

Design Concept

This board game is an adaptation of *The Plough and the Stars* by Seán O’Casey, translating its dramatic tension between revolutionary idealism and everyday survival into an interactive system.

The design is structured around the symbolic opposition embedded in the original title: the “Plough,” associated with labor, land, and material conditions, and the “Stars,” associated with political aspiration and imagined futures. Rather than treating these as abstract themes, the game turns them into competing mechanics that continuously shape player decision-making. Progress in one direction inevitably creates loss in the other, requiring players to negotiate trade-offs rather than pursue optimal outcomes.

Instead of presenting revolution as heroic or coherent, the game foregrounds instability and moral uncertainty. By embedding irreversible consequences into gameplay, it encourages players to confront the uneven emotional cost of political commitment. In this sense, the system reflects a worldview in which choices are never neutral, and every form of agency carries sacrifice.

Ultimately, the project adopts an anti-romantic perspective on nationalism: history is not structured around victory or defeat, but around fragmented human experiences shaped by competing necessities.

Setup

Each of the 4 players selects one character card and notes their starting **Plough / Stars values**.

Turn Structure (Each Round)

Each round consists of 3 steps:

1. Draw 1 History Card and apply its effect.
2. Players take turns moving to one city and completing 1 Mission Card, adjusting their Plough / Stars values accordingly.
3. Draw 1 Quote Card and read it aloud. Players receive a small bonus effect.

End of Game

When the “Easter Rising Begins” History Card is drawn, continue playing for 3 additional rounds. The game then ends.

Final outcomes are determined by the balance between Plough and Stars:

- Players with a balanced Plough/Stars ratio score highest and are classified as **Survivors**.
- Players whose Stars significantly exceed Plough, and who choose total commitment to the cause, are removed from play but receive **Martyr points**.

There is no single winner, only different forms of outcome.

Card System Design

This board game employs a triadic card system—History Cards, Mission Cards, and Quote Cards—to operationalize its central conceptual tension between material survival (the Plough) and political aspiration (the Stars). Rather than functioning as isolated mechanics, these card types constitute an interdependent narrative-logic system in which external historical forces, player agency, and interpretive meaning continuously intersect. The design deliberately resists teleological or victory-oriented structures, instead foregrounding instability, contingency, and moral ambivalence as constitutive features of political experience.

1. History Cards: Structural Determinants of Historical Contingency*16

(Further details are provided in the following sections.)

(1) Conceptual Function:

History Cards represent forces outside the player's control, which is the unfolding of historical time itself. They are drawn collectively, one per round, and their effects apply broadly (often to all players, or to a specific city), rather than resulting from individual choice.

They serve three purposes:

1. **Pacing the timeline** : moving the game from early 1916 toward the Easter Rising
2. **Differentiating the three cities** : some cards apply uniquely to Dublin, Cork, or Galway to reinforce that the Rising was not a single uniform event, but a set of uneven regional experiences
3. **Introducing irreversible pressure** : several cards force an immediate, binary choice (e.g. responding to a conscription poster, hiding documents for a friend and so on) that permanently affects a player's Plough/Stars balance, regardless of what they were planning to do that round

2. Mission Cards: Liminal Agency and Ethical Exchange*22

(Further details are provided in the following sections.)

(1) Conceptual Function

Mission Cards constitute the primary locus of player agency, yet this agency is deliberately structured as *conditional, constrained, and morally ambivalent*. Each Mission represents a localized articulation of survival strategies, ideological participation, or hybrid forms of ethical compromise.

(2) Timing of Appearance:

Mission Cards are drawn and resolved dynamically during the player action phase, immediately following a player's movement to a chosen city.

The turn sequence is strictly ordered to enforce psychological pressure:

1. **The player selects a city** (Dublin / Cork / Galway).
2. **The player draws a Mission Card** from the shared deck.
3. **Players must immediately decide** whether to execute or abandon the Mission.

Design Note on Immediacy: This instantaneous decision-making mechanism is vital. By severely limiting a player's window for deliberation, the game mechanics simulate the frantic, high-stakes urgency of actual historical crises.

(3) Design Philosophy:

Mission Cards articulate a central proposition: Agency in conditions of crisis is not expressive freedom, but structured exchange under constraint.

