

# Through The Woods



Through the Woods is a thrilling fantasy role playing game about being lost in the space you are when you are in between sleeping and waking up.

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## Introduction

***“Wait... where are we?”***

*It happens a little bit differently for everyone -- usually in the places where the walls are thin and the brambles are overgrown. Perhaps you were playing hide and seek with some friends when a voice from the closet called out your name -- a siren song for the young and curious. You might have been digging through your toy chest when you happened to just fall right in. Who knew toy chests could be so deep and dark? Maybe it was even something as simple as waking up one morning and realizing that the bed and room you were in was not your own in spite of the striking similarities, and that the voice calling you down to breakfast did not belong to your dear mother after all.*

*Whatever the reason, it doesn't matter -- not anymore. No, the only thing that matters is that you're here and here is so very different from home. The air is damp and cold in a way that cuts right to your bones. The buildings seem a little too inviting. Through the tops of the trees you can see faces in the clouds. Their eyes gaze down upon you hungrily. Their mouths move slowly, whispering things they should not know. In the distance you see a dim fire glowing. There are several other children gathered around it's warmth, they seem to be lost and without purpose. Can they be trusted? Are they alone and afraid just like you? In this realm of near waking there are wonders and terrors of which adults could never dream of, and in the woods that towers around you, you will find both.*



## ***About the game***

Through the Woods is a thrilling fantasy role playing game about being lost in the space you are when you are in between sleeping and waking up. The ultimate goal is escaping and waking up in the real world, but it is the journey that really matters.

**Important Note: The amount of cards you have left at the end of the game is important**

The game is inspired by works such as Alice in Wonderland, Coraline, Over the Garden Wall as well as by classic fairy tales in the vein of Little Red Riding Hood and Hansel and Gretel.



August Malmstrøm - Dancing Fairies (1866)

## **Requirements to play**

In order to play Through the Woods, you'll need to gather up a few things. First, you'll need a group of at least three people, more is better, but try not to have more than 6 players. One of you will take on the role of The Forest (or GM), the GM and The Forest is the same. By the way The Forest is out to get you! In addition, you'll also need some pencils, paper, and a standard deck of playing cards, with or without jokers.

As GM you will present challenges for the players to react to and try to overcome. Players you'll have to rely on your Luck, Wits, Courage and Kindness in order to survive and return whole.

There will be Doors, but they won't always take you where you want to go. And of course, you'll need to find Keys, but some things are better off locked away as you'll find out. All the while, you will slowly become more and more part of the magical world you entered. If you don't leave soon enough, you may never leave.

Stay brave, press onward, and never give up.

## Creating your character

All characters are siblings in the same family. The youngest player plays the oldest sibling, the second youngest the second oldest, and so forth. Remember that your character needs to have abilities that will make him or her withstand the dark forest and the creatures you are to face. But also remember the impulsive and soft sides that most children have.

The GM deals each player three cards, and explains what the cards mean - this will let players know how they can initially react to the world. Also they can be used as a basis of the character creation. Refer to the card table for the details on each card.

Starting with the oldest sibling, and ending with the youngest, each player tells a single sentence about what the normal world is like, what their family is like, what their life as a group is like.

Then, again starting with the oldest sibling, each player in turn describes how their character is like - their name, their looks, their special talents, or whatever else they feel is relevant.

This defines the starting point and the common ground for your group, and should tell something about the bond between the characters. Of course in the space they are stuck, these things are not always like they are in the waking world.

Write down the details about your character on a piece of paper to help you remember them, there is no particular requirements for the layout of this document, except for maybe writing your characters name clearly on the top so that the other players can see it.



