

Journeys

A Magic: The Gathering Fan Format



Rules of Play

What is Journeys?

Like Elder Dragon Highlander (Commander) and countless other variants, Journeys is a fan format for *Magic: The Gathering*. Journeys allows *Magic* to be played as a lightweight roleplaying game (RPG).

What is Journeys About?

In Journeys, players roleplay as explorers of a vast multiverse, the rare few who venture between worlds: planeswalkers. Journeys has *Magic*'s iconic battles, but also enables cooperation, exploration, and wonder.

How Many People Can Play?

Participants fall into two groups: **PLAYERS**, each of whom controls one **PLANESWALKER CHARACTER** (a **PC**), and the **GAME MASTER (GM)**, who guides the flow of the story and controls the other elements of the worlds the players explore—including the hazards (**THREATS**) and non-player characters (**NPCs**) the PCs will meet in their travels.

How Does It Work?

Each player creates a *Magic: The Gathering* deck that represents their PC, including their unique style of magic, how they think, and what they are capable of doing. This deck is used to fight epic battles based on the rules of *Magic* (with some modifications) and to determine if the character overcomes other obstacles they face.

What Does a Player Need to Start Playing?

Each player needs a 40-card *Magic* deck created with special rules (see page 3), a character card that contains your character's vital info, a writing implement, note paper, and a d20 (20-sided die).

What Does the GM Need to Start Playing?

The GM needs a writing implement, paper, a d20, and a set of d6's (6-sided dice). The GM also needs a number of *Magic* cards to create **THREAT DECKS** (that represent hazards and groups of minor foes) and **MAGE DECKS** (that represent potent spellcasters). Even a small collection of *Magic* cards can be used to create a wide range of challenges.

Credits

Design: Max Brooke

Playtesting, Proofreading, Feedback, & Forbearance: Matt Harkrader, Sir Lord Falconwrath, Ramses, Luna, and Zil Rivet

Available for download at maxbrooke.com

Cover Art Courtesy the Smithsonian Public Domain collection. Painters from left to right, top to bottom: Thomas Cole, Thomas Moran, Thomas Moran, Françoise de Nome, C. Morgan McIlhenney, M.A. Hall

Character Creation

Your character is made up of:

- A **DECK** of 40 cards, which represents who your character is, the magic that they know, and how they think and act.
- Three **SPHERES** (Mental, Physical, and Social), stats ranging from 2 to 4 which represent their inclination to tasks of these kinds.
- **TALENTS**, which represent other abilities of your character.
- A **LIFE TOTAL**, which begins at 20 and is persistent between scenes.

To create a character, follow these steps:

Step 1 (Assemble Deck): Open six packs of *Magic: The Gathering* cards (or eleven packs, if you're using *Fallen Empires* for some unfathomable reason) and build a deck of exactly 40 cards using those cards plus any number of basic lands from the same block. All of these cards, including unused cards, become part of your character's **COLLECTION**.

Step 2 (Assign Spheres): Distribute these values as you choose between your character's spheres: 4, 3, 2. Record these on your character card.

Step 3 (Select Talents): Select one Common talent from the list on page 12 and record it in the top talent node on your character card.

Step 4 (Name and Background): Look at the deck. Who does this reflect? What is their name? Their species? What led them to this kind of magic? What do they want, and how do they go about getting it?

Alternate Step 1: Open Deck Building

If the GM prefers, they can allow players to choose to use either **Step 1: Assemble Deck** as listed above or these **Open Deck Building** rules instead:

- All cards must be from the same set (other than basic lands, which must be from the same block or plane).
- Your deck cannot include any Mythic Rare cards, and can include no more than 2 Rare cards and no more than 8 Uncommon cards.
- Your deck can include no more than 2 copies of any single card (other than nonbasic lands).
- After creating a deck, you may add up to 15 different Common cards from the same set **not** included in your deck to your collection.

Flow of the Game

In Journeys, the GM sets up and describes the world to the players across a number of scenes. The players control their PCs throughout those scenes, describing their actions and speaking in their PCs' voices if desired. The GM explains consequences of the PCs' actions, and speaks for any NPCs, and adjudicates the rules as needed. A scene ends when the GM declares it over. Over multiple scenes, the players and GM form a story together. There are two types of scenes:

- **Challenge Scenes:** These are the intense scenes used for combat and other high-stakes encounters. These are likely occur once or twice per session. The PCs play a game of *Magic* against NPC mage decks and/or threat decks controlled by the GM. See below.
- **Narrative Scenes:** These are most scenes, in which PCS interact and perform tasks in a more freeform manner. See page 6.

Playing a Challenge Scene

In a challenge scene, PCs solve a problem with that most time-honored RPG panacea: blowing things up with big spells! It proceeds as a standard game of *Magic*, with these exceptions:

Start of Scene: The GM describes the scene to the players.

Initiative: Each PC and each NPC rolls a d20 (twenty-sided die). The combatant with the highest roll goes first, then turns proceed clockwise. Players may swap seats at this point, if desired.

Favored Cards: To reduce the amount of “land, go” in the early turns, players can make cards in their character's deck **FAVORED** via talents. Favored cards are marked on their face. At the start of each challenge, a player may search their library and choose up to three favored cards, then shuffle their library. Lands chosen this way are put onto the battlefield tapped. Nonland cards chosen this way are shuffled into the top ten cards of their library.

