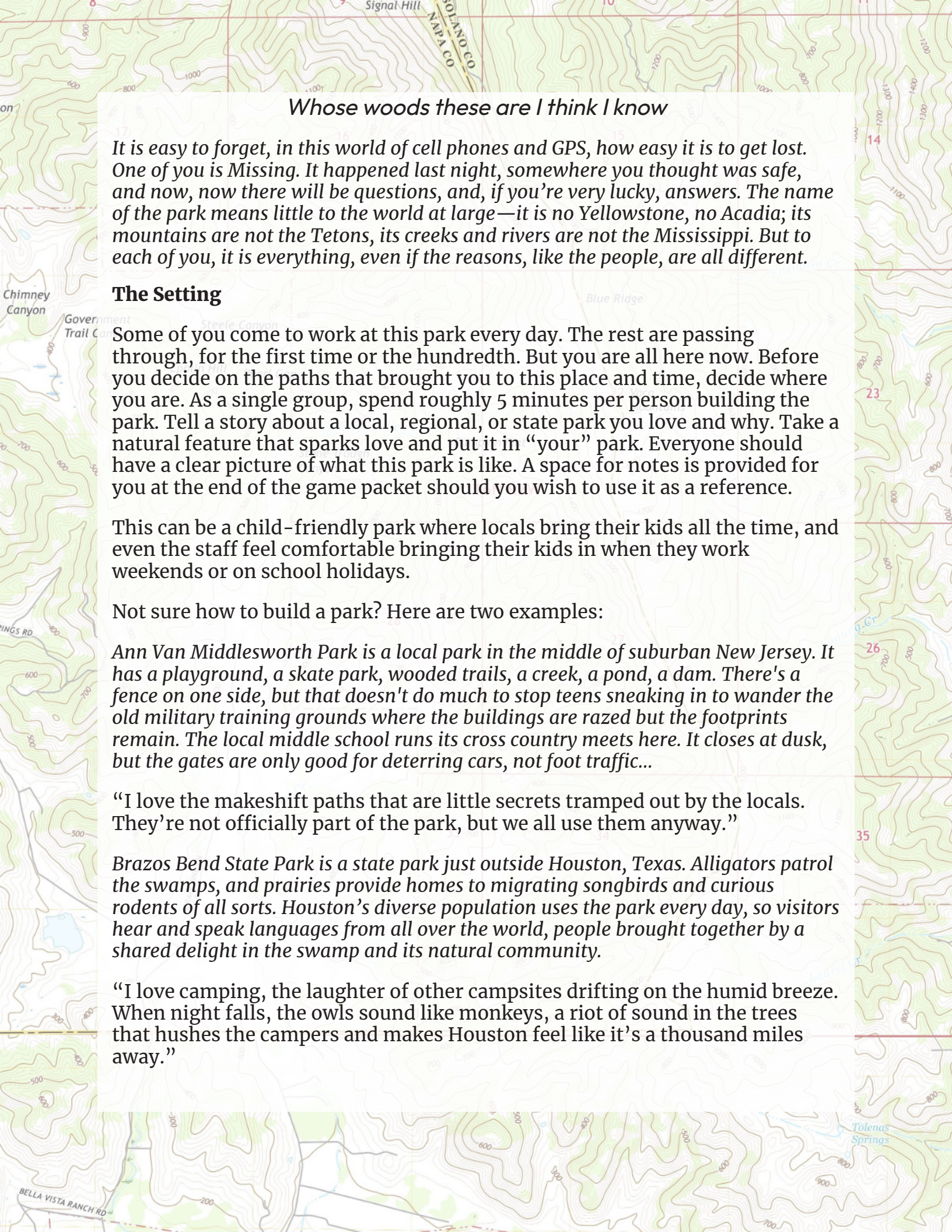# Lovely, Dark, and Deep

A LARP for 2+ people, ages 13 and up

By Meredith Mayes and Penelope Ray

Whose woods these are I think I know

It is easy to forget, in this world of cell phones and GPS, how easy it is to get lost. One of you is Missing. It happened last night, somewhere you thought was safe, and now, now there will be questions, and, if you're very lucky, answers. The name of the park means little to the world at large—it is no Yellowstone, no Acadia; its mountains are not the Tetons, its creeks and rivers are not the Mississippi. But to each of you, it is everything, even if the reasons, like the people, are all different.

The Setting

Some of you come to work at this park every day. The rest are passing through, for the first time or the hundredth. But you are all here now. Before you decide on the paths that brought you to this place and time, decide where you are. As a single group, spend roughly 5 minutes per person building the park. Tell a story about a local, regional, or state park you love and why. Take a natural feature that sparks love and put it in "your" park. Everyone should have a clear picture of what this park is like. A space for notes is provided for you at the end of the game packet should you wish to use it as a reference.

