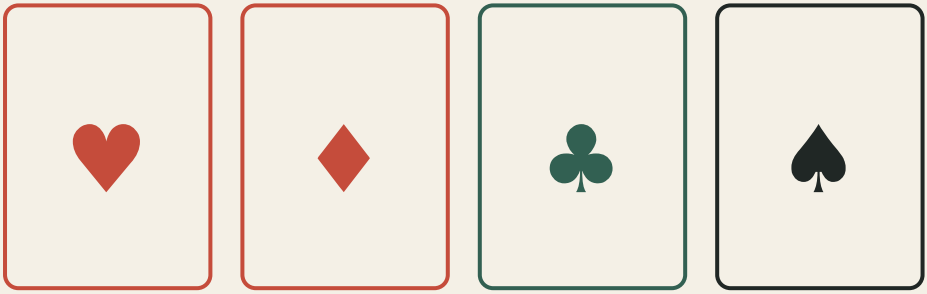
A CARTA GAME BY GERMAINE CHIN

BURN DOWN

Get something Done. Keep enough of yourselves to do it again.



ONE SPRINT. FOUR VOICES. A DATE NOBODY NAMED.

Solo journaling + cooperative play
52 prompts / 4 scenarios / design critique

A5 reading edition • Print using your PDF viewer’s booklet option on A4 paper. 24 pages; fold and staple. Test one duplex sheet first.

“Whenever it’s ready.”

The feature never had a deadline. “No rush,” someone said. That was months ago.

Now the date is firming up in rooms you are not in, and the team that has to meet it is already tired. You are the Scrum Master. You do not own the backlog and you do not write the code. You help the team reach the Review with something Done and enough left to do it again.

Two numbers, one tension

Capacity starts at 10. Energy, focus and sustainable pace. Exploration spends it. Reaching zero ends exploration. It is a fictional resource, not a measure of employee productivity.

Done starts at 0. Work meeting the Definition of Done. In the original scoring, reach the Review with at least 3 Done to meet the game’s goal.

Inside this issue

03-07 Setup, rules and multiplayer
08-09 Four crises
10-17 The complete prompt deck
18 Sprint log
19-22 Critique and playtest plan
23-24 Credits and quick reference

Edition note: the core rules and all prompts are retained. Explicit editorial rulings resolve ambiguous timing and movement for this playtest. Proposed redesigns appear separately on pages 19-22; they are not active rules.

Lay out the Sprint

Bring: 52 playing cards + 2 jokers, a marker, two counters and a notebook. Index cards can replace the jokers.

1. Choose a scenario (pages 08-09). It names the crisis suit.
2. Set the jokers aside: Planning and Review.
3. Remove the crisis King. Shuffle the other 51 cards; deal 21 unseen. Add the crisis King and shuffle those 22.
4. Build the grid below. Fill the other spaces face down; put unused cards away unseen.
5. Start at Planning. Answer the scenario questions and write a one-sentence Sprint Goal.



4 rows × 6 columns = 24 spaces. Two jokers + 22 prompts. The crisis King is on the board, but your route may never reveal it.

For learning play, also name the product, its users and what “Done” means before beginning.

Reveal. Respond. Record.

Before each new reveal: say in one line what the team plans next toward the Sprint Goal. The source calls this the Daily Scrum; treat it as a compressed fictional check-in.

Move: travel freely through connected face-up cards, then enter an unrevealed card touching that explored area above, below, left or right. No diagonal movement.

1 / Reveal. Lose 1 Capacity.
2 / Resolve. Apply the rank effect on page 05.
3 / Journal. Read that card’s prompt and answer in one or two lines.

Remove an impediment • once per game

Cancel Capacity loss from one card’s effect. A King’s loss is reduced from 2 to 1 instead. You cannot cancel the reveal cost. Write how you coached, facilitated, made something visible, or spoke to someone outside the team.

Editorial rulings for this edition

Check for zero immediately after each Capacity loss. If the reveal cost reaches zero, stop before applying a recovery effect. If an effect reaches zero, finish its simultaneous rewards, then stop. You may still answer the final prompt.

Declare an ability before its affected cost is paid. A Queen peeks only at an orthogonally adjacent face-down card; if none exists, it has no effect. Capacity has no upper cap. Face-up cards never trigger again.

These are proposed resolutions of gaps in the source, not tested balance changes. Record if they cause confusion or feel too punishing.

What each rank does

A +1 Done and +1 Capacity

2 +1 Capacity

3 -1 Capacity

4 No effect*

5 +1 Done

6 +2 Capacity

7 May spend 1 Capacity for +1 Done

8 -1 Capacity

9 No effect*

10 +1 Done

J +1 Capacity

Q Peek at one adjacent face-down card

K -2 Capacity

* The 4 and 9 of the crisis suit cost 1 Capacity instead. All effects come after the 1 Capacity reveal cost.

