

WHAT IS HERE?

'What is Here?' is a game about building a myth around a being through a community's eyes. By using a deck of cards and answering questions in short role play scenes, this game gives you the opportunity to build an organic story through a community, and shape their history forever. This being is whatever you want it to be, though try to approach the game without a preconceived image of what 'it' is. The whims, nature, desires, and temperament of 'it' will become apparent through play.



What you need to play:

- A deck of playing cards
- At least one copy of this game
- 2+ players



You may also want note-taking accessories, snacks, drinks, or atmospheric touches.

This game can be played solo, either for your own entertainment or to use as a writing / conceptualisation aid.

The aim of the game is to emulate the complex, layered way urban myths and stories of fantastical creatures grow over time, like vampires, sirens, and other such creatures.

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◆ How to play ◆

Separate out all the jokers, kings, queens, and jacks and shuffle them. These will be your Wild Cards. Shuffle the rest of the deck and place it face down where everyone can access it (or where the designated card-drawer can access it). These are your Questions. Place your Wild Cards near them, but make sure you can differentiate between the two stacks.

Decide as a group what your community looks like. Is it a 10th century fishing village? An ancient castle overlooking an endless moor? A group of high school students? A spaceship travelling through the universe? Then decide as a group who will take the first turn, and how play will circulate. You could go by oldest to youngest, clockwise, or a rock-paper-scissors tournament. The first player draws a card from the Questions stack and reads the corresponding question aloud. They then set up a role play scene, inviting other players in.

For example, you might decide to set up a scene where a grandmother puts her grandchildren to bed with a story. Or you might be reporting a happenstance to a council. Or perhaps you're with two fellow prisoners in the local jail.

Remember your community setting, but think freely of who might be talking, and where they may be.

You can invite any number of players into the scene or construct a one-on-one scene, but be mindful of how many scenes everyone has been in, and make sure no one is left out of play.

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◆ How to play ◆

After either a minimum of 4 scenes have been played through, or at the end of each round if there are 4 or more players, draw a Wild Card. The Wild Card is discussed by all players, and the events detailed on the card are decided by the group.

Try to say “yes, and” rather than no, and try to build on ideas rather than shooting them down. As soon as possible during the discussion, but when all players are ready, move into a group scene involving all players to play through the events of the Wild Card.

Play then continues until you are ready to end the game. Consider either setting a timer for a few hours, or deciding on a number of scenes to play through to help guide you.



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Play styles



Every table has a different approach to free form role play. If this is your first time playing a game like this, below is just one example of how to approach the game.

Player A draws the 4 of Diamonds. They read out the question to the group: What can banish it, or coax it closer? After taking a moment to think about the community, a group of scientists, stationed deep within a forest, they decide to set a scene at dinner time. They explain the surroundings, the atmosphere, give themselves a name, and invite other players in as they like.

Player A: Did you hear that rattling last night, like something was walking around in the canopy? If there was something up there, it sounded huge.

Player B: I did, it woke me up! Thought it was hail or something at first. Or birds. A lot of birds.

Player C: Really? Damn, I slept right through it. What time was this?

Player A: Late. Like, really late. Almost morning, maybe. Scared the hell out of me, so I went out with my pistol. You know, in case it was some bear, or something. But I couldn't see anything. Realised I was being pretty stupid, standing out there with a gun and my pyjamas, so I came back inside and locked the doors.

But this morning when I went out to get the river samples, I saw all these weird marks.

Player C: Like footprints?

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Play styles



Player A: I guess. The bank was too churned up to see anything clearly. But here's the weirdest thing. You know those red flowers that grow down there? There were no marks for like, 10 feet around each bush. Like it was avoiding it. Keeping it away.

Player B: Huh. Maybe it's poisonous to it, or something?

Player A: You might be right. Maybe we should go gather some and put them round the camp...

And so on, until the scene draws to an end.

You may prefer to set the scene and suggest roles (like being the grandmother and asking for children or other family members) and let other players claim roles as they like.

