

Ithaca in the Cards: Second Expedition

v1.02

Test Characters

Stranded behind enemy lines, a ragtag squad must evade enemy patrols to reach friendly territory in the closing stages of a war

Player	Vian	Takuma	Aaron	
Character Name	Tenga (he/him) A warrior/assistant type who dedicated their life to retrieving an important stolen artifact	Maya (she/her), a diplomat who has a loved one that disappeared in enemy territory. She is looking for them	Linus (he/him) Bookish historian, navigator/translator, believes in ancient prophecies	The Hierophant
Character Archetype	Q♣ - Warrior, one who overcomes	Q♠ - Hunter, one who seeks	J♦ - Academic, one who studies	
Character Aims	A♠ - Return something that was lost	K♠ - Get every single person on this quest home safe	J♠ - Spread the stories of your party's deeds	
Asset	2♠ - A treasure gained on your quest at great cost	3♣ - A skill you've honed over many years, your pride and calling	4♥ - A promise to a loved one that gives you strength and purpose	
Asset	7♥ - The teachings and warnings of your mentors	8♣ - Looks and charm that have drawn admirers and adversaries alike	9♦ - A prophecy that you believe you are destined to fulfill	
Asset	5♠ - A deadly weapon you're loathe to use	8♥ - A facility with words and poetry that draws others to you	5♥ - A debt owed to you, not to be called upon lightly	

Premise

You are fellow travellers trying to make your way home. It is a perilous journey, and you will be constantly hounded by danger and death. You may lose parts of yourself, or lose your life completely. There is no escape, only survival. As you journey on, you will need to reflect on what spurs you on your homeward path, and what is worth giving up to reach that destination.

Introduction

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.

The goal of the game is to make it home safely. The chances of your survival on this journey are slim. The game typically ends with just one person surviving the entire journey, and just as often no one might make it home. Occasionally, you might get lucky and reach home quickly and safely, but you will still have to lose some part of yourself to make that happen.

Obviously you can try to “win” this game, but it’s best to come into this game with a “play to lose” approach. Play to lose well, and figure out what dealing with hardship and loss says about you.

Safety and Expectations

In this game, you will often have characters interacting in stressful and dangerous situations. This can bring up themes and situations that might cause discomfort or distress for some players. It’s vitally important to have a conversation early on about trust and safety, define clear boundaries and expectations, and establish procedures on how to deal with any issues that may come up during play.

An atmosphere of trust and safety will enable you to share your creativity boldly and boost your ability to collaborate. Please make sure to cultivate this atmosphere by keeping the safety and comfort of players paramount.

Discuss and implement safety tools such as Lines and Veils, Script Change, Cut and Brake, the X-Card and open table policies that work with your group. The game’s structure has multiple breaks in play as you switch between play steps, so use them as predetermined breaks to check in with all players, get feedback and adjust as needed.

Establishing the Journey

After setting up your safety procedures and expectations, it's time to establish the setting of the game and the context of your journey. Start by answering the following questions together:

- What quest required you to venture far from home?
- How did that quest end?
- How are you making your way home?
- Why is your journey back so deadly?

You may use the following prompts to help you, or come up with details of the journey on your own:

Card	Journey Details
A	After the war, twelve ships sail home against the will of the gods
2	You stepped into the past to fix something in the present, begetting more mistakes as your time machine fails
3	Stranded among the stars, the intrepid crew of a cutting-edge science vessel encounters new worlds on their way back to familiar ones
4	Investigating an unexplained disappearance, you return with more questions than answers, and more passengers than you were supposed to
5	Having stolen from Death, you ascend the levels of the Underworld to return to the land of the living
6	Recovering an artifact buried in the dunes, your expedition races through the desert to evade those who would take it for their own plans
7	You found an answer to the mystery in the centre of the exclusion zone, forever changed, you must still endure the strange landscape on your way out
8	Stranded behind enemy lines, a ragtag squad must evade enemy patrols to reach friendly territory in the closing stages of a war
9	A tranquil cruise encounters disaster, and the crew and passengers must find their way back to safe harbour after the vessel sustains heavy damage
10	Trapped in an alternate reality, dimensional explorers hop between worlds, hoping their next hop is the one that leads them home
J	After conquering a summit, a climbing expedition contends with freak accidents and setbacks on their way back down
Q	A visit to the spirit realm turns dangerous as malevolent forces bar the occultists from returning to their bodies
K	After an arduous quest to defeat a great evil, the survivors of the adventuring party face just as many dangers on their way home

Creating Characters and Setting Up the Deck

Next, create your characters and set up the card deck. Take a deck of cards and set aside the face cards (Jacks, Queens, Kings) and Aces. Each player will create a character based on 1 Archetype, 1 Aim, and 3 Assets.

