

# Looking for Home

*by Encho Chagas*



*a solo story game about  
smoothing out a crumpled past*



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*by Encho Chagas*

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*"You don't have a home until you leave it and then,  
when you have left it, you never can go back."*

*"Perhaps home is not a place but simply an  
irrevocable condition."*

*- James Baldwin*

The game depends on your creativity. Although the rules are straightforward and act as a guide, many events are open to allow your imagination to run wild. Because of this, the story's depth will be unique to each player. Use the rules as the wireframe for your story and fill in the blanks as you like.

### *How does it work?*

First, you'll need to gather some things:

- a blank sheet of paper
- a pen or pencil
- a regular six-sided die

The paper must be a regular thin sheet of paper, that you're able to fold, rip, crumple, and, of course, write on it. A regular notebook sheet will do.

The game is about creating characters and telling stories. But first you must be sure about your main character. Is it you? Is it someone you know? Or maybe a fictional character? Where did you come from and where will you go? What are your problems, the questions you will face? No matter the answers to these questions, during this game that character will be represented by you. Whatever you think he would say, he will say. Whatever you think he would do, he will do.

You could play anyone you want, any way you want. Any age, any time period. Regardless, one thing must be true: you, as the character, still haven't found somewhere to call home. Or you found it but can't stay. Maybe you lost it and can't return.

You need to find a new place. You'll need hope. You'll need plans for your future. But you'll especially need to know your

### *What is this game?*

Looking for Home is an intimate, personal game. You should play it alone, and its stories should reflect your core, your heart... or your character's, of course. Yes, the main character can be you, using your real life experiences to create a meaningful storyline.

This is a story game where you—the player—will create a story with guidance from the rules. More than role playing a character, you will create a world, a story. You will give life to other characters, say what they should say, do what they would do. You as the main character must react to all of it.

Winning or losing isn't the purpose of this game, but they are possible endings. The goal, though, is the path, the journey, the experiences.

*What is this game?*

weaknesses, your fears. The best stories come from your flaws, not your strengths.

This is a solo game, so don't worry. There's no need to treat yourself as invincible, always victorious, always succeeding. You can be honest with yourself.

You could even change the rules of the game. No one would see, right? Only you would remember that time you were going to lose an important resource (don't worry, you'll find out about resources later), but then you decided just to ignore it and move on as if nothing happened. Yeah, you could do that, and only you would know that you tried to trick yourself. But this is a really short game, so see where that difficulty would lead you, if you're curious.

*Where do I start?*

On the next page you'll find a questionnaire. Answer all of its questions honestly. Or at least what your character would really think as honest. This is a moment to take a hold on everything you'll need for the story. Memories, ideas, thoughts.

On the page after that, there will be a table with four columns and five rows. All fields empty. Of course you wouldn't write on your book, but organize your answers in that manner: each answer must go in a different field of the table, starting at the upper left corner and then going right. Do that until you fill every field. You'll see how the answers will fit the suggested categories. Later you'll have to cut each table cell and divide the individual answers.

These are the elements for your story.

## The questionnaire

Answer each of these questions with one word or a small phrase. Each answer can mean more to you than just what you write, as each word might symbolize some history and context that is not written.

If by any reason you think you might forget the context of an answer during the game, it's ok to take notes and write down a background summary.

1. What's your favourite place to have fun?
2. What do you like to do just after waking up?
3. Is there something you once had – an object – that you really miss?
4. Who is the person that might have what you're searching for?
5. Which place do you miss the most?
6. What's the most spontaneous thing you've ever done?
7. What do you keep that was a gift from someone important to you?

8. Who is the most important person in your life?
9. Where do you wish you had been raised?
10. What do you do that people don't understand?
11. What possession will allow you to find peace?
12. Who was the first person you felt comfortable showing your true self to?
13. Where do you think you would have more opportunities?
14. What are you best at?
15. What was taken from you, but that you don't want it back?
16. Who would you love to have as a friend?
17. Where is the person who you really want to meet again?
18. What did the person you miss the most like to watch you do?
19. What thing do you most regret leaving behind?
20. Who is most loyal to you?

