

ENGRAM

SCI-FI SURVIVAL HORROR IN THE
WILDERNESS OF THE HUMAN MIND

[ALERT] - TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY DETECTED
[RUN] - CORRECTING DIFFUSE AXONAL TRAUMA
[RUN] - CORRECTING SUBDURAL HEMATOMA

[ERROR] - EPISODIC MEMORY NOT FOUND
[ERROR] - SEMANTIC MEMORY NOT FOUND
[INIT] - ATTEMPT RESTART FROM BACKUP

[ERROR] - BACKUP NOT FOUND

[INIT] - FALLBACK TO BIOS
[RUN] - LOADING QUICKSTART.EXE

WHAT IS THIS GAME ABOUT?

ENGRAM is a sci-fi survival game about the crew of a crashed starship, stranded on a hostile alien world.

As you scavenge resources from the wreckage of your ship, you'll also discover **uploaded memories** that you can choose to absorb.

These memories offer valuable knowledge and abilities, but integrating their experiences will start to change you.

Will you cling to the person you thought you were before, or become someone new who has the skills to stay alive?

WELCOME TO IRANTI

ENGRAM takes place on a mysterious alien planet called **Iranti**.

Once home to the enigmatic and powerful Anterior, Iranti has since witnessed the rise and fall of countless civilizations.

Today, life flourishes in the graveyard of the past. A vast and deadly wilderness of time-haunted ruins, organ-thieving spiders, and hailstorms of psychic crystal that inject paralyzing phobias.

LEGACY OF THE ANTERIOR

Millions of years ago, Iranti was inhabited by a species known as the **Anterior**.

Little is known about these ancient precursors. Only their cyclopean ruins, and fragments of inexplicable technology remain.

Whether the Anterior perished, ascended to some higher destiny, or simply abandoned their old home, they remain one of the greatest mysteries of the galaxy.

A persistent feature of the Anterior is their fascination with, and mastery over the **science of memory and cognition**.

Dormant relics hum with latent energies, ready to knead sentience like dough, reshaping and redefining the world around them.

TARGET AUDIENCE & INSPIRATION

ENGRAM is perfect for sci-fi fans with an interest in the game's key themes: memory, identity, and subjective experience.

Inspiration for the game includes:

- ◆ Alien shipwreck stories like Scavenger's Reign, and Returnal
- ◆ Sci-fi horror stories like Alien, and The Thing
- ◆ Sci-fi exploration stories like Ringworld, and Annihilation
- ◆ Stories about memory and subjectivity like Westworld, and Altered Carbon

WHAT ARE THE KEY THEMES?

As you play, you're encouraged to make Iranti your own. When in doubt reference these **Pillars** to remain tonally cohesive:

SURVIVAL REQUIRES SACRIFICE

Players must make difficult choices, and decisions comes at a cost. You may lose resources, safety, or the beliefs you held sacred.

IDENTITY IS FRAGILE

As you integrate new memories, the boundaries of personhood start to blur. What does it mean to be you, when every new decision expands that definition.

EXPERIENCE IS SUBJECTIVE

Survivors may experience the same events differently. As they grapple with conflicting truths, they'll begin to question what's real.

THE ALIEN CAN'T ALWAYS BE UNDERSTOOD

Iranti is filled with ancient ruins, bizarre ecosystems, and inscrutable technology. Mysteries may be unsolvable, forces may exist beyond human logic, and events may leave you forever changed.

HOW DO I PLAY ENGRAM?

ENGRAM is a **shared storytelling** game.

One player acts as the narrator, or Game Master (GM), while the other players act as Survivors, who are each a main character.

Typically, the GM narrates the scene, the Survivors decide how they react, and the GM describes the outcome. We roll dice if the result is uncertain, and the cycle repeats.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This is a **Quick Start** guide for ENGRAM's core mechanics. It's designed to help you start playing quickly, and for easy reference to help look up rules. There is a more extensive rulebook available at [\[LINK HERE\]](#)

WHAT IS IN THIS DOCUMENT?