The Kings are the Date. Each makes the loose deadline more fixed. Make later Kings more specific in your log. The Hearts King is a date the team offers under pressure; other Kings may come from outside.

Example: Capacity 6, Done 1. Reveal 5♣: Capacity becomes 5; Done becomes 2. Reveal a King next: Capacity becomes 2, or 3 if you use Remove an impediment.

An honest ending

Enter the Review when it is orthogonally adjacent to the explored area. Entering costs nothing and ends exploration. You may choose an early Review even if you have fewer than 3 Done.

If Capacity reaches zero, stop exploring. If the Review is accessible through the explored area (including a final step onto the Review), hold it. Otherwise use the spent-team ending.

3+ Done at Review

The game’s Sprint Goal is met. Who came, what did they use, and what did they say?

1-2 Done at Review

There is a smaller Increment. Be honest about what is missing.

0 Done at Review

There is no Done Increment. What evidence can you inspect, and who notices?

Zero Capacity, no Review route

The team is spent. Who stops first, and what does the Product Owner decide?

Always end with a Retrospective

Name one concrete thing to change next Sprint. Who will act, and how will the team know whether it helped?

This is a game ending, not a prescription for cancelling Scrum events. A real Sprint’s timebox and Review do not depend on a stamina counter.

Four voices. One team.

One marker, one Capacity, one Done. Everyone shares the outcome, including the Stakeholder. Each player owns a suit and answers its prompts in character.

Before a move, the Product Owner suggests where value lies. The Developer chooses the move. The Scrum Master keeps the log and invites a closing line from each player.

♥ Scrum Master / Remove an impediment

Once: cancel one effect’s Capacity loss; a King still costs 1. This is the same ability as solo, not an extra use.

♦ Product Owner / Refine

Once: peek at up to two face-down cards orthogonally adjacent to the marker; return them face down.

♣ Developer / Swarm

Once: reveal a legally reachable card without paying the 1 Capacity reveal cost. Resolve its effect and prompt normally.

♠ Stakeholder / Air cover

Once, when a Spade is revealed: describe the protection you provide and gain 2 Capacity.

Editorial timing: announce Air cover after seeing the Spade but before paying its reveal cost. Two or three players share roles; give unowned suits to the Scrum Master. Each role ability remains available once.

Source defaults: solo 10 Capacity / 3 Done; hard 8 / 4; multiplayer starts at 9 / 3. These are playtest settings, not validated difficulty levels. No new simulations or human playtests were run for this zine.

When everything is first

♦ EVERYTHING IS P1 / Prioritization

Five initiatives are “top priority”, each with a different sponsor. The Product Backlog has an order on paper that nobody outside the team accepts.

Open: What are the five things that are all first? Which one does the Product Owner privately believe in?

Spent: The team works for whoever is loudest.
Goal met: One thing is in users’ hands, and the backlog finally has a real first item.

♣ AT NO POINT / Data leak

A Developer finds customer data somewhere it should never have been. The feature’s deadline was loose. The disclosure clock is not.

Open: What is the data? Where was it found? Who did you tell first?

Spent: The people who could have fixed it properly are the ones who stop.
Goal met: The leak is closed to the Definition of Done; the Product Owner openly decides what happens to the feature.

For this fictional scenario, invent all people and data. The deck is a discussion device, not an incident-response procedure.

“It’s only one small thing.”

♠ WHILE YOU’RE IN THERE / Scope creep

The feature has had three names. Every stakeholder has added one small thing, and each believes theirs was the only one.

Open: What was the original one-sentence purpose? What are the three largest additions?

Spent: What ships is a pile of half-features.
Goal met: Something small and whole is Done. The rest returns to the Product Backlog to be ordered.

♥ FINE. / Burnout

The team has been “almost done” for months and has stopped believing the phrase. Nobody complains. That is the problem.

Open: When did the team last celebrate anything? Which person worries you most?

Spent: A resignation arrives quietly on a Friday.
Goal met: The Increment is Done, and people still talk to each other in the Retrospective.

Before group play: agree to use fictional names. Anyone may skip or soften a prompt without penalty. Do not ask colleagues to disclose real burnout or workplace conflict.

