbols with red (if you're copying) and the set is ready!



*A ancient grove of divine trees,  
grown from seeds of paradise. Eat,  
ask, and it will be answered.*



*At long last, the treasure which was  
kept from you and that you have  
always sought.*



*Make the gift, swear the oath, and  
don the mantle of your  
hidden lineage.*



*Waters lap gently in the cistern.  
Gaze long and you will  
be changed.*



A strange dream. *What new quest, task, or cause does it inspire?*

K♣

You break a custom or tradition. *What are the lasting effects?*

Q♣

You cause a deception or misunderstanding. *What do the affected come to believe?*

J♣

An omen is written in the stars. *How do you interpret it?*

K♦

A unique relic, mechanism, or ritual. *What does it do, or make possible?*

Q♦

Disaster strikes. *You can save some but not all. What is lost?*

J♦

Support is needed. *With whom do you forge an alliance?*

K♥

A festival, holiday, or other gathering. *To what patron, deity, or lover do you swear a new oath?*

Q♥

A familiar source of counsel. *What course of action is advised?*

J♥

A rival or enemy is vulnerable. *What action do you take?*

K♠

A violent struggle erupts. *You are hurt gravely — how?*

Q♠

A snap decision is made, humble or significant. *Who dies as a result?*

J♠

A task handed from on high.  
*Undertaken or refused?*

10♣

A deception uncovered.  
*Reburied or made known?*

9♣

In dire need of help.  
*Given or withheld?*

8♣

Something dangerous and rare.  
*Preserved or destroyed?*

10♦

A great boon at great price.  
*Accepted or rejected?*

9♦

A promise made.  
*Kept or broken?*

10♥

An intimate secret.  
*Revealed or left hidden?*

9♥

What seemed  
like choice is  
revealed as fate.

7♣

On trial for past choices.  
*Punished or spared?*

10♠

An old  
decision rears  
its head in the  
present.

6♣

A great offense given.  
*Forgiveness or reprisals?*

9♠

What results is  
something  
unexpected.

8♦

A different  
opportunity  
emerges.

7♦

A change of  
heart by  
someone close.

8♥

What was  
done becomes  
a major  
obsession.

7♥

Your feeling  
develops into  
its opposite.

6♥

The result falls  
upon the  
unintended.

8♠

A new  
problem  
arises.

7♠

Reputation spreads far and wide.

5♣

Mastery achieved in the  
chosen course.

4♣

A doubling of cost or reward.

6♦

The choice holds true for  
a long time.

5♦

More is at stake than anyone  
knew until now.

4♦

A feeling grows in intensity.

5♥

A group increases in size.

4♥

Trapped  
forever.

3♣

Aftermath spreads from few  
to many.

6♠

In a strange,  
far-off place.

2♣

The effect is more than  
expected.

5♠

Transformed  
into something  
permanent.

3♦

To pay  
a price.

2♦

In defense of  
others.

3♥

At the side of  
your beloved.

2♥

Another's  
revenge.

4♠

Mutual  
destruction.

3♠

By your  
own hand.

2♠

# ORACLE FOR PROTAGONISTS

	♥ background	♦ distinction	♠ flaw/hardship	♣ dilemma
2	Grew up in a different society	Genius inventor or thinker	Distrustful, isolated	An old promise must be fulfilled
3	Last of your lineage	Recipient of prophetic visions	Consumed by ambition	Neighboring states are at war
4	Given up for adoption	Beloved by the people	Desperate to prove yourself	The people slowly starve during drought or famine
5	Child of a union between feuding rivals	Eloquent speaker and diplomat	Obsessed with the past	Invaders pillage the countryside
6	Orphaned or estranged	Crafter of masterpieces	Followed by bad luck	An ideologue stirs the people up to alarming outbursts
7	Born physically different or marked	Described in a prophecy	Cursed with terrible beauty	Something important has been stolen, broken, or befouled
8	Raised by beasts	Favorite of a deity	Hated by a deity	Strange plague has fallen across the land
9	A reincarnated soul	Scholar of secrets and hidden knowledge	Easily provoked	An old wrong must be made right
10	Kidnapped and raised by others	Physical strength of ten people	Target of vicious lies	Whispers of a conspiracy are growing
J	Member of a royal family	Heir to a throne	Lacking in subtlety	The former monarch is dead or dying, with no apparent heir
Q	Descended from divine blood	Bearer of a divine weapon or tool	Rejected by society	Divine wrath has been roused
K	Brought back from the dead	Blessed with near-immortality	Proud to a fault	The people suffer under a tyrant
A	Given artificial life or created from inanimate matter	Possessor of sorcerous magic	Death foretold by an oracle	An unnatural force throws the cycle of life into disarray

To use this oracle, take a 52-card poker deck, remove the jokers and other inserts, and separate the cards by suit. Shuffle each suit, then draw one card from each. (For more-varied results, don't separate suits; just shuffle & draw four cards. For less-varied, choose four ideas you like best.) Integrate the four parts into a cohesive concept, and you're done! A digital version of this oracle can be found at: <http://forkingpaths.info/labryrinthine-oracle>



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