

THE GREAT LONG DARK

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THE GREAT LONG DARK



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Created for Game Chef 2017.
Theme: Borders
Ingredients: Yarn, Echo, Smoke, Cut.

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PROLOGUE

Read the following out loud:

Thirty years ago your parents fled from the Tyrant's Kingdom. They packed their things in secret, and prepared to make the long hard journey through the underground, to freedom.

As they went they made a promise to the suffering many they left behind. To the brothers, sisters, uncles, and friends, who lived under the Tyrant's yoke in daily fear. Your parents promised to return, as soon as they could. To return with steel, and iron, and vengeance. To return and rescue those who remained.

So, with the hopes of their people upon their backs, and little in their pockets, they set forth into the Labyrinth. Into that maze of caverns, ancient halls, twisting tunnels and lurking horrors. Into the Great Long Dark.

For months they wandered from terror to terror, losing many of their number. But at last, after escape seemed but a distant and foolish dream, they finally emerged into the light. Blinding sun. Lush green grass. Fields of wheat that stretched their stalks ever higher. Foods they have never tasted, sights they had never seen. Freedom.

And so, your parents stayed there, in the grasslands, and started a new life. They planted wheat, built houses, and had children. They had little, but were proud of the future they sculpted. Though they never forgot their promise to the ones they left behind, still they never returned. Year after year, just when their heads were filled with thoughts of those they loved, something held them back. There was wheat that needed tending, animals to feed, shelters to build, and children to raise. And there were the horrors. The horrors of the Great Long Dark haunting them, filling them with fear and black dread. And so, in almost an instant, thirty years passed.

Now your parents' people,
your people, can wait no longer.
Now you must journey to the Tyrant's lands
and bring them home.

Now you must journey through the Great Long Dark.

THIS IS A GAME

about the price of freedom,
about what we would sacrifice for our people,
and for the ones we love.

This is a game about leaving,
about journeys that change you,
about desperation,
and about finding hope

in the strangest of places.

This is a game about the Great Long Dark.

The game has no GM.
It takes two to five players,
two or three hours to play.

It is a storytelling game.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Per player:

1 Character Sheet
1 Two-sided Token (e.g. coin)

Prepare:

9 Labyrinth Cards
10 Counters to Symbolise Taint
2 Markers to Symbolise the Children and the Parents
(e.g. minis, figures, meeples)

Prepare an X-card and learn how it works.

This is a card that players can use to edit out anything
that makes them uncomfortable with no explanation required.

(Optional: the X-Card rules
by John Stavropoulos can be found [here](#)).

1. CHARACTER SHEETS

one per player.



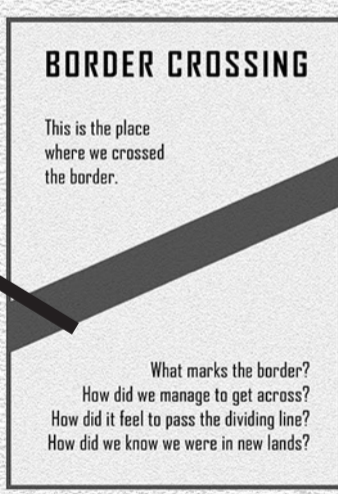
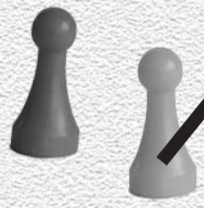
2. TOKENS

one per player.

3. LABYRINTH CARDS

Shuffle all but the Border Crossing card and place in a deck within easy reach.

Place the Border Crossing card aside for now, face up.

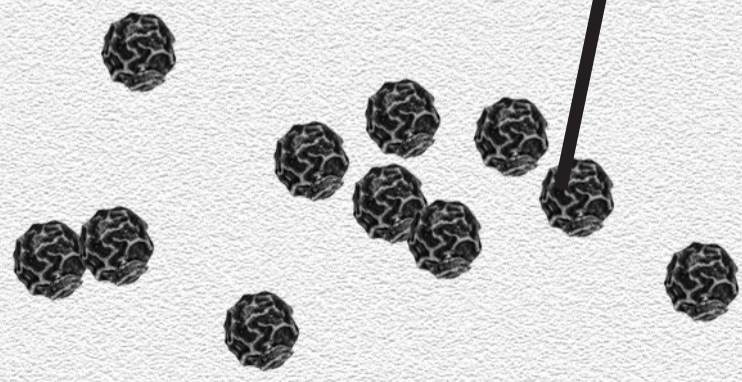


4. MARKERS

Assign one marker to the Children and the other to the Parents.

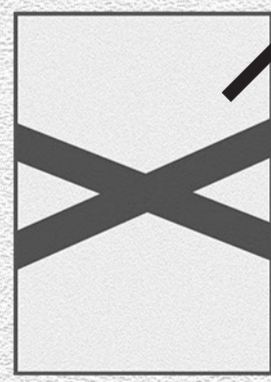
5. TAIN TOKENS

Find 10 or so tokens to represent taint. Place these in a pool within easy reach.



6. X-CARD

Prepare an X-card and make sure everyone knows how it works.



7. PLAY AREA



ACT ONE



THE RETURN

Read the following out loud:

You have been born in the grasslands—green and fertile plains. Now you have grown to adulthood. You have been raised in a world of hard work, plenty, beauty, and freedom. With the old culture of your parents, and the new one of the grasslands.

With strength. With hope.

Today you awoke to find your parents crying. In the vast, vast distance, over the Labyrinth, lies the land your parents came from. And above it, like a cloak of death, sits thick, black, smoke. The land of grandparents, of your cousins and aunts and uncles you have never known... that land is burning.

And so. The promise of your parents can wait no longer. Your people must be freed from the Tyrant's grip. And only you, and those who grew with you in the grasslands, are strong enough to do it.

CHARACTER CREATION

Everyone creates a character in the Child section of their character sheet by answering the questions written.

Each player should introduce their character, and read the answer to their questions out loud.

One player takes a token,

saying:

This is me, and this is you.

We march together.

showing which side of the token is the (me) side and which side is the (you) side.

All other players take a token, and respond:

We march together.

Each player decides whether to place their token with the (me) or the (you) side face up.

Now, it's time to depart.

DEPARTING

Begin the journey.

Each player draws two labyrinth cards.

The most courageous starts. They are the lead player.

They pick one of their cards and place it down for all to see.

That player moves the Children marker onto the card, they have taken their first steps.

That player reads the bottom half of the card out loud, and then answers, from the perspective of their character, the question, **what happened?**

Example:

Anush puts a card on the table.