Or you may prefer to set the scene and allow players to come in as they please with fitting characters of their own imagination. You may even ask another player to bring back a previous character of theirs.

No matter how you decide to set the scenes, continue to be mindful of everyone getting equal space at the proverbial table.

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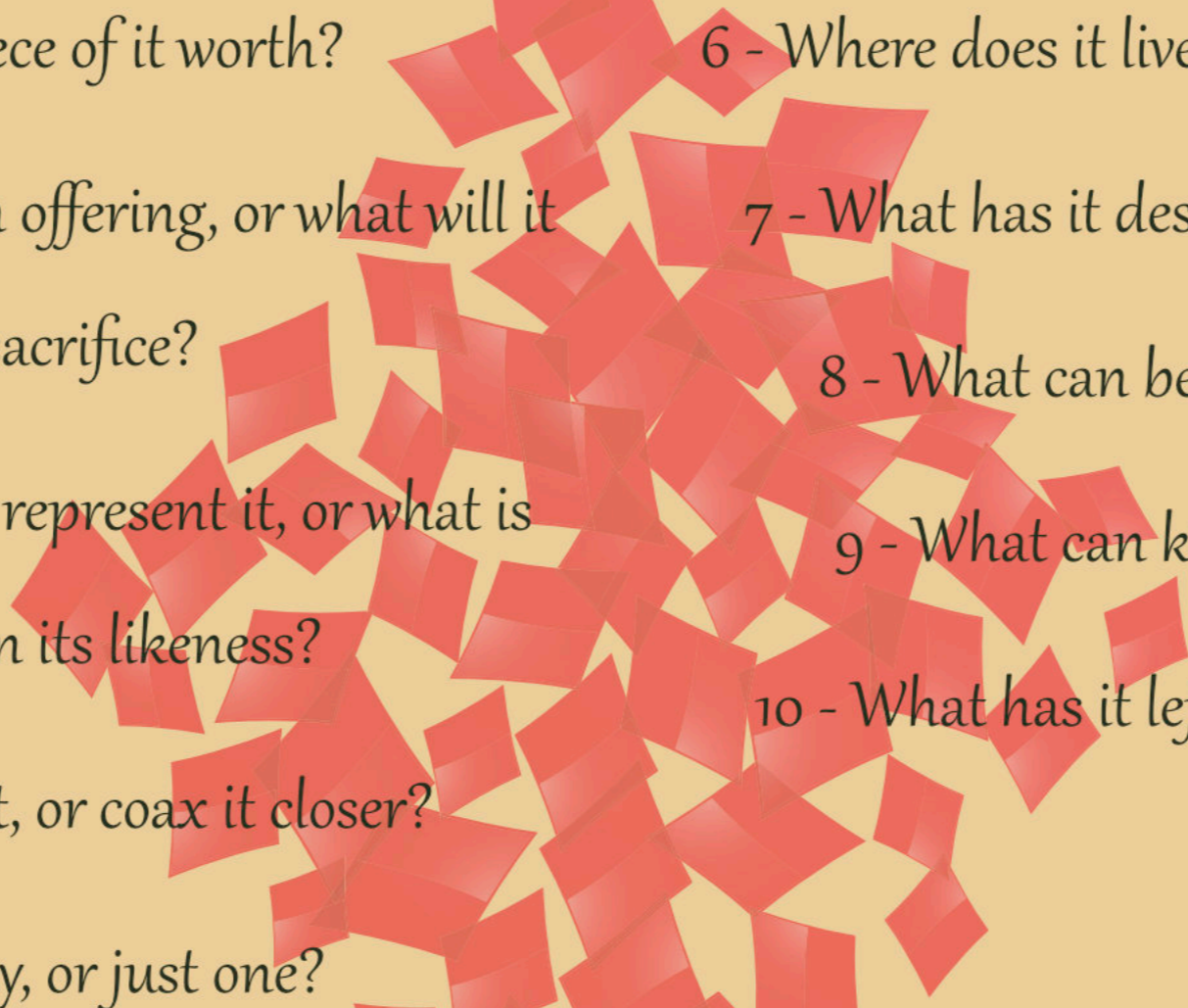
Questions

