



# RULES OF PLAY

# A STORY IN THREE MESSAGES

**We are no longer alone; an alien ship has landed on Earth. You are part of a Mission Crew tasked with deciphering an alien language. As you uncover meaning in their messages, you begin to see each other differently. You begin to change.**

## WHAT IS THIS?

**Xenolanguage is a role-playing game about our first encounter with alien life, messy human relationships, and what happens when they mix together. It's for 3–4 players and takes 3–4 hours.**

## YOU WERE CHOSEN

You play as people bound together through a shared past who are called to communicate with our alien visitors. As members of the Mission Crew, your task is to understand why the aliens have come and what they are trying to tell us. You will soon discover that the key to understanding lies in your memories together.

You will communicate at the **Platform**, a mysterious object of alien origin that is covered in strange symbols. During the game, players all touch a planchette-like Lens and channel over these symbols to receive the alien messages. Much will be unknown at first, but as the game unfolds, the Mission Crew will progressively discover meanings for the symbols on the board, grapple with what they learn, and experience how it changes them.

**Your connections with fellow players drive the game.** The Mission Crew are no strangers to each other. Whether by chance or fate, they share deep histories. You may play as siblings who have split apart, friends brought together in a moment of life or death, or old rivals that never could let go. All that is certain is that each of you received a call that would change your lives forever. In Xenolanguage, you will explore who you turn to in moments of doubt and in moments of discovery, what lies beneath your shared memories, and how your bonds change in the wake of knowing we are no longer alone.

**You'll tell a story by exploring language and meaning.** Xenolanguage gives a nod to media like *Arrival*, *Contact*, *Interstellar*, and *Story of Your Life*, but you need no familiarity with these touchpoints. This is your story.

## THE FACILITATOR & THE RULES

One player will take on the role of the Facilitator. The Facilitator will still participate in the game as a normal player, but they'll also have some light logistical duties to keep play running smoothly.

Go into the session with a Facilitator chosen. As the one reading these rules, this might be you. Here's what you'll do as Facilitator:

**Know the flow of play.** You'll set up the materials, explain the rules, and model turns as needed. Have the "Overview of Play" (page 22) handy as you progress through the game.

**Perform Facilitator actions.** Certain cards in the Story Deck will be labeled "For the Facilitator." As they come up, that's your cue to read the card aloud and follow the actions described.

**Be a good host.** Help players feel welcome. Push for more detail as needed. Invite people to build on each other's ideas. Help people tell a juicy story and get the most out of their time together. The energy you bring sets the tone for the group.

Dear Facilitator: our thanks for making this game happen.

## MAKING THINGS UP

This is a collaborative storytelling game. There's no winning or losing—your only goal is to make up something together that feels exciting and true for all of you. You won't do this from scratch. Every player has a stake in what happens. Here are a few pointers that we find make for a better game, especially if you're new to this style of play.

**Go with what's obvious.** If it feels true to you, in all likelihood, it will feel true to the story you're telling together. This isn't a creativity competition; mute your internal critic and go with what comes naturally to you.

**Describe what the camera sees.** When adding to the story, give details to make things concrete. Be specific. We're all fluent in the visual language of movies and video games, so lean into that. Showing how a character is feeling and what they are thinking through their actions, in their expressions, and in their movements will make things feel alive.



**Build on what's come before.** Playing with other people's ideas is the joy of collaborative storytelling. You'll be guaranteed to get places that surprise you. Listen to what your fellow players offer and see where you can make connections.

## HOW TO TEACH XENOLANGUAGE

You can teach Xenolanguage one step at a time. Instead of sharing all rules at the start of the game, explain each rule to players as needed. This puts the spotlight on the story itself and less on the pipes and scaffolding of how the pieces fit together.

For a quick reference on how to facilitate the full game, refer to the "Overview of Play" section (page 22). This rulebook gives detailed explanation and examples to complement step-by-step instructions in the overview and on cards.

It's natural for unexpected things to come up when you make up stories with other people. To be sure everyone is on the same page, we recommend having a conversation around what to include or avoid in a game before you start. See the "Safety Tools" section (page 20) for a recommendation on how to make the game more fun for everyone.

## AT A GLANCE

**A game of Xenolanguage has three stages:**

### CREATE THE MISSION CREW.

In this phase, each player will select an archetype for their character, define their relationships with the others at the table, and make introductions.

### START THE STORY DECK.

Play will continue through the central deck that structures the story. On their turn, a player will select the next card and respond to the prompts. In this phase, the aliens will transmit three messages that the Mission Crew will work to interpret. Along the way, they'll confront the personal questions that hang between them.

### THE END.

The aliens will always leave in the end. A short epilogue phase will wrap up the game and allow each character to finish their story. Who will they become in the wake of their shared alien experience?

# SETTING UP THE GAME

Follow these steps to prepare the materials, assemble the board, and get ready to play.

## ASSEMBLE THE STORY DECK

Xenolanguage is run out of a deck of cards. Each card represents a story beat that will shape what happens next. When a player has a card, it's their opportunity to add to the story.

**Story Deck: The Core Mission.** Gather the Story Cards that correspond to the core mission (just the cards with the blue numbers on top). Put them in order according to the number, starting from 1 and ending at 47. The number 1 card should be at the top of the deck (so the back of the card is facing up). Also, take the blue summary card to read aloud before the game starts. Set aside all non-blue Story Cards for the time being.

The card deck provides a path for play, but the flesh-and-blood details of the story are created by you and your fellow players. The story will change on every playthrough.

You'll notice that certain numbered Story Cards come in different colors. These introduce variations to play the game with new endings or twists. For your first game, we highly recommend using the core story pathway (only the blue cards). Go to the "Variants and Tools" section (page 20) for instructions on how to explore other story arcs.

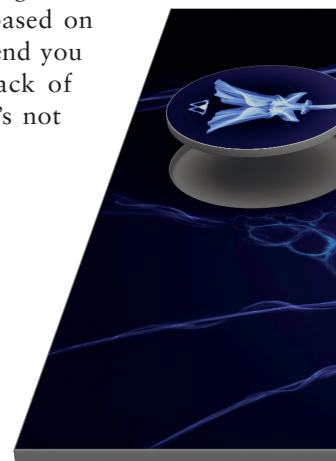
## ASSEMBLE THE BOARD: THE PLATFORM

Xenolanguage uses a modular channeling board of alien symbols to simulate alien communication. This board is known as the Platform. Symbols are removable and chosen at the start of each game, allowing for surprise and replayability.

To assemble the board, choose seven symbols and load them into any of the open slots on the board with the symbol side facing up and the text facing down. Choose symbols at random or pick based on art that catches your eye. We recommend you avoid reading the prompts on the back of each symbol while you choose, but it's not a big deal if you do.

### THE LENS

A channeling Lens allows for smooth motion on the Platform as you receive alien messages.