She reads out loud: This is the place we destroyed the lurking horrors. What happened?

Anush thinks for a minute: I think we had heard our parent's stories, and we were ready for them. We set up an ambush.

Even though we were so scared, trembling, we knew our silver would end them in seconds.

YOUR COMPANIONS

Each of the other players take turns to:

Pick one question on their sheet from the (before border) section to answer from the perspective of their character.

If their token is on the (me) side, they start the question with,

How did I...?

If their token is on the (you) side, they pick another player character to be the subject of the question, they start the question with,

How did <character name>...?

Even if another character is the subject of the question, the player answering it will still answer from the perspective of their own character.

When the question has been answered, flip the token over.
(me)/(you)

Cross out the question that was answered. It cannot be used again.

When all players have taken their turn:

As a group, decide together who receives **taint**.

Lead player rotates to the left. Repeat once more, until two cards have been played.

Once two cards have been played, take the Border Crossing card and place it after the second card.

Then, proceed to the next Act.

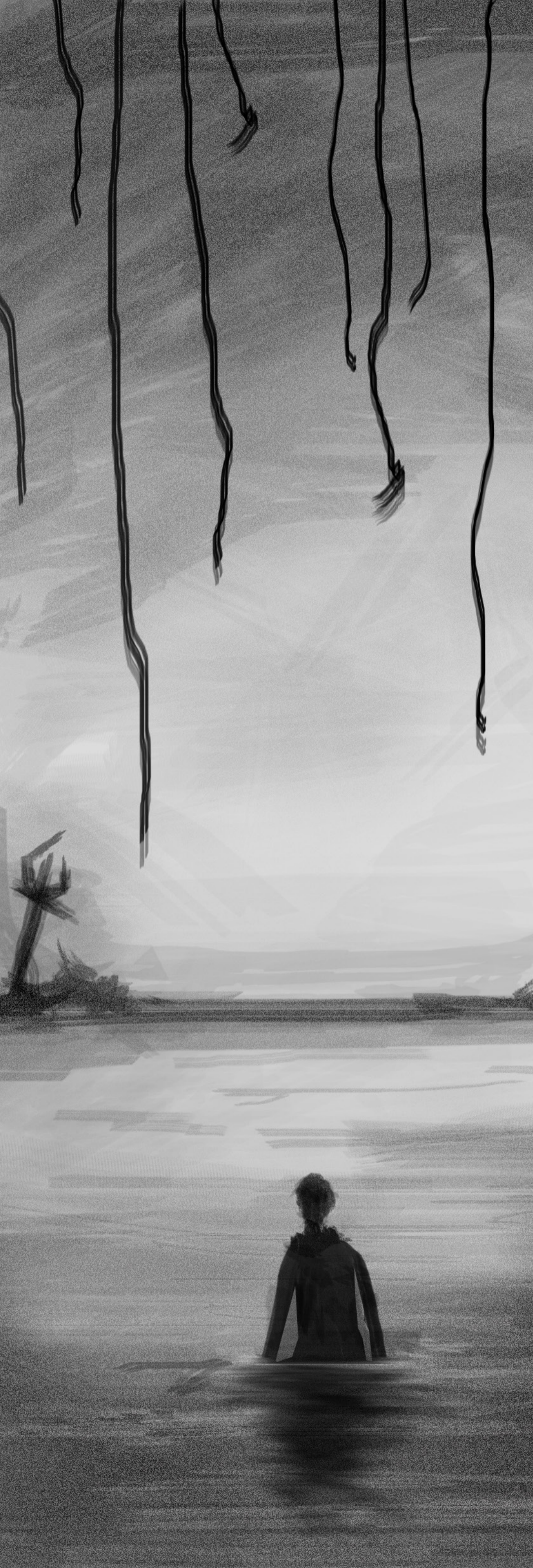
Example:

*Yurii chooses to answer the question: how did * save another from a deadly situation?*

Yurii's token is on the (you) side, so he picks Julie's character, Tobias, as the subject of the question. The question then becomes: how did Tobias save another from a deadly situation?

Yurii says: I had been told the stories by my parents. But I wasn't prepared. As I saw the horror, black blood dripping from its eyes, shapeless limbs, and yawning mouth, I froze. I froze and I couldn't move a single muscle. I would have been devoured whole, but thankfully, Tobias has twice the courage I had. I saw his quick arms dart over my shoulder, slaying the beast in a single strike of the shining silver.

After Yurii has answered the question, he flips his token from the (you) side to the (me) side. He then crosses the question he just answered off his sheet.



TAIN

The Children endure.
But the Great Long Dark is a place of
despair, desperation, and death.

Nothing within it is without taint.

Every round, the players will decide which character
has been touched most greatly by the Labyrinth.

This player receives a taint token.

Once a player reaches four taint, they must pick
either their Child or Parent character to succumb to the
Labyrinth. When they next play this character, they must
answer a question from the taint section of their sheet.
This character is then out of the game.

If the tainted player is the next lead player,
they pass this mantle to the person on their left.

In this game, as in our own lives,
much is shared between the generations.

The Parents pass on their trauma
and their burdens
to the Children,

while the Children draw strength
from the Parents and seek
to complete their mission.

This is why taint stacks on players,
not on individual characters.

If the players are strongly against
deciding who has been
most touched by the Labyrinth,
they can allocate taint randomly.

Variant

You may remove taint
from the game altogether.

ACT TWO



THE ESCAPE

Read the following out loud:

Thirty years ago you left your home, your people, and the life you'd always known to escape the Tyrant.

You barely knew where you were going.

You heard tale of another land. A green and grassy land of plenty, where the sun shone equal upon all who dwelt there. The truth was, you weren't even sure it existed. It didn't matter. You had to leave. But there's a reason nobody leaves the Tyrant's Kingdom. They don't leave, because the only way out...

is the Great Long Dark.

CHARACTER CREATION

Everyone creates a character in the Parent section of their character sheet by answering the questions written.

This character does not need to be the parent of any Child characters, in fact, they probably shouldn't be. They are merely the parent of a child, one of the many raised in the grasslands.

Each player should introduce their character, and read the answer to their questions out loud.

Each player passes their token left,

saying:

This is me, and this is you.

We leave together.

Each player decides whether to place their token with the (me) or the (you) side face up.

Now, it's time to depart.