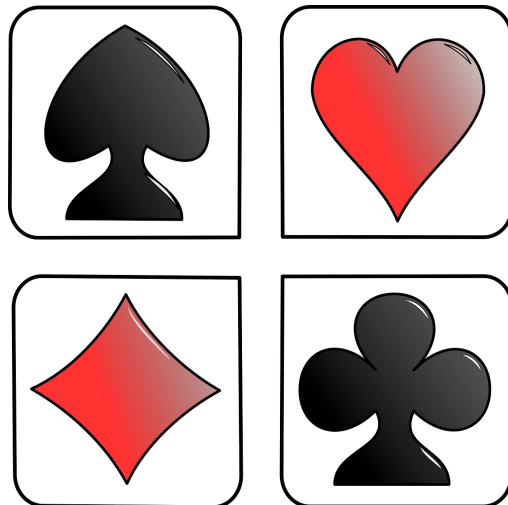
## The Forest / GM

Remember it is your responsibility to keep the game going, take a few punches if the players are in bad shape, don't hesitate to introduce something spectacular and over the top, crush their hopes if they are feeling overconfident, scold them like kids, surprise them as adults. Try to make the players pee themselves, either in laughter or horror. Most of all, have a mighty fine table-top session



# What do i need the deck of playing cards for again?

The cards of a normal deck is divided into four suits, the suit tells something about the state of mind behind your action, where the number on the card could something about the intensity and type of action. The cards introduce variation to your session, and forces you to take paths you normally would not give a second glance.



## Clubs - Luck

Luck is about good luck and bad luck, fortune and misfortune, laughter and games of chance. Gambling, getting caught in a rainstorm, finding a magic coin in the road - all of these are the domain of Luck.

In front of the force of Luck, Wits means nothing. However, Kindness is always able to overcome or alter the arbitrariness of chance.

## Diamonds - Wits

Wits is cleverness, doing the right thing at the right time. A riddle, a clever plan, passing oneself off as something one is not - all of this is Wits. Wits can also be manipulative, or even cruel.

Wits function very well when the world makes sense, and is able to manipulate the straightforwardness of Courage. However, they fall apart in front of the arbitrariness of Luck.

## Spades - Courage

Courage is being brave, doing the right thing, sacrificing oneself for others. It is leaving behind what is comfortable to find out the next horizon. It is also being brutal, monstrous, or unforgiving. Courage does not care about things beyond it's own will and sense of Righteousness.

Courage is able to ignore the soft comforts of Kindness, or even brutalize it. However, it's inflexible nature makes it an easy dupe for Wits.

## Hearts - Kindness

Kindness is being giving, helpful, and nice. It is pulling a thorn from a lion's paw, an inviting inn, the warm sun on a beautiful day. It is gentle beauty. It can give one strength, but it can just as easily entrap one in it's gentle charms.

Kindness' gentle perseverance makes the best of bad Luck, and helps those in misfortune. It spreads good luck out among everyone, muting it's effects. However, it is easily overrun by the brashness of Courage.

## The Card Numbers

Each card number is related to something, and at least one of the keywords should be combined with the suite that card has to make up your actions during the scene.

Number	Possible Affected, Action and/or Results
2	Companionship
3	Introduce something new, strange, unfamiliar, confusion
4	Darkness, Despair, Lock, Door
5	Unwanted, Physical, Loss
6	Evil, Enemy
7	Positive, Receive
8	Life, Exchange, Tradeoff
9	Good, Friend, Key
10	Impenetrable, Defence, Solid
Jack	Fun, Absurdness, Laughter, Negotiation
Queen	Secrecy, Tricks, Comfort
King	Violence
Ace	Determined, Success
Joker	Counters all

## Playing the game

There are five phases of the game. After completing, or rather surviving them, the phase called *The Clearing* begins. Players start with 6 cards on hand, if they are reduced to 0 cards they are dead.

### Starting a new phase

The start of a new phase is a tactical game where the players attempt to counter the cards of the GM, while not risking themselves too much.