♥ Scrum Master

A♥ For one Daily Scrum, everyone can say what the Sprint is for. What is the goal, in the team's words? (+1 Done, +1 Capacity)

2♥ Someone brings coffee for the whole team without being asked. Who, and what had they noticed? (+1 Capacity)

3♥ You see a timestamp of 1:14 a.m. on a Developer's message. What was it about? (−1 Capacity)

4♥ The team's mood board has a single note on it: "fine." Whose is it, and how do you know?

5♥ A Developer finishes something and, for once, goes home on time. What got Done, and what did they go home to? (+1 Done)

6♥ Someone makes the whole team laugh properly for the first time in weeks. What was the joke? (+2 Capacity)

7♥ The team offers to work the weekend. You could say nothing. What do you say? (may spend 1 Capacity for 1 Done)

Pay 1 Capacity to reveal, then apply the effect. Crisis-suit 4: lose 1 extra Capacity.

♥ Scrum Master

8♥ You catch yourself assigning tasks. That is not your accountability. Whose choice did you take away? (−1 Capacity)

9♥ The person you least expected asks if you are okay. What do you answer, and what is the true answer?

10♥ Two Developers who had stopped pairing sit down together again, and the thing gets finished. What changed between them? (+1 Done)

J♥ The newest Developer asks what they can take off someone's plate, and means it. What do they pick up? (+1 Capacity)

Q♥ The most senior Developer tells you privately how close they are to leaving. What can you now see coming? (peek at one adjacent card)

K♥ The team offers a date themselves, only to make the asking stop. What date, and who said it first? (−2 Capacity)

Crisis-suit 9: lose 1 extra Capacity. Queen: peek without revealing or triggering the card. King: make the date more specific.

♦ Product Owner

A♦ The Product Owner says no, out loud, to someone senior, and it sticks. What did they refuse? (+1 Done, +1 Capacity)

2♦ The Product Owner sits in on the Daily Scrum only to listen, and stays afterwards to answer one question. Which one? (+1 Capacity)

3♦ The Product Owner is unreachable for two days and a question about the top item cannot wait. The team guesses. What is the guess? (−1 Capacity)

4♦ A Product Backlog item has a title and nothing else: "Make it better." Who wrote it?

5♦ The Product Owner cuts an item in half, and the half that matters gets Done. What was left out? (+1 Done)

6♦ Refinement goes well. One large item is split into pieces small enough to finish. What became clear? (+2 Capacity)

7♦ The team could pull one more item into the Sprint. The numbers say no and the room says yes. Who speaks first? (may spend 1 Capacity for 1 Done)

Pay 1 Capacity to reveal, then apply the effect. Crisis-suit 4: lose 1 extra Capacity.

♦ Product Owner

8♦ Two stakeholders give opposite priorities, and the Product Owner brings both to the team to sort out. What do you coach them to do instead? (−1 Capacity)

9♦ The Product Owner asks you whether the roadmap is a lie. What do you say?

10♦ Something valuable is cut to protect the Sprint Goal, and what remains gets Done. Who will notice the missing piece? (+1 Done)

J♦ A customer's own words reach the team. What do they say that reminds everyone why this matters? (+1 Capacity)

Q♦ The Product Owner admits their manager has been ordering the backlog through them. What does that explain? (peek at one adjacent card)

K♦ A roadmap slide appears with a quarter on it. Nobody on the Scrum Team made it. Where did you first see it? (−2 Capacity)

Crisis-suit 9: lose 1 extra Capacity. Queen: peek without revealing or triggering the card. King: make the date more specific.

♣ Developers

A♣ The Developers refuse to call something Done that is not, and then they finish it properly. What did they hold back, and who was annoyed? (+1 Done, +1 Capacity)

2♣ The build goes green on the first try. Nobody trusts it, so they check. It really is green. What had they expected? (+1 Capacity)

3♣ An access key turns up in a commit, a chat or a screenshot. Who found it, and how long has it been there? (−1 Capacity)

4♣ "It works on my machine." What is not being said in the Daily Scrum?

5♣ A fix goes out through the whole pipeline, tests and review included, and it holds. What was fixed? (+1 Done)

6♣ A Developer automates a job that used to take an afternoon. What do they do with the afternoon? (+2 Capacity)

7♣ It could be Done by tomorrow if two people stay late tonight and do it properly. Do they? (may spend 1 Capacity for 1 Done)

Pay 1 Capacity to reveal, then apply the effect. Crisis-suit 4: lose 1 extra Capacity.

♣ Developers

8♣ The one person who understands that module is on leave. What do the others try? (−1 Capacity)

9♣ An item is finished but not Done. What is the gap this time, and who called it finished?