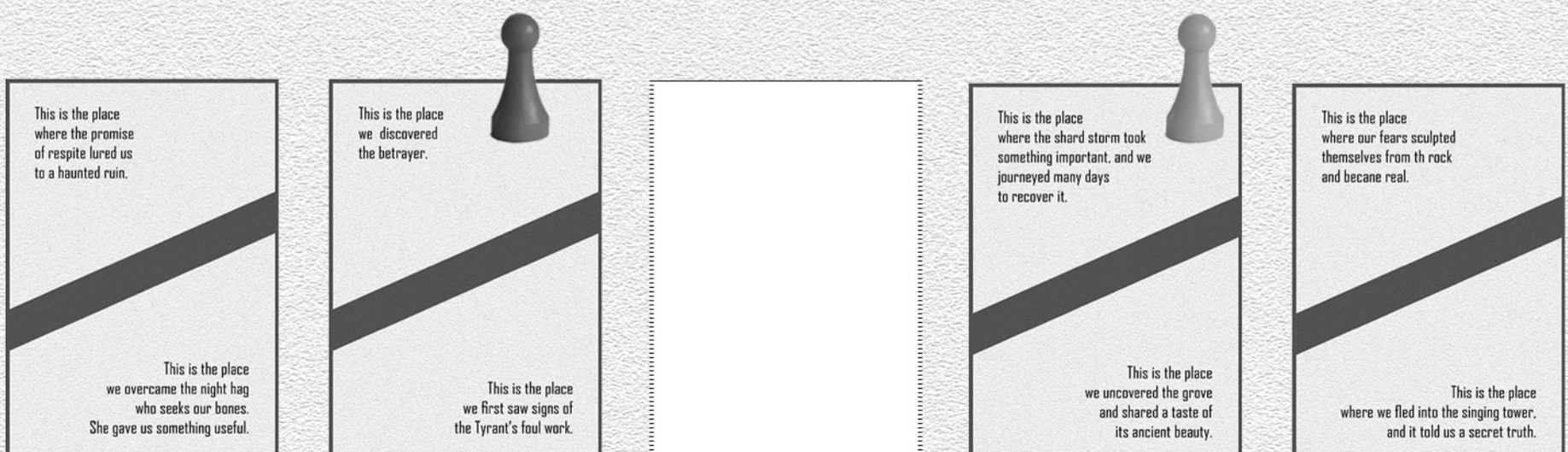
DEPARTING

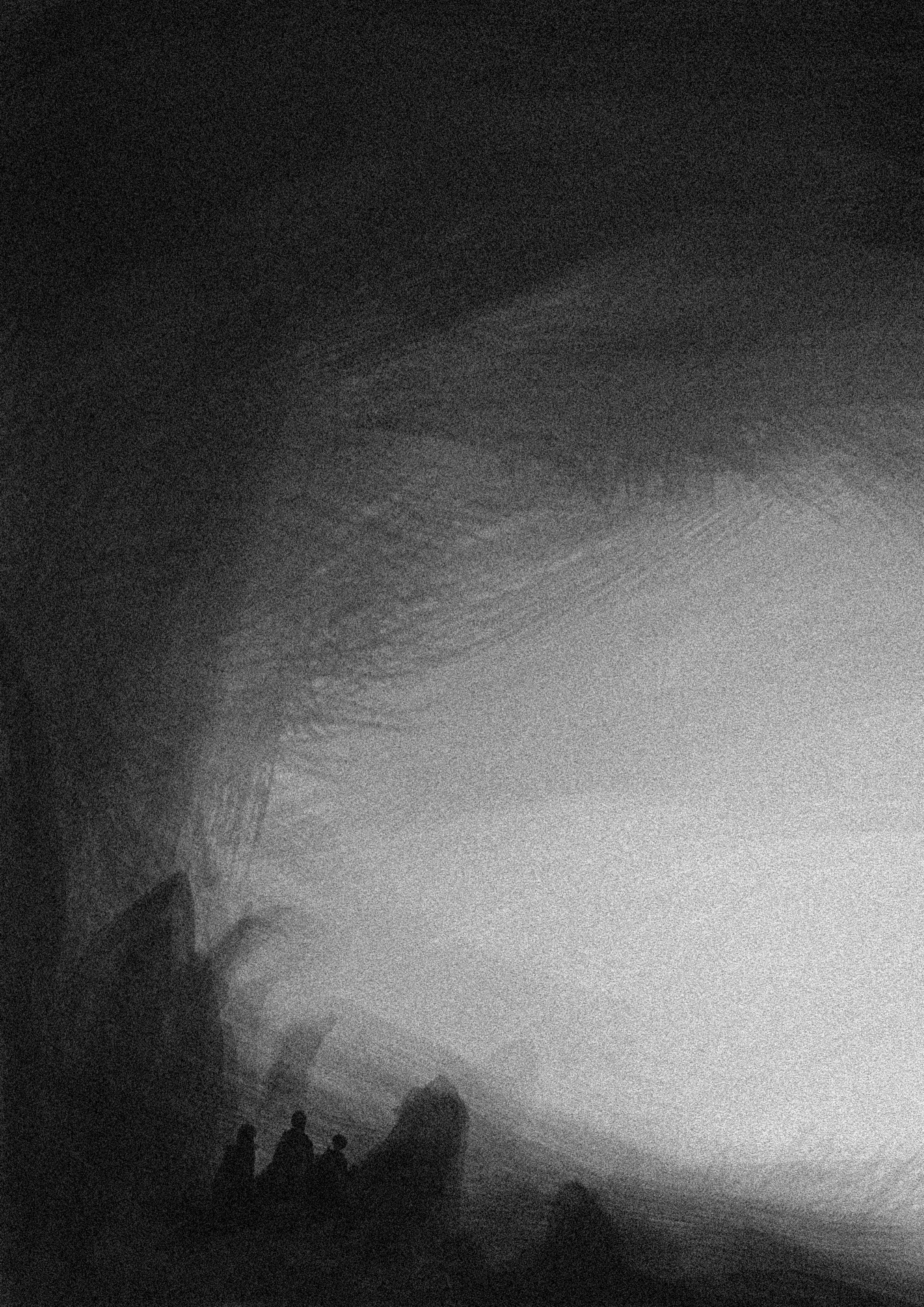
You must flee.

Play two rounds as you did but with the following differences:

- This time, you are the Parent characters.
- This time, you start from the opposite direction.
- This time, you move the Parent marker to symbolise their path.
- This time, use the top half of the Labyrinth cards.

Once you have played two more cards, your play area should look like this:







**ACT
THREE**

—

**THE
BORDER**

CROSSING

The Children cross the threshold first, returning to rediscover their past, wreak revenge, and save their people from whatever sickening act has shrouded their land in pitch-black smoke.