- 1) At the start of each phase, the **GM draws** a number of cards equal to twice the number of players. This is his challenge deck. He looks them over and places them on hand, he then **plays one card facing up, and one card facing down for each player**. The GM does not say what his plans with the cards are before each player has played their cards, but they have an idea based on the suit and number on one of the cards played. This is the foundation of the challenges this phase will bring. The Forests challenge cards does not have to be coherent, its up to him to create an interesting narration.
- 2) Each player, in turn, **plays a card face down**, then narrates what each card means to the plot - a character, scenery, or situation. They may narrate something that might bridge more than one of these categories, they must always include at least a hint of the appropriate kind of narration, but are not allowed to disclose the number or suit they are playing until all the players have played one card each. This is important because when the players play the same number or suit this will give them advantages over the Forest/GM.
- 3) Players **flip the face down cards** up to find out how the story ties together and how the siblings manage to work together, if any of the suits or numbers are the same between the siblings, that card is reinforced, meaning that the effect is much stronger, on the opposite side if any of the cards matches the Forests suit or number, then the Forests card will have a stronger effect. After going over the cards again, each player then **draws a new card**.
- 4) Play a round normally as in the “A New Round” section shown below, at any time The Forest may flip up his other cards and narrate **wildly** based on the suit and color.
- 5) If any survivors, players discuss what to do next (as in the section “At the end of a phase” below)

#### **The Forest/Game Master:**

Your goal is to prevent the players from escaping your forest,

*In the first phase, introduce the mysterious and slightly scary world. Focus on making it seem real rather than specifically threatening.*

*In the second phase, introduce more threatening elements.*

*In the third phase, a lull - make it seem more pleasant, easy. This is a good place to play low cards, or high Hearts.*

*In the fourth phase, reintroduce the threatening elements, or introduce new ones. Start hinting at a way back*



home.

*In the final phase, introduce the exit, the way to get back home, and pull out all the stops. Nothing is too grandiose for a fairy tale in a magic world!*

## A New Round

Each Phase consists of several rounds and ends when either all players are dead, or all challenges played by the Forest have been overcome.

The outline of a round looks like this:

- 1) In each round every player has a turn, in the order from oldest to youngest character. During their turn, they play a card, narrating their Luck(Clubs), Wits(Diamonds), Kindness(Hearts), or Courage(Spades). Luck always beats Wits, Wits always beats Courage, Courage always beats Kindness, and Kindness always beats Luck.  
In all other instances, the highest card played wins. In the case of a tie, the player fails.
- 2) After playing a card, immediately draw a new one.
- 3) If the player or players succeeds, then the player narrates how thing goes well for them, with the help from the Forest/GM.
- 4) If they fail, the GM narrates how things go poorly for them, then the GM draws a random card from their hand, and immediately plays the card against the players, creating a new challenge to be overcome in this phase. The players do not regain this card and will now have a disadvantage!
- 5) The round ends if there are no challenge cards in play. Go to the end of the phase. Otherwise, the GM briefly describes how things are going in general. If there are more challenges in play, repeat the round process.

## At the end of a phase

1. The players discuss what to do and where to go next.
2. The player with the most cards describes where they try to head next. In the case of a tie, the youngest player with the most cards narrates.
3. The Forest describes where their path takes them regardless of their intentions, either by narrating freely or drawing random cards, before setting up another Phase.
4. Finally, cards not in player's hands are shuffled together to make a new draw pile

## The Clearing

You see more light pouring into the forest in front of you, have you come to the end of the forest, or is it just a small clearing? The Clearing is the name of the final step of the game, where the players find out if they are able to return to their world, or if they become lost in the Forest.

## Going Home

After phase 5, The Forest describes the fate of the magical world and them being on the brink of escape.

Then, each player, from Eldest character to Youngest, describes their fate:

First, they play the highest card in their hand in front of them, using its suit and number to inspire the tone of their ending narration. (Do not redraw a card here, meaning the most cards you can end the game with is 5)

If the players have four or five cards in hand at this stage, they haven't been particularly influenced by the world, and describe how their life goes on much as it did before the adventure, it was all just a dream after all wasn't it?

If they end with have two or three cards, describe how the world has fundamentally changed them - perhaps they're a different person, or they've brought back a piece of the world with them, or they still retain some kind of connection to it.

If they have one card left, describe how they are lost in the world - how they merge with, naturalize to, are devoured by, or come to rule a part of it. They will not wake up.



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