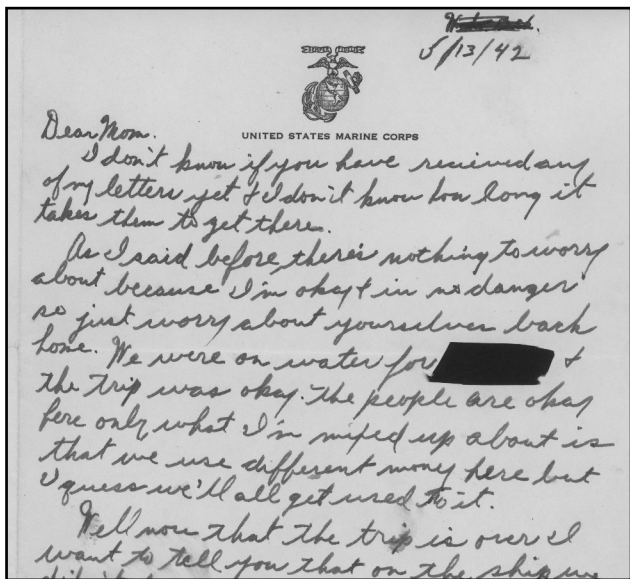


LETTERS FROM HOME

A [REDACTED] GAME FOR TWO PLAYERS AND ONE FACILITATOR



Letters from Home is a game for three people. One person acts as The Facilitator, and two Players who will take on the roles of characters. This game makes use of the USPS (or equivalent postal service, if in another country), which is a vital part of our society.

Letters from Home is a letter writing game. The two players are going to write letters to one another. These letters can be hand-written or typed, but, these need to be physical letters.

The Facilitator establishes the initial set-up and filters all communication between the players. Every game is based on the idea that the two players can only communicate through letters and that the letters are censored by some foreboding organization.

Letters from Home is by Barak Blackburn, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED], and Ellie Hillis. Together, they
are...

DENSITY
MEDIA

RULES

The rules are simple: The two players can only communicate through physical letters and media. These letters and media are filtered through The Facilitator. Players can send whatever they like through the postal service, understanding full well that The Facilitator is going to examine and REDACT any content they deem inappropriate.

The Facilitator will also communicate with the players, giving them information to establish the setting and advance the fiction. This communication can be through post, or through email, text or voice. The latter methods might be preferable for the player to ask any relevant questions*. However, keep in mind, using post also builds the suspense for each story beat.

The Facilitator needs to explain to the players that they can only communicate with each other via physical mail. This is the extent of the "rules" the players need to know.

**The Facilitator informed the character of Georgie that the news media is reporting that the primary station on Mars was destroyed by an asteroid. The player playing the character of Georgie has several follow-up questions.*

EXPISTLE

This setting and premise is created by The Facilitator. It should be a basic idea, and one that leaves plenty of room for all to explore. This information will be conveyed to the players, perhaps in the form of a letter. Several Expistles are included in this rulebook, some include sample Exolutions (see next page).

The Expistle is the starting point, it should be clear and concise. Players can ask some questions, but the Expistle should quickly push the characters into the world and immerse them in the fiction.

A strong Expistle brings with it a sense of the unknown, even danger. But the Expistle also must take place in a reality where letter-writing is the only form of communication allowed. or available. What is the external force constricting communication? an oppressive government; technology and distance; incarceration; simply whimsy.

Players can ask questions, but The Facilitator should also encourage to players to answer them through their letters. The world is theirs as well.

EXOLUTION

The fiction of the world moves forward with every letter exchange. The Facilitator needs to encourage player suggestions, say "yes, and" but also should be imprinting upon these changes their own will. The progress in the fiction, the forces operating from the outside, that alter the reality is called an Exolution.

Exolutions are the story beats. Every Exolution should change the status quo in some way, pushing the narrative of the story forward, whether the players want it to or not.

The Expistle is the base, it is affected by the Exolutions and the character's responses.



The Facilitator might well have Exolutions in mind, but should also respond to the letters and adjust accordingly.

**When in doubt have a man
come through a door with a
gun in his hand.**

-Raymond Chandler

EXOLUTIONS

Suggested Exolutions should embrace some of the base elements of fiction creation, including the standard 3-Act structure. Below is an example, along with broad sample Exolutions which assume no drastic player-instituted narrative alterations. Both characters should have Exolutions affect them, on the homefront and at war, as it were.

ACT I (Set-up):

I: 1 Beginning: The facilitator introduces the players to the fiction.

A city lies in a period of unrest. Militaristic police have, for too long, used violence and intimidation to silence many while ignoring and brutalizing certain portions of the population. One character (Ahmaud) is heading off to help as they can. Perhaps the first letter is a report from the front (from Ahmaud), while the other was a letter tucked in Ahmaud's go bag by his significant other, Breonna.