3. Quote Cards: Discursive Pressure and Affective Historicity*14

(Further details are provided in the following sections.)

(1) Function:

Quote Cards operate as the game's affective and interpretive layer, introducing fragments of language that reshape how players cognitively and emotionally interpret prior actions. They do not represent events, but rather the discursive residues of historical experience.

(2) Timing of Appearance:

Quote Cards are drawn at the end of each round, after all player actions have been resolved. This sequencing is critical: Meaning always arrives after action, never before it.

(3) Theoretical Significance:

Quote Cards articulate the following proposition: Historical reality is not only enacted through events, but continuously reconstituted through language that interprets those events.

4. Character Cards *4

(Further details are provided in the following sections.)

(1) Conceptual Function

Character Cards introduce radical asymmetry into the game's system, operationalizing Seán O'Casey's anti-romantic perspective on the Easter Rising. Rather than representing unified, idealized archetypes of historical rebellion, the characters embody fragmented human experiences driven by competing necessities and varying capacities for survival or political sacrifice. Each of the four playable characters operates with unique starting resource distributions, distinct mechanical vectors of survival or commitment, and hidden psychological motives.

Historical Background & City Design Rationale

Set in the context of early 20th-century Ireland, particularly around the 1916 Easter Rising, the game draws on a period defined by political fragmentation and uneven revolutionary participation. While Dublin became the symbolic center of the uprising, the broader national landscape was characterized by divergent local conditions and responses.

To reflect this heterogeneity, the game incorporates three cities—Dublin, Cork, and Galway—each representing a different mode of historical engagement rather than repeating the same narrative in different locations.

Dublin represents the point of direct confrontation, where political action becomes visible and immediate. Cork reflects disrupted coordination and postponed mobilization, where preparedness did not necessarily translate into action due to fragmented command structures. Galway, in contrast, represents cultural continuity, where identity is sustained through language and education rather than armed resistance.

Together, these regions highlight that the Easter Rising cannot be understood as a single unified event, but as a constellation of uneven experiences shaped by geography, timing, and form of resistance.

Conclusion

This board game is not intended to “recreate” history or to present revolution as a heroic narrative. Instead, it transforms *The Plough and the Stars* into an interactive system where players must constantly negotiate between survival and idealism.

By turning the play's central tension into gameplay mechanics, the project allows players to experience, rather than simply observe, the moral and emotional instability faced by ordinary

people during periods of political upheaval. Every decision carries consequences, and every path involves loss—whether of ideals, safety, or both.

In this sense, the game reflects O’Casey’s anti-romantic perspective on nationalism: history is not a story of clear victories, but a series of fragmented human experiences shaped by conflicting needs and impossible choices.

Ultimately, there is no single winner—only different ways of enduring, resisting, or being remembered.

History Cards *14

All in all, History Cards embody the idea that history happens to people before they get to act on it. They can't choose what they want to suffer, but only choose how to respond.

Details of each History Card

The [slides](#) showcase the visual design of the cards.

Card Name	Effect	Textual Basis
Irish Volunteers Mobilize in Secret	All players: Stars +1 . Represents the period of preparation before the Rising.	Historical background (Irish Volunteers)
Food Shortage, Bread Prices Rise	All players: Plough -1 . Survival pressure precedes revolutionary pressure.	Matches the play's ongoing picture of poor life in the slums.
British Army Patrols Appear in Dublin Streets	Players completing a mission in Dublin this round: additional Plough -1 .	Direct echo of Dublin street tension in Acts 3–4
Gaelic League Night School Opens	Players in Galway this round: additional Plough +1 after completing a mission.	Historical background (Gaelic League cultural revival)
Cork Command Gives Contradictory Orders	Players in Cork this round: mission effects are halved.	Historical background (Eoin MacNeill countermanding order)
Arms Smuggling Ship Seized at Port	All players in Dublin this round: Plough -1 .	The seizure tightens British scrutiny across the city
Local Newspaper Publishes a Patriotic Poem	The next Quote Card drawn has its effect doubled.	Historical background (cultural nationalism in print media)
An Elder at Home Falls Ill	The player who draws this card chooses: stay and care for them (Plough +2) OR ignore it and continue acting (Stars +1 , Plough -1).	Echoes the play's tension between family duty and political action
Dublin Castle Increases Security	Dublin missions become riskier this round: if a Dublin mission fails, Stars additionally -1 .	Direct echo of escalating British military presence in the play
Rumors Spread That Cork Volunteers Will Disband	Players in Cork choose: stand down (Stars -1 , avoids future Cork penalties) OR persist (no change, but risk remains).	Historical background (Cork Volunteers' uncertain mobilization)