- ◊ Basic Dice Rules
- ◊ Playing As a Survivor
- ◊ Playing As a Group
- ◊ Travel Excursion Mechanics
- ◊ Campfire Mechanics
- ◊ Encounter Mechanics
- ◊ Session 0 Guide

SAFETY RULES

ENGRAM is a game, and it's supposed to be fun.

The default setting encourages content that includes body horror, and psychological trauma, but discuss at your table what is desired and acceptable to all players.

Respect if a topic is off limits, whether raised ahead of time, or during play.

GAME STRUCTURE

ENGRAM is played in several discrete modes.

The game is treated as being in Free Play by default with the other modes activating under specific conditions.

FREE PLAY

Survivors interact with each other and the environment, making rolls when needed. When things seem safe, they can choose to enter Campfire Mode to recover.

EXCURSION MODE

When traveling between areas on the map, the Group follows a fixed sequence. They must discover 3 Landmarks to reach their destination, entering Campfire Mode in between each Excursion.

ENCOUNTER MODE

Complex challenges shift gameplay into a turn-based mode where Survivors fill up a progress Track to achieve success.

CAMPFIRE MODE

Around the campfire, survivors can rest and recover, at the cost of making Survival rolls using their scavenged resources.

WHAT DO I NEED TO PLAY?

ENGRAM can be played by gathering a group of friends around a table, or online via the virtual tabletop (VTT) app.

If you are playing in person you will need:

- ◆ A copy of the rules
- ◆ Each Survivor needs a Survivor Sheet, available at [\[LINK HERE\]](#)
- ◆ All Survivors share one Group Sheet, available at [\[LINK HERE\]](#)
- ◆ Between 2 and 12 six-sided dice

WHEN DO WE ROLL DICE?

If a Survivor tries to do something with a chance of failure, the GM will ask them to roll a **pool of d6s**, opposed by the GM's own roll.

HOW MANY DICE ARE ROLLED?

As a **Survivor**, you can add dice from these sources to your pool:

- All dice from 1 applicable **Engram**
- All dice from 1 applicable **Asset**
- 1 die for each point of **Convergence** spent
- Max of 1 die from ally **Assistance**

As a **GM**, you can add dice from these sources to your pool:

- All dice from 1 applicable **Threat**
- As many dice as wanted from **Challenge** pool

NUDDING A ROLL

You can optionally Nudge the result of a single die by **+1 or -1**

Survivors can buy a Nudge by spending 1 point of **Divergence**. GMs can buy a Nudge by spending 1 die from their **Challenge** pool

WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ROLL?

Rolling **4 or higher** on any 1 die is a Hit. Rolling **3 or below** is a Miss



HOW DO WE DECIDE THE OUTCOME?

Outcome is determined by comparing the number of **Hits** and **Misses** made by the Survivor and the GM:

OUTCOME	CONDITION
Full Success	Survivor Hits > GM Hits
Mixed Success	Survivor Hits = GM Hits
Failure	Survivor Hits < GM Hits

ARE THERE ANY SPECIAL NUMBERS?

Every 6 rolled adds 1 die to the **Challenge** pool

Every 1 rolled by the Survivor causes **2 Durability damage**. The Survivor can choose how to distribute the damage among their Assets

HOW TO APPLY CONSEQUENCES?

On a **Full Success**, the Survivor does what they were trying to do, or marks up to 2 progress on a relevant Track.

On **Mixed** or **Failure**, they must choose 1 negative effect. **Self** hurts their body, **Stuff** hurts their Assets, **Squad** hurts group resources:

OUTCOME	SELF	STUFF	SQUAD	SUCCESS
Full Success	Survivor takes NO negative Consequences			Mark 2 Progress
Mixed Success	Minor Injury	Lose 1-2 Durability	Lose 1-2 Resources	Mark 1 Progress
Failure	Major Injury	Lose 2-3 Durability	Lose 2-3 Resources	Mark NO Progress

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SURVIVOR 1/2

The skills and identity of your Survivor are defined by collecting and equipping new **Assets** and **Engrams**.

ASSETS & YOUR INVENTORY

Assets are the Survivor's equipment. To use an Asset, it must be equipped to an **Inventory** slot. You can equip one Assets per slot.