## WHAT'S IN THE BOX

In this box, you'll find the following:

- The Platform Board
- The Lens
- 30 x Alien Symbols
- 57 x Story Cards
- 5 x Archetype Cards
- 7 x Relationship Cards
- 5 x Epilogue Cards
- 1 x Notepad for Alien Meanings

In addition, you'll also need a way to play the soundscapes, a few index cards, and a pen for each player to write with.

### MAKING THE MISSION CREW

Archetype Cards will help you define a character, and Relationship Cards will connect your characters to each other.



## CUE UP SOUNDSCAPES

Soundscapes are used to set the atmosphere at particular moments in the game. As the Facilitator, you'll be asked to play sound cues during two phases:

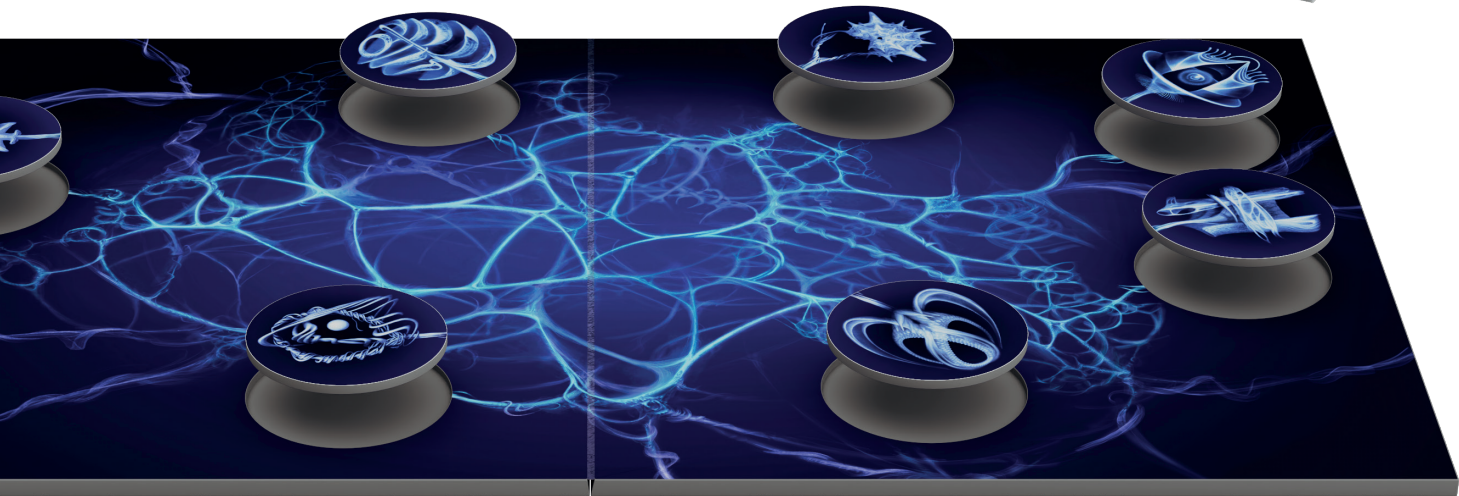
- **Required / Alien Communication:** This sound represents what the characters hear while they receive an alien message. Players will be channeling while this sound plays and will not be speaking.
- **Optional / Approaching the Craft:** This is an optional background sound to simulate the Craft as players are responding to prompts from Story Cards (for more on soundscapes, see page 21).

You'll need to have sound cues ready when play starts. Find these sound files at the following link: [www.thornygames.com/xenolanguage/sounds](http://www.thornygames.com/xenolanguage/sounds). Multiple options are included. Choose one from "Alien Communication" and optionally, "Approaching the Craft," according to taste.

In a pinch, it's possible to play Xenolanguage without the sounds, but we find that sounds add a lot to the mood—especially during channeling. Story Cards will direct you when to play the required soundscapes.

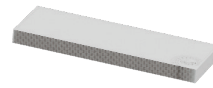
### THE PLATFORM BOARD

A custom, modular channeling board illustrated by symbolic artist Jason McPhillips.



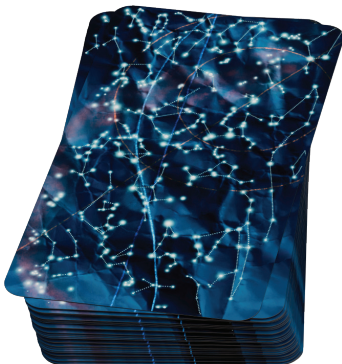
### THE MEANING NOTEPAD

A place to write down meanings you uncover for alien symbols.



### THE STORY DECK

Story Cards drive the action forward between visits to the Platform, while ensuring consistent pacing and satisfying arcs.



### THE EPILOGUE CARDS

Cards with prompts to close out the story you create.

### THE SYMBOLS

30 alien symbols with otherworldly art. Double-sided and removable, allowing for new symbols and memory prompts every game.



# CHANNELING AND LANGUAGE

Channel to receive the alien messages.  
Look to your history to help decipher them.  
Along the way, you'll tell a story at the edge of language and meaning.



## CHANNELING: AN INTRODUCTION

Channeling is an age-old technique for collaborative storytelling. During a session, channeling can feel alive, spooky, and enigmatic, all while forging a group connection through a strange ritual. In Xenolanguage, it's how players simulate alien communication.

It's useful to practice how channeling works before starting the game. Follow these guidelines:

- Make sure the board is assembled into the Platform by filling all the open slots with alien symbols.
- Place the circular Lens on the Platform board near the center with the printed side facing up. All players should be able to comfortably reach the Lens and move it across the entire board.
- To channel, players will each use one finger to touch the Lens together and let it glide around the board as it visits different symbols.

**Note for the Facilitator:** You'll play an alien soundscape during channeling sessions in the game. This sets the mood when players are receiving a message. You will be prompted when to do this by cards in the Story Deck.

Some things to keep in mind for channeling:

- **Make sure the Lens can move.** Players should not rest their wrists or elbows on the board while channeling. If the Lens gets stuck, check that alien symbol pieces fit snugly into their slots and wipe the board down to help the Lens glide freely under the players' touch.
- **Keep your eyes open.** Players should keep their eyes open to watch how and where the Lens moves. The path it takes and the symbols it visits represent an alien message that the Mission Crew will interpret.

We like to think channeling adds another player to your table that you're manifesting together. Now you're ready to listen to what it says.

## ADDING LANGUAGE TO THE BOARD

Some Story Cards will instruct you to add language to the board. To do this, you'll answer the card's prompt and write down a phrase or description on a sheet from the notepad. You'll then connect it to the relevant alien symbol by placing it off the board, close to that symbol. This language represents what you understand about an alien symbol's meaning.

When adding language, think of it as a rough translation of an alien meaning that is tied to a symbol. This meaning is something your character feels intuitively but that needs to be put into words. The language you write down becomes your shorthand for what you understand about the alien meaning. During channeling, these meanings will help you interpret the alien message you receive.

When choosing language, we recommend thinking in phrases. None of these symbols tie directly to something that can map to a single word or simple concept. Players may choose to say more to describe the meaning and then paraphrase on the card.