Landlord Demands Rent	All players: Plough -1 . Survival pressure never pauses for revolution.	Direct echo of the tenement landlord-tenant tension in the play
Conscription Posters Cover the Streets	The player who draws this card chooses: A) Answer the call: Stars +2 , Plough -1 . B) Look away : Plough +1 , Stars -1 .	Historical background (British conscription pressure in Ireland)
A Close Friend Asks You to Hide a Bundle of Documents	The player who draws this card chooses: A. Agree: Stars +2 . Reveal the top card of the history deck. If it is a "Citywide" or "Dublin" type, the documents are affected, Plough -3 . For any other city card, nothing happens, and Plough remains unchanged. B. Refuse: Plough +1 , Stars -1 .	Just like the play, this brings out the secrecy and danger of being caught. The random-flip mechanic is a unique design that represents how unpredictable the outcomes were.

Mission Cards *16 normal +6 special =22

All in all, Mission Cards show how we can make choices even when we are limited. You choose, but your choice is always decided by where you are.

Details of each Mission Card

The [slides](#) showcase the visual design of the cards.

Card Name and Card Count	Dublin Effect	Cork Effect	Galway Effect	Price	Textual Basis
Normal Cards (1 of each)					
Pass Along Intelligence *1	Stars +2, Plough -1	Roll: Success>> Stars +1, Failure>>no effect	Stars +1, Plough +1	You chose to trust, but no one can guarantee whose hands the information falls into.	Direct echo of the secrecy and informant networks surrounding the Volunteers in the play

Scrape Together Household Money*1	Plough +1, Stars -1	Plough +2	Plough +2, Stars +0	Survival has never been the opposite of revolution — it just takes up all the time there is.	Direct echo of the tenement poverty and economic struggle central to the play
Give a Street Speech*1	Stars +3, Plough -2	Stars +1	Skip a turn	Words can stir hearts — and also make you a marked target.	Direct echo of the play's political rhetoric scenes (e.g., the pub debates)
Teach the Irish Language*1	Skip a turn	Plough +1, Stars +1	Plough +1, Stars +2	Resistance without gunfire is still resistance — history books just may not remember it.	Historical background (Gaelic League cultural revival)
Hide a Cache of Weapons*1	Stars +2, Plough -2	Stars +1, Plough -1	Skip a turn	Once this choice is made, there's no returning to the life you had before.	Direct echo of arms concealment and Volunteer secrecy referenced in the play
Care for the Neighborhood *1	Plough +1, Stars +0	Plough +2, Stars +0	Plough +2, Stars +1	No one will raise a monument for this, but without it, the community would have already collapsed.	Direct echo of the tenement community and mutual dependence depicted in the play
Carry the Wounded*1	Plough +1, Stars +1, then Plough	Plough +2	Plough +2, Stars +0	The person you save won't remember your politics — only that you came.	Direct echo of the violence and casualties in Acts 3–4

	-1 (risk offset)				
Keep Watch Overnight at the Outpost*1	Stars +2, Plough -2	Stars +1, Plough -1 (the night was wasted waiting)	Skip a turn	A sleepless night may only buy you a tomorrow that never comes.	Direct echo of the Volunteers' standby tension referenced in the play
Write a Letter to Distant Family*1	Plough +1, Stars +0	Plough +1, Stars +1	Plough +1, Stars +1	What you write may comfort your family — or just reveal your own hesitation.	Echoes the play's themes of family separation and uncertainty
Sew Flags and Badges*1	Stars +2, Plough -1	Stars +1, Plough +0	Stars +1, Plough +1	Clothes can carry a symbol, but symbols cannot fill a stomach.	Historical background (nationalist symbolism and Volunteer materials)
Listen for News at the Pub*1	Roll: success Stars +2, failure Plough -1	Roll: success Stars +1, failure nothing happens	Plough +1 (the news doesn't concern you)	Between rumor and truth, there is often only the time it takes to finish a drink.	Direct echo of the pub as a hub of gossip and political talk in the play
Confess to the Priest*1	Plough +1, Stars -1	Plough +2, Stars -1	Plough +1	The Church gives you peace, but quietly asks: is revolution a sin?	Direct echo of the Church's moral authority and presence in the play