This can be a child-friendly park where locals bring their kids all the time, and even the staff feel comfortable bringing their kids in when they work weekends or on school holidays.

Not sure how to build a park? Here are two examples:

Ann Van Middlesworth Park is a local park in the middle of suburban New Jersey. It has a playground, a skate park, wooded trails, a creek, a pond, a dam. There's a fence on one side, but that doesn't do much to stop teens sneaking in to wander the old military training grounds where the buildings are razed but the footprints remain. The local middle school runs its cross country meets here. It closes at dusk, but the gates are only good for deterring cars, not foot traffic...

"I love the makeshift paths that are little secrets tramped out by the locals. They're not officially part of the park, but we all use them anyway."

Brazos Bend State Park is a state park just outside Houston, Texas. Alligators patrol the swamps, and prairies provide homes to migrating songbirds and curious rodents of all sorts. Houston's diverse population uses the park every day, so visitors hear and speak languages from all over the world, people brought together by a shared delight in the swamp and its natural community.

"I love camping, the laughter of other campsites drifting on the humid breeze. When night falls, the owls sound like monkeys, a riot of sound in the trees that hushes the campers and makes Houston feel like it's a thousand miles away."

The Characters

Once you know where you are, split into two groups: visitors and park rangers. The number in each group does not matter, so long as there is at least one person per group. Spend 10 minutes deciding who each of you are as individuals, who you are to each other, and your names. If you are in a sub-group of three or more, aim to have at least one positive and at least one antagonistic connection. Some suggestions include:

Visitors	Park Staff
Bird watcher	Park superintendent
Hiker	Law enforcement ranger
Camper	Education ranger
Photographer	Office manager
Tourist	Fee collector
RVer	Maintenance ranger

In the Visitor Group

Yesterday, in this magical, meaningful place, one of your number went missing. Or was made to go missing. Decide among your group who the Missing was to each of you, what happened to them, how you feel about this, and where each of you were when it occurred. *[Note: The identity of missing people can be sensitive and cause unpleasant feelings. When deciding any characteristics of this person, including age, gender, and sexuality, consider group feelings, as these are potentially sensitive topics. If someone brings up a topic you'd rather not play with, simply say "no thank you," and the group will decide on a new answer.]*
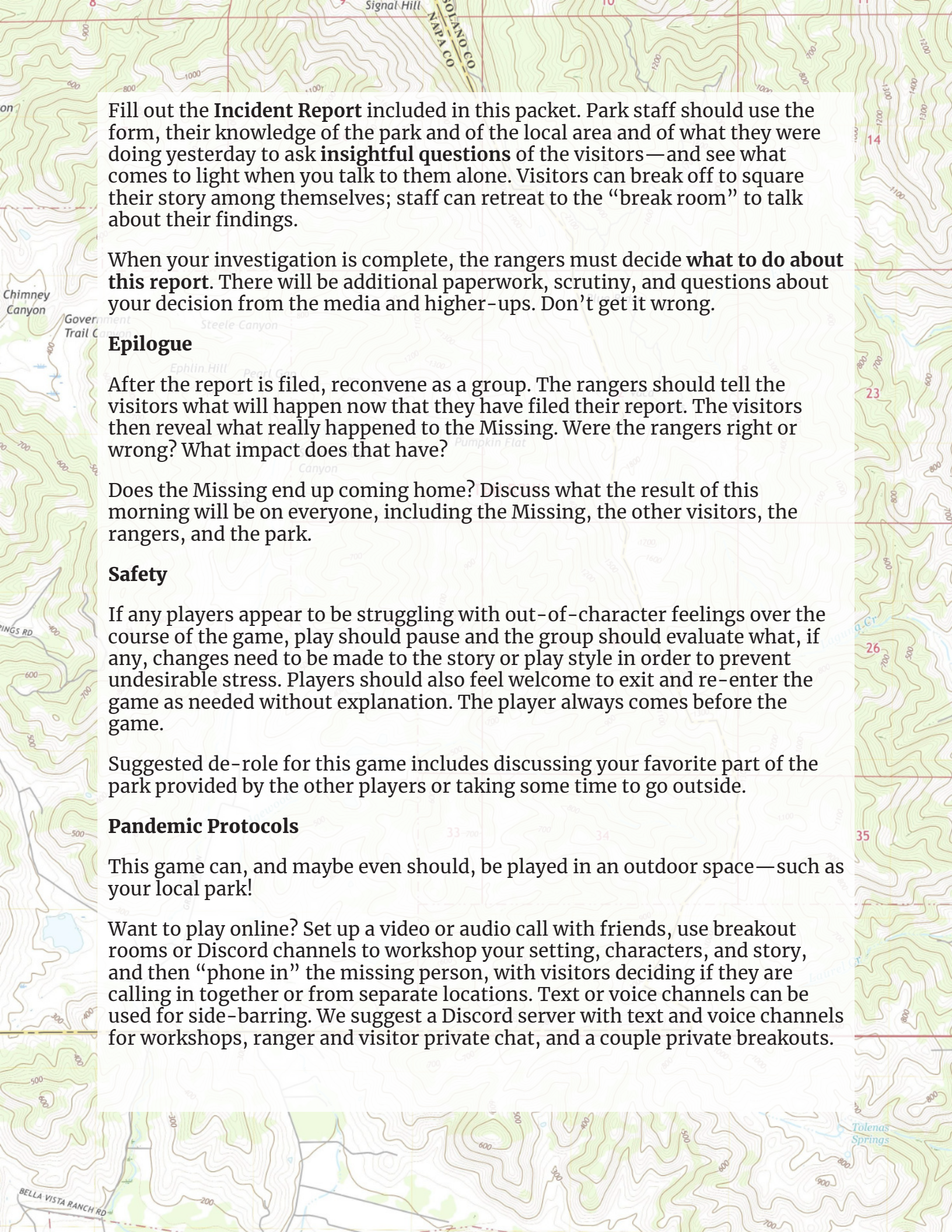
How do you all know each other? **What** you will say to the park staff tomorrow morning when you report the missing person? **Why** couldn't you contact the Missing? **Why** can't you just call them and **why** did you wait until morning to make a report? Someone will surely ask...