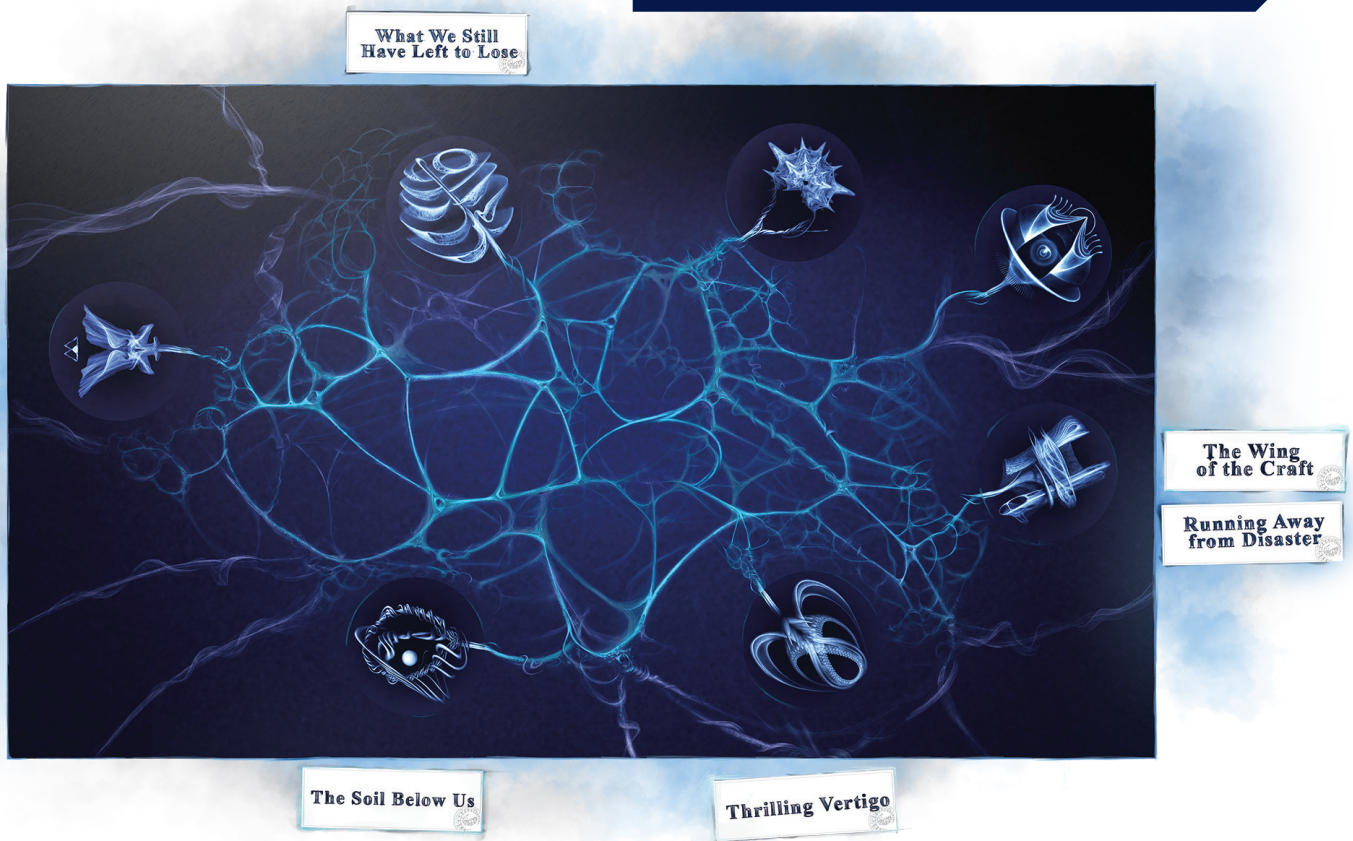
## A PRE-GAME CHECKLIST

### What you'll need to play:

- Everything in the box.
- A handful of index cards and something to write with.
- A way to play soundscapes and the soundscape files. You can find soundscapes at: [www.thornygames.com/xenolanguage/sounds](http://www.thornygames.com/xenolanguage/sounds).
- 3–4 players with 3–4 hours of time.

### Before starting the game:

- Assemble the board, Story Deck, game materials, and players.
- Set the stage for collaborative role-play as a group. Cover tips for making things up together and introduce a way to edit the story. See page 20 for some suggestions.
- Review how to channel. Practice once with the players.

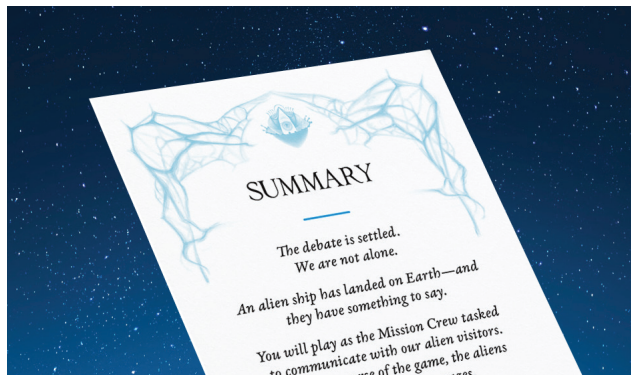


# GETTING STARTED

One by one, you each received a call. The call to change the course of your life and the course of humanity forever. You knew you couldn't say no. When all was said and done, you were the chosen crew.

## SET THE STAGE

Each game of Xenolanguage begins with a summary card. Read this card aloud to orient your players and prepare them for the game. Following this, you will go directly into creating the Mission Crew.



## MAKING THE MISSION CREW

To start off, you'll create the team that was chosen for this mission. Every player's character is based on an archetype and two important relationships that shape their backstory. Your personal connections with other player characters drive the game and will be a focus of play.

- **Choose a character archetype.** Lay out the Archetype Cards and have each player take one. Ask the players to pick what seems exciting or sounds fun. Once everyone has an archetype, take a moment to read the prompts for why your character was selected for the mission. You don't need a full idea in mind yet—that will come out through relationships.
- **Pick relationships.** Lay out the Relationship Cards and read the titles aloud. Each player will pick a Relationship Card, starting with whoever chose an Archetype Card last. After a Relationship Card is picked, the chooser should place it between themselves and the player to their left or right to signify which other player will share that relationship. When selecting a card, check in with the other side of the relationship to make sure they are interested in playing it, too. Continue until everyone has exactly one Relationship Card connecting them to the player on their left and right. This means in a four-player game, the players sitting diagonally from each other will not share a relationship card.

- **Answer relationship questions.** After relationships are chosen, players should pair off and resolve the questions on their Relationship Cards together. With four players, let opposite pairs answer their relationship prompts at the same time, before switching off to define the remaining one.

Your characters should care about each other. Make sure to spend enough time on character creation to really understand the personal dynamics between the characters. It may be tempting to leave many questions to gameplay itself, but Xenolanguage is about exploring these relationships and seeing them change rather than watching them come out in play. Encourage players to fully flesh out their relationships before the game starts instead of picking an option on the card and moving on. A rule of thumb we use is to make sure the players know why their characters care about each other (for good or bad) before continuing.

