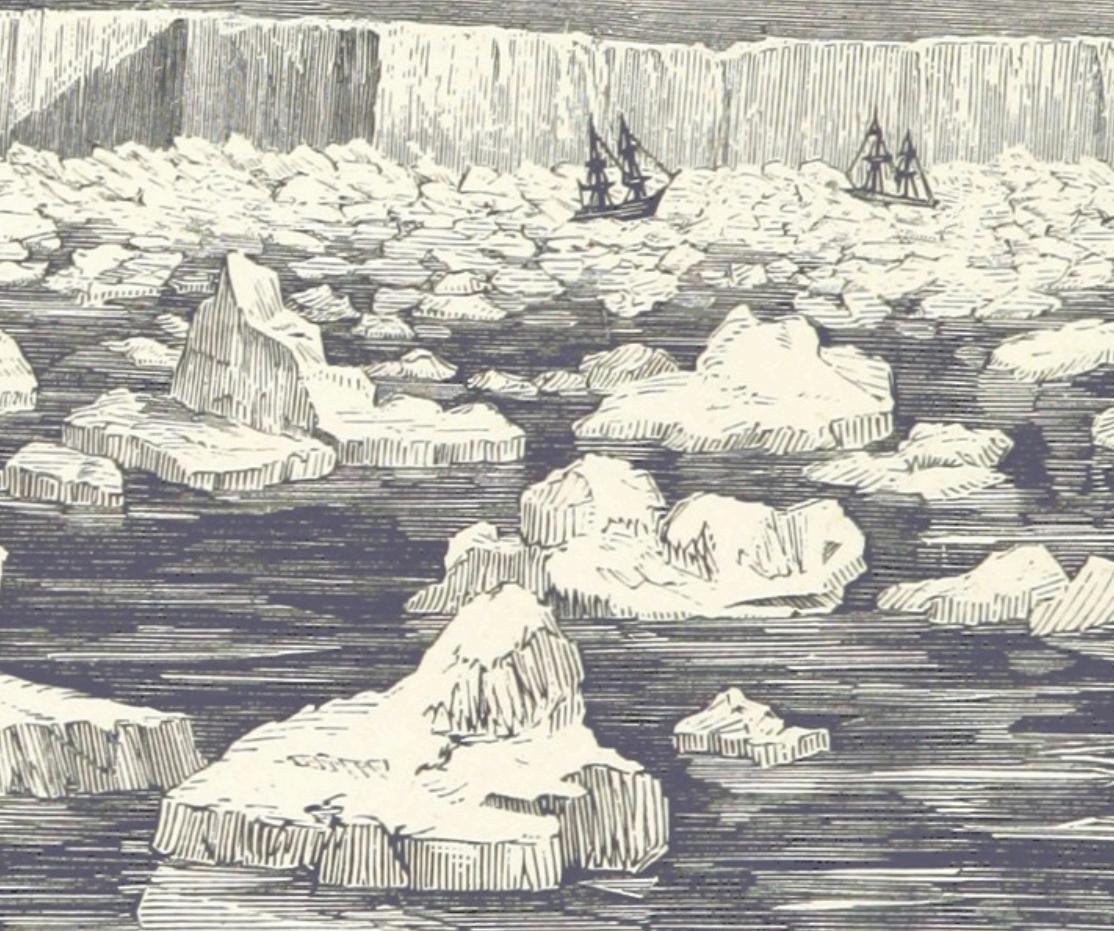


Whoever Finds This Paper

A Solo Journaling Game

By Shawn
Graham





This work is based on The Wretched (found at <http://loottheroom.itch.io/wretched>), product of Chris Bissette and Loot The Room, and licensed for our use under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).

THE WRETCHED™ is a trademark of Chris Bissette. The Wretched and Alone logo is © Chris Bissette, and is used with permission.

H. M. S. HMS Erebus and Terror
wintered in the ice in
Lat. $70^{\circ} 5'$ N Long. $98^{\circ} 25'$ W

23 of May 1841

Having wintered in 1840 - 1 at Beechey Island
in Lat $74^{\circ} 43'.28''$ N. Long $91^{\circ} 39.15''$ W after having
ascended Wellington Channel to Lat 77° and returned
by the West side of Cornwallis Island.

Commander.

In John Franklin commanding the Expedition

All well

WHOEVER finds this paper is requested to forward it to the Secretary of the Admiralty, London, with a note of the time and place at which it was found: or, if more convenient, to deliver it for that purpose to the British Consul at the nearest Port.

