

ROAD TO NOWHERE



AN ARCHIPELAGO HACK BY NICK WEDIG

ROAD TO NOWHERE

This is a simple hack I made for the game **Archipelago** by Matthijs Holter. You'll need to understand that game to understand this one.

In this game, you tell a story of some friends on a road trip together, not just across the country but across universes. As you travel across physical distance, you also shift into other worlds. The farther you travel, the more the world diverges from the universe you're familiar with. Eventually, the world will be completely alien to you. But you still might find what you're looking for.

Gameplay works mostly the same as in **Archipelago**: take turns framing scenes about individual characters, invoke ritual phrases as needed, etc. I will just note the places this game differs from default **Archipelago**.

This document is a set of new and modified rules. You don't have to accept all the different ideas in here. Just take the ones that work for your group and incorporate them into your play.



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CHARACTER CREATION

At the start of the game, there are a few facts that you should work with the other characters to establish.

Work with your fellow players to answer these questions:

- **What is our method of transportation?**
- **How did we all join together for this trip?**
- **Do we know this is a trip across realities when we start, or is that a thing we discover during play?**
- **How does interdimensional travel work? What triggers the jumps?**

EXAMPLE

*We sit down and decide to play **Road to Nowhere**. After a bit of discussion, we decide that the PCs are all traveling together in a beat up old station wagon, heading toward a larp-based theme park we heard about in Utah. We decide that none of the characters know about interdimensional travel at the start of the story. And jumps between worlds are triggered whenever one of the PCs is harmed or their life put in danger.*

As you create your character, think about why they are on this journey. Choose one of these two questions and answer it:

- **What are you seeking on your journey?**
- **What are you trying to get away from on this journey?**

In default **Archipelago**, characters are supposed to share indirect relationships, through setting details. In **Road to Nowhere**, characters should have more direct relationships. Once you have defined your character, you will work with the player sitting next to you to create a relationship between your characters. Describe your character, then ask the player on your right a question about the relationship between your two characters. This could be about how you know each other, or how they feel about one another, or any other question that helps establish the ties between the characters. The other player answers the question, honestly, in whatever way they feel is most interesting and would make for the best story.

EXAMPLE

I decide that my character is an untrustworthy gambler named Euclid. Euclid is leaving New Jersey to get away from some bad gambling debts. His luggage consists of nothing but paperback science fiction novels with weird annotations in the margins.

*I turn to Erica and consider her PC, a nerdy guy who always wears his Star Wars Stormtrooper cosplay armor and calls himself M-4557. M-4557 (whose we all call Mike) is seeking a rare collectible action figure from the larp park. I realize that our shared interest in science fiction might be the basis of a connection. So I ask Erica about what obscure science fiction we bonded over, and what we now always disagree about. Erica says that we first became friends discussing old Philip K. Dick novels, but now mostly spend our time in the car arguing about which is the best version of **Doctor Who**. I agree, and decide that Euclid prefers Paul McGann over all other Doctors Who.*



FRIENDSHIP QUESTIONS

Road to Nowhere assumes all the player characters know each other and are travelling together (*for the most part*).

At the start of each session, before creating destiny points, each player asks another player a question about the relationship between their characters. These should be open ended questions, not just Yes or No questions.

Friendship questions should explore how the two characters interact with each other. You're free to ask leading questions, to invent details about your character or theirs or events that have happened "off-screen" in between the stories told during play. Questions might relate to things that one or both characters are unaware of, but it nonetheless has to be significant to the characters and their relationship.

The other player answers the question honestly, in the way that they think will create the most interesting story. Share your answer with everyone. (So I could ask something like "What secret are you hiding from me?" and you would tell me, even though my character wouldn't know the answer.)

Friendship questions also come into play when someone uses the ritual phrase "**That might not be so easy**" (see page 5).

(Friendship questions are taken from *Misspent Youth* by Robert Bohl)