End of Scene: Each character resolves the following in this order:

- Gain 1 life.
- Move all cards on the battlefield into your graveyard.
- Shuffle all cards in your hand and command zone into your library.

Favored Card Alterations

A player must mark each of their favored cards by writing their character's name or personal symbol on the face of the card. Some favored cards also tell the player to **RENAME** the card. In this case, the player must write a new name of their choice on the card, as well.

If a player would prefer not to make alterations to their cards, they can slide a piece of paper into the sleeve with the extra information instead.

Mage Decks: Mage decks represent enemy powerful NPC spellcasters. Each has a “seat” at the table (position chosen by the GM), a turn, a library created by the GM, and a life total set to a value of the GM's choosing. See page 14 for more details.

Threat Decks: Threat decks can represent groups of enemies, environmental dangers, etc. They are not characters, and do not have a turn or a life total. Instead, they have some specified **CONDITION** the PCs must achieve to overcome them. They act at during the threat step, before any player's turn. See page 14–15 for more details.

Tasks: Tasks are narrative actions (see page 6), which can be used in challenge scenes at the GM's discretion. If a PC tries to pursue some wacky idea like collapsing the ceiling or actually talking to their foe, they may skip their draw step to make a single attempt at a task.

Defeat and Death: Defeat works differently than in a normal game:

- A character's life total cannot be reduced below 0. If a character's life total is 0, that character is **VULNERABLE**. When a vulnerable character would lose life, they mill that many cards from the top of their library instead. Otherwise, they can continue to participate in the current scene, or try to flee via planeswalking (see page 10).
- If a character has no cards in their library that character is **EXHAUSTED**. When an exhausted character would draw cards, mill cards from their library, or otherwise remove cards from their library, they lose that much life instead. Otherwise, they can continue to participate in the current scene.
- If a character becomes both vulnerable and exhausted, they perish. For a PC, this means their player must make a new character.

Recovery and Healing: For this topic, see page 10.

Playing a Narrative Scene

Narrative scenes are more freeform, allowing players to focus on role-playing. During a narrative scene, the GM describes the scene to the players, and the players describe how their characters act to the GM.

Tasks

When a character attempts an action in the story, the GM may call for a **TASK** to determine if the character succeeds or fails in that action. The GM should call for a task only if the outcome is in question; if a player wants to do something trivial or inconsequential (or if failure would be boring), just let them do it. They're a planeswalker, after all.

Overview: The GM gives each task a sphere and a number of mana symbols that reflect its difficulty. The PC attempting it draws 7 cards, picks a number of those cards up to their sphere, and matches those cards' mana costs (or mana produced) with the symbols the GM listed.

Anatomy of a Task

Each task has a **SPHERE** (Mental, Social, or Physical), a **COLOR** (set by the character's method), a **DIFFICULTY** (a set of mana symbols that reflect how hard it is), and a **TIME** (how many tries the PCs get to resolve it).

The **sphere** is determined by the character's method, and whether it is:

- **MENTAL** (knowing and perceiving things)
- **SOCIAL** (persuasion via communication)
- **PHYSICAL** (feats of bodily activity)

The **color** is determined the **TACT** that the GM thinks best matches the action the player described. Each sphere has a tact for each color that reflects a different way of using that expertise (see page 7).

The **difficulty** is a number of mana symbols (usually 2 to 5 mana symbols of a single color) that the character attempting it must **CONTRIBUTE** with cards from their deck to complete it. Mana symbols contributed to a task remain contributed until the task is completed or failed.

The **time** is a number of increments (usually a value from 1 to 5) for how many times a character can attempt the task before the window of opportunity closes. Each attempt expends one increment of time. If the time reaches 0 before it is completed, the task is unsuccessful.

List of Tacts

When a PC attempts a task, consult this list of colors by tact.

Mental Tacts

Color

SOCIETY - Cultural knowledge of customs, laws, and graces of various groups of people (W)

SCHOLARSHIP - Academic knowledge of science, history, philosophy, and arcane secrets (U)

INTRIGUE - Practical awareness of how to use and circumvent systems to one's advantage (B)

INSTINCT - Intuitive awareness and assessment of the danger a situation or individual poses (R)

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ETIQUETTE - Arguing for your viewpoint based on cultural norms or codified moral systems (W)

REASON - Presenting one's case as resting on information you can verify or logic you can prove (U)

NEGOTIATION - Securing a deal or making a bargain that appeals to the self-interest of two or more parties involved (B)

INTIMIDATION - Ensuring compliance through aggression, force of personality, or threats of violence (R)

INSPIRATION - Gaining support through words and actions that make people desire to follow you (G)

Physical Tacts

Color

PRECISION - Moving and falling acrobatically, evading harm, maintaining balance, striking specific targets (W)

STEALTH - Moving undetected, manual dexterity tasks, leaving no trace, striking while staying hidden (U)

GRIT - Moving through rough or dangerous terrain, contortion, shrugging off injury, resisting poison and disease, striking heedlessly (B)

SPEED - Moving quickly, reacting quickly, leaping and throwing for