Draw or choose 2 face or Ace cards and use them as prompts to define your character. Choose one as your character's Archetype, and the other as your Aim. Your character's Archetype is a rough description of the role your character might play in the group or what your character might be skilled at. Your Aim is something that motivates or drives you on your journey home.

Character Archetypes

J♣ - Rogue, one who takes	J♦ - Academic, one who studies	J♥ - Artist, one who inspires	J♠ - Rebel, one who opposes
Q♣ - Warrior, one who overcomes	Q♦ - Sorcerer, one who conjures	Q♥ - Healer, one who mends	Q♠ - Hunter, one who seeks
K♣ - Guardian, one who protects	K♦ - Prophet, one who sees beyond	K♥ - Commander, one who leads	K♠ - Spy, one who deceives
A♣ - Assassin, one who kills	A♦ - Navigator, one who plans	A♥ - Priest, one who connects	A♠ - Outsider, one who is not

Character Aims

J♣ - Burn your enemies and expose their corruption	J♦ - Bring home a vast hoard of treasure	J♥ - Bring home proof of your great discovery	J♠ - Spread the stories of your party's deeds
Q♣ - Bring home a much needed prize	Q♦ - Gain renown for your latest accomplishments	Q♥ - Return to your great work, so close to completion	Q♠ - Reunite with your loved ones
K♣ - Betray the party as soon as you reach safety	K♦ - Warn your home of an impending calamity	K♥ - Fulfill an important personal promise	K♠ - Get every single person on this quest home safe
A♣ - Build a home and a future for yourself and your loved ones	A♦ - Settle a score with someone	A♥ - Repay your debts	A♠ - Return something that was lost

Also set aside the 10s from the deck. Place two of them face-down, and two of them face-up within easy reach of all players. The 10s represent the group's Morale, with the face-up 10s representing your current Morale. Your Morale can not go above four.

Remove the unused face and Ace cards, and any Jokers from the deck. They will not be used in the game.

Shuffle the rest of the deck (the deck should now consist of 32 cards, 2-9 of each suit) and place it in the centre of the playing space.

Then, draw cards from the deck or choose from the following table to generate 3 Assets for your character and describe them. Return any cards drawn to the deck and shuffle it.

Feel free to interpret the Archetypes, Aims and Assets broadly to fit with the setting and journey you've chosen. For example, a Sorcerer in a sci-fi setting might be a gifted inventor, a Hunter could be a sniper or archer, a talent or knack could be a powerful mutation, and a symbol of your profession could be the halo that marks you as a god's chosen messenger.

Character Assets

2♣ - Toughness and endurance that has allowed you to survive	2♦ - Confidence and knowledge about a topic or area	2♥ - A close bond with a fellow traveller	2♠ - A treasure gained on your quest at great cost
3♣ - A skill you've honed over many years, your pride and calling	3♦ - A critical secret you've discovered and kept	3♥ - A song that calls for answers and accompaniment	3♠ - A trusted tool that's worn with heavy use
4♣ - Strength to overcome and destroy those who oppose you	4♦ - A conviction that guides you in difficult times	4♥ - A promise to a loved one that gives you strength and purpose	4♠ - A piece of armour, a symbol of all you've endured
5♣ - A talent or knack you've always been able to rely on	5♦ - A knack for strategy and tactics that has garnered loyalty and trust	5♥ - A debt owed to you, not to be called upon lightly	5♠ - A deadly weapon you're loathe to use
6♣ - Speed and reflexes that have kept you ahead and away	6♦ - Maps and charts that guide you where you need to go	6♥ - A symbol of your profession and obligations	6♠ - A coin of highly specific value, not to be traded easily
7♣ - Keen senses and awareness of your surroundings	7♦ - The last words of a dying language	7♥ - The teachings and warnings of your mentors	7♠ - A cherished memento which has nourished you for many years
8♣ - Looks and charm that have drawn admirers and adversaries alike	8♦ - A hidden name that grants you power over someone or something	8♥ - A facility with words and poetry that draws others to you	8♠ - An old key to a sealed and hidden door
9♣ - A miracle of the stars marked on your body	9♦ - A prophecy that you believe you are destined to fulfill	9♥ - A ghost that haunts you, in your waking and sleeping	9♠ - An enigmatic item of last resort

For the Assets, you could go into some detail at this point to interpret the prompt, or you can hold off until it becomes relevant during play. Going into detail early can help you gain a better grasp of your character early, while holding off might let you play off ideas and themes that get brought up by other players during play.