QUICONQUE trouvera ce papier est prié d'y marquer le temps et lieu où il l'aura trouvé, et de le faire parvenir au plus tôt au Secrétaire de l'Amirauté Britannique à Londres.

CUALQUIERA que hallare este Papel, se le suplica de enviarlo al Secretario del Almirantazgo, en Londres, con una nota del tiempo y del lugar en donde se halló.

LEN ieder die dit Papier mogt vinden, wordt hiermede verzocht, om hetzelve, ten spoedigste, te willen zenden aan den Heer Minister van de Marine der Nederlanden in 's Graveneind, of wel aan den Secretaris der Britsche Admiraliteit, te London, en daar by te voegen eene Nota, inhoudende de tyd en de plaats alwaar dit Papier is gevonden geworden.

FINDEREN af dette Papiør ombedes, naar Leilighed gives, at sende samme til Admiralitets Secretairen i London, eller nærmeste Embedsmand i Danmark, Norge, eller Sverrig. Tiden og Stedet hvor dette er fundet ønskesvenskabeligt paategnet.

WER diesen Zettel findet, wird hier-durch ersucht denselben an den Secretair des Admiralitets in London einzusenden, mit gefälliger angabe an welchen ort und zu welcher zeit er gefundet werden ist.

Life remains.... for now...



With hands blue from the cold, and ink made liquid only by burning some precious whale oil, Captain James Fitzjames did his best. He scrawled in the margins.

'H.M. Ships Terror and Erebus were deserted on the 22nd April, 5 leagues NNW of this, having been beset since 12 Septr. 1846. Sir John Franklin died on the 11th June 1847 and the total loss by deaths in the Expedition has been to this date 9 Officers and 15 Men'.

The paper, printed in several languages, enjoined the reader: 'Whoever finds this paper is requested to forward it to the Secretary of the Admiralty...'.

'God damnit Franklin' Fitzjames looked at the remaining crew.

The First Mate caught his eye. It was time to go. Fitzjames jammed the paper under the pile of rocks, stood, and together the crew began to walk. To where? God only knows. 105 men, dragging sledges, over the April ice. In the distance, someone watched them go.

You are Captain James Fitzjames from the doomed Franklin Expedition, navigating the hostile Arctic as isolation, dwindling resources, and moral dilemmas weigh upon you. Guide your crew to salvation or to their doom; and either way, write it all down so someone knows what men you were.

You are Wretched and Alone.

Keep your log safe. It will vindicate your name.

'Whoever Finds This Paper' is a solo role-playing game. You take on the role of James Fitzjames, one of the officers on Franklin's ill-fated expedition searching for the North West Passage.

You use cards and dice to generate prompts that describe the events you are reacting to, the situations you are in. You chronicle your response; your responses influence what happens at the next die roll, the next pull of the cards.

How would Fitzjames react?

How will you react?



Provisions



You will need:

- Standard Deck of Cards: Each suit and value drives the narrative with specific challenges and reflections.
- Jenga Block Tower: Represents your psychological stability and the crew's cohesion.
- Tokens: Start with 30 tokens representing food reserves. These can be replenished or diminished through gameplay.
- Dice: Two standard dice. Used to navigate interaction potential with the Inuit, influencing Fitzjames's internal and external conflict.
- A notebook to write in
- Suitable music

James Fitzjames

Your First Entry

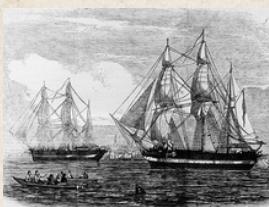
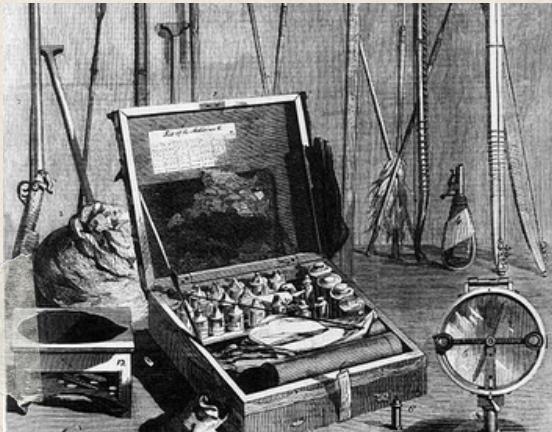
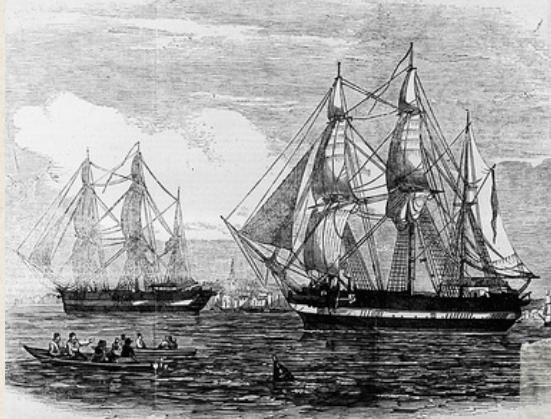
Begin by chronicling that day on the ice, that day when you neatly folded the paper and hid it in the cairn. Franklin is already dead. What lies ahead of you?