- **Introduce your character.** Each player should return to their Archetype Card and flesh out their character. Write down your character's name and archetype on a folded index card and display it so that everyone can see. Go around in a circle and briefly introduce your characters, touching on why you were chosen for the mission and your connections to others. While your characters may hold secrets from each other, don't hide anything from the players at the table.
- **The call.** The Facilitator should wrap up by asking each character to answer the following question: **Where were you when you got the call to join the mission?** Encourage the players to provide detail to give the others a glimpse into the life of their character before they were summoned.

A note on turn order. Throughout the normal flow of play, you'll follow a sequential turn order starting from whoever volunteers to go first for the rest of the game. While selecting archetypes and relationships, feel free to use any order you like. We recommend going around the table once in order to pick archetypes, and then reversing the order for relationships. The player who picked the last archetype can go first for relationships.



## EXAMPLES OF PLAY

### Picking Relationships

*In this example, each player has just selected an archetype and is about to pick their relationships.*

**Holly (Facilitator):** Alright, now it's everyone's chance to pick a relationship. Jackson, you picked last for archetypes, so why don't you go first for relationships.

**Jackson:** Great—I'm the Fighter. I don't quite have much else figured out yet, but I'm thinking of a character who never gives up, who keeps going no matter the stakes. Maybe I'm in the military? I like the idea of playing that against someone close, so I'm going to pick "Siblings, and all of their struggles." Ayla, want to be siblings?

**Ayla:** Sure! So we pick the card and place it between us. Do we need to answer the questions now? Do we know who is older or younger, or what kind of relationship we have?

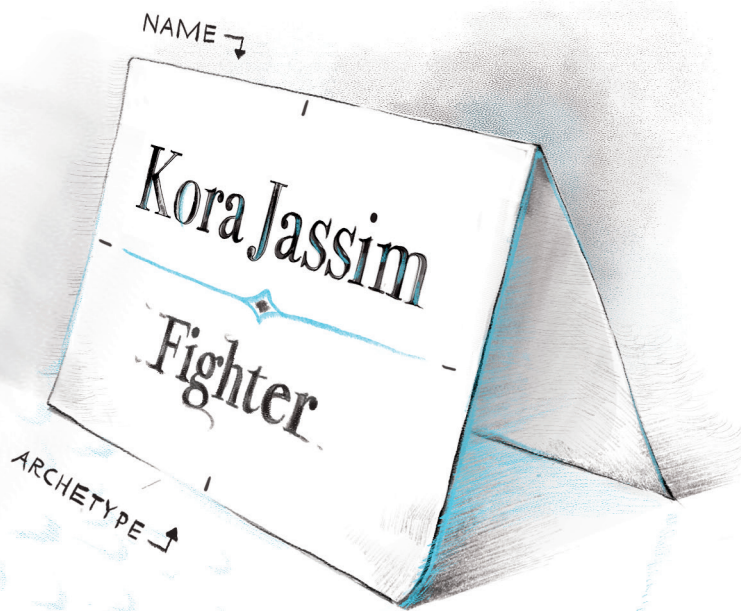
**Holly:** Not yet. After everyone has picked their cards, we will all pair off and start answering questions together.

### Answering Relationship Questions

*At this point, each player has a relationship to their left and right. It is now their turn to pair off and answer the questions on their Relationship Cards. In this four-player game, Ayla and Jackson get ready to resolve their questions while Holly and Max resolve theirs.*

**Jackson:** So, let's figure out the nuts and bolts of this relationship. It looks like the first line is telling me to do something since I picked the card... According to the instructions, I should ask you if you want to be the Elder or the Younger. How about it?

**Ayla:** Oh! Since you were thinking of someone who never gives up, and I'm an idealistic Dreamer, I like the idea of me being the Elder. Feels like you didn't get what you would have wanted from me as an older sibling.



**Jackson:** Love it. Looks like the first question is for you. "What is your particular relationship with the Younger?" And there are a few options.

**Ayla:** I like "twins." Like I'm the Elder but only by two and a half minutes. Something we're both acutely aware of.

**Jackson:** Perfect. So, next question. What pulled us apart... That one's for me. How about "The need to be independent." Maybe you took after the rest of the family—also dreamers, philosophers, and I needed something more down to earth. I saw the "You've known war" option on my card and was thinking of going with that, which I think would fit in nicely.

**Ayla:** That's great—but how about instead of philosophers, we were all psychologists. Like we studied the mind, maybe our mother authored a famous book on consciousness and what it meant to be human. I followed in her footsteps. At some point, you had enough. You needed to be in the action, not at a university. I'm sure there's tension with the family because of it.

*Ayla and Jackson resolve the rest of their questions. After they're done, Ayla/Holly and Jackson/Max resolve their relationships.*

### The Call

*After defining their relationships, the players all go back to their archetypes and pick a name and one detail about their character from the card. They then move on to introductions. After Jackson gives an overview of Kora Jassim, "the Fighter," Holly asks them the remaining question.*

**Holly (Facilitator):** Jackson, where was Kora when she got the call to be on the mission?

**Jackson:** Training. Four nights a week, after her evening briefings, Kora has a sparring partner that she practices with. Kora religiously turns off her phone during these sessions. Everyone she works with knows that, and if it's an emergency, they know where to find her. But by fate, this is the one night she forgot. In fact, she's so surprised to hear her phone ring that she totally loses focus and almost gets clocked.

# THE MISSION

Decipher the alien messages, delivered by chance or fate to these individuals.  
This is their story. And here is how you will tell it.

## THE STORY DECK

The main plot of the game is run out of the Story Deck. To begin play, you should have the Story Deck ready and within easy access of everyone.

On a player's turn, they will pick the next card from the deck and resolve the prompts to add more to the story. The deck consists of standard Story Cards and three other card types, which are covered in subsequent sections.

When a Story Card is turned over, resolve it by doing the following:

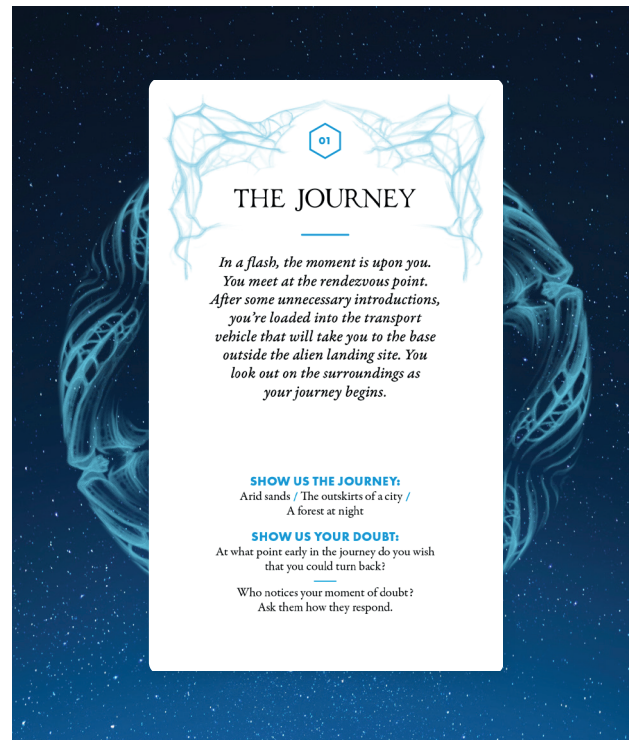
- **Read the title and description text aloud.** This is the text at the top of the card, and the italicized text underneath that gives additional setup to the prompts.
- **Resolve prompts.** Story Cards have prompts at the bottom for the player to add detail, tell their character's story, and make the environment come alive. These may be framed in one of two ways:

1) Add detail to the story or environment. In these instances, the prompt will frame the next step of the narrative, and several examples will be included to help spark ideas. Players are welcome to come up with their own idea not on the list as well.