I: 2 Inciting Incident: Something happens to escalate and heighten the drama, or to introduce what is really going on.

The police and military escalate the use of force against

EXOLUTIONS II

protesters. A pro-government citizen murders several protesters with the tacit support of the police, military, and government. The facilitator shares the POV presented by the media, the pro-government news, as well as the traditional news agencies.

I: 3 Second Thoughts: Shit is getting real. Is it worth it?

As the injuries and body counts increase on a daily basis, many of the protesters begin to have second thoughts. Numbers thin.

I: 4 Climax of Act I: Something even more drastic happens.

The government declares martial law on select portions of the city and population. All access to and from these sections is denied. Reports differ from the different news agencies. The pro-government news describes protesters as violent, that the government had no choice. Law and Order is necessary against these violent anarchists. Other news outlets paint a very different picture.

ACT II (Confrontation):

Act II is defined by ascending action, the threat is known, how does it continue to grow as a threat as more layers are added to the complex futility of opposition. (Examples will be less

EXOLUTIONS III

defined).

II: 1 Obstacles: What stands in the way of the characters?

The military is actively seeking protesters, breaking down doors and cracking skulls. At home, people are on edge, a co-worker shows interest one of the characters.

II: 2 Midpoint : A Big Twist

The military presence is gone. The city is still walled off, but the streets are empty of any military or police. News indicates order is restored. Letter doesn't arrive at home.

II: 3 Another Obstacle:

Everything seems fine. One person within the wall announces they are leaving. Others vanish the middle of the night. At home, the same, co-workers and friends vanish.

II: 4 Disaster: Not a twist, but something catastrophic happens.

Military and police presence is felt at home, as tanks and soldiers roam the streets. Inside the wall, buildings are destroyed with bombs dropping from the sky.

II: 5 Climax of Act II: Everything comes to an explosive head, figuratively or perhaps literally.

EXOLUTIONS IV

Explosions within the wall reveal something deep beneath the earth. On the homefront, portions of the city, some businesses, continue to function as normal, other sections are war-ravaged.

ACT III (Resolution):

In stories, Act III is the wrap-up. However, in interactive fiction, consider instead having the wrap-up and resolution be far more messy, undefined and even abrupt. Because those interacting with the fiction are the protagonists, the story does not need to follow the traditional beats for audience satisfaction.

With that said, some more traditional story beats for Act III include:

III: 1 Everything is Bleak, All Hope Is Lost:

Both the protagonists are in the middle of warzones. Have they both found new shoulders to cry on, new people to comfort them? The Facilitator asks the players to send two letters, proverbially a week apart. Reads both, discards one, and sends the other along, perhaps redacted, perhaps not.

III: 2 Preparations: Gather the team, come up

EXOLUTIONS V

with a new plan?

What is under the city? What is the real threat? Will the characters ever be able to return to one another.

III: 3 Additional Final Obstacle:

Beneath the city a lost civilization is discovered, initially players might think they have found allies. They are wrong. And the most shocking thing about the citizens is.....

III: 4 Last Ditch Effort: One final chance to survive. Perhaps something is discovered, it puts the initial conflicts into context. It doesn't make them right, but with knowledge comes power. Armed with that power, what will the characters do.

(The authors have decided to leave these last exolutions empty, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] make this story your own if you want to jump right in and play.)

III: 5 Resolution: Will the characters be united? Does one die? Is a letter unread? The Facilitator will explain what happens, and might ask for letters, one could be a letter read at a funeral, the other could be shouted to the news cameras. Finally, The Facilitator needs to inform the players of THE END.

PEN TWO PAPER

After establishing the Expistle and assigning characters, The Facilitator will ask for initial letters. One or both of the characters will be told [REDACTED] in the broadest of senses what their initial letter should be about.

This will begin the two-person dialogue that is the crux of this game.

Every letter is filtered through The Facilitator, who is able to REDACT how they see fit, and push the narrative forward with a note to the player via Exolution.

Characters can send multiple letters between Exolutions: daily love letters, news from the front, diary entries.

And, the Facilitator can also decide to withhold letters.

Letters get lost in the mail, so the story goes.

Letters are returned to sender, having been read by The Faciltator.

[REDACTED]

REDACT

The Facilitator has crafted a reality where the flow of information is not unfiltered. They, and they alone, are able to determine what can be shared between the characters.

How can the characters communicate when their communiques are censored?

What is censored and why?

Can characters find ways around this?

What happens when information is incomplete?

These are the pressing questions.

This is why we play.

REDACTIONS may be in place from the beginning, or might slowly creep into the game.

truth

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Ahmaud,

You're an idiot, you know that, right? I'm going to worry for you every night and day, all because you had to get it in your head that you're going to be some big hero. When do I get to be the hero, huh?