Unequipped Assets are stored at the Group level, and can be claimed by any Survivor.

INVENTORY SLOTS:



ASSET NAME
Self-explanatory

SLOT NAME
The compatible
Inventory slot

IMPACT SCORE
The # of dice rolled
when using this Asset

DURABILITY
Damage the Asset can
take before it breaks

EFFECT TAGS
Certain Threats can be
overcome by Assets
with the right Tags

SPECIALS
Unique abilities and
situational modifiers

DESCRIPTION
The Asset's properties
& appearance

TRAUMA LIMPET · UTILITY

2

IMPACT

DURABILITY

TAGS

HEAL

REGULATE

EFFECTIVE HEALING · SPECIAL
When making a Medicine roll, you can choose to reroll 1 of your dice

SACRIFICES MUST BE MADE · SPECIAL
You can choose to destroy this Asset, and add +2 to your Medicine pool

DESCRIPTION
A small medical robot shaped like a crab or louse. It scrambles across the patient on many small legs, wielding an array of clever tools.

SAMPLE ASSET

ENGRAMS & YOUR PERSONA

Engrams are digital memories that can be installed to gain their knowledge and abilities. Engrams are installed to your **Persona**.

The Persona has 9 slots split into **3 Layers**. An Engram grants only the ability matching the Layer it is installed to.

The Survivor also gains the **personality trait** described for that layer. In the below example, installing the Engram to your Values slot would make your Survivor unconcerned by personal injury.

ENGRAM NAME
Self-explanatory

INSTINCT
Your desires & impulses. The id

VALUE
Your moral beliefs. The superego

PERCEPTION
How you see the world. The ego

DESCRIPTION
Details of the memory you gain

SQUIRMING TO EMERGE FROM DISCARDED CHITIN

ITCHING TO CHANGE · INSTINCT
You are highly adaptable. Once per Scene you can choose to Nudge 1 roll for free

IMPACT

CAVALIER WITH BODILY HARM · VALUE
Once per Scene, when you would suffer a Minor Injury, you can choose to ignore it.

IMPACT

QUICK TO MOVE ON · PERCEPTION
Roll with this Impact when attempting to concentrate, to resist powerful distress, or psychic attack.

3
IMPACT

DESCRIPTION
You remember how it feels to molt. The feeling of building new bones beneath the ones you already wear. The perimeter of your personhood slowly contracts, and you begin to redraw the borders between what is You, and what is not.

SAMPLE ENGRAM

PERSONA SLOTS:

LAYER	SLOT 1	SLOT 2	SLOT 3
Instincts			
Values	SQUIRMING TO EMERGE FROM DISCARDED CHITIN		
Perceptions			

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SURVIVOR 2/2

Survivors begin the game with pre-existing Instincts, Values, and Perceptions. This is called their **Core** (see p. 11)

Engrams can be **Convergent** or **Divergent** from this Core. If your Core Value is “all killing is wrong,” an engram with the Value “killing in self defense is okay,” would be Divergent.

You start with **4 points** in each stat. If you have more Engrams of one type in a Slot, increase the matching stat by 1, and decrease the other stat by 1.

LAYER	SLOT 1	SLOT 2	SLOT 3
Instincts	CONVERGENT	DIVERGENT	DIVERGENT
Values	DIVERGENT	DIVERGENT	CONVERGENT
Perceptions	CONVERGENT	CONVERGENT	

CONVERGENCE 4

DIVERGENCE 4

+1 Convergence from Slot 1
+1 Divergence from Slot 2
Neutral from Slot 3

CONVERGENCE

Reflects your sense of self. If you lack an applicable Engram, you can use Convergence to remember something from your own past.

Add 1d6 to the roll for each point of Convergence spent. This cannot be used in combination with an Engram on the same roll.

Write down the memory that you drew upon. You will reflect on it during the Campfire Phase.

DIVERGENCE

Reflects your broadening neuroplasticity. For each point of Divergence you spend, you can **Nudge** the result of one die.

Write down the foreign perspective that enabled your adaptation. You will grapple with it during the Campfire Phase.