2) Resolve a question by narrating your response, or playing out a brief interaction between characters. These interactions should be short and sweet to keep play tight.

A few tips for the road:

- **Resolve prompts one at a time.** Instead of reading through the entire card at once, players should read and resolve each prompt before moving to the next prompt.
- **Make your response specific.** When you hold a card, it's your turn to put your mark on the story. The story will be richer with everyone imprinting their own mark into the game! Make descriptions vivid so everyone has the same mental picture of the world around them.
- **Remember the rules of collaborative storytelling.** Bring your voice to the story by building on what's come before. By using and building on others' contributions, you'll make the story feel cohesive and help your fellow players see their mark on the world.



**Facilitator Cards.** Certain cards are marked as being “For the Facilitator” and signify a transition to special phases of the game. As these cards come up, the Facilitator should read the italicized text out loud and follow their directions.

Once a Facilitator Card is resolved, return back to the normal turn order and have the player whose turn was skipped draw the next card. They should then take their turn.

## CARDS FOR SPECIAL PHASES

There are three special phases that occur at different points in the game. All of these phases are encountered as cards in the Story Deck but feature different actions than standard Story Cards. These phases are:

- **Uncover Meaning.** Relive a memory to uncover meaning behind a symbol.
- **Experiencing the Alien.** Share an alien moment with another character at the base inspired by the meaning you've uncovered.
- **The Messages.** Channel over the board to receive an alien message and interpret its meaning.

## EXAMPLES OF PLAY

*Now that they have defined the Mission Crew, the players are about to start the Story Deck. Jackson is playing Kora Jassim, “the Fighter,” who is the younger twin to Ayla’s character, Renata Jassim, “the Dreamer.”*

**Holly (Facilitator):** Let’s get started, Ayla. When you’re ready, turn over the first card of the Story Deck. Start by reading aloud the title and the text below it.

**Ayla:** Sure thing. “The Journey... In a flash, the moment is upon you. You meet at the rendezvous point. After some unnecessary introductions, you’re loaded into the transport vehicle that will take you to the base outside the alien landing site. You look out on the surroundings as your journey begins.”

**Holly:** Great—now below that, there’s going to be prompts. Those are each asking you to add something to the story. Generally, the first one will be a prompt to add a little to the world, or describe what happens next in our alien mission. The second will be something more personal about your character or a small interaction they have with another player character. Think of it like a movie, where you show us what the camera sees at every step along the way.

**Ayla:** So, up first we have “Show us the Journey.” So now I just make up the journey to the base by the landing site?

**Holly:** That’s right, feel free to use one of the options listed below as inspiration, or just make up your own!

**Ayla:** I like the idea of the setting being a forest at night, maybe far up in the mountains like in an alpine forest. So as we quietly look out of the window of the transport, which I’m thinking is something like a military humvee, the air is thin from the altitude. For a long time, it’s just deep forest covered on both sides. We feel the altitude change in our bodies, but for a while, we don’t actually have any scenery to pair with the experience. Then all of a sudden, the trees open up, and we’re in the middle of the most breathtaking view of the Swiss Alps, just wide open like a postcard.

**Holly:** Love it—aliens in the Alps. That’s all you need to do. Other things, like where the alien craft made landfall, where the military has set up shop, those will all be on other cards for other players. And what’s the second line?

**Ayla:** “At what point early in the journey do you wish that you could turn back? Who notices your moment of doubt? Ask them how they respond.”

Well, I think, Jackson—since Kora and Renata are twins, maybe we used to take long road trips together with our family, and you’ll remember Renata always had a fear of heights. Just by coincidence, we’re both seated in the back row in the humvee—exactly like we would when we were kids.

Renata tries to calm down and remind herself that the stakes are so much higher now, but she can’t help it. She closes her eyes, leans her head back, and you hear her doing the same thing she used to do as a little girl to keep it together—counting back from fifty. Slowly and deliberately, “fifty...” “forty-nine...” “forty-eight...” Kora definitely notices.

**Holly:** And what does the card say next?

**Ayla:** “Ask them how they respond.” So Jackson, how does Kora react to Renata’s ritual?

**Jackson:** I think Kora at first doesn’t notice, and it takes her a few moments to realize what’s so strangely familiar about this. When she notices it’s Renata counting—she realizes that head-in-the-clouds Renata never really grew up. That she’s still that same little girl who was getting sick in the back of a car and reading under the covers with a flashlight until four in the morning. On the other hand, Kora was a field paramedic, she’s never unprepared.

So I think Renata’s concentration is broken as she hears Kora say “Catch” under her breath in a cold tone. She opens her eyes just in time to catch a tiny bottle of pills Kora throws over.

**Holly:** Nice, I love how the “elder” and “younger” dynamic has obviously changed with time. But I have to know, does Renata take a pill to help with her vertigo?

**Ayla:** She does. I think Renata is a little oblivious to just how estranged Kora feels. They haven’t talked in a while, and maybe Renata missed Kora’s second wedding—but what the hell—she made the first, right? From Renata’s point of view, things are fine, that’s why she recommended Kora for the mission. What’s Kora doing?

**Jackson:** Just staring out the window—hoping Renata doesn’t mess this up.



# UNCOVER MEANING

In every waking moment, the symbols from the Platform turn in your mind. Old memories you share with each other come to the surface and won't leave. Slowly, you each come to the same conclusion: the key to understanding these symbols lies in your memories together.

The board starts off covered in symbols that are mysterious and unknown. As the Mission Crew begins their work, and the players progress through the Story Cards, they soon discover that memories they share with one another are crucial for assigning meaning to the symbols, and in turn, interpreting the alien messages. In “Uncover Meaning” cards, players will relive a flashback between two characters that they become convinced is the core to understanding the meaning of one of the symbols. All essential rules are on the cards themselves, but here we offer more information in case questions come up during play.