Move the Children marker onto the Border Crossing card and play out the card as normal, but use the questions on the Border Crossing card instead of those from a sheet.

If a player has four taint, they answer a taint question instead.

CROSSING

Next, the Parents cross, fleeing from a land of desperation and fear into a new hope and a terrible unknown.

Move the Parent marker onto the Border Crossing card and play out the card as normal, but use the questions on the Border Crossing card instead of those from a sheet.

If a player has four taint, they answer a taint question instead.

**ACT
FOUR**

—

**THE
JOURNEY**



THE GREAT LONG DARK

Both the Children and the Parents
continue their journey to the other side.

Following forward
along the path

that has already been laid before them.

Instead of
laying down new cards,
each group will progress through the two cards
already traversed through by their counterparts.

Proceed one card at a time.

Start with the Children.
Then, alternate between rounds.

Only questions from the (after border) section of the
character sheet can be answered. Otherwise, play continues
as normal.

When both the Parents and the Children have reached the end,
proceed to the next Act.

We are all
echoes

every story,
every tale,

of our sons and daughters
of our mothers and fathers.

ACT FIVE

EMERGENCE

The Parents and the Children
who still remain
emerge

from the Great Long Dark,
and reach their destination.

Begin with the Children. Read the following out loud:

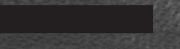
**Now, smoke has begun to trickle into the caverns through which you trudge. Smoke, and mingling with it, the faint traces of sunlight. Your boots march up the final ascent, pounding on the rocks that lead towards the surface. And at last, you emerge through the thick smog and into the sunlight. You will find your people. You will save them. And you will take them back with you, one step at a time, back and back to the grasslands. As your eyes, stinging with smoke, adjust to the world around them, answer this same question one by one.
What do you see?**

Now the Parents. Read the following out loud:

You are exhausted. You are starving, thirsty, desperate and grieving. You are nearly dead. But none of that matters when you see it. It's light. And as yellow pours like honey into the caverns, your slow steps turn to a run. You race through the final tunnel, the ascent, towards the smell of fresh air long forgotten. And then, with a gasp, you see it. Your future. Answer this same question, one by one. What do you see?



APPENDIX



PLAY MATERIALS

INSPIRATION

Atmospheric music: [here](#)