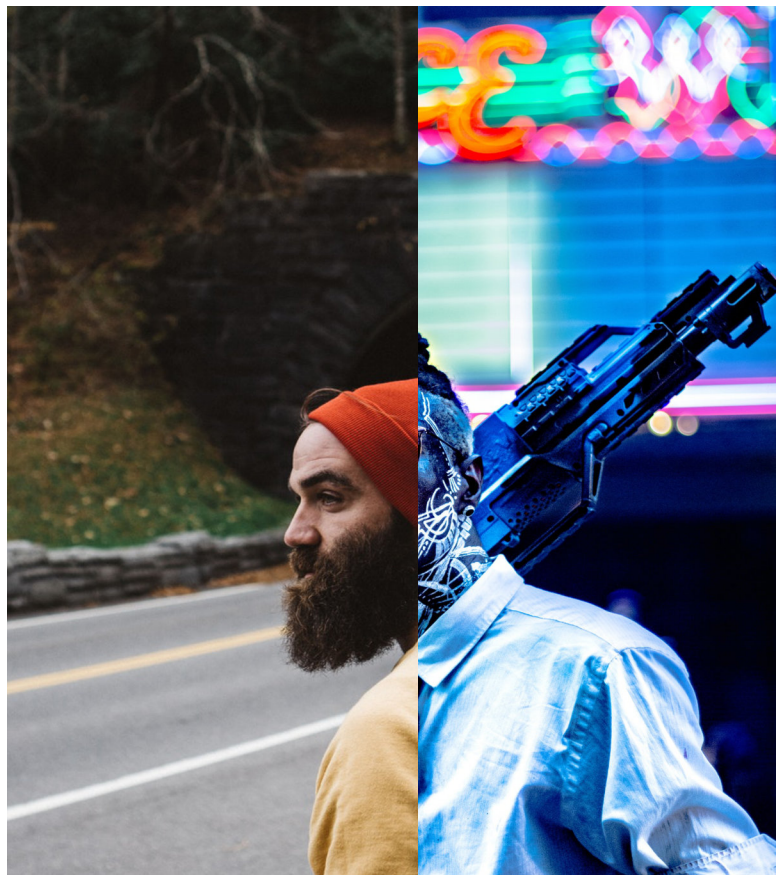
EXAMPLES

- *What did you teach me about myself that I didn't know?*
- *How do I keep you entertained during long hours of travel in the car?*
- *What's the meanest thing you ever did to me, and how did we stay friends?*
- *What did I do to earn your trust?*
- *What was our favorite thing to do together before we set out on this trip?*
- *What are you insecure about and how do I make you feel confident about it?*
- *What are you afraid I'll find out about you?*

Try to choose other players to balance things out, so that everyone answers roughly the same number of questions, and so that you ask all the other PCs questions roughly equally over time. No one wants to be left out. And you can use this as an opportunity to explore interactions between characters who haven't done much together previously.

EXAMPLE

*At the start of their second session playing **Road to Nowhere**, I think about who my crooked gambler PC Euclid has been interacting with. The game hasn't established much about the relationship between Euclid and Hollis, your teenage runaway PC seeking acceptance. So I ask you how "**What do we do for entertainment together while we're on the road?**" You think for a moment about our two PCs and what we know about them so far before answering "**Whenever we stop at a convenience store or truck stop, I distract the cashier while you shoplift some llama jerky or whatever weird snack foods this universe has.**"*





"THAT MIGHT NOT BE SO EASY"

When someone invokes this phrase, you draw two resolution cards instead of one. The better card is discarded into a discard pile. The worse one happens, then is placed on the bottom of the resolution card deck. For this purpose, **"Yes and"** cards are better than **"Yes but"** cards, which are better than **"Perhaps"** cards, which are better than **"No but"** cards, and **"No and"** cards are worst of all. If you draw two resolution cards of the same kind, then the person interpreting the resolution card chooses which becomes true and which goes in the discard pile.

"IT WILL BE EASIER WITH MY HELP"

If you have the help of your fellow travelers, then things tend to go better for you. If it is your scene and one of your friendship questions is relevant to the task you're performing, then you can take the better of the two cards, not the

worse. You have to be assisted by the character you asked a question of, or one you answered a question of. The other player has to describe how that friendship question's answer is relevant and meaningful in the scene and how their character helps the focus PC.

EXAMPLE

*My character, Euclid, is trying to sneak past a lizardperson security guard into a secure facility to rescue my friends. Carlos says **"That might not be so easy"**, so I select Abigail to draw two cards and interpret. I get a **"Yes, but"** and a **"No, but"** card, meaning I will take the **"No but"** card and fail.*

*But at the start of the session, you asked me the question "What do we do for entertainment together while we're on the road?" I answered, talking about how your teenage runaway PC Hollis would distract shopkeepers while Euclid shoplifted llama jerky to enjoy on the ride. So now you say **"It will be easier with my help"** and explain how Hollis will distract the reptilian watchman while Euclid slips over the fence. Instead of taking the worse cards **"No, but"** I can take the better of the two **"Yes, but"** and succeed.*

"FRIENDSHIP GROWS OVER TIME"

Once per session, when a scene ends, a player can declare "**Friendship grows over time**" as a ritual phrase. This is a reflection on the scene that just ended. It makes a statement that the scene was meaningful about one of the friendship questions asked at the start of the session. It means that the relationship has grown or changed, so the answer needs to be updated. Sometimes, this means the information is no longer true, like when a secret that was hidden has been revealed. Or it could be that an answer has deepened and become more meaningful, as when a casual flirtation becomes a more meaningful romance. The point is that a player is suggesting that the relationship is growing or changing.