10♣ The Developers change their plan mid-Sprint to keep the Sprint Goal alive, and it works. What did they drop, and what did they keep? (+1 Done)

J♣ Someone from another team offers an afternoon of help with no ticket required. What do they untangle? (+1 Capacity)

Q♣ Compliance asks, "Can you confirm that at no point…". You say plainly that you cannot. What does saying it make visible? (peek at one adjacent card)

K♣ A clock starts that does not negotiate: an audit, a contract, a disclosure window. Which one, and how many days? (−2 Capacity)

Crisis-suit 9: lose 1 extra Capacity. Queen: peek without revealing or triggering the card. King: make the date more specific.

♠ Stakeholder

A♠ Someone with authority asks what the team needs, and then provides it. Who are they, and what did you ask for? (+1 Done, +1 Capacity)

2♠ A stakeholder cancels a meeting with the note "you don't need me for this." What does the team do with the hour? (+1 Capacity)

3♠ "While you're in there, could you just…" Finish the sentence. (−1 Capacity)

4♠ A stakeholder asks for a mid-Sprint status deck. What do you send instead?

5♠ A stakeholder answers a question the same day, and a blocked item gets Done. What was the question? (+1 Done)

6♠ A stakeholder tries a working build and drops a request they had been pushing. What did they see? (+2 Capacity)

7♠ A client demo has been promised for Friday. The team could make it, at a cost. Who promised it? (may spend 1 Capacity for 1 Done)

Pay 1 Capacity to reveal, then apply the effect. Crisis-suit 4: lose 1 extra Capacity.

♠ Stakeholder

8♠ A new invitation arrives: "Alignment Sync (mandatory)", one hour, daily, recurring. Who sent it? (−1 Capacity)

9♠ A competitor ships something similar. The screenshot is forwarded with a single question mark. What does the Product Owner reply?

10♠ The Product Owner and a stakeholder agree to move an addition to the Product Backlog, and the original item gets Done. What was moved? (+1 Done)

J♠ Someone outside the team tells another stakeholder, "Ask the Product Owner, not the developers." Who is it? (+1 Capacity)

Q♠ An executive stops you in the corridor and asks for "a commitment". You tell them what you actually know. What is that? (peek at one adjacent card)

K♠ The date is said out loud to a customer. Who said it, and how did you find out? (−2 Capacity)

Crisis-suit 9: lose 1 extra Capacity. Queen: peek without revealing or triggering the card. King: make the date more specific.

Your Sprint, on record

Scenario / crisis suit / people at the table

Sprint Goal: why will this matter to a user?

What counts as Done in this story?

Card → what happened → response → Capacity / Done

Review: what changed, and what should happen next?

Retrospective: one action, one owner, one signal

Keep the voice. Strengthen the choices.

My assessment: a compelling reflective journaling game; not yet a strong Scrum decision simulator.

What already works

Specific moments carry the theme: the 1:14 a.m. message, the vague backlog item, the recurring alignment meeting. Keep them. They invite stories without prescribing one correct answer.

Capacity versus Done is easy to grasp. The four suits expose different pressures, and an honest partial ending is more interesting than a binary victory screen.

P0 / The biggest gap: response rarely matters

Most cards resolve before the player responds. Coaching brilliantly or ignoring the problem often produces the same numbers. Face-down routes offer little informed choice until a peek occurs. This supports surprise and reflection, but weakens strategic learning.

First experiment: rewrite just the 3s and 8s with two explicit choices. Example: “Escalate now: lose 2 Capacity and peek at a neighbouring card” versus “Absorb the interruption: lose 1 Capacity.” The extra information has a price, so the choice depends on your situation. Keep the original prompt for the journal.

Test one change at a time. Do players describe an actual trade-off, or simply pick the numerically best option? Do not add a large skill tree before answering that question.

Fix the contract first

P0 / Timing and reachability

The source does not fully settle recovery at zero, ability timing, Capacity caps, or adjacency for peeks. “Next to a face-up card” also makes the marker’s role unclear. Pages 04-07 give explicit editorial rulings so a test can run consistently.

Next step: give the rules to a new reader without explaining them. Watch their first three turns. Any rescue explanation belongs in the rules.

P1 / The crisis can be missed

The crisis King is guaranteed to be dealt, not encountered. Apart from prompts, scenarios differ mainly through their 4 and 9. A player can finish without seeing the headline crisis.

Experiment: put the crisis King visibly on a shared escalation track and trigger it after the fourth reveal. Replace its grid position with a random non-King card. Retest the resulting balance; do not silently add this penalty to the baseline.

P1 / Crunch buys reliable output

The 7s always convert 1 Capacity into 1 Done. Close to the Review, overtime can become the obvious optimisation. Its human cost disappears after a single game.