Both approaches have their benefits, and you can also mix and match by going into detail early with one or two Assets and leaving the rest for later. Go with what works for you.

Once you've determined your character's Archetype, Aim and Assets, you should have a decent grasp of what your character is like, what their personality and drive might be like. Like the Asset details, you can choose to add more detail now or hold off and fill these in during play. There will be plenty of opportunity later on to examine and express your character's quirks.

You can record all your character details on a character sheet, or writing each detail and Asset on separate index cards.

Assets can become Exhausted later on by marking them as Exhausted on a character sheet, or turning the card you wrote them on face down. An Exhausted Asset could mean it is lost, damaged or otherwise no longer reliable. When detailing your Assets, keep in mind how they might become Exhausted and lost in the future.

As you fill in your character details, you can also describe your character's look and what they might have contributed to the quest. Feel free to discuss with other players and share ideas and suggestions for character details with each other.

Record all the relevant details down on a character sheet or some note cards, and also pick a name and pronouns for your character.

Once everyone has created characters, it's a good time to go around and introduce each of your characters, re-stating your character details so that everyone is on the same page before beginning the journey home.

Journeying Home

The journey home begins after everyone has introduced their characters. The journey consists of several rounds, with each round having 4 steps:

1. Define the Trial
2. Choose Your Response
3. Fate Deals the Cards
4. Resolve the Trial
5. Pause and Reflect

1. Define the Trial

Choose someone to act as Fate (in later rounds, this should be the player to the left of the previous Fate player).

For the first round, Fate randomly chooses one of the cards of value 6 as the first Trial. Make sure to return any 6s not chosen to the deck and shuffle it.

In future rounds, Fate draws and reveals a card from the deck to the centre of the playing space, adding it to a stack of all previously drawn Fate cards. The total value of all of Fate's cards in the stack is the Trial's Threshold for the round.

There is no limit to the Threshold's value, so the journey will become more and more dangerous as you continue, taking its toll on all the travelers.

Fate describes what the Trial represents based on the prompts in the following table; a difficult situation that the group faces on their journey home.

Trial Prompts

2♣ - Dangerous wildlife threatens your safety	2♦ - Harsh weather impedes your journey	2♥ - Poor progress leads to dampened morale and low spirits	2♠ - Something breaks and require urgent repairs
3♣ - Bandits and opportunists catch you unawares	3♦ - Hazardous terrain and geography stand in your way	3♥ - A trust is broken, leading to an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust	3♠ - Food or basic resources become damaged or run out
4♣ - An especially menacing creature or monster attacks	4♦ - Locals become wary of you, reducing chances of getting help	4♥ - A debate over a group decision turns into a heated argument	4♠ - Fatigue overwhelms some or all of the group
5♣ - A rival challenges you head-on	5♦ - You get turned around and become lost for a spell	5♥ - A close bond is irreparably strained due to the stresses of the journey	5♠ - An important object or resource is lost
6♣ - A hunter dispatched after you successfully corners you	6♦ - A natural disaster occurs, setting you back immensely	6♥ - Competing objectives leads to a major argument over the group's destination	6♠ - A key item or mechanism is severely damaged
7♣ - A formidable old foe reappears, launching a renewed assault	7♦ - A disease ravages your group, leaving you weak and vulnerable	7♥ - A key member of the group temporarily leaves due to a disagreement	7♠ - A tragic accident occurs, injuring several people
8♣ - Enemies surround you from all sides, intent on your destruction	8♦ - You encounter an unexplained anomaly that disorients or displaces you	8♥ - A mutiny occurs, splintering the group	8♠ - A route or mode of transport becomes unusable, a new one must be found
9♣ - A traitor and their sabotage is revealed	9♦ - Supernatural forces oppose you, gods and demons seem intent on your destruction	9♥ - Romantic entanglements come to a head in the most disastrous way	9♠ - Someone loses a limb in an accident

Fate weaves the Trial's prompt into the story so far, and invites the other players to elaborate on how the Trial came to be and what each character's role could be in causing the Trial 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 Trial.

Fate reminds the players how the Trial prevents the group from reaching home unchanged.

2. Choose Your Response

For the first round, all players must choose to Face the Trial. Follow the steps for Facing the Trial below.