You will find out.

Shuffle the deck and erect the tower. Roll a d6 and pull that many cards; these are the things that have happened that day. Follow directions on the cards, and write your log as best you can.

And then put one foot in front of the other, and roll the dice again, for another day, there on the ice.

If the tower falls, you have collapsed into insanity and death swiftly follows. If you run out of food, well, how many men do you have left...?

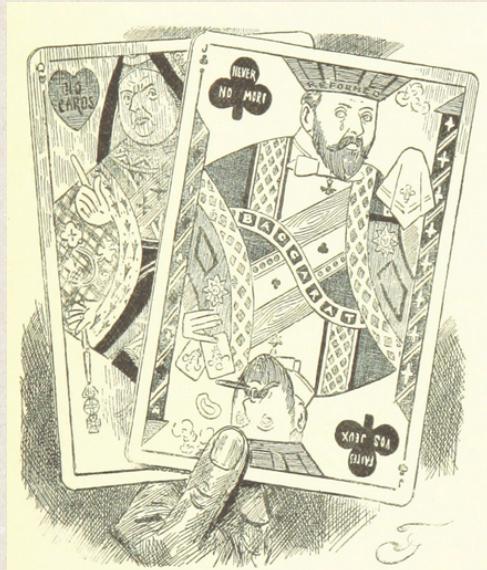


Events

Spades: the unforgiving north. There will be storms, frostbite, and ice entrapment. There could be bears

Diamonds: Provisions and Supplies

There's only so much we can carry, that we can drag, over the ice.



Clubs: Mental Strain and Exhaustion
A British Officer always knows what to do, a British Officer never falters.

Hearts: Crew morale
We are the only men for hundreds and hundreds of miles.

Aren't we?

Certain card draws might trigger a die or dice roll. Dominos could be used as an alternative.

When rolling, consider the context of the interaction or observation being made.

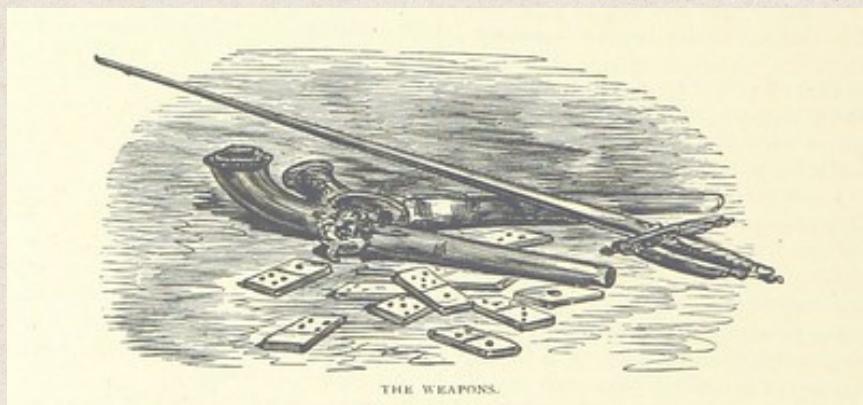
The roll result should lead to immediate in-game consequences and influence the narrative, either stabilizing your mental state or exacerbating fears and tensions.

Interpreting Results:

- Roll 1-3: The outcome skews from less to a more negative, distrustful or fearful interpretation, reflective of the crew's heightened paranoia and cultural biases. This symbolizes a regression or negative response.
- Roll 4-6: The outcome skews from less to a more positive, insightful or accepting interpretation. This outcome represents hope, progress or enlightenment.