INJURIES

When a Survivor suffers negative **Consequences**, they may receive an Injury. Injuries affect a specific body part, and should be recorded as such (ie. “Broken Right Arm”)

MINOR INJURIES

- You can have up to 3 Minor Injuries
- After that, new Minor Injuries count as Major Injuries instead
- Minor Injuries impose no penalty, and indeed can be “burned” to Nudge a roll. This represents adrenaline brought on by pain

MAJOR INJURIES

- You can have up to 2 Major Injuries
- After that, new Major Injuries cause **Death** instead
- Each Major Injury imposes -1 Impact to all Actions that would involve the injured body part

MINOR INJURIES

+

Bruised Ribs

🔥

Slashed Arm

■

MAJOR INJURIES

-1

Broken Leg

■

INJURIES EXCEEDED [☹] STATUS: TERMINAL

UNDERSTANDING YOUR GROUP

Your **Group** has its own character sheet that tracks resources, and absorbs the consequences of decisions made together.

RESOURCES

Rather than tracking individual gear, survival resources are represented by **5 dice pools**.

The dice in these pools are rolled when making **Survival Rolls**.

Food: Daily rations & potables

Shelter: Survival & camping gear

Morale: The Group's mental state

Medicine: First aid supplies

Salvage: Components & materiel for crafting

CHALLENGE POOL

Every time **a 6 is rolled**, a die is added to the Challenge pool.

The GM can **add Challenge dice** to their rolls, or spend a die to **Nudge** the result of a roll. Additionally, some Threats can trigger special effects by spending Challenge dice.

CRAFTING PACKS

As you play, you will discover Crafting Packs that expand the variety of new Assets you can craft during the **Campfire Phase**.

Each pack is a collection of 3 Tags, one of which is only unlocked if you have the right Engram. You can use any of the unlocked Tags when crafting Assets (see p. 9)

HOOKS & TENSION

Hooks are a promise that something bad will happen later. As the Tension pool grows, the odds of triggering a Hook increases.

GAINING HOOKS

Hooks can be caused by certain Threats and Events. The Group has **6 shared Hook slots**. When receiving a new Hook, record it in the first vacant slot by writing what happens if the Hook triggers.

GAINING TENSION

When Survivors **act rationally**, a die is added to the Tension pool, to a maximum of 6. Tension resets to 1 when a Hook triggers.

ROLLING TENSION & TRIGGERING HOOKS

When Survivors **act irrationally**, the Tension pool is rolled.

Roll d6 equal to the current number in the Tension pool. If you roll **doubles** (or triples, etc.) the Hook in the matching slot triggers.

If you roll doubles for a slot that is empty, nothing happens. If you roll multiple doubles, you can trigger multiple Hooks.

If you roll 6d6 and trigger no Hooks, clear 1 Hook and reset Tension to 1

HOOKS		5 TENSION
1	The eggs hatch	4 You find what's making those sounds
2		5
3 The infection spreads		6



EXCURSION MODE

Travel is broken up into **Excursions** where Survivors draw Event cards to determine what they encounter as they explore.

Each Excursion follows a sequence of **3 phases**.

1 - PREPARATION PHASE

Before travel begins, the group makes several choices.

Assign Roles: 3 Survivors should choose a Role for the Excursion.

The **Pathfinder** chooses the travel **Approach**

The **Quartermaster** chooses **Resource Actions**

The **Guardian** decides when to **Detour**

Resource Actions: The Quartermaster may select up to 3 actions.

Forage: +1 Food - Costs 1 Detour

Scout Ahead: +1 Shelter - Costs 1 Detour

Take it Easy: +1 Morale - Costs 1 Detour

Select Approach: The Pathfinder may select 1 Approach to determine how many Events, Detours and Landmarks occur.

APPROACH	EVENTS	DETOURS	LANDMARKS
Careful	4	2	1
Measured	6	3	2
Aggressive	8	4	3

2 - TRAVEL PHASE

To determine what happens during the Excursion, pull a number of cards from the **Event Deck** determined by the Approach.