In future rounds, 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 (this means Fate goes last), picking from the options below.:

- **Face the Trial** - Choose one of your character's Assets. Then describe how your character uses that Asset in an attempt to endure or overcome this Trial. In the next step, you will draw a card to represent how your attempt went, potentially losing your chosen Asset if you fail.
- **Exert Yourself in the Trial** - Alternatively, you may choose to exert yourself and choose two of your character's Assets in an attempt to overcome this Trial. Describe how your character acts in a courageous or desperate manner using both Assets. In the next step, you will draw 2 cards to represent how your attempt went, potentially losing both chosen Assets if you fail. Usually, you'd do this when you are falling far behind against the Trial's Threshold, in an attempt to overcome the disparity.
- **Improve Morale** - Choose another player and describe how your character improves overall Morale by helping them instead of addressing the Trial directly. This should involve expending some effort or resources in the process. Choose two of your Assets that you relied on to help improve Morale and describe how you do so. Usually, you'd do this when you're already far ahead of the Trial's Threshold, and you don't want to risk drawing too many cards.
- **Succumb to the Trial** - If you have no Morale, one player must choose to succumb to the Trial, never to see home again. You can also choose to do this of your own volition if it feels right to do so. You can frame this action as performing a valiant sacrifice, accepting your doomed fate, splitting from the group, or abandoning the journey to stay where you are. As you succumb to the Trial, you choose one player to share your final words with before leaving. Swap one of your cards with one of their cards to represent this final conversation.

Once everyone has chosen a response, move to the resolution step.

3. Fate Deals the Cards

Starting with the player to the left of Fate and going clockwise, Fate deals cards to them based on the response you chose (Fate deals cards to themselves last):

- **Face the Trial** - Fate deals you one card from the deck. Add it to all your previously drawn cards in a stack. Note the total value of all the cards in your stack as your Effort for this round.
- **Exert Yourself in the Trial** - Fate deals you two cards from the deck. Add it to all your previously drawn cards in a stack. Note the total value of all the cards in your stack as your Effort for this round.
- **Improve Morale** - Fate deals you no cards. Note the total value of all the cards in your stack as your Effort for this round. Exhaust one of the Assets you relied upon to immediately to gain one Morale (flip one of the face-down 10s face-up).
- **Succumb to the Trial** - Fate deals you no cards. Instead, Fate takes all the cards in your stack and returns them to the deck and shuffles it. You no longer participate in the Trial.

4. Resolve the Trial

For each player still involved in the Trial, compare your Effort for this round against the Trial's Threshold:

- If your Effort is equal to or higher than the Threshold, you acquit yourself well during the Trial and gain one Success against the Trial. Describe what amazing feat you accomplished during this Trial, tying it to any Asset(s) you relied on or to your actions in helping others indirectly during the Trial.
- If your Effort is lower than the Threshold, you lose something or are harmed in the Trial and gain one Failure against the Trial. Exhaust all the Asset(s) you relied on in this Trial. Describe how you either lose those Assets or how they were irreparably changed in this Trial.

If you Succumbed to the Trial this round, describe the circumstances of your departure and you may choose whether that counts as a Success or a Failure against the Trial.

Then, check if any of your characters are lost, and if you have reached home:

- If your Effort is over 21 or all of your Assets are Exhausted, your character is now lost. Similar to Succumbing to the Trial, your character is now either lost, dead, or forever changed. You can choose the manner of their death or departure, either directly caused by the Trial or shortly after.
- If all characters are lost, then you have failed on your journey home. Describe how you all haunt this place.
- If any one player's Effort is exactly 21, or only one player survives, or the deck runs out, then the journey is over and all surviving players reach home after this Trial.

If your character succumbed to the Trial or became lost or dead, you may leave the game or stay to witness the end. You may still act as Fate and help in defining Trials, and can take part in reflections by asking questions.

In addition, give your character card to a surviving player. It is now their 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 you survived the Trial and have not reached home, you continue on the journey, bearing any losses you suffered on the Trial. Adjust the group's total Morale as follows:

- If there were more Failures than Successes in the Trial, the stresses and costs of dealing with the Trial overwhelms your group, and you lose 1 Morale.
- If there were more Successes than Failures in the Trial, your success against the Trial bolsters all your spirits, and you gain 1 Morale.
- If you already have 4 Morale (the maximum) and would gain more, instead one player un-Exhausts one of their Assets (remove its Exhausted mark or turn its index card face-up).

Take some time in the next step to reflect on the journey so far. If you reached home, instead skip the reflection step and move to Ending the Journey.

5. Pause and Reflect

After resolving the Trial, pause for a while and reflect as a group on what you've just faced together. Use this time to recount and summarize what has happened on the Trial and the journey so far and explore how each of your characters feel about the journey home. Mourn what was lost, and reaffirm what keeps you moving homeward.