If rolling because of an Encounter with the Inuit: Roll 2 dice. Results:

- 1-5: The Inuit presence feels threatening, amplifying the descent into madness. Pull two blocks.
- 6-9: A neutral encounter. Potential for reflection; no immediate effect but the prospect to address lingering dread in the journal entries.
- 10-12: Recognize moments of clarity. Successful observation of Inuit humanity and adaptability grants two tokens.



Spades: The Unforgiving North

Ace: A severe storm annihilates your camp.

Remove two blocks. Lose three tokens.

Jack: A crew member dies.

Roll dice to decide what happens to the body. If you have less than five tokens, you might need to make a hard choice.

Queen: Severe cold snap hits.

Attempts to maintain morale are interrupted by strange, guiding chants.

Roll dice to glean lessons or fear from this influence. Lose three tokens.

King: Navigation instruments fail due to cold. Write of the hope as direction is temporarily restored by following mysterious stone cairns that look like little... people?

Roll dice for deeper introspective insight.

2: A crewmember succumbs to frostbite. Remove one block.

3: The landscape is endlessly of ice. It never ends... it's all around you... you're trapped as surely as if in prison.
Remove one block. Lose a token.

4: Ice floes create a physical barrier. As you're forced to reroute, you glimpse distant figures on the ice. Roll dice to determine the nature of the encounter. Lose a token.

5: Supplies buried under snow and ruined by frost. The crew discovers footprints leading away. Decide whether to follow and roll dice for the potential outcome. Lose a token.

6: Exhausting search for open land. Amidst the search, distant voices echo. Roll dice to interpret them as either disconcerting or insightful.

7: A blizzard separates you from your crew. In the distance, you spot a figure. Roll dice to determine if this is a threat or a guide, affecting blocks removed.

8: Dangerous wildlife threatens the camp. In their pursuit, you learn new hunting methods. Write about this revelation and roll dice to comprehend their origins.

9: An unexpected thaw turns the ice treacherous. Roll the dice to determine how many die going through.

10: Find a frozen partially eaten carcass. On the carcass are unfamiliar tool marks. Or maybe animal tooth marks?

Roll dice to determine appreciation or suspicion, guiding journal reflections. Add one token.

Hearts: Crew Morale

Ace: A ship! A ship! A ship is seen on the horizon. Set the card aside. At the end of a day, roll a die. If you roll a 6, place a token on it if you have one. This represents food saved for the final push. If you get to ten tokens, make the FINAL PUSH (see THE ENDING OF THINGS, below).

Jack: A personal conflict escalates. The fight is over food.

Roll dice for their impact on reconciliation efforts. Lose two tokens.

Queen: Emotional breakdown of a close officer. He confesses to having eaten... human flesh.

Pshaw, you don't believe it. No one believes it. Yes?

Roll dice to illustrate effect or dismissal in the journal.

King: Thorough division among the crew over leadership. As decisions waver, if Inuit have been encountered, someone suggests trying to make contact with them. Others disagree.

Roll dice to influence unity or further division.

2: A frightening exchange between crew members. Roll dice to decide how it affects morale.

3: Crewmates become ...visibly close.

Roll dice for impact on morale.

4: Tension arises after a rationing disagreement. A crew member suggests considering Inuit tactics.

Roll dice to see if this suggestion is heeded or dismissed. If heeded, add one token.

5: An old friend is descending into hysteria. It seems to be... catching.

Pull one block.

6: Accusations of theft circulate.

Roll dice to determine the truth of the matter. Add or lose one token accordingly.

7: A crew member shows remarkable resilience.

8: Unexpected laughter breaks the silence.

Roll dice to expand understanding or to compound fear.

9: A man is discovered hoarding food. Take the food away.

Roll dice to determine if it calms tensions or stirs conflict.

10: You force the men to sing hymns to keep our spirits up.

Roll dice to assess impact.

Diamonds: Provisions and Supplies

Ace: Supplies run dangerously low, instigating panic. A crewmember suggests learning from the Inuit.

Roll dice to see if the idea is adopted or rejected.

Jack: Your brother officers' love and affection leads to efforts to keep warm at night by sharing blankets.

Queen: Misplaced stock leads to a crucial shortfall. In seeking solutions, discussion of 'native' solutions that the sailors have seen elsewhere are mooted.

Roll dice for hope or hypothesis. Lose one token.

King: Discovery of contaminated supplies. Lose one token. Inuit fishing methods offer remedies.

Roll dice to decide on adoption or avoidance.

2: Successful hunting trip brings back food. Among the spoils are traces of previous Inuit hunts.