THE BORDER CROSSING CARD | LABYRINTH CARD

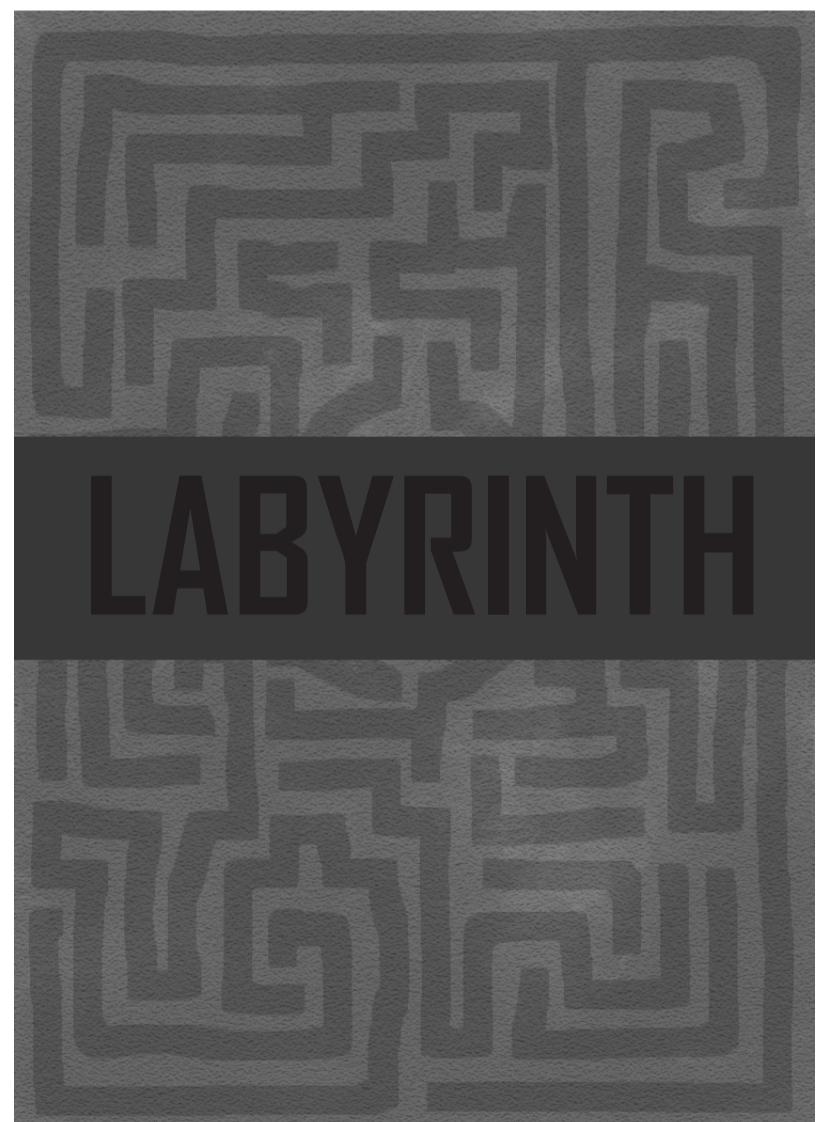
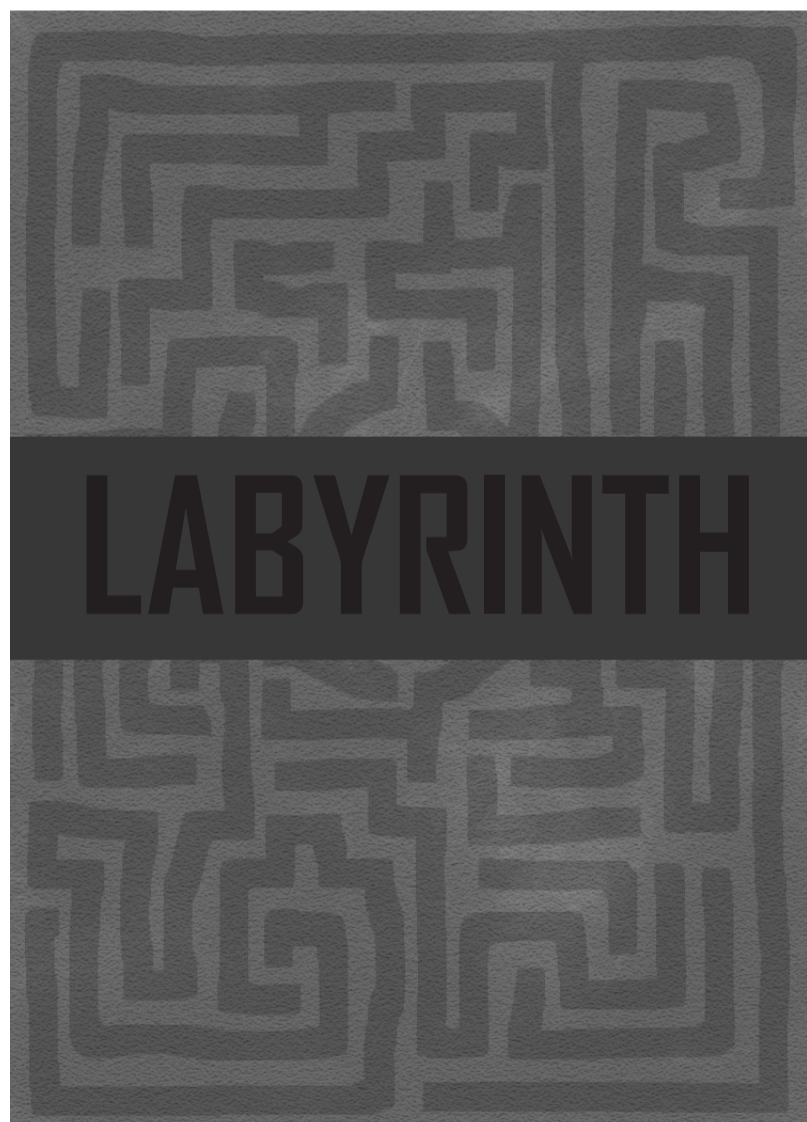
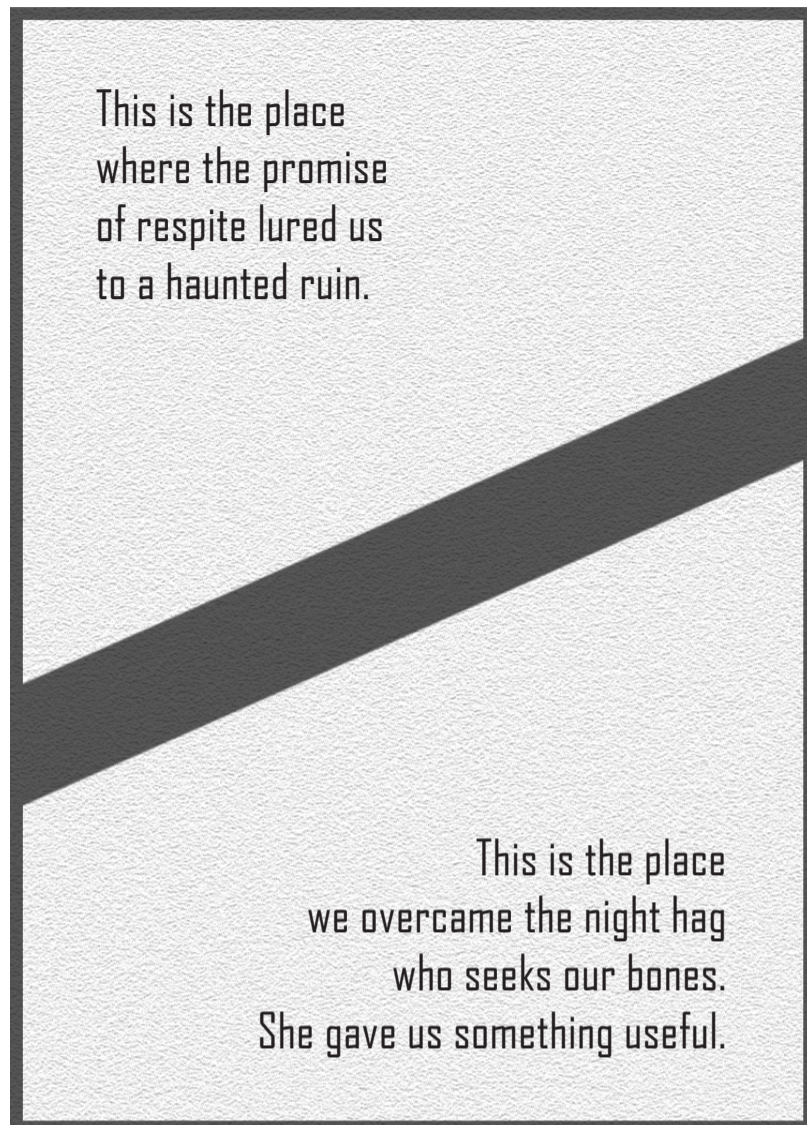
BORDER CROSSING

This is the place
where we crossed
the border.

What marks the border?
How did we manage to get across?
How did it feel to pass the dividing line?
How did we know we were in new lands?