## PLAY OUT A FLASHBACK

The card will first instruct the player to pick a symbol from the board and look at the secret prompt on the back. Players may either choose new symbols or ones that already have meaning attached. After looking at the prompt, they should return the symbol to the board (prompt side down). Based on the prompt, the player will frame a flashback to an important memory that they share with another player's character. Together they will play out the flashback as a scene. Anyone at the table can end a flashback once they feel it's run its course. Here are a few tips for this phase:

**Frame an important moment.** Using what was established during setup, the player whose turn it is should briefly describe what the flashback is about before the players play out the scene. Pick an obvious moment, big or small, that the prompt evoked based on what we already know about the characters. *And don't worry about what comes next.*

**Play them out in character.** The flashbacks are scenes where players speak in the voices of their character and describe what their character is doing in real time. These scenes typically feature memories established during character creation, but that's not a requirement.

**Keep them punchy.** It can be hard to end a scene when you're in the middle of it. Don't rush it, but as Facilitator, help players spot a good moment to wrap up the scene.

## ADD MEANING TO THE SYMBOL

Some cards in the Story Deck will instruct you to add language to the board. This will represent what you understand about an alien symbol's meaning. After flashbacks, the “Uncover Meaning” cards will instruct the players to discuss the most important part of the memory to them. This will help decide on the meaning of the symbol. Why did this symbol awaken that memory? Why now?

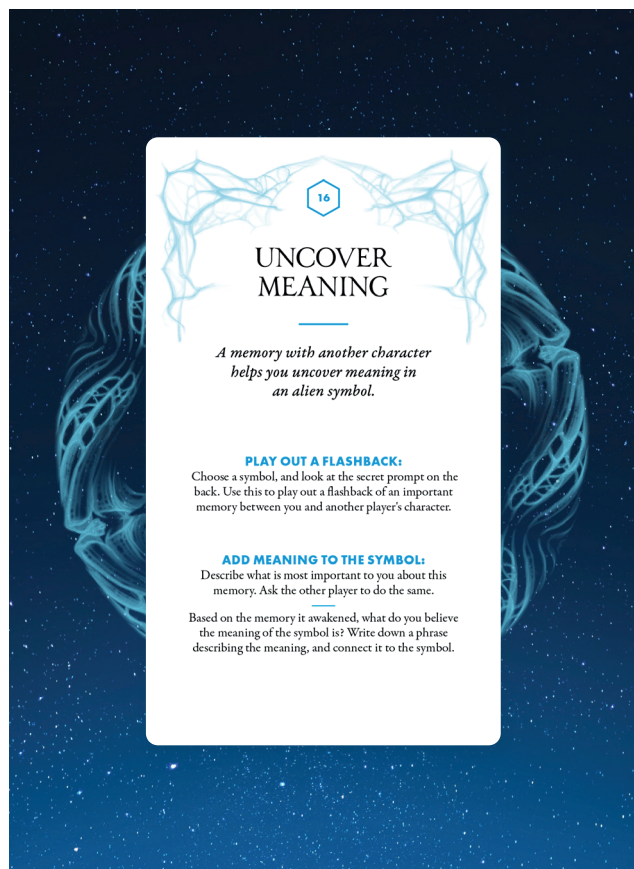
In the fiction, both characters experience this relived memory and will provide their input on what the memory evokes in them. However, the player whose turn it is has the final say over what is recorded as the meaning of the symbol, either taking into account what is most important to them, to the other player, or a blend of both.

**To add a meaning,** you'll write a phrase or a description on a slip of paper from the notepad and connect it to the corresponding symbol by placing it nearby off the edge of the board, out of the path of the Lens during channeling.

When choosing meaning, we recommend thinking in phrases. It's unlikely any of the symbols tie directly to something that can map to a single word or simple concept. The language you write down becomes your shorthand—a rough translation—for what you intuitively understand about the alien meaning. Perhaps a symbol that awakens the memory of reconciliation after a vicious fight might inspire a meaning like “*Bonds that grow back stronger after a trial,*” or a moment of shared strength during a long night of restless travel to a remote research outpost might give “*Determination in pursuing a shared goal.*” You may add meaning to a symbol that already has language on it. These different interpretations might hint at a deeper meaning that ties both together, or different viewpoints on the same symbol. Either way, the previous meaning is never discarded. These will be your tools for understanding the alien messages throughout the game.

**Early on in the game,** during the first trip to the Platform, some cards will instruct players to add meaning to symbols directly (without flashbacks). For these, it's natural for the players to opt for simpler meanings. That's absolutely fine in the beginning, but as Facilitator, nudge them to more complex meanings and phrases as the game continues.

## EXAMPLES OF PLAY



### Play Out a Flashback

**Holly (Facilitator):** Alright, Ayla, any questions about the card? Go ahead and pick a symbol that you want to uncover meaning for.

**Ayla:** This one (*points to a symbol on the board*) has come up a few times already, so I'm really curious about what it means. So I just take it and flip it over? Should I read what it says?

**Holly:** You can, but you don't have to, whichever you prefer. You can just start setting the scene for a memory between you and another player based on it.

*Ayla takes the symbol. Silently, she turns it over and reads the prompt on the back: "A moment when something important was cut short." She then returns it to the same location on the board, prompt side down.*

**Ayla:** Great—I know exactly the memory I want. Holly, remember how we established that we were in that accident together driving back from the convention in Chattanooga? Maybe it was because we were both broke grad students and couldn't afford another night in a hotel. We decided

we'd make the nine-hour drive starting at midnight all the way back to Chicago.

I think I'd like to see the last thing we said to each other. We talked about how it was never the same between us after that point, but I'd like to see what it was like before. Back when we thought we were invincible.

**Holly:** And you were driving, right? How about, to set the scene, you're taking the first shift on the drive, and I'm getting ready to doze off.

**Ayla:** Sounds great—I'd love to see those last few moments of innocence before our lives are flipped around entirely.

### Adding Meaning

*Ayla and Holly play out the memory together, recalling when Jarvi (Holly's character) tells Renata (Ayla's character) about an exchange she had at the conference that made her feel like an impostor.*

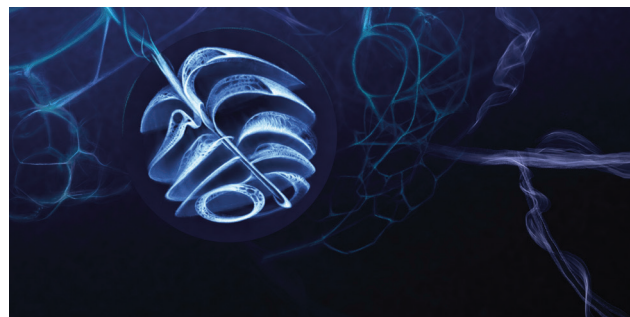
**Ayla:** So in the last moments you were awake before the accident, that's what you were remembering? Something that made you feel small?

**Holly (Facilitator):** That's right. I think it was already a low point, or at least Jarvi thought it was a low point, before the accident put everything into perspective and reminded her just how much she still had left to lose.

**Ayla:** And I think that's what stands out to me as the most important part of the memory. It's like a reminder of what we take for granted.

**Holly:** Yeah, I feel similar. It feels like the memory is a reminder of just how much can be going right, even when it feels like everything is going wrong.

**Ayla:** Yes, let's run with it. I'm going to call it "What we still have left to lose." I'll write it down and connect it with the symbol.