If you succumbed to the Trial and became lost or dead, use this time to describe your final moments, and the other players may describe how they respond to your loss.

Each player may choose one of the following questions to ask another player, or to the group. You can choose the same question as another player and can repeat questions over multiple rounds. Feel free to come up with your own questions as well.

- How have you changed on this journey?
- Is your motivation to reach home still the same as when we started this journey?
- Is reaching home worth the costs you've paid so far?
- What awaits you at home that you would endure these trials?
- How did this trial bring us closer together?
- Why is there a vast distance between us now?
- How do we comfort each other after our losses?
- How do we celebrate together after our triumphs?
- What promises do you make to me, to be fulfilled after this journey?
- What oaths have you broken to make it this far?
- What do we plan to do together once we're home?
- How did my departure affect you?
- Why are you relieved that I'm no longer on this journey with you?

Once you're satisfied with the reflection, end the round and start a new one. Repeat rounds until either everyone is lost or you've reached home.

Ending the Journey

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.

Each player asks these last two questions of each other:

- How has this journey changed you?
- What part of home means the most to you, now that you're finally here?

Solo Mode: Lonesome Winds

Set up play as for 3 players, but pick one of the characters to be the current Chronicler. This will be your main viewpoint character. Set up a notebook, journal or some sheets of paper as your Chronicle.

Play the journey following the 5 steps as with a multiplayer game, with the following changes:

- At the start of each round, start a new section of the Chronicle dedicated to that round's Trial. Also start a sub-section for the Chronicler's Private Notes for this round.
- Once the Trial has been defined, record the details into the Chronicle from the perspective of the Chronicler. You can go into as much detail as you like here, providing dates and names for all the characters involved, and even adding sketches or attaching images or relevant parts of documents into the Chronicle.
- You decide how each character responds to the Trial, but record the outcomes and actions from the perspective of the Chronicler. You can speculate on what the other members of the group might feel or what might have motivated their actions, but this is just speculation by the Chronicler and is recorded in the Private Notes.
- Optionally, you can choose how the Chronicler responds, but randomly determine how the other characters respond to the Trial by drawing a random card from the unused ace and face cards and looking at the suit:
 - Club, or most common suit - Face the Trial
 - Diamond - Exert Yourself in the Trial
 - Heart - Improve Morale
 - Spade, or least common suit - Succumb to the Trial
- During the Reflection step, instead of asking a question to another character, instead look at the last card drawn in Fate's stack of cards (which defined the Trial). Find the corresponding Reflection prompt in the following table and use that as a prompt for the Chronicler's reflections in their Private Notes.
- If the Chronicler dies or leaves the group, the role of Chronicler is passed on to one of the other characters. They can look back at the previous Private Notes and reflect on them as well.

Reflections

2♣ - A friendly animal you remember back home	2♦ - A memory of a beautiful day before you left home	2♥ - Something you're thankful to have learned about your companions	2♠ - Something you've lost and still yearn for
3♣ - What treasures you are looking forward to bring home and what you plan to do with them	3♦ - A scenic location in or near your home that you long to see again	3♥ - Something you wish you hadn't learned about your companions	3♠ - Food or drink that you miss from home
4♣ - Someone you dread seeing again when you reach home	4♦ - Neighbours and friends that helped you prepare for your journey away	4♥ - A promise that you've finally fulfilled on this journey	4♠ - Bonds that you've made during this journey
5♣ - A fear you have for home and any loved ones you have there	5♦ - The one place you feel most comfortable and at home at	5♥ - A lesson of home that has saved you on your journey	5♠ - Something you've gained and are excited for
6♣ - Someone who used to challenge you back home that you are grateful to now	6♦ - A goal that you still have to achieve once you finish this journey	6♥ - Someone you can't wait to see again to prove yourself to them	6♠ - Something you've gained that you are fearful of
7♣ - Old wounds or grievances you are hoping to lay to rest when you get home	7♦ - A memory of home that has sustained you on your journey	7♥ - Words unsaid that you've carried with you for a long time	7♠ - One or more graves that you have to visit once you're home
8♣ - What about home makes you feel safe and secure	8♦ - How you felt the day you set out on your journey away on your quest	8♥ - The bonds of family and community that have supported you all this time	8♠ - Something you're hoping to build once you're home
9♣ - Something about home that you dislike and wish you could change, maybe this time	9♦ - A custom or superstition from home that you've maintained on this journey	9♥ - One or more lovers awaiting you at home	9♠ - Something you've lost and are glad for losing