LABYRINTH

LABYRINTH CARDS 2



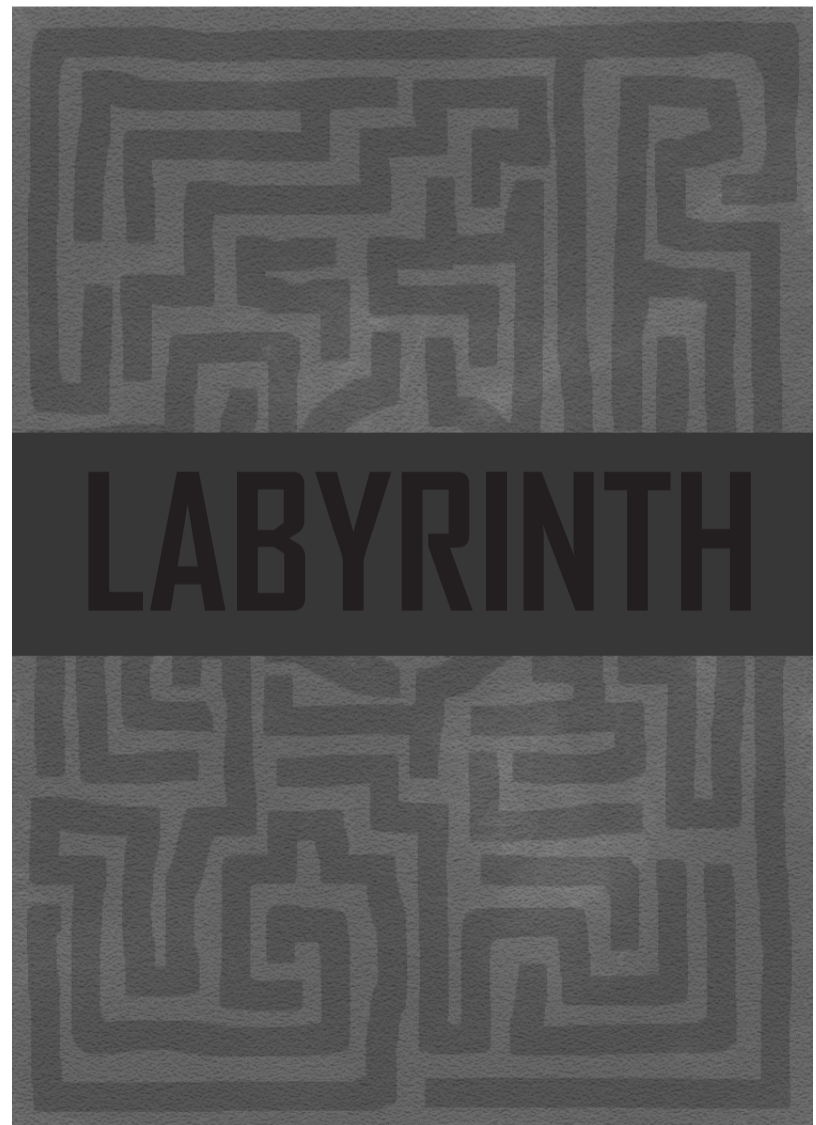
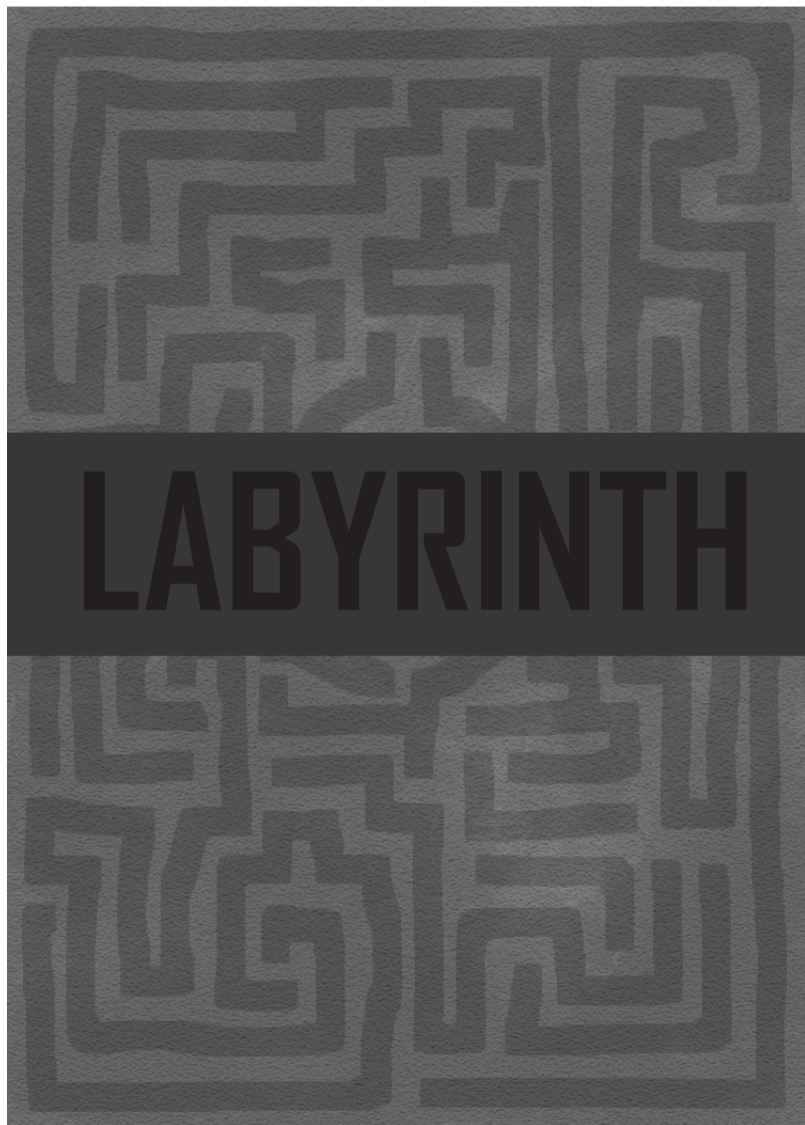
LABYRINTH CARDS 3

This is the place
where the shard storm took
something important, and we
journeyed many days
to recover it.

This is the place
we uncovered the grove
and shared a taste of
its ancient beauty.

This is the place
where our fears sculpted
themselves from the rock
and became real.

This is the place
where we fled into the singing tower,
and it told us a secret truth.