What We Still  
Have Left to Lose

# EXPERIENCING THE ALIEN

**As you continue to uncover meaning, signs of the alien creep into small moments of your day. They come to you when you least expect it: while you eat, as you work, in flashes at night... Will they push you together or pull you apart?**

As the Mission Crew studies the alien messages, it begins to affect how they see the world and their relationships with each other. Surreal experiences creep into their private moments together. Cards labeled “A Shared Moment” will prompt these experiences and drive forward their characters’ relationships.

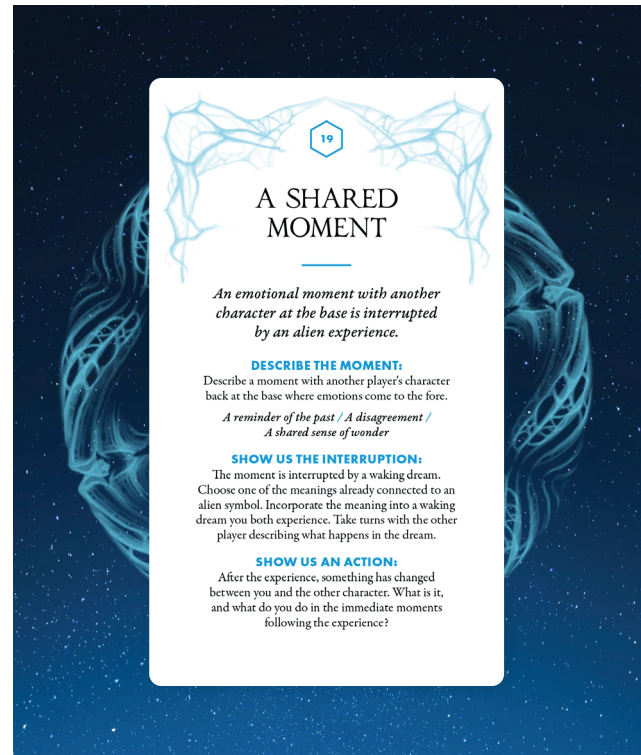
**While resolving these cards, take things one at a time.** Like other Story Cards, players should resolve directions on the card one step at a time rather than trying to plot out the entire card from the outset. The cards themselves contain all the directions you’ll need, but to add more detail by way of examples, each of the card’s steps are described below as well.

- 1. Describe the Moment.** These moments will involve two players: the player whose turn it is and another player that they select. Together they will describe a shared emotional moment at the base between their characters. The player who drew the card will set the scene. Make sure to establish the place and setting details so everyone can picture where the interaction unfolds. Perhaps this is an argument at night in the sleeping quarters, a reminder of the past during morning breakfast that stirs up old feelings, or a deep sense of awe while taking a walk around the base’s perimeter as you both look out at the sky.

These moments can be narrated or acted out in a scene. The players should describe the interaction up until the point when both characters have established a strong emotion.

- 2. Show us the Interruption.** Following the heightened emotion, the characters experience a waking dream together, prompted by one of the alien meanings on the board. This is a hallucination or alien experience that interrupts the shared moment. The player whose turn it is will select one of the alien meanings that has already been added on the board. This meaning will inspire a waking dream for both characters.

Both players can take turns describing what happens in the hallucination, either by asking the other player involved in



the waking dream to resume the description or by asking for input as they add more detail. The turns are not formal, but both players should contribute to the waking dream. These dreams should be personal and bring an alien twist to the dynamics between the two characters. They can be brief, symbolic, or more involved. Have them poke and prod at any lingering tension between the characters.

- 3. Show us an Action.** As a final step, the player whose turn it is will describe an action their character takes immediately following the experience. This should reflect what has happened between the two characters and show how the character is moving forward from the alien vision. The action can be large or small, real or symbolic, but at the end, you should feel like something has changed between the two based on the shared experience.

## EXAMPLES OF PLAY

*It's Jackson's turn. They take the top card from the Story Deck, which is titled "A Shared Moment," and then read the directions on the card. Jackson, playing Kora, decides this shared moment will include Renata, played by Ayla.*

**Holly (Facilitator):** So Jackson, just to recap—how is Kora feeling about her relationship with her sister so far?

**Jackson:** Well, to be honest, Kora has been doing her best to avoid Renata. The first trip to the Platform is enough that she's just trying to keep her bearings straight—not to mention that she's pretty sure the aliens are not here with peaceful intentions.

**Holly:** Got it. As we established on a previous card, the experience from the Platform has begun to seep into your activities at the base. You start seeing these concepts where you hadn't before. Go ahead and turn over the next card.

**Jackson:** Sure thing... "A Shared Moment. An emotional moment with another player's character at the base is interrupted by an alien experience." First we need to describe the moment.

**Ayla:** Oh, and I see one of the options is "A reminder of the past..." Maybe something tense happens and Kora goes back to her nervous counting.

**Jackson:** My thoughts exactly... So I think it's after we've delivered a briefing to whoever is in charge here... I don't know, let's say it's the Lieutenant Colonel. He's steaming. Despite all the resources they've given us, and the urgency of the mission, we just haven't made enough progress, and our reports are contradictory. Are they here as a threat, or to show us a path to salvation? It can't be both. I think he storms into where Kora and Renata are studying together and tells us off. He's had enough of this. At some point he throws a chair against a wall, and gets right in Kora's face. When he's done, Kora slams her fist into her desk and clenches her eyes shut. She's holding back tears, and from the back of the room she hears Renata, also clearly rattled, with that damn counting. "Fifty..." "forty-nine..." "forty-eight..."

**Holly:** Great—a tense moment and a vivid reminder of the past. That nervous counting, just like we saw on the car ride. What does the card say next?

**Jackson:** "Show us the Interruption." Kora and Renata have a waking dream inspired by one of the meanings on the board. Those are what we've written and placed next to the board, right?

**Holly:** That's right, they're the actual meaning you've assigned to the symbols by writing them down. And the turns mentioned on the card don't need to be a strict process. You can go ahead and start, Jackson, and when it's appropriate, feel free to chime in, Ayla.

**Jackson:** Got it. Well, the big reminder we have is Renata's nervous countdown. It's always driven Kora mad, but I think there's a nice hook with the meaning "What we still have left to lose," so I'm going to go ahead and pick that one.

I'm imagining that as Renata starts the countdown, Kora closes her eyes and suddenly sees something. As Renata says the number "forty-seven," she's brought back into a moment from their youth when they were counting their Halloween candy, and Renata looked up with a grin that's missing several teeth that fell out earlier in the month and triumphantly says "forty-seven" at the same time Renata says it back at the base. So it's childhood Renata saying it with adult Renata's voice. Renata sees it too. One by one, I think we each experience a hallucination like this for each of the numbers. What do you think Renata sees for "forty-six?"

**Ayla:** I think Renata used to watch Kora playing basketball, and it's a moment when Kora sinks a basket as the clock is ticking down. She makes the shot and the scoreboard lights up with "46," at which point we hear Renata's voice saying the

same thing. In the dream, young Renata gets up and cheers.