Drill with the Volunteers*1	Skip a turn	Stars +1, Plough -1 (still on standby after drilling)	Stars +2, Plough -1	The more skilled you become, the further you drift from an ordinary life.	Historical background (Irish Volunteers' military preparation)
Host a Local Cultural Evening*1	Skip a turn	Plough +1, Stars +1	Plough +1, Stars +2	There is no charge — but it is also a form of holding on.	Historical background (Gaelic cultural revival movement)
Beg the Landlord for More Time*1	Plough +1, Stars -1 (seen as weakness)	Plough +2	Plough +2	Survival sometimes requires lowering your head — revolution never teaches you how.	Direct echo of the landlord-tenant tension depicted in the play
Convince a Comrade to Retreat*1	Plough +2, Stars -2	Skip a turn	Plough +1, Stars -1	You saved his life — but he may spend the rest of it wondering why he didn't stay.	Direct echo of the play's portrayal of fear, desertion, and survival instinct among the men
Special Cards (2 of each)					
Root Out the Informant *2	You become the Dealer, immediately getting Stars +2. All players simultaneously call a number from 1–10. Let N be the number of players matching the Dealer. If $N \geq 1$: Dealer and matchers get Stars $+(2 \times N)$. If $N = 0$: Dealer keeps Stars +2 only.			In crisis, trust is a liability; suspicion can forge a movement or burn a neighborhood.	In the play, the Volunteers are constantly paranoid and afraid that anyone could be a British spy.

Tactical Displacement *2	Select any player and exchange your current cities. You must immediately resolve your other active mission using Dublin's severe modifiers, regardless of where you planned to be.	Select any player and exchange your current cities. Because of Cork's fragmented coordination, the swap is delayed: Roll a die. If 1-3 >>switch If 4-6 >> no switch	Select any player and exchange your current cities. The cultural safety of Galway shelters you: Both you and the swapped player gain an additional Plough +1 after the exchange .	Moving across a fractured nation breaks your plans; you might find safety, or you might step directly into the line of fire.	Reflects the geographic heterogeneity of the Rising. Characters like the Volunteers are forcibly uprooted or re-assigned due to conflicting nationalist commands.
Blind Blindfold Exchange *2	You must immediately and publicly declare either "change" or "no change" the card. The next player then draws and plays their Mission Card as normal. If you choose "change": Both players trade the rewards or penalties of their Mission Cards for this round. This decision cannot be changed. If you choose "No change": Both players resolve their missions normally.			Agreeing to help someone without knowing what they're actually doing is a huge gamble. If they succeed, you win; if they go down, they're taking you with them.	It shows that the characters have no idea what the right thing to do is. When things go wrong, they just react blindly, and because they are all in it together, no single person can control how it ends.

Quote Cards *14

Details of each Quote Card

The [slides](#) showcase the visual design of the cards.

cards	quote	place	effect	meaning
1	<i>"Ireland was not made for the Irishman alone."</i>	James Connolly	All players gain +1 Plough.	Emphasizes workers, ordinary people, and the community over narrow nationalism.
2	<i>"We seem to have lost. We have not lost. To refuse to fight is to lose."</i>	Patrick Pearse	Each player may choose to lose 1 Plough and gain 2 Stars.	A temptation to embrace revolution—sacrifice immediate security in exchange for ideals and glory.
3	<i>"The whole world is in a state of chassis."</i>	<i>Juno and the Paycock</i>	Each player rolls a die (or draws a card): 50% chance to gain +1 Plough; 50% chance to gain +1 Stars.	Chaos itself reshapes fate; no one can truly control the course of events.
4	<i>"I'd be ashamed to be brave."</i>	Nora Clitheroe, <i>The Plough and the Stars</i>	The Survivalist gains +2 Plough. All other players lose 1 Star.	Challenges the notion of heroism, reminding players that families often bear the true cost