Roll dice for a potential shift in respect and utilization of find. Add one token.

3: A necessary ration is spoiled or lost. An Inuit method presents as a solution.

Roll dice to determine if it is adopted successfully. Add one token if successful.

4: Innovative approach secures fuel for heat. The idea stems from observed Inuit practices.

Roll dice to gauge adoption or skepticism amongst the men.

5: Encounter an abandoned but usable camp. Its origins are unknown, but speculated to be Inuit.

Roll dice to dictate use or rejection.

6: Theft of essential supplies by a crew member. One officer argues that you should cast the man out.

Roll dice to decide on conflict resolution and trust. Lose one token.

7: Spoiled food leads to sickness.

Pull one block.

8: A bear is following you.

Roll dice for resolution.

9: Creative meal keeps crew nourished longer with techniques borrowed from Inuit practices.

Roll dice to dictate appreciation or disregard.

10: Lice. Lice everywhere. No relief!

Pull one block.

Clubs: Mental Strain & Exhaustion

Ace: Unrelenting nightmares disturb sleep. They transform Inuit figures into demons.

Roll dice to differ between terror and awakening. Pull one block.

Jack: Isolation gnaws at sanity.

Roll dice to dictate state of anguish. Pull one block.

Queen: A flashback to sailing as a little boy, a memory of joy.

Roll dice to reinforce anguish or provide insight.

King: Your group encounters an Inuit hunting party.... or are they daemons? Internal fears manifest into actions against whoever these creatures are.

Roll dice to determine the impact of this encounter on your clarity. Pull one block if clarity is diminished.

2: Something about the lights in the night sky trigger a memory of warmth and safety? Or something else?

Roll dice to settle on clarity or confusion.

3: Monotony breeds frustration.

Roll dice to invoke turmoil or tranquility. In case of turmoil, pull block.

4: Hallucinations blur perception. Who are those people on the horizon? People?

Roll dice to choose between threat perception or revelation. In case of threat, pull block.

5: The loss of a treasured possession sends you spiralling.

Pull block.

6: Stray from camp in confusion. You hear voices in some other language echo through the night. Is it a memory?

Roll dice to guide as memory or fear. If fear, pull one block.

7: Discover a peculiar artifact, igniting curiosity likely of Inuit origin.

Roll dice for high impact or dismissal.

8: You steal clothing off a dead man to wrap your feet, rationalizing the act. Roll dice to influence emotional responses.

9: Attempt to record the incredible aurora. You can almost hear it, there in the sky.

10: Your fellow officer stops moving.

Roll dice to decide if you turn his body over to the men.

The Ending of Things

If the tower falls, you have descended into madness and perish on the ice, in the tundra, even though help may have been there to hand.

Running out of tokens doesn't necessarily mean starvation... yet. For every two turns without a token in your possession, pull a block. But if you eat nothing for more than seven turns, well...

Pulling all four queens and having replenished supplies through consistent good relations with the Inuit (four or more 10+ rolls):

You are sustained, in this vast wilderness, and though members of your crew have perished, you reach the Hudson's Bay Company outpost. When you eventually reach London, you are held in contempt for adapting to 'native' ways. Your log is held as evidence for your eventual court martial.

The Final Push:

Is that... is that a ship in the distance? Can you reach it? If you can reach it in three more turns without dying / descending into madness - you must pull a block from the tower each turn, regardless of what a card says - you are saved by a simple whaling ship that returns you to Newfoundland, and eventually, to London. If the tower falls, you perish within site of salvation. But if not...

Burn the pages of your diary/log that you cannot afford for anyone to see.

You know which ones.



Afterword

I am fascinated by the possibility space that solo journaling RPGs may offer historical- and archaeo-gaming.

In this present effort - my first - I am playing with the 'what if' of the Franklin expedition. I want the player to experience the disorientation of the North, but also, offer salvation to these doomed men. But is it a salvation that a 19th century British Officer would have recognized? The Franklin Expedition lived on in Inuit oral history for generations; it is harrowing reading. (the link is to: <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/theyre-not-human-how-19th-century-inuit-coped-with-a-real-life-invasion-of-the-walking-dead>).

I also come to this from a background in simulation. Don't like the rules? Feel the balance is off? Feel free to make your own, but try to ground them in the historical/cultural realities of the scenario. Play through, then think with. We write to find out what we know; solo journaling rpg offer a powerful way, I think, of plumbing our own knowledge.

Shawn Graham CC-BY 2024