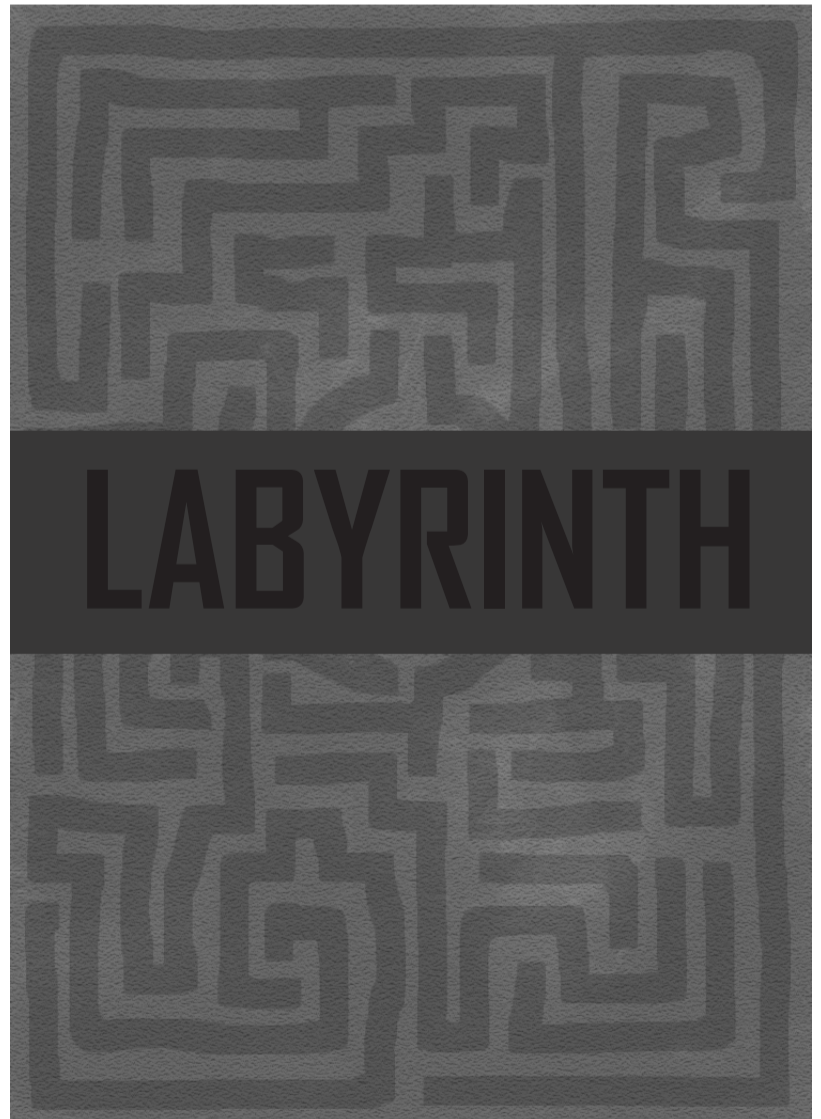
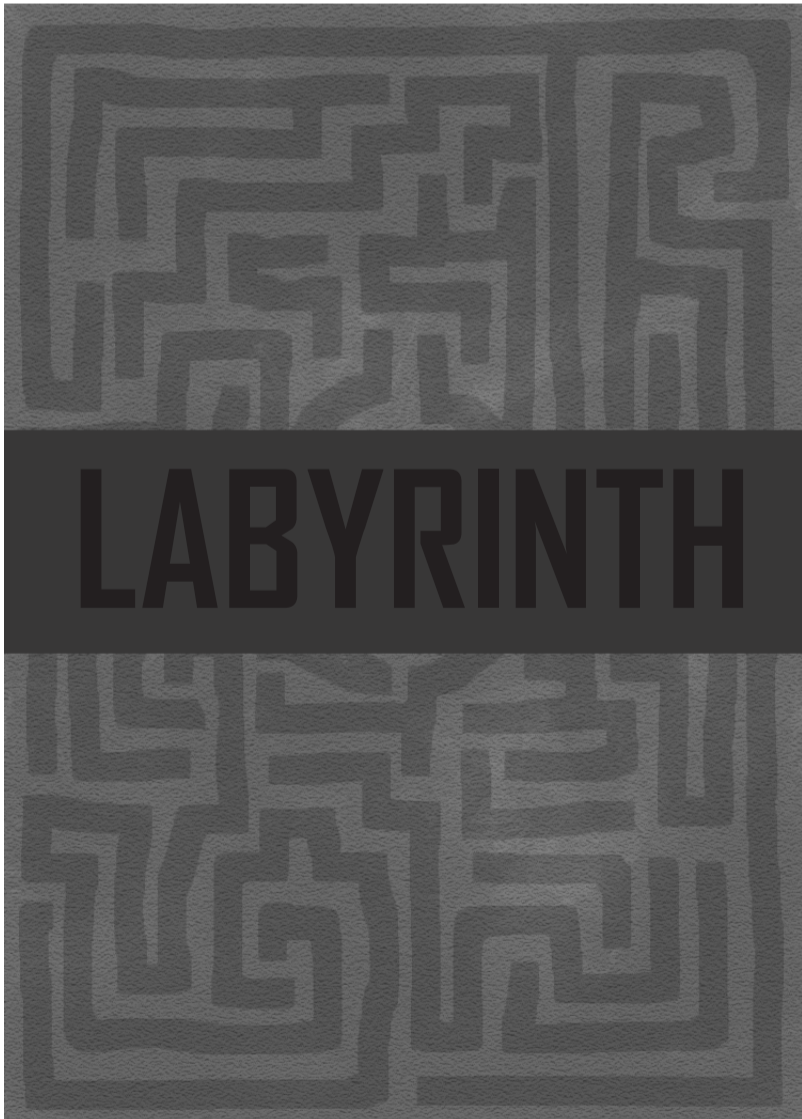
LABYRINTH CARDS 4

This is the place
we saw the many stars
float in the cavern, and we
captured one to light the way.

This is the place
we found the others that fled,
who never found the Labyrinth's end.

This is the place
where the chasming depths
threatened to swallow us.

This is the place
we were first touched
by the smoke.