You know I'm kidding, my love. I am scared, though, but I am so, so incredibly proud of you, my big, stupid hero. I will do what I can at home. Revolution must happen from inside and out.

I would leave you something to think of me by, but I think you have quite enough after last night. It will be so lonely at home while you are away. I'll have to rely on Biscuits for company, and we both know she'll be moping without you as well!

Remember always that I believe in you. You stay safe and look out for others. We all need you in one piece. When you get home, I will be here for you, with open arms...

Love, eternally,
Breonna

A roommate from college studied abroad for a year. A close friend would send him care packages, knowing full well the packages would be opened and looked through, he would often include a note, kindly explaining what was in the package and pleading softly with those searching the package.

REDACTED LETTER I

Ahmaud,

I hope you are safe. I had not heard from you since the news reported a wall was being put in place. Reports are so mixed and full of strife. It's hard to know the truth. I know few within the walls have working communication beyond letters, so the reports from the front line have slowed to a trickle at best.

Biscuits whines every night. I probably do to. It's hard to proceed as if everything is "normal": the word feels stale in my mouth. My office hired some new temps to cover for the vacancies we've been getting. It's all very tiring, but at least a few of the newbies are entertaining.

Otherwise, things are "fine". You are missed and inquired after frequently. Sadly, I have little to say. Stay safe, try to write me.

Love, Breonna

P.S. Your father sent a box. I have not opened it.
Should I?

The position of a stamp on an envelope can have many meanings. Can the characters communicate without The Facilitator catching on.

REDACTED LETTER II

Breonna, my love, my princess -

~~Black with my [redacted] you're sure~~
~~to from him~~ open the box! Please tell

him I love him, and he is part of the
reason I am here.

I miss you dearly and Biscuits, and what
would not give to hear you whine, to make you
whine.

Everything here is good. Remember that trick
your cousin Floyd did? I saw another guy
do that. I was there! And then I thought
of those crazy pork chops he served. That
cracker bread, with that weird Asian zing.

I've been wishing I had that book
you gave me sophomore year. I'd like to
re-read it.

Tell biscuits no bread w/o me!

love you so
much - dt

EXPANDING EXPISTLES

The Facilitator creates the initial Expistle, likely, they have some Exolutions in mind. But, because the narrative and the drama is very much in the hands of the players, they are encouraged to create as well. If Ahmaud (from the Expistles section) wants to define something, a person, a place, the details of a conflict, they may do so. Conversely, if Breonna decides to share how much she loves Ahmaud's love of that cartoon cat Gorfield, and the daily strips fill her with joy, missing him, she can also do this. Players may take things in ridiculous directions (one player gains superpowers... Great! Now the narrative changes again).

The Facilitator needs to incorporate these changes into the Exolutions that follow. Let the players embrace and create the world, but if they are struggling, The Facilitator is encouraged to amp up the drama on their own: an awkward embrace with a co-worker, getting arrested, [REDACTED] eating a whole ham.... whatever.

EXAMPLE EXPISTLES I

On the following pages, several Expistles are presented, for your use, to get you started, along with some sample Exolutions and even letter instructions for players.

██████████ Academy was always going to be in your future. You had made a promise to your husband you'd be sure to see that your son would attend. Just as he, and his father and brothers, and uncles, etc. all attended. Now, your father-in-law has arrived and explained the only outside communication allowed is letter writing, "a lost art" he chuckled, puffing on his pipe.

Player 1: The spouse: you may write a letter that will be opened upon arrival by your son.

Player 2: Grandfather has instructed to write two letters: one to your deceased father, who attended ██████████ Academy, and one to your living parent, allowing you to attend.

Exolutions:

I: 2 Player 1: Your bills have all decreased, you are treated better everywhere you go.

I: 2: Player 2: School is very strange, and everyone here seems to have a better idea of what is going on.

EXAMPLE EXPISTLES II

You had to escape them. You couldn't live there any longer, suffer the abuse. So you ran. You left everything that could identify you at home, only bringing what minimal supplies you could carry in your bag and the address of your estranged relative. If anyone would understand, could help, it's them.

Player 1: Escapee. Write a letter to your relative trying to ask for help or shelter without directly asking. Someone might see or catch on.

Player 2: Relative. It's been rainy lately, and cold, and you're getting the itch to travel. You have a friend who arranges trips, maybe it's time to write them a letter.

Exolutions:

Player 1: You've found a place to stay, temporarily. It's a commune, and the people seem so nice.

Player 2: you've been getting threatening anonymous letters in your mail for the last week. No Postmark to identify where they came from.