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- Ace - Can it understand you?
- 2 - What dream did it appear in, or what nightmare?
- 3 - What does it mourn, or what does it celebrate?
- 4 - What has it changed in you? Is this good, or bad?
- 5 - Is it an omen, or a blessing?
- 6 - What does it make you doubt, or what does it confirm?
- 7 - What thrills you about it, or what chills you?
- 8 - Is it beautiful, or terrible? Or both?
- 9 - Does it fill you with hope, or dread?
- 10 - Do you want to protect it, or hunt it?

Emotional impact

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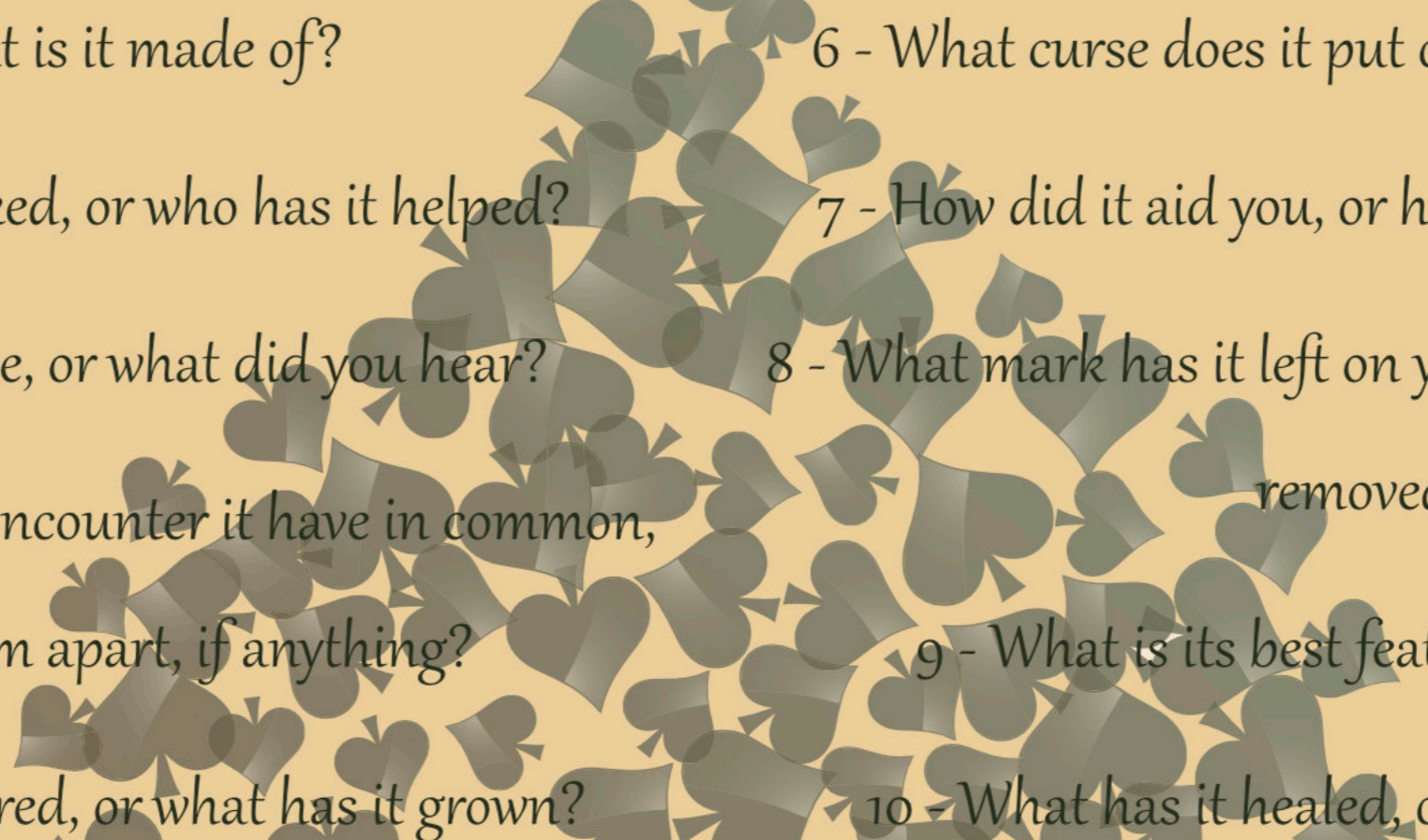
Questions