These are the possible outcomes:

Threat: A dangerous Encounter

Oddity: A neutral discovery

Barrier: Potential negative Consequences

Cost: Guaranteed negative Consequences

Opportunity: Potential positive Consequences

Reward: Guaranteed positive Consequences

WHAT ARE DETOURS?

The Guardian may spend Detours to avoid an Event. The cost varies based on when they commit to the Detour:

1 Detour – Before the Event is revealed

2 Detours – After the Event is revealed

If the group runs out of Detours, they must face all remaining Events.

WHAT ARE LANDMARKS?

To reach your destination, you must attune to **3 Landmarks**. You reach a number of Landmarks in each Excursion determined by your Approach.

It is also possible to unlock bonus Landmarks by finding maps, learning about the local environment, etc. These bonus Landmarks are awarded at GM discretion.

3 - CAMPFIRE PHASE

At the end of the Excursion, the Group automatically goes to the **Campfire** (see the next page).

CAMPFIRE MODE

When Survivors stop for a long rest, they enter Campfire mode, engaging the **Survival** and **Recovery** mechanics.

At the start of each Campfire scene, the GM makes a roll to set the scene difficulty. This result is used to oppose all Survivor rolls.

SURVIVAL ROLLS

Every time they enter Campfire mode, the group must make a Survival Roll using these **Resource** pools:

The **Pathfinder** rolls for **Shelter**
 The **Quartermaster** rolls for **Food**
 The **Guardian** rolls for **Morale**

There are 3 possible outcomes:

OUTCOME	RESULT
Success	No consequences
Mixed Success	Reduce Pool by 1. If the Pool is 0, gain a Condition
Failure	Reduce Pool by 1 and gain a Condition

CONDITIONS

If the group fails a Survival roll, they gain a **Condition**. Succeeding on that Survival roll in the future cures the Condition.

ROLL FAILED	CONDITION	TYPE OF ACTION PENALIZED
Shelter	Tired	Awareness and mental acuity
Food	Hungry	Strength, speed, and endurance
Morale	Defeated	Grit and emotional regulation

RECOVERY

Around the Campfire, Survivors are able to heal **Injuries**, as well as recover their spent **Convergence & Divergence** points.

HEALING INJURIES

The Group may attempt 1 **Medicine** roll opposed by scene difficulty:

OUTCOME	RESULT
Success	Heal 1 Major Injury OR 3 Minor Injuries
Mixed Success	Same as above, but reduce Pool by 1
Failure	Heal nothing, and reduce Pool by 1

RECONCILIATION

When Survivors spend Convergence & Divergence they record their psychology. To recover all points during Campfire, they must **narrate** how they feel about one of these memories or experiences

CRAFTING

The Group may attempt 1 **Salvage** roll opposed by scene difficulty:

OUTCOME	RESULT
Success	Craft 1 new Asset for any Inventory Slot
Mixed Success	Same as above, but reduce Pool by 1
Failure	Heal nothing, and reduce Pool by 1

All crafted Assets have a **Durability** of 3. **Impact** is equal to your crafting Tier, which is increased by unlocking new Crafting Packs.

Each crafted Asset includes **2 Tags** from any unlocked Packs. This lets you design new Assets that exploit a Threat's weaknesses.

Narrate an appropriate description for your crafted Asset.

ENCOUNTER MODE

Many challenges in ENGRAM can be overcome with a single roll.

Encounter Mode begins when more serious **Threats** emerge.

Encounters are usually time-sensitive, using a turn-based approach to track the order and duration of actions taken.

Encounters utilize a **Track** to measure progress. When the Encounter's main Track has been filled, the Encounter usually ends.

THREATS

Threats are complex dangers, like enemies or natural disasters.

By default, any roll against the Threat is opposed by **Base Impact**. Threats also include Specials that may override the Base Impact, or introduce other complications.

Each **Special** has its own Track. A Survivor can choose to apply Success from a roll against the Special's Track, rather than the Encounter's. When a Special's Track is full, it can no longer be used.

2
SHATTERMAW

ULTRASONIC BITE • SPECIAL
The Shattermaw latches onto prey and begins to liquify them for feeding. Always deals a Major injury as negative Consequences.