Experiment: when crunch is used, mark Fatigue. In a two-Sprint session, each mark reduces next Sprint’s starting Capacity by 1. Compare whether this changes behaviour without making recovery hopeless.

A single game need not punish every bad workplace habit. But its incentives should support the lesson you want players to carry away.

Metaphor vs. Scrum

P0 / A count is not a Sprint Goal

Three completed items can deliver little value. In Scrum, the Sprint Goal is one objective. Keep Done as a game resource; ask players to explain how the resulting Increment achieves the written goal. [1]

P0 / The Review is not an escape square

In Scrum, Sprint duration is fixed and the Review inspects outcomes with stakeholders. A resource collapse does not cancel those events. Keep exploration as metaphor, or test a fixed reveal budget followed by a Review every time. [1]

P1 / Let Developers own the check-in

The Daily Scrum belongs to Developers. Let their voice state progress and the next adaptation. The Scrum Master can support the conversation without turning it into a status report. [1]

P1 / A deadline is not the cure

The premise repeatedly links a missing date to scope growth and burnout. That is one possible story, not a universal cause. Try: “No shared goal, no explicit trade-offs, and no trusted forecast.” Let deadlines be useful information as well as pressure.

P1 / Avoid the lone rescuer story

The Scrum Master logs everything and intervenes once. Rotate the scribe; give each role a consequential decision. Clarify that a Stakeholder is a dramatic voice outside the three Scrum Team accountabilities. [1]

[1] The Scrum Guide (2020), sections on Scrum Team, Sprint, Daily Scrum, Review and Sprint Goal. Source links on page 23. Recommendations here are design proposals, not requirements of the Guide.

Test the promise

Recommended positioning: “A reflective game about delivery pressure, sustainable pace and Scrum conversations.”

Round 1 / Can someone play unaided?

Run three solo sessions with new readers using the baseline. Record setup time, rule questions, completion time, reveals, final Capacity / Done, whether the King appeared, and whether peeks changed a route.

Round 2 / Does the table share agency?

Run two four-player sessions. Track who speaks, who makes decisions and when abilities matter. Ask each person to name a decision they influenced. If the Scrum Master does all the work, revise turn responsibilities.

Round 3 / Does a redesign improve anything?

Test one variant, using comparable card layouts. Ask: “Which choice changed your outcome?” and “What would you try differently at work?” Keep a change only if it improves the intended experience without excessive bookkeeping.

Evidence before difficulty claims

The source reports rough simulated success rates but supplies no script, seeds, sample size or precise policy. Treat those rates as unverified. Publish them only alongside reproducible assumptions and human-playtest observations.

A useful first target: readers finish without clarification and can name one meaningful trade-off. A small pilot finds usability problems; it does not establish a reliable win percentage.

Credits & edition notes

Original game and prompts: Germaine Chin.
Zine adaptation: editorial layout, clarification proposals and design critique prepared with ChatGPT, 13 November 2026.

Based on Carta

This work is based on the Carta system (found at https://peachgardengames.itch.io/carta-srd), from Cat McDonald and Peach Garden Games, and licensed for use under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/).

No Carta logo is used. The attribution above is reproduced from the Carta SRD mirror. Verify it against the downloadable SRD before public release; the publisher’s download page did not open during this review.

Sources and reading

[1] Ken Schwaber & Jeff Sutherland. The Scrum Guide (2020).
scrumguides.org/scrum-guide.html

[2] Cat McDonald / Peach Garden Games. Carta SRD.
peachgardengames.itch.io/carta-srd
SRD text mirror:
keeper.farirpgs.com/resources/peach-garden-games/carta/

What changed in this adaptation

Rules and scenarios were condensed for page layout; all 52 deck prompts were retained. Added: setup diagram, worksheet, example, explicit timing / movement rulings, learning caveats and critique. The source Markdown is unchanged. No balance validation is claimed.

The game is an independent creative work. References to Scrum and Carta do not imply endorsement. Choose a licence for your original contributions before publication.

Before the next move…

What are we trying to make possible?

START Capacity 10 / Done 0
TARGET Review + 3 Done
REVEAL Spend 1 Capacity
RESOLVE Rank effect, then journal
STOP Review or zero Capacity

```
A +1 Done, +1 Capacity
2 / J +1 Capacity
3 / 8 -1 Capacity
4 / 9 No effect; crisis suit: -1
5 / 10 +1 Done
6 +2 Capacity
7 Optional: pay 1 for +1 Done
Q Peek at an adjacent card
K -2 Capacity
```

One intervention. One honest Review.
One thing to change next Sprint.

Full effects: 05 • Endings: 06 • Roles: 07
All proposed redesigns remain optional and untested.