				of revolution.
5	<i>"A principle, as I said, is a thing that compels a man to do what is right even when it costs him something."</i>	O'Casey	The player who declares they are furthest behind on their Secret Objective gains +2 Plough and +2 Stars.	Rewards those who remain faithful to their principles even in the face of adversity.
6	<i>"They died for Ireland—but Ireland doesn't seem to care very much."</i>	O'Casey	The player with the highest Martyr Score loses 2 Stars.	The sharpest critique of martyrdom: Are sacrifices truly remembered, or simply forgotten?
7	<i>"Better to die on your feet than live on your knees."</i>	Revolution proverb	Any player may choose to lose 3 Plough and gain 3 Stars.	A high-risk, high-reward gamble—trade survival directly for ideals and glory.
8	<i>"The poor have no country."</i>	James Connolly	The player with the lowest Plough gains +3 Plough.	When survival itself is uncertain, ideas of nation and homeland become distant luxuries.

9	<i>"When are you going to realise that the country is more important than a few broken windows?"</i>	<i>The Plough and the Stars</i>	All players gain +1 Star and lose 1 Plough.	Revolution demands the sacrifice of present security in pursuit of a greater cause.
10	<i>"My son was no Fenian—he died for something bigger than Ireland."</i>	革命時期相關語錄	All players except the player with the highest Martyr Score gain +2 Plough.	Shifts the focus to those who remain, rather than those who have fallen.
11	<i>"You can't teach the old dog new tricks—but Ireland keeps trying."</i>	O'Casey	Double the effects of all History Cards this round.	The weight of history and its recurring cycles draw everyone into its grasp.
12	<i>"I do not grudge them: Lord, I do not grudge my two sons I have seen taken away."</i>	Patrick Pearse, <i>The Mother</i>	No player may use their Special Ability this round.	The game pauses as mourning takes precedence over strategy.
13	<i>"An Ghaeilge—ár dteanga, ár gcroí."</i> (愛爾蘭語——我們的語言，我們的心)	愛爾蘭文化運動口號	The Poet/Cultural Guardian gains +3 Stars. All other players in Galway gain +1 Star.	Language and culture are revolutionary forces in their own right.
14	<i>"We had fed the heart on fantasies, the heart's grown brutal from the fare."</i>	W. B. Yeats, 《Meditations in Time of Civil War》	The player with the highest Stars loses 2 Stars.	A sobering reflection on idealism: a heart nourished only by fantasies may itself become brutal.

Character Cards *4

Details of each Character Card
The [slides](#) showcase the visual design of the cards.



Character	Dublin Volunteer Fighter	Tenement Housewife	Cork Volunteer Commander	Poet / Cultural Guardian
Archetype	Action-Oriented	Survival-Oriented	Hesitant	Symbolic
Plough (start)	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Stars (start)	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Special Ability	Charge Forward — In Dublin, may "double down": effects ×2, but Stars −2 if mission fails.	Neighbourhood Network — Skip movement once per round; borrow 1 Plough from each other player (they lose nothing).	Fractured Command — Before each mission, declare Obey (full effect, Stars +1) or Question (half effect, Plough +1).	The Weight of Words — When a Quote Card is drawn, declare it Plough- or Stars-leaning; all bonus effects shift accordingly. 3 uses per game.

Secret Objective	Reach Stars 9+ and voluntarily choose martyrdom → +3 Martyr Points.	End game with Plough 6+ and never having entered Dublin → +2 Survivor Points.	End game with Plough and Stars differing by 1 or less → +3 Balance Points.	Influence at least 3 Quote Card interpretations → +2 Points.
Positioning	High risk, high reward. Stars volatile — every action edges closer to martyrdom.	Steady survival. Hardest to eliminate, hardest to score high.	Most complex. Balanced start; every round forces a moral choice.	Scores through influence, not action. Own stats are secondary.