If one or both the players of the involved characters agree, then people should note the change. You can use this phrase about your own character's relationships, but you need to get the agreement of the other PC's player. You can also use it on other player's characters.

When the change is finalized, you take the resolution cards in the discard pile, shuffle them, and put them on top of the resolution deck. These cards will be generally positive. So as friendships grow and deepen, the story will tend to be better for you for the rest of the session.

EXAMPLE

At the start of the session, I asked Erica "What does M-4557 want to tell Euclid, but is reluctant to do so?" She answered that Mike had developed romantic feelings for Euclid over the course of the road trip, but he wasn't sure how Euclid would respond if they were revealed.

*During a later scene, the PCs stop by the road for a break and Mike reveals his feelings. Euclid reciprocates, and I declare "**Friendship grows over time**". In future scenes, we'll explore their budding relationship further. For now, we make a note to remember for future sessions. And we shuffle the discard pile and place it on top of the resolution card deck. For the rest of this session, at least, things should be easier for the PCs.*

"THE PORTAL BETWEEN WORLDS OPENS"

When you speak this phrase, the player characters shift from their current universe into a parallel universe. The new universe is different in some way from the existing universe, and the game changes to reflect that.

Use this phrase when the PCs would travel from one universe to another. Depending on how you have set up your game, that could happen in different circumstances. It might be that the PCs have the ability to move between worlds voluntarily, and you invoke this phrase whenever they choose to move between worlds. Or it might be random and uncontrolled.

The player who speaks this phrase must abandon ownership of their element. It players no role in the new universe. They create a new element that is important in the new universe. Then they describe where the PCs in the scene find themselves in the new universe. Other players have the option to abandon their element and create a new one as well.

(Optionally, you could return to a previous universe, restoring the elements important to that universe.)

When you do this, collectively decide which things need to be changed and which don't. Look through the records of NPCs, locations, items and such and decide which are the same in the new universe and which are different. If different, discard the previous record. Start a new one if necessary.



"THERE'S SOMETHING ODD ABOUT THAT"

As you travel the multiverse, things get strange. Whenever you invoke this ritual phrase, it signals that the thing the PCs are interacting with is different than expected. You can invoke this phrase to make strange anything the PCs interact with: NPCs, locations, objects, cultural practices, whatever.

When you invoke this phrase, you create a record for that person, place, thing or concept, if the thing didn't already have one. To create a new record, just take a notecard or scrap of paper and make six bullet point down the left edge. Each bullet will be a fact about that thing. For the first bullet, write a word or phrase covering the basic idea of what that thing is. **"Theme park"** or **"corrupt local sheriff"** or such.

When the phrase is invoked, you're going to learn something strange about that setting element. Take a six sided die and roll it. If you roll equal to or lower than the number of bullet point entries for the thing, then it is an unexpected but helpful twist. The strange thing about that thing will help the PCs and make their lives easier. It turns out the motorcycle never runs out of fuel, because it is driven by an endless well of regrets. Or the guards are sworn to obey the first request they hear on the holy day of the Undying Squid King. The player whose scene it is invents a weird but useful detail. Write that detail on the thing's record sheet, beside the next open bullet point.

If you roll higher than the number of known facts about that thing, then there is an unexpected twist, but it will make the lives of the PCs more difficult, complicated, dangerous or unpleasant. Maybe it turns out the only vehicle to cross the desert waste is a sandslug that is horribly disgusting and only eats human flesh. Maybe anyone who violates local rules of etiquette is infected by a virus that transforms your body into glass. The players who aren't the focus of the scene collaborate to invent a suitable complication and write it on the thing's record sheet.

If a thing has 6 filled bullet points on its record sheet, you can't invoke this phrase for that person, place, thing or concept.



EXAMPLE

*The PCs stop by a truck stop diner for some food. As I begin to describe the diner, you say **"There's something odd about that diner"**. So I take a note card and write **"truck stop diner"** as the first item on its card. Then I roll a d6 and get a 3. So you discuss with the other players and then write **"the diner only accepts barter when paying for food"**. My PC, Euclid, only discovers that fact after having eaten his meal, so he has to figure out what he has of value that could be given up to pay for his meal.*

*Euclid is unable to convince the waitress to accept old paperback novels as payment for his scrambled dinosaur eggs. So he decides to make a run for it, through the kitchen. As I describe going into the kitchen, someone else at the table says **"There's something odd in the kitchen"**. So I roll a die again, getting a 2. So this time, there's something odd, but helpful. I narrate running into the kitchen, and finding out that the dinosaur eggs were fresh from some sort of ostrich-like theropod dinosaur, kept in a pen behind the diner. I add **"keeps live dinosaurs"** to the diner's card. Then I describe Euclid freeing the dinosaur from its enclosure and riding away from the diner as the waitress angrily shouts at me from the diner doorway.*