**Jackson:** One by one, I think we each go through these memories. But for the numbers "two" and "one," it's different. For "two," we both just see the two of us together—sitting back to back like we are in the base now. And then, once we hear the number "one," the other sister starts fading away. Piece by piece, they're drifting away into nothing.

For Kora, it's a reminder of just how much she has left to lose. As she sees Renata fade away, with all the life they've shared together, she knows Renata is the one who has borne witness to who she was. They grew up together, and all those stories, those shared memories—they're kept between the two of them.

And I think that leads into what the action is. I think Kora is going to look over to Renata, and from the expression on her face, she knows she's also experienced something similar. For the first time since the mission, Kora realizes that she's failed to remember so much that she still has left to lose in her relationship with Renata. "We should call Mom," she says as she fumbles for her phone.

**Ayla:** "Y-yeah..." Renata nods as she swivels her chair closer to her sister.

# THREE MESSAGES

**For these three messages, they chose humanity.  
And knowingly or unknowingly, within all of humanity, they chose you.**

Your game will be structured around the Mission Crew receiving and interpreting three messages. These “sessions” will commence when certain cards are drawn that contain instructions for the Facilitator to play an Alien Voices soundscape and then for all players to begin channeling.

Players will use the circular Lens to channel from symbol to symbol over the board. This experience—the Lens’ pattern of movement and the symbols it visits—represents the alien message that players will later interpret using the meanings they have uncovered so far.

## THE CHANNELING SESSIONS

Certain cards will instruct you to begin a channeling session to receive an alien message. Here are detailed directions for the Facilitator when a card instructs the players to begin a channeling session:

- Place the Lens near the center of the Platform board and start playing the Alien Voices soundscape.
- Everyone should touch the edge of the Lens and begin channeling: the Lens should glide around the board under the collective touch of all players.
- Continue until the Lens has visited four symbols. As the Facilitator, be ready to end the session and stop the soundscape after the symbols are visited. At that point, have the next player draw from the Story Deck to continue the game.
- And one tip: If the Lens isn’t moving, help it along to get started. A nudge is usually all it needs!

We recommend giving a channeling overview before the game starts so as to not break the flow of play in the middle of the session. But if players need a refresher mid-game, give them one. The most important things to reiterate are (1) don’t put too much pressure on the Lens so that it can move freely, (2) don’t rest wrists or arms on the board, and (3) if the Lens doesn’t seem to be moving, feel free to give it a nudge. Finding the message should be a communal activity, guided by everyone together.

Don’t worry too much if a symbol isn’t fully covered by the Lens. It’s up to you whether to count it in the four. Decide based on how the Lens was moving, and what the intent of the motion seemed to be.

## THE REPORT

After the session, the next four cards will focus on interpreting the message the Mission Crew just received. Early in the game, the players will have limited information to go on. They can use what they know about a symbol’s meaning (as written on the notepad paper connected to a symbol), the feel and movement of the Lens, or anything else they like to suggest a possible interpretation of the message. Others may choose to agree or disagree with this interpretation.

But as the game continues, more meaning behind the board will be revealed, like in “Uncover Meaning” cards. In subsequent channeling sessions, players can use this meaning to better interpret new messages—and perhaps reconsider previous messages in light of new information.

After each session, the players will be asked to help create a report by putting together what they know about the message. However, the report is not delivered all at once. Instead, the interpretations will be built up, card by card, over the four Story Cards that follow the session.

## A FEW NOTES ON THE REPORT

When answering the Story Cards about the message, the players do their best to piece together an interpretation for the message using the meanings they have uncovered. Think of this a little like Tarot interpretation—what might the connection of multiple concepts (aka meanings) lead you to believe?

Of course, some, if not many, of the symbols in the message might be complete mysteries at the moment. In these cases, they can incorporate other story elements or information they have. Use meanings for the symbols that the players have uncovered to give the message firm grounding.

Especially in the beginning, the Mission Crew will not have enough information to truly decipher the message and give a confident answer. That is to be expected, but rather than “we don’t know yet,” try to extrapolate from what you have.

The Mission Crew will never have perfect information about the messages, but they are compelled to deliver their best analysis. Don’t feel like you have to force an explanation, and feel free to leave certain points undecided, but the Facilitator should encourage players to nail down what they can. Might this be a cry for help? An offer? A threat? A prayer? Something else entirely?



## EXAMPLES OF PLAY



*The Mission Crew has just completed a channeling session where the Lens moved over the board and visited four symbols: three symbols with connected meanings and one symbol without any assigned meaning. Holly, the Facilitator, has stopped the Alien Voices soundscape and announced the message is over. She asks Jackson, the next player in turn order, to select the next card.*

**Jackson:** The card says: “Describe where and how the Lens moved through the session.” OK—I can do that. So we know three of the symbols, it started with “What we still have left to lose,” and then it went to two that we only have brief impressions about. The one that sparked the feeling of “Thrilling Vertigo” in Renata, and the one that reminded us of “The Wings of the Craft.” The remaining one, we don’t yet know. The movement itself felt fast, but not forceful. Like they were being rushed for time. Next on the card, “What does this hint about their meaning?” I feel like maybe this isn’t the first time they’re doing this. Like maybe they’re searching for the right planet, or they’re fleeing something, but I think we’re not the first ones they’ve come to in their journey.

**Ayla:** So the next card is for me. It looks like I’m supposed to pick out one of the symbols that feels especially important—the focus of the session.

Does this need to be one that we’ve already uncovered meaning for, Holly?

**Holly (Facilitator):** It can be, but it doesn’t have to be—it just needs to be part of the message. And why the symbol stands out in the message is up to you. Maybe it’s the meaning that makes you think it’s the focus of the session, maybe it’s the movement, or maybe it’s something else entirely!

**Ayla:** I think it’s “Thrilling Vertigo.” Jackson had said how it made Kora remember that feeling when she went skydiving where her stomach was in knots, but she also felt a pull and momentum to jump. I feel like the Lens hovered there for just half a second longer than I thought it would. Maybe we all have that feeling when the Lens hovers over that spot during the message, so that definitely feels like the focus for me.

**Holly:** Next one’s for me. “Given what you observed, what do you believe they are trying to say?” I

think they’re anxious about us. They’re nervous but are excited by what’s possible. I also feel like “What we still have left to lose” hints that there are stakes to this visit. Like they’re here to evaluate us. I think they’re examining world after world, evaluating each one—for what, I don’t think we can say yet. But it’s an evaluation of some sort. It’s a positive message overall. There’s hope in it.

**Max:** Alright, next card. “Dissent!” Looks like I feel differently about the message. Well, that’s absolutely right. Look, “What we still have left to lose” isn’t there to convey hope. It’s a threat. What do we still have left to lose? Our planet? Our lives? I don’t know exactly, but I think that’s what they’re getting at here. The vertigo from the other symbol makes me feel like they’re anxious about what they might have to do, but they’re ready to do it. It’s a threat. They are telling us to listen up, hold tight, or they’re going to make us acutely aware of just how much we have left to lose.