TWO FRIENDS, EACH AWAY AT SUMMER CAMP, ACROSS THE LAKE FROM ONE ANOTHER. THEY WRITE EACH OTHER EVERY WEEK. HOWEVER, SOMETHING SINISTER AND SUPERNATURAL IS AFOOT. SOMEONE IS READING THEIR LETTERS. SOMEONE IS MARKING UP THEIR LETTERS. SOMEONE IS EDITING THEIR LETTERS. COULD IT BE THE GREEN LAKE GOBLIN? A COUNSELOR? BOTH?*

**Idea suggested by Charles Broody*

EXAMPLE EXPISTLES III

It's a right of passage for many, to go to sleepaway camp during the summer. But not everyone can afford to go, so best friends are split, one goes away, one stays home. It's an old camp out in the woods, no phone, no internet, no electricity! You promise to write each other every day.

Player 1: At camp. Write a letter on the bus to camp. You miss home already.

Player 2: At home. Write to your friend after seeing them board the bus to camp. Things will be boring without them.

Exolutions:

Player 1: Time moves differently at camp. It's been weeks for you, but only a few days based on your daily letters. There are things that go bump in the night... and the day... and you hate visiting the latrine.

Player 2: You have a new neighbor that moved in next door. You haven't met them yet, but you thought you spotted them taking a leisurely walk last night... at midnight.

One player is in prison, the other is at home.

Player 1: You know you didn't do it, but you've seen the video, so, you can't be sure, or something. You're in solitary, but you have never actually seen anyone here, prisoner or guard. You hear them you think. Food is delivered, they collect your mail, and deliver what you request on your personal item requisitions sheet.

Player 2: You've never met Player 1, you started to write when a letter addressed to you arrived, from someone claiming they were your incarcerated spouse.

MATERIALS

The Facilitator might be extra ambitious and purchase envelopes for all parties. The facilitator would secure and address 15-20 envelopes for each player and themselves, these envelopes would be large enough to hold a smaller sized envelope. If players will be writing letters that fit in a 5x7 envelope, The Facilitator would provide these as well as 6x9 envelopes.

Players will address the same 15-20 number of envelopes to themselves and give to The Facilitator.

Players will send each letter in an unsealed* envelope they address and send on to The Facilitator in one of the SASE**.

The Facilitator will [redacted] and forward the letters in the envelopes provided by each player, along with any Exolution information.

**For more immersive gameplay, players should seal the envelopes and the repackaging and taping of envelopes by tThe Facilitator adds to the visual and tactile experience.*

***Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope*

He would return with a sheep's head, tripe, trotters, etc. No beef was taboo in our home and he never forgot popcorn for us children. And we looked forward to it like the Jews waiting for their Messiah. Only ours arrived - till ten years before his death, he had a stroke and went blind. A sorry day to all who knew this wonderful man. Did you know when he came to this country. Yes an indentured labourer - he stole my grandmother - she was a Christian and he was able to marry her in church and appease her conscience. Their boat was stuck outside Beira and they + thirty of them tramped through the sub-tropical forests of Mozambique and arrived in some Northern Transvaal dorp, took a train to Durban. His great boast was that he never worked for the sugar companies - but that he was employed as Judge Tatham's gardener - what a grand beginning at ten shillings together with rations per month.


His son, my father from these beginning humble to say the least, was Inspector of Schools when he died. I'm sure I bore you with this - but I'll leave my Dad to the next instalment. You know he is now dead.

I met a young doctor who is extremely learned - there's not a single book he has not read - you name it - he's read it. Truly magnificent - but sterile. I organised a jumble sale and said you get me some clothes - he said hell I can't do that - what will my friends think? Need I tell you that finally he was my greatest contributor - and the sheer joy of the experience was tremendous.

If you can find anyone that loves you more than I do - you name it and it will be dead.

All my love,

Sithu
Sintsee

all of them missing
their hands or their
 story

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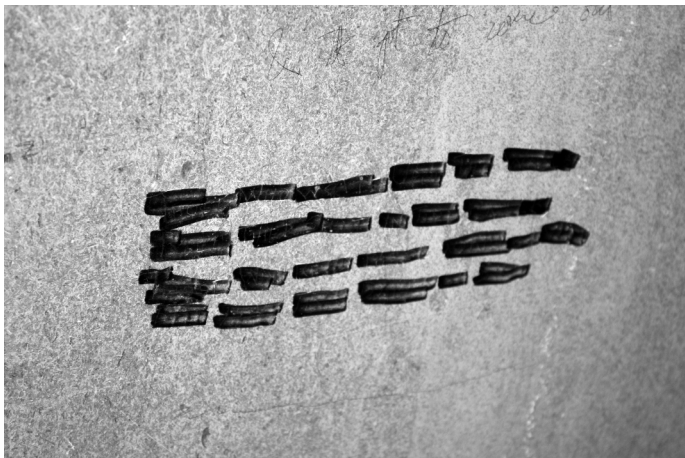


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**BLACK
LIVES
MATTER.**

a game

of letter writing.

zinegame