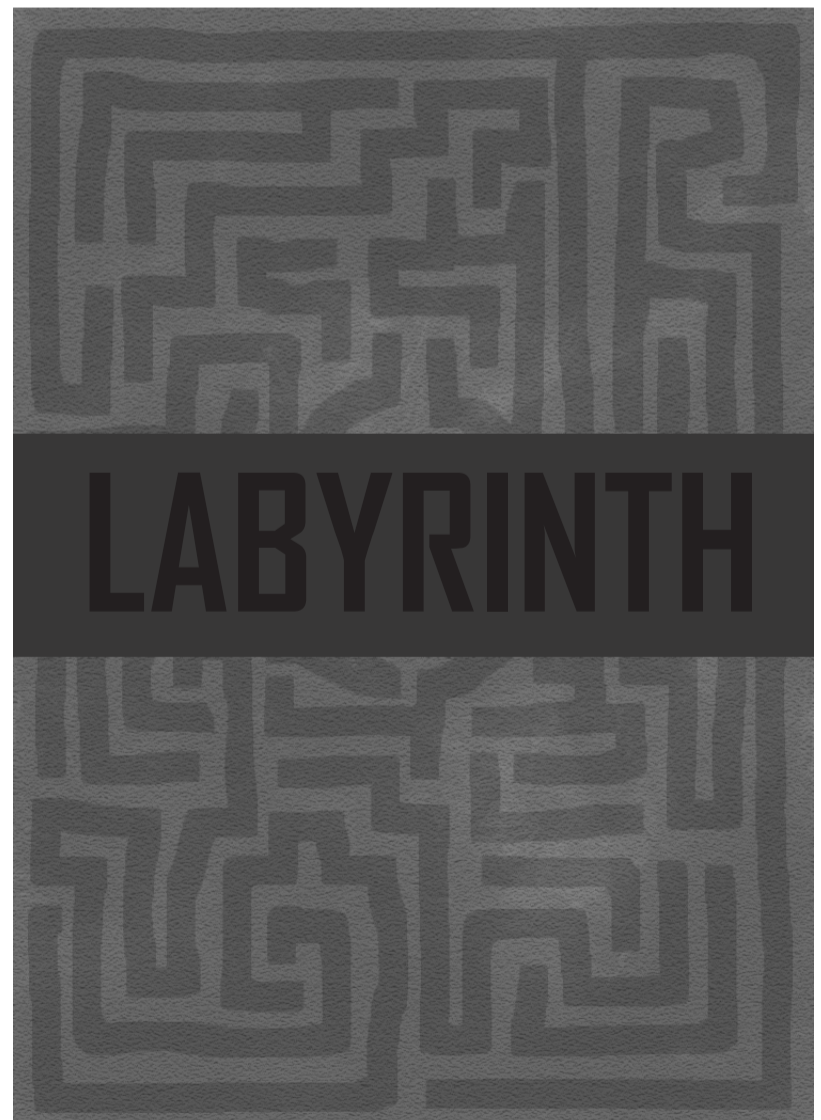
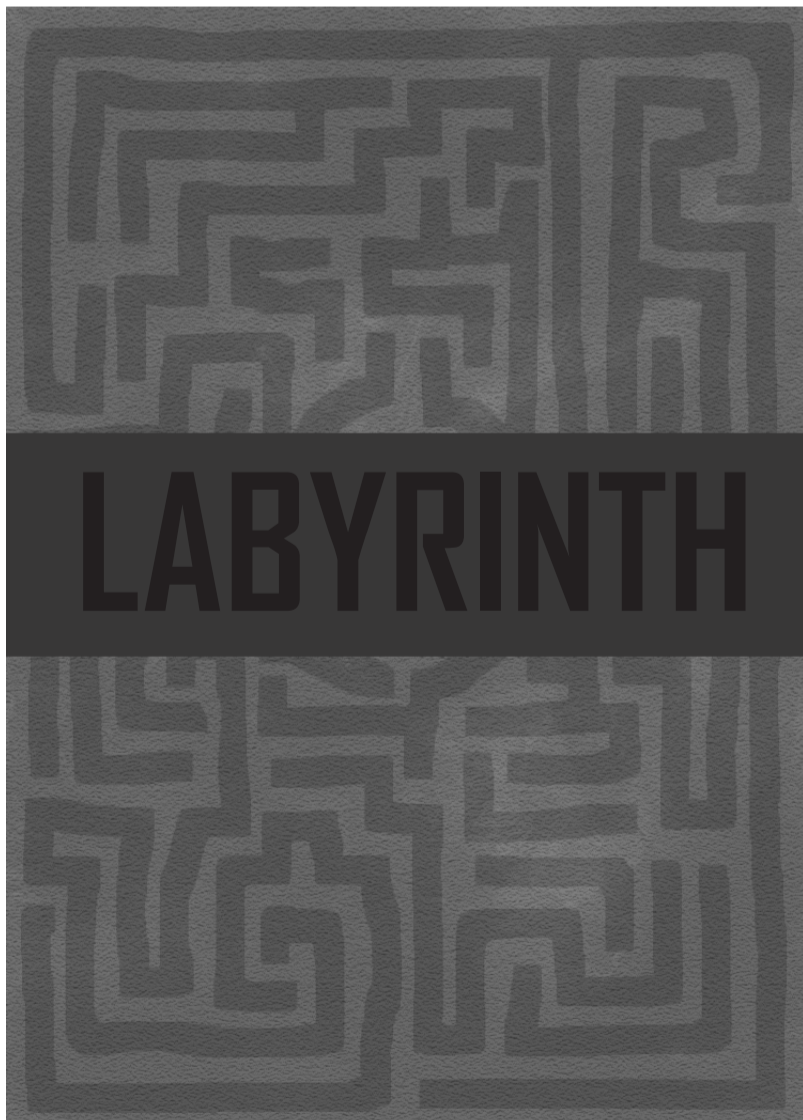
LABYRINTH CARDS 5

This is the place
where a child was born,
touched with
ghostly power.

This is the place
where the Tyrant's twelve chosen
faced us with steel, yet
we won without bloodshed.

This is the place
we performed a dark
favour for the bridge lurker
in exchange for passage.

This is the place
where the black sands
swallowed us and we braved
the underearth.



THE PARENT

NAME: _____

Why did you leave your home?
Why does the Tyrant scare you?

Who placed their trust, hope, and faith in you, and what do you fear might happen to them?

What charms, secrets, or power have your people given you to help brave the journey?

What do you hope to discover beyond the Labyrinth?

Your parents told you many stories of the Great Long Dark.
What are you most afraid of?

QUESTIONS

Before the Border

How did * give everything to another in the hope they would grant the group safe passage?

How did * leave a message for our return? What did it say?

How did * use that which the Tyrant forbade to overcome peril?

How did * use words to defuse a violent situation?
How did * make an unexpected connection, or deepen a relationship?
How did * avert danger with a deal, bargain, or promise?
How did * take a risk on something we did not understand?
How did * break an important taboo of our culture to survive?

After the Border

How did * act dishonestly or dishonourably to survive?

How was * parted from loved ones?

(me only) How did I realize I would never return?

How did * sacrifice something important for the chance to continue?
How did * give into fear?
How did * lash out in anger, hatred, or greed?
How did * use the dark forces of the Labyrinth for selfish gain?
How did * find a fragment of hope among the ruin?

TAINT

(me only) How did I lose resolve and turn back?
(me only) How did I sacrifice myself so others could continue?

QUESTIONS

Before the Border

How did * use an old tale, myth, or legend to gain the upper hand?

How did * risk mortal wounds for the good of the group?

How did * discover a secret about our parents or culture?

After the Border

How did * go against parental advice or wishes to find a new path or solution?

How did * use the ways of the grasslands to gain an unexpected edge?

How did * instinctively draw on the magics of our culture?

TAINT

THE CHILD

NAME: _____

Your name is the name your parents gave you.
What does it mean in the old tongue?

Why are you making this journey?

What did your parents give you, from their homeland, to help you through the Labyrinth?

What did you bring or learn from the grasslands, a tool your parents did not have?

Your parents told you many stories of the Great Long Dark.
What are you most afraid of?



FIN

STORYBREWERS ROLEPLAYING