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- 1 - Ace - What is a piece of it worth?
- 2 - What will it accept as an offering, or what will it accept as a sacrifice?
- 3 - What is being made to represent it, or what is being destroyed in its likeness?
- 4 - What can banish it, or coax it closer?
- 5 - Are there many, or just one?
- 6 - Where does it live? What does its home look like?
- 7 - What has it destroyed, or what has it created?
- 8 - What can be collected or taken from it?
- 9 - What can kill it, or what can create it?
- 10 - What has it left for you, or what has it taken away?

Material impact

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Questions

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- 1 - Ace - What is it made of?
- 2 - Who has it attacked, or who has it helped?
- 3 - What did you see, or what did you hear?
- 4 - What do those who encounter it have in common, or what sets them apart, if anything?
- 5 - What has it withered, or what has it grown?
- 6 - What curse does it put on you, or what boon?
- 7 - How did it aid you, or how did it hinder you?
- 8 - What mark has it left on you, or what mark has it removed?
- 9 - What is its best feature, or its worst?
- 10 - What has it healed, or what has it hurt?

Physical impact

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Questions

- 1 - How do you pass the stories of it on?
- 2 - What has been built or torn down in your community because of it?
- 3 - Has it divided your community, or brought you together?
- 4 - How can you be saved from it, or how can you welcome it into your life?
- 5 - What songs are sung about it, or what books are written, or what pictures are painted?
- 6 - Where do people no longer go, or where do they now go more often?
- 7 - What ritual is done to celebrate its presence, or what is done to ward it off?
- 8 - Who is revered for being in its image, or who is shunned?
- 9 - Why do some claim the stories around it are false, or why do some spread the stories?
- 10 - What words have been created to describe it, or what words have been discarded due to it?

Cultural impact

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Wild Cards

King - Someone tries to kill it. What happens?

Queen - Something happens within the community, bringing the peoples together. What happens, and how does it factor into this?

Jack - The hearts of the community are changing because of it. How?

What is happening, person to person?

King - Who has died because of it? What happened?

Queen - Something is now in abundance because of it. How has this benefited the community?

Jack - There's been a natural disaster.

Is it its fault, or has it helped?

Black joker: Something huge happens because of it. This is great. What happens?

Red joker: Something huge happens because of it. This is terrible. What happens?

King - There is war nearby. What effect does this have?

Queen - Someone is profiting from it in some way. How does this affect the community?

Jack - Stories of it either bring people to the community, or keep them away. What does this mean for the community?

King - Something important surrounding it has been destroyed. Was this done by believers, or non-believers? Why? What happened?

Queen - Someone creates a Masterpiece centred on it. What masterpiece, and how does it change art forever?

Jack - What institution has taken notice? What have they outlawed, or decreed?

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Notes, acknowledgements, and thanks

I'd like to thank W. H Arthur and Flowers for hosting this jam. It's been an incredible experience to write my first ever TTRPG around such a fascinating subject. I'd like to acknowledge Avery Alder's influence on my game with her amazing game 'The Quiet Year', as well as Matthew Guzdial's 'The Junkyard'. Some graphics provided by Vecteezy.

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You can also follow me on Twitter under the handle @uzbadyubi. If you enjoyed this game, please consider leaving me a review or tweeting me about it! I'd love to hear what myths you create.