



# Canta

A Game-Making  
Toolkit by Peach  
Garden Games

# Carta SRD

## A Toolkit For Making Exploration Games

### Welcome to Carta!

Carta SRD is built for making games about exploration. The idea is that players lay cards out in a grid, and then turn them over one at a time, exploring prompts and mechanics as they do. The game is a sort of boardgame / storygame hybrid, where players explore journaling prompts by physically moving their marker from card to card and looking up the results. It can have a definite goal, making it more boardgame-like, or it can be more nebulous and story-focused.

### Carta was inspired by:

- The Wretched and Alone SRD by Matt Sanders & Chris Bissette
- The Estate of Baron Archambaud, an Ingrate, by Galazor
- Board games like Zombies! and Betrayal at House on the Hill

### Let's Discover!

This SRD was built for stories about solitary discovery. GMless Multiplayer rules can definitely be added, but the default ruleset is a singleplayer one. You might want to tell stories about:

Exploring a classic-style dungeon in search of treasure

Wandering around a city and seeing the sights

Being pursued through a haunted mansion

Searching an alien planet for survivors

Just playing Monster Hunter, I guess. That's what I did.

### A Note!

Hey, colonialism is bad. It has devastating effects on entire civilizations and perpetuates generations and generations of cruelty and injustice. It's one thing to tell stories about a person exploring an area, but don't use "Explore" in the sense of "Being The First European".

Be respectful of inhabited places and established traditions.

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# The Basics

## How To Play A Basic Carta Game

### Definitions

- The Deck is a standard deck of playing cards with the jokers removed
- The Goal Card is the card whose prompt ends the game
- The Starting Point is the card where the player's marker is placed at the beginning.
- The Marker is a small object that the player uses to track their movement
- The Board is a 4x6 grid of playing cards
- Resources are values that change as the player explores the board
- Prompts are story scenes and mechanics associated with a particular card.

### Setup

The game is played with a deck of standard playing cards, with the jokers removed.

Players should also have a way to track resources, and a marker, like a coin or small toy.

Players start play by going through the deck and retrieving the Goal Card and the Starting Point.

Next, players shuffle the deck and draw 22 more cards to bring the total to 24

The player then takes this pile and shuffles in the Goal Card face-down.

Once this 23 card pile is shuffled, the player deals out the cards face-down in a 4x6 grid, filling the last place with the Starting Point, face-up.

The game is played by moving the marker from one card to an adjacent card, turning the card face-up if necessary, and then following the prompts.

### Resources

The base gameplay involves moving around this “board” of cards, but resources add another layer of complexity on top. They're immensely variable, and they're a great way to flavor the base rules.

There are two basic modes. You can use either one, or you can use both!

- **Survival Mode**

Survival Mode is about exploring while your resources are dwindling, and looking for ways to replenish them. It could represent Warmth, Courage, Fuel, Blood, or something else that you need in order to carry on

The player starts with 8.

Moving from card to card costs 1

10 of the card prompts reduce it by an extra 1

15 of the card prompts increase it by 2

There is a consequence to reaching 0. Players may have to return to the starting point or lose the game entirely.

- **Collect Mode**

Collect Mode is about searching the area for smaller pieces of your ultimate goal. These could represent Advantage, Clues, Rescues, or something else that you need to achieve your goals.

The player starts with 0

13 of your card prompts add 1 (Or, if you like, cards of a certain suit add 1)

When the player reaches the Goal Card, they only succeed if they have 4 or more of these, or if every card on the board is face-up.

## **Goal Card**

The goal of the game is to move the marker onto the Goal Card and succeed at the condition written in its prompt.

For a basic game in Survival Mode, the goal is to arrive with your resource higher than 0.

For a basic game in Collect Mode, the goal is to arrive with your resource higher than 4, or if every card on the board is turned face-up.

## **Prompts**

Every card should have a unique prompt written about it. The player will look up each card's prompt as they play. I know, it's a lot of work, but it's part of making the game a unique experience! Not every card needs to interact with the resources, but each card should be something special. Don't worry – I've gone ahead and written a little help-list later on.

# Turning the Knobs

## Turning Carta Into Your Own Game

You can re-skin the base game all you want! But, you might want to make some adjustments, or even introduce your own mechanics! I hope you do. Obviously you can change all you want – I'm not the boss of you, and that's okay. But in this section, I've included some easy guiderails for you.

### Some Helpful Numbers

If you're going to tweak the numbers, then you might find the following statistics helpful. Remember, though, that any outcome is possible, even if the possibility is remote, so try not to make a game that can't be won.

The odds of getting a card in a particular suit is  $\frac{1}{4}$  or 25%. On a 24-card board, there will, on average, be 6 cards of any given suit.

The odds of getting a card of a particular color is  $\frac{1}{2}$  or 50%. On a 24-card board, there will, on average, be 12 cards of either color.

The odds of getting a card with a particular value is  $\frac{1}{13}$  or 7.6%. On a 24-card board there will, on average, be one or two cards of any given value.

A 24-card board is a little under half the deck. A particular card has a 43% chance of being on the board if only one card is added deliberately in setup. The more cards are picked out and added, the lower this chance becomes.

The odds of the player finding the Goal Card on any given move start at  $\frac{1}{23}$  in the base game.

### Tweaking Setup

Any card that is mandatory for play should be picked out in this step to make sure it ends up in the game. If you choose to have multiple Goal Cards, or multiple fixed cards on the board, be sure to let the player know during setup.

If you want a card to be visible from the start of the game, shuffle it in face-up.

If you want a card to be hidden at the start of the game, shuffle it in face-down.

If you want a card to have a fixed position, like the starting point, do not shuffle it in. Set it aside and use it to complete the grid once the other cards are set up.

Adding more cards deliberately stabilizes the game, making sure the player has a chance to encounter certain key events. After

the player has picked out all the mandatory cards, be sure to let them know how many to draw so the total is enough for your board.

Making the board larger (say, 5x6) increases all the averages above. It makes the game take longer, as the player's odds of finding the Goal Card are decreased.

Making the board smaller (say, 4x4, or even a line of 12) decreases all the averages above. It makes the game shorter.

### **Tweaking Survival Mode**

There are three things you may want to change about Survival Mode. You might want to change the resource's starting value, the manner in which it goes down, and what happens when it hits 0.

The key to tweaking Survival Mode is the question, "How often do I want 0 to happen?"

As a rule, the lower the starting value of your resource, the more likely it is that it will hit 0 during play.

In the base game, the resource goes down every time you move to a new card. You might choose to only have it go down with certain card prompts. For example, if it goes down when the player moves to a red card, then that will mean it only goes down  $\frac{1}{2}$  the time.

You might choose to add a dice mechanic here, too. Maybe it only goes down if the player rolls a certain value. The odds are going to depend on which dice and value you use.

What happens when the player hits 0 is entirely up to you. In the base game, I suggested that the player either return to the start or lose entirely. But you could have a powerful monster show up that introduces a combat mechanic to the game, or you could change the game to Collect Mode. What you decide to do when the player hits 0 is going to help you answer the question of how often you want it to happen.

### **Tweaking Collect Mode**

When changing Collect Mode, you might want to change how often players gain their resource. The default version of this mode increases it roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the time. You might choose to add die rolls here.

You might also want to change how many are required, or how they interact with the Goal Card.

Remember that there's no guarantee there will be enough of the right cards on the board unless you have the player fish them out and add them deliberately! In order to make sure your game is still winnable, remember to add something like the "or every card on the board" clause in the base game.

## **Tweaking the Goal Card**

The Goal Card can just be a card that ends the game when the player finds it. In the basic Collect Mode game, the Goal Card is only the end of the game if the resource is 4 or the entire board has been explored.

You might want the Goal Card to have a die roll on it, maybe one based on the other resources or prompts you've discovered.

You might also want a final challenge that takes one last piece of your Survival Mode resource, like a six-sided die roll that subtracts that many points.

The most important thing is that your final prompt meets two criteria:

- It lets the player know what, if anything, to do next.

- It always, no matter what cards have come up on the board, creates a winnable game.

If you're playing a grim or intense game, it can be fun to make a game that is very difficult to win, but make sure that however unlikely or difficult it is, it is always possible.

## **Tweaking the Card Prompts**

The ratios suggested in the base game are just suggestions – numbers that have worked well for me in the past. If you want the resources to change more often, you can simply add more card prompts that change them. If you want them to go down faster than they recover, you can add more that reduce them.

You might also like to add die rolls to the prompts. Instead of a prompt saying something like "Gain 2 Warmth" or "Lose 1 Blood", you might like to try "Roll a die and gain that much Warmth" or "Roll a die. If the result is 4 or less, lose 1 Blood."

Subtle tweaks here add up to bigger changes in how the game feels. I like to use six-sided dice because they're easy to find, but you can use any dice you like. You could even use a whole set if you want!



# Prompt Prompts

## In Case You Run Out Of Ideas For Cards

There are 52 cards in a deck of playing cards. That's a daunting amount of writing to do. It'll be worth the work, though.

If you don't know where to take your writing, I've written some prompts for prompts in this section. They're loosely based on tarot cards, which is usually how I decide what goes on which card. Obviously you don't have to use these, but please have a look if you're stuck.

It might help to divide your work by assigning themes to the four suits. You might choose something like this:

- Hearts (Cups): Water, healing, kindness, emotion
- Clubs (Wands): Fire, ambition, courage, movement
- Diamonds (Coins): Earth, stillness, growing, reality
- Spades (Swords): Air, thought, calculation, fear

A of Hearts: Something new and beautiful

2 of Hearts: Romance, understanding

3 of Hearts: Celebrating, relaxing

4 of Hearts: Depression, boredom

5 of Hearts: Loss, giving up

6 of Hearts: Memory, nostalgia

7 of Hearts: Choices, priorities, illusion

8 of Hearts: Departure, endings

9 of Hearts: A wish coming true

10 of Hearts: Acceptance, community

J of Hearts: Poetry, thoughtfulness

Q of Hearts: Kindness, gentleness

K of Hearts: Mastery of emotion, of love.

A of Clubs: Something new and exciting

2 of Clubs: Balance, opposition

3 of Clubs: Opportunity, acknowledgment

4 of Clubs: Home, peace

5 of Clubs: Struggle, bickering

6 of Clubs: Victory, pride

7 of Clubs: Defensiveness, courage

8 of Clubs: Movement, action, suddenness

9 of Clubs: Accomplishment, what remains to be done

10 of Clubs: Stress, burden

J of Clubs: Fury, temper

Q of Clubs: Passion, inspiration  
K of Clubs: Mastery of courage, of action

A of Diamonds: Something new that will grow  
2 of Diamonds: Harmony, coexisting  
3 of Diamonds: Good work, expertise, artisanship  
4 of Diamonds: Hoarding, gathering, keeping  
5 of Diamonds: Sadness, poverty  
6 of Diamonds: Charity, judgment  
7 of Diamonds: Patience, slow-growing things  
8 of Diamonds: Harvest, hard work, mastery  
9 of Diamonds: Solitude, peace, plenty  
10 of Diamonds: Community, family, togetherness  
J of Diamonds: Patience and determination  
Q of Diamonds: Generosity, tenderness  
K of Diamonds: Mastery of cycles, of wealth, of profit

A of Spades: Something new and powerful  
2 of Spades: The unknown, opposition, balance  
3 of Spades: Heartbreak, sorrow, grief  
4 of Spades: Death, sleep, rest, silence  
5 of Spades: Loss, defeat  
6 of Spades: Departure, guidance, peril  
7 of Spades: Stealth, theft, manipulation  
8 of Spades: Entrapment, desperation  
9 of Spades: Anxiety, fear, sleeplessness  
10 of Spades: Final defeat, death  
J of Spades: Recklessness, speed  
Q of Spades: Clarity, Serenity  
K of Spades: Mastery of intellect, of suffering

## Now What?

Thank you for your interest in Carta! I have two favors to ask of you once your game is finished.

First, please, please charge for your game. Writing all those card prompts was a lot of work, and you deserve to be paid for that work!

Second, please show me your game so I can buy and read it! I'm so curious to see what other people do with these rules.