In the Ranger Group

This park is...well, it's work. But it is also special to you, or you wouldn't work here. Certainly you're not in it for the money. Establish your roles in the park. **What** were each of you doing yesterday, **where** in the park were these tasks located, **how long** have you worked at the park, and **why** did you want (or not want) to work at this park? **What** is your park's protocol for missing persons? **What** have you been reprimanded for in the past?

Making The Report

Once each group is done with their individual meeting, come back together. It is the next morning at 8. The park office has just opened for the morning, and the visitors have come in to report their missing member.

Fill out the **Incident Report** included in this packet. Park staff should use the form, their knowledge of the park and of the local area and of what they were doing yesterday to ask **insightful questions** of the visitors—and see what comes to light when you talk to them alone. Visitors can break off to square their story among themselves; staff can retreat to the "break room" to talk about their findings.

When your investigation is complete, the rangers must decide **what to do about this report**. There will be additional paperwork, scrutiny, and questions about your decision from the media and higher-ups. Don't get it wrong.

Epilogue

After the report is filed, reconvene as a group. The rangers should tell the visitors what will happen now that they have filed their report. The visitors then reveal what really happened to the Missing. Were the rangers right or wrong? What impact does that have?

Does the Missing end up coming home? Discuss what the result of this morning will be on everyone, including the Missing, the other visitors, the rangers, and the park.

Safety

If any players appear to be struggling with out-of-character feelings over the course of the game, play should pause and the group should evaluate what, if any, changes need to be made to the story or play style in order to prevent undesirable stress. Players should also feel welcome to exit and re-enter the game as needed without explanation. The player always comes before the game.

Suggested de-role for this game includes discussing your favorite part of the park provided by the other players or taking some time to go outside.

Pandemic Protocols

This game can, and maybe even should, be played in an outdoor space—such as your local park!

Want to play online? Set up a video or audio call with friends, use breakout rooms or Discord channels to workshop your setting, characters, and story, and then "phone in" the missing person, with visitors deciding if they are calling in together or from separate locations. Text or voice channels can be used for side-barring. We suggest a Discord server with text and voice channels for workshops, ranger and visitor private chat, and a couple private breakouts.

INCIDENT REPORT

Incident Date and Time	Location of Incident

Clearance Code (bubble applicable)

	Victim Information

Clearance Code	Victim name
A – Arrest F – Found I – Investigate M – Misfortune U – Unfounded	
	Victim occupation
	Relationship to reporter

Description of Incident

What happened? Who was the missing person? When and where did they go missing?

Result of Investigation

Describe investigators' conclusions. What happened? Who reported the incident? Was it reported promptly? If not, why not? Who or what caused the incident? Was any park property damaged?

Crime Suspect (if applicable)

Suspect name

Suspect location

List evidence of suspect's involvement

Reported by	Date

NOTES