VITREOUS PLATING • SPECIAL
Physical attacks are opposed by this Challenge unless they use **RESONATE**. Attackers see visions of their loved ones reflected in the glassy hide.

DESCRIPTION
The Shattermaw hurls on six legs, its skin covered in a fractured mosaic of jet black Anterior Glass. Its head is an eyeless ruin, centered around a jagged maw lined with hundreds of rotating, shard-like teeth. The creature feeds by vibrating its teeth at ultrasonic frequency, turning flesh and bone into a fine slurry.

2
IMPACT

4
IMPACT

○ **BASE IMPACT**
The # of dice this Threat uses to oppose

○ **ASSET NAME**
Self-explanatory

○ **SPECIAL**
This Special has been destroyed and can no longer be used

○ **SPECIAL**
This Special can be ignored by an Asset with the right Tag. Or you can fill its Track to destroy it

○ **DESCRIPTION**
Self-explanatory

SAMPLE THREAT

TRACKS

Tracks are ways to mark **progress** towards an outcome. The longer the Track, the harder it is to complete. Generally, you mark 2 progress on a Full Success or 1 progress on a Mixed Success.

FACING THREATS

During an Encounter, **Threats never take their own turn**. Players act in any order, reacting to complications and pursuing their goals.

Events typically proceed in this sequence:

1. INTRODUCE COMPLICATIONS

The GM sets the scene, highlighting any problems the Survivors need to deal with. **Complications** are open ended, but may include:

- ⬢ Imminent harm to an ally or resource
- ⬢ Escalating danger in the local environment
- ⬢ Something that will close off a path forward

2. SURVIVORS TAKE ACTION

Each Survivor chooses how they act this round. Their goal is to:

- ⬢ Neutralize Complications where relevant
- ⬢ Mark progress towards the Encounter's Track

3. RESOLVE COMPLICATIONS

At the end of the round, the GM describes how any unaddressed Complications play out, if any. This may lead to further Complications next round.

4. REPEAT UNTIL COMPLETE

The Encounter continues until its Track is full, or the Survivors flee.

STARTING YOUR GAME

Before waking up in the wreckage of the crash, take time to shape the context of your story. ENGRAM is a game about memory, so the world needs a history, even if that **history is unreliable**.

CREATE YOUR SURVIVORS

Each player should share their Survivor with the rest of the table.

1. Give your Survivor a **name** and a backstory
2. Define your **Core** by answering these questions:
 - ⦿ **Instinct:** What's a belief you'll fight to protect?
 - ⦿ **Values:** What's a line you won't cross?
 - ⦿ **Perception:** What's a truth you've observed about the world?
 - ⦿ **Anchor:** A place where you lost something, or a person who taught you something
 - ⦿ **Yearning:** A thing you want, but you're not sure if you should

DETERMINE STARTING ASSETS

The Group begins with Assets equal to the **number of Survivors +2**. Roll on the table to determine each Asset's type. The GM can then either choose the specific Asset, or roll on a separate table.

ROLL	ASSET TYPE
1	Head
2	Chest
3	Arms
4	Legs
5	Utility
6	Engram

REMEMBER THE WORLD

As a Group, you will establish **6 Truths** about the world as you remember them. Go around the table, each answering 1 question.

You can answer these questions yourselves, or roll on the matching Truth tables found in the core rulebook.

The GM also receives **1 Retcon Token**. At any time in the future, they can spend it to reveal that one of the foundational Truths was misremembered, and replace it with something else.

WHO ARE WE?

What type of **culture** did we come from? Was it a warlike empire? A benevolent federation? Space pirates?

WHERE IS HOME?

What sort of **world** did we leave behind? Was it Earth? A space station? A smoking ruin?

WHEN DID WE LEAVE?

How long ago did we begin our journey? Days? Centuries? Did we ever expect to come back?

WHY ARE WE HERE?

What drew us to Iranti in the first place? A distress signal? Orders from HQ? Happenstance?

WHAT IS THE MISSION?

What was our journey supposed to **accomplish**? Were we here to Colonize? Conquer? Explore?

HOW DID WE CRASH?

What went wrong? Sabotage? System failure? Divine intervention?