*The questionnaire*

- *Optional: After playing at least once or during play, you might want to create new questions to extend the game or maybe change the tone of the story and personal links. If you do, remember to link them to a place, an action, a thing and then a person, in that order, to fit the categories in the table of answers.*

After answering the questions, cut or tear the paper on the marked lines to separate each answer. Crumple each piece the tighest as possible, with all the strength you have. This might, or should, even damage the paper. That's what we are aiming for.

Each answer's columns represents a category of narrative elements present within the story. After separating them, gather the answers in four different category piles, accordingly.

**Places   Actions   Things   People**

*Your resource*

Although you might have many possessions, money, whatever, for what is worth to the game you have only one resource, and your life depends on it. It doesn't need to be something that you would die if you don't get. It doesn't have to be that extreme. But it's something trustworthy, the only thing that you can depend on.

It's not just something for times of need. It's a link to something bigger, grander. It's something that grips you, even when you're not threatened.

You will use it during the game to beat hard issues. Clinging to the only thing that gives you peace of mind... and for that same reason it will be the thing that eventually will throw you off balance. It's reliable, but it won't solve your whole life. And as



you keep depending on it your own nature might lose it's grip to reality. You might get too emotional, too attached to this thing. You might completely lose emotional attachment to everything else, as nothing else has meaning.

There is a reason why it is so important to you. It's your anchor. It could be a reminder of home or the real reason you can't go back. Maybe it's all you have left. But you have it. And you still need it. Now you just have to define what it is.

### *Defining your resource*

The first part of defining your resource is deciding on its nature. The resource interacts directly with your nature in some manner, triggered by your emotions or rational thinking. These triggers determines how you use it. The resource has two triggers should you have to use it: a rational trigger, and an emotional one.

Define a set of two phrases that trigger the use of the resource, either in a rational or emotional manner. A car, for example, could be "A way to leave a place" (rational trigger) or "A way to run away" (emotional trigger). The action and use of the resource should be the same in both triggers, but the reason behind each should be different.

Here are some examples of resources and some possible triggers.

### *Sample natures (simple)*

#### *Rational*

A way to escape...

Something to eat...

Somewhere to sleep...

A valuable possession...

Someone who can help...

#### *Emotional*

... A way to forget

... Something to worry about

... Somewhere to feel safe

... A possession with sentimental value

... Someone who gives joy

If you want to play something more complex, maybe more abstract, you can create a resource with a built-in complication, or with a dangerous condition.

### *Sample natures (complex)*

An impassable barrier...

Someone who owns you...

Something you can't live without...

... An unforgettable memory

... Someone you hate

... Something you can't forget

The last detail to define about your resource is what it actually is. A person. An object. Maybe a talent, something you're capable of performing.

While there are possibly no limits on what it could be, many resource choices could make using it less straightforward. For example, how could a place be used when you should be travelling around? Bear this in mind when choosing the resource.

The rules will ask you for your emotional position or your rational position. Each step on the axis is plus or minus one. For example, if the marker is 3 positions to the right of zero it would mean +3 on emotional position and -3 on rational position.

An extremely tense or emotional situation will demand that you use your resource either emotionally or rationally. In these cases, you can't use the other. These cases represent something bigger than just your opinion. Otherwise, feel free to stretch your creativity to make an argument for a specific usage, or just use the most relevant end of the resource axis. Remember... you are playing alone, so you're the only one able to define what should be the best usage of each trigger.

During the game these numbers might be affected by other variables. This will be elaborated later, but for now keep in mind that the marker might constantly change its position. So maybe writing down its position with a permanent marker might not be a good idea.

If at some point the marker goes beyond the extents of the resource axis dashed lines (4 or more), you will meet your end immediately. A sad and dismal end.

Going beyond the maximum of the resource axis means you lost the bond with the opposite end of the axis. You should give your story an ending based on which of the extremes was reached. For example, if the resource was someone dear, losing the connection to the emotional bond could lead the character to mistreat or abuse the person. On the other hand, if the character loses their rational bond, they come to feel that the person means nothing to them anymore. Either way, your story is over.

## *The nature axis*

You depend on the resource, it's a representation of your nature. But your reliance on it can be emotional or rational, like the axis below.

*Rational* \_ \_ \_ 0 \_ \_ \_ *Emotional*

During the game, you'll need something to mark your position at the axis. You can do it with an object or just write down the number. You'll refer to your position as the location of the marker.

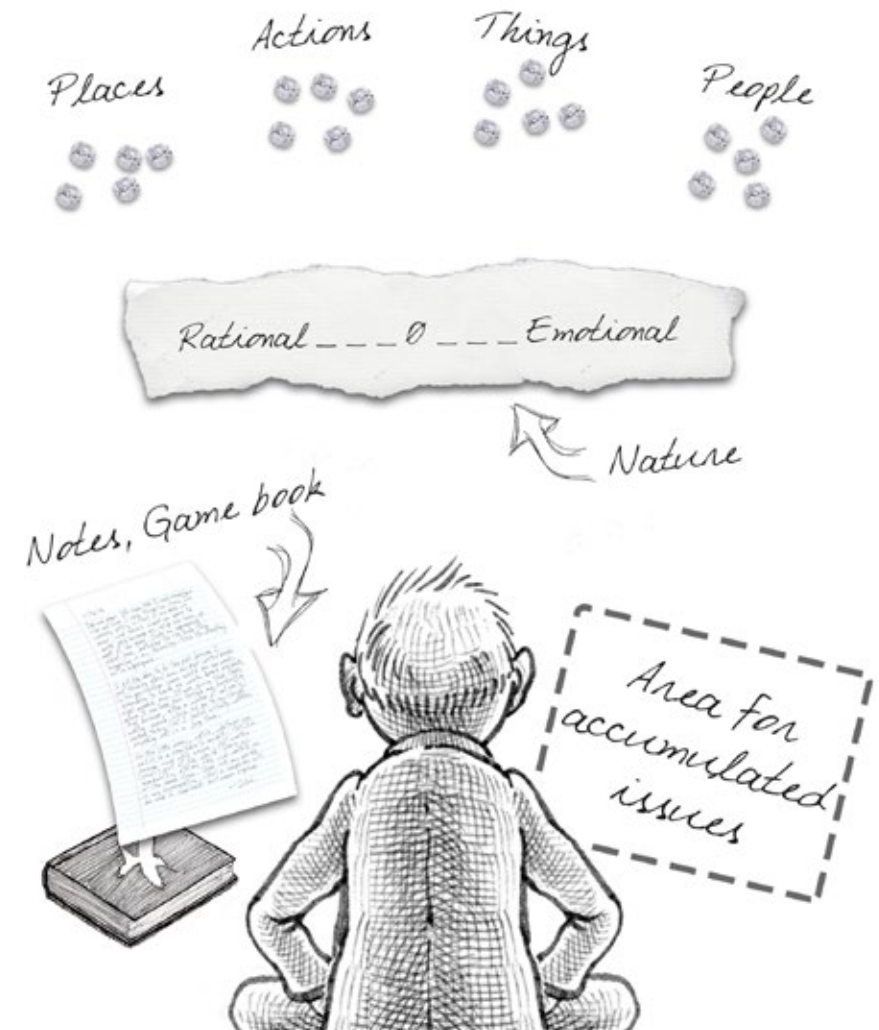
The marker starts at zero (the middle point) on the resource axis, representing a balance between rational and emotional. Each circumstance will move your position on axis in either direction.

## Preparing the gameplay area

Now you have already created everything you need to tell your story. But before starting the game, you must prepare the area you're going to use to play.

It's easier if you're playing on a flat surface, like a table, on your bed, or on the floor. You'll need enough room for your notes, the 4 piles of paper with the elements' categories, the resource axis, and the questionnaire. All these things should be kept separate and organized, as you will have to access them throughout the game. Take care of possible wind blowing all these paper scraps, or maybe dropping them.

This is a suggestion on how you should organise your gameplay area. In this manner, everything is within reach and organized.



## Story stages

Although you're free to create your story any way you want, the story is actually build on a canvas. A structure that will connect different events. This will help you if you ever find yourself out of ideas and also ground your creation if it gets out of control.

Your story follows sequences of four stages: Search for a New Home, Remembering the Past, Complications, Dealing with People. These are represented by four moments, or scenes, that frame your relentless search.

While developing the story, please don't let yourself feel constrained by this structure in any way. Take your time, and when you feel there might be a story hook that will lead you to that stage's framing, just take it and embrace the game canvas.

Each stage has a main event (reaching a new place, finding a problem, meeting someone, etc), and you'll have to draw one questionnaire answer from the indicated pool. This means that, for some reason, you found something that remembers you of that place, person or thing, or maybe you did found or returned there to deal with your old demons. You can interpret that anyway you find reasonable to your story at that moment.

### 1. Search for a new home

Every time you arrive at a new place, you return to this stage and start a new journey. A new city to live in, a new job, a safe space, you're the one to define how this place might feel like home.

You're certain you might establish yourself here. But what brought you here? Do you already have a link, a connection, to this place? What would keep you out of here?

- **Draw from Places pile** and find out where you are or where does the new place reminds you of.

### 2. Remembering the past

Now that you're in a new place, you must find a way to live in it. Old habits die hard, and troubles hinder your adjustment. What do you like to do here? Is there something that reminds of the past? What's troubling here? Is there something to be done about it?

- **Draw from Actions pile** and find out what is the main activity this new place offers, remembers, or lacks. It might be something to help you adapt, or to forget, or relax in this new place.

### 3. Complications

Your physical and emotional needs are not being met, and the psychological pressure leads you to see new problems where they weren't any before. Has something lost its purpose? Maybe something old still bothers you. Is it hard to admit there's a problem? Is it hard to let go of the past?

- **Draw from Things pile** and find out what you're missing. It might also be an annoyance that makes the new place uncomfortable.

### 4. Dealing with people

This place should feel like home. Or it might be just welcoming, or familiar, but not quite home. Maybe you might already have everything you ever wanted. But people change everything. They have their special way of destroying what was perfect or maybe salvaging a terrible environment. Who is helping you here? Who wants you close? Who can't you forget? Who's the one person you'd fight to be with? Is there someone that you can never forget, no matter how hard you tried?

- **Draw from People pile** and find out who is the biggest link with this place right now. It might be someone you want close or someone that could make your life in this place unbearable, even if they're not even here.

- After finishing this chapter, **you can choose to deal with any accumulated issues**. Draw one of them and play as you were starting a new stage. You can do this once for each issue, but can't try twice the same issue during the same chapter.

### Continuing the journey

Consider these four stages as four sections of a chapter in your story. You might just play a chapter and end your game there, or maybe you want to see how many chapters might roll out if you keep playing.

Of course, it would be great to deal with all accumulated issues before moving on. That is... if you had that peace of mind. Maybe it's not worth the trouble, or you just want to run away. You could just leave them. But some old demons might come back to haunt you again.

Finishing the fourth stage should be a cathartic moment on your story. You should have discovered a little more about yourself or your past, or maybe refined what you want for your future. Maybe you decided to stay, even if you didn't like it or it didn't make you feel at home. Or you decided to leave and find another place.

The next chapter of your story might start as a quick trip, or maybe just a visit, and progressively turn into a significant part of your journey. It's cool to suggest where or what you want to do before starting the first chapter, to set the expectations for the sequence. Then, when you finally draw your story elements, you get to find out if your dreams came true or maybe got crushed without hope and you're set for a bad time.

But until now we only talked about the general guidelines for the game. From the next chapter onward will talk about how does this game gets more complex, how does it challenge the player, the available options in variable situations, etc. Now we're moving from a playful storytelling tool to a real role playing game.

## Rules and resolution options

As described in the last chapter, at each stage you draw a crumpled paper wad from a pile, smooth it out, and then narrate that element into the story. If the paper rips or gets unreadable, even though you know what it is, immediately toss it away.

This new story element should require you to react, to make a decision about how to move forward. You may need to face it directly, but it may also require doing something to maintain or restore the status quo. Maybe you don't want things to change.

Doesn't matter how you develop your story, at some point you'll have to make a choice about how to deal with that story element. You have three options to resolve it before being able to progress to the next stage:

- **Activate your resource:** Your resource will be key in this scene, and the Axis will move one position. This will remove a story element from the game.

- **Face the situation:** You'll bet on a dice roll the solution to the situation. Things might not turn out your way, but you'll advance to the next stage at least.

- **Avoid the issue:** You go from the frying pan into the fire, ignoring the issue for a brief moment. Of course, the problems will just pile and come back in the future.

### *Activate your resource*

You can eliminate something from your life by recurring to the most precious thing you have, the one thing that brings you peace.

When you decide to activate your resource, define which of these is greater: your emotional bond with the element or the rational link to it. Evaluate if the situation demands that you could only use it in one of the two ways. If its uncertain, just choose what you think might work best in the context of the story.

Then move the marker one position to the direction you used (rationally or emotionally). If you had activated the resource in the last stage, no matter at which direction, now move two positions instead. If it's the third consecutive time, move three. And so on.

Then narrate what happened and how did your resource worked for you. Where did it take you, and what changed for you. Take that story element's piece of paper and destroy it. It can't be used anymore in this story. Move to the next stage.

## Face the situation

Maybe the best way to go is facing your troubles head on, right? Think what you're going to do about it, and then imagine the possible outcomes. If you win the roll, you will get what you want; but if you lose, you will be in more trouble than before. Set both these outcomes before rolling the die.

When you roll a die there is a value you're trying to beat, that is called the challenge. If you roll equal or above the challenge value, you win. The math that will calculate this value will be explained in the next chapter, because we will have to talk about some other things first.

- **If you won the roll**, crumple the paper again into a very little ball, really tight, with all your strength, and then return it to its proper category pile. The element returns to a category pile even if it was an accumulated issue. Then move to the next stage.

- **If you lost the roll**, crumple the paper again into a very little ball, but put it in the accumulated issues area right next to you. Then move to the next stage.

- **If you roll a 6**, the natural maximum value of the die, you had a special victory. Even if the sum would not match the challenge. Something really great and unexpected happened. Keep this paper in the accumulated issues area, but fold it. This is now a treasured element for you, and it might help in future rolls.

So... folded paper scraps are specially solved issues that will help you in the future. The other paper wads in the accumulated issues area are ongoing or postponed issues.

## Avoid the issue

Maybe it's not a good idea to deal with all this mess right now... but you know how these things are. It might be best to run away, but it will come back to haunt you in the future.

Crumple the paper into a very little ball, really tight, with all your strength, and put it in the accumulated issues area. You won't be able to be in peace unless you face all your accumulated issues.

Now draw another slip of paper from a pile. Any pile. This means you're trying to get away, maybe looking for someone, something, whatever. Which pile is up to you. The choice of pile might lead you to different consequences.

- **If you choose the Places pile**: You consider a new place. This means you're getting used to two new places at the same time going forward or you might abandon your progress so far in this chapter, restarting your journey. That means you can take this opportunity to go back to Stage 1 with this new piece of paper.

- **If you choose any other pile other than Places**: You run away just momentarily but find a new problem that you must resolve. You may do this as many times as you want, but you never advance or change stages when you avoid an issue in this manner. You only advance when finally dealing with one of them, either by activating the resource or facing it.

You might want to avoid issues due to storytelling purposes but also to regulate the numbers on your resource or challenge value. Maybe you didn't advance a stage, so if you activated your resource in the last chapter, you might find a better story element to use your resource again without maxing out your nature.

After ending the fourth stage at any chapter, you might want to trim some accumulated issues or maybe deal with them all. You can only do this after finishing the four stage in a chapter, as previously stated, playing extra chapters for each issue. This is optional.

### *Without options...*

If at any point you're asked to move to the next stage and there are no paper wads left in the appropriate pile, you can't go forward unless you have an accumulated issue for that category. And you can't skip a stage.

This means at that moment you felt completely out of options. You might settle with what you have. You can try to solve all your other accumulated issues, thus extending your journey a little more. But the reality is that your story has come to an end. Evaluate everything that happened, what issues are left, what special moments you treasure, and even how balanced is your nature at this point... and finish this story.

### *Conflict and rolling the die*

At some point in the story, you'll have to deal with your problems. Even though an issue might not be that troubling, we always call it a conflict.

A conflict occurs every time you want to resolve one of the elements you have at hand without using your resource. You might solve it forever, but more frequently you will just avoid it becoming an issue.

You solve conflicts by rolling a single six-sided die. We already talked about all the storytelling aspect of rolling the die, and you should already know the consequences of winning or losing. In this chapter we will talk about the process and the math itself needed for the roll.



Before making a roll there are two values to be calculated: the bonus and the challenge. The bonus is what you will add to the rolled result, and the challenge is the value to beat. If the die result plus the bonus is at least equal to the challenge, that means you won this conflict.

Of course you can also roll a natural 6 on the die, and then it doesn't matter whatever is the bonus or challenge values. It's an automatic win.

### The bonus value

Check the Accumulated Issues for folded papers. These are special moments, that might help you if they relate to this conflict in some manner. Maybe something similar, or someone, or somewhere that might have help you. Each of these folded papers that relate to the conflict will add +1 to the bonus value.

And that's it.

### The challenge value

The challenge value starts at a base 4. That means at the beginning of the game rolling the die has a 50 50 chance. Remember you just have to match the challenge to win.

Then you have to add the nature axis modifier. This is a little tricky because, as explained in the nature axis chapter, the axis value is relative to the context of the scene. You're the one who will access the situation and decide if you're dealing with this issue in a rational or emotional manner.

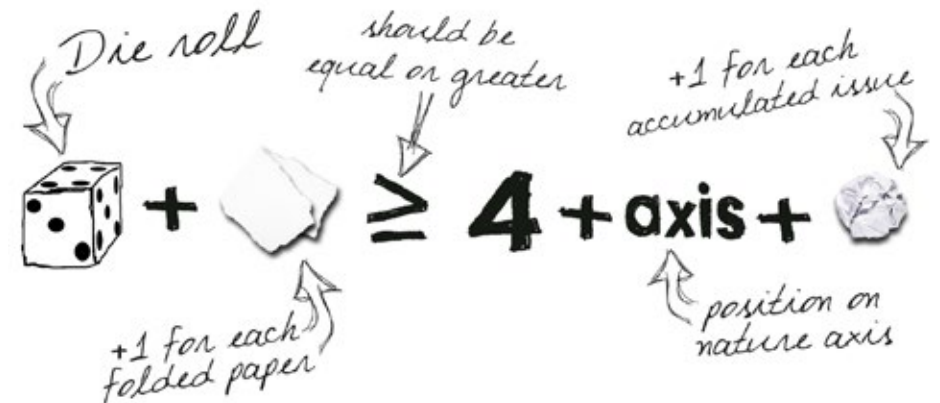
If you think this is a rational decision, you'll use your rational position. If this is an emotional challenge, you'll use your emotional position. Instructions on how to read rational and emotional positions are in the nature axis chapter.

Lastly you'll have to uncrumple all accumulated issues and add +1 for each one of them. But why uncrumple them? Because there is a chance that you rip one of them during this process. If this happens, this issue turns out to be a trauma, an unsolvable issue for the rest of the game. Keep it in the accumulated issues area. Of course, every trauma permanently adds +1 do challenge values.

Remember to crumple all issues again, really tight, all strength, and return it to the accumulated issues area after the roll.

... and roll it!

Roll the single die. If it's a natural six, you win, no math needed. If it's not, add the bonus value to the result. If it's equal or greater than the challenge value, you win.



Roll the die, add +1 for whatever special element in a folded paper that relates to this conflict. To win, this sum must be equal or greater than 4 plus the position on the nature axis, rational or emotional whichever is appropriate, plus +1 for each accumulated issue.

### *Conflict resolution example*

Encho is playing Alberto. At this point in the story, Alberto is trying to find somewhere to sleep in a new town, to no avail. Encho decides to face the situation; Alberto remembers an old friend that could help him. The conflict resolves with 3 (die result) + 0 (no special elements yet), and that is not enough to beat the difficulty 5, which is 4 + 0 (resource never used) + 0 (no accumulated issues). His old friend denies help, and Alberto ends up sleeping on the streets. It's raining, cold, and he is terribly hungry. The friend scrap of paper becomes an accumulated issue. Even though he finds a place later, this experience still gives him bad memories.

Later in the story, Alberto decides to try and rekindle a relationship with a long, lost ex-girlfriend. He gets a 5 die result + 2 (a memento he treasures and going to this special place), against 5 + -1 (resource axis position has moved 1 towards rational but this is an emotional roll because of context) + 1 (that friend who left him in the rain earlier). Now his 7 beats the challenge 5, and he is able to get past some old grievances and meet with her again.

### *Journey's end*

Each person has their own way to end stories. Many like a happy ending, others an enigmatic turn of events full of questions left unanswered. Some just want to go on and on, and see what's going to happen even though their initial expectations have already been met.

But you should complete at least once a chapter of four stages with all accumulated issues solved. That should be the minimal Looking for Home experience. The optimal run should be to play until you see that a category has no more elements to be drawn at the next chapter, so you take the current one as your last.

Although you can finish your experience at any point, throughout the book we talked about some imposed endings if some

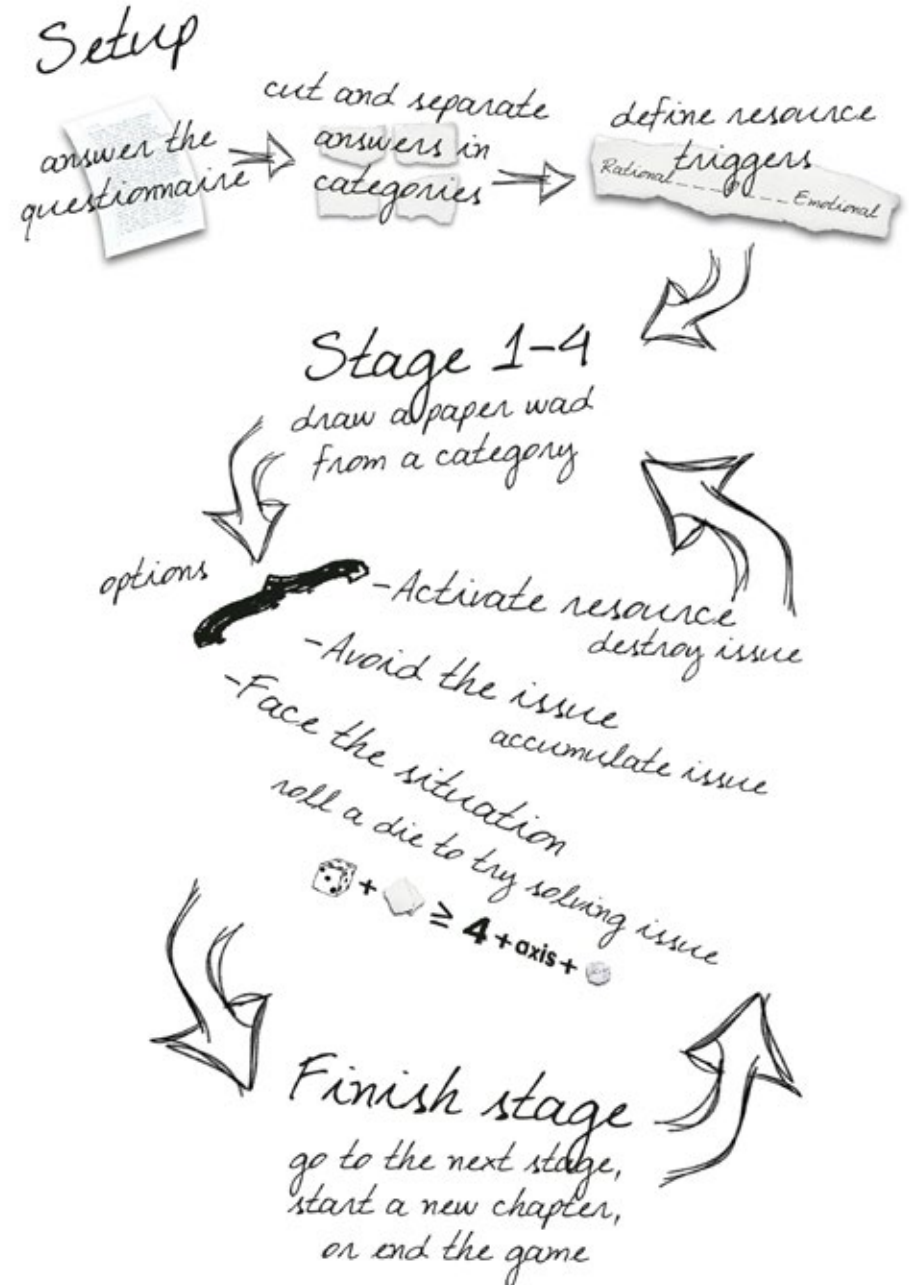
requirements were met. Those are obligatory dark endings. They are actually very predictable, since you have control over all the game's resources and have a lot of options to deal with them. But this is the point... maybe you really want to activate this kind of ending on purpose, if you think that ending should be interesting.

Let's just recap all these obligatory ending events.

We just talked about how **a game ends if you have no elements left in a category** and for any reason you have to draw another one. Also, you don't have any accumulated elements from that category. This ending is called a "Without any options ending". You reached a dead end, you don't know what to do.

Also, **the game can end abruptly if your nature axis goes beyond its limits**. That means its number goes greater than 3 in any direction. In that case, the ending must be a sad one that corresponds to which end of the nature axis you exceeded. You lost your connection to the opposite axis, flooded by emotions or voided of any.

The best timing to end a game should be every time you finish stage 4. You just finished a chapter in your life, and that might also mean the ending of the game. Or maybe just a pause, to be continued whenever you feel like it. Then you get to look for a new place, and resume your journey. Maybe now you may find closure.





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# *Far from home...*

Lingering memories still haunt while trying to experience something new somewhere else. The game treats the frailty of crumpled paper to represent the endurance of resources and relations. As the player continuously unwrap his past, at some point there might be possibility for closure... maybe a way to go back, but perhaps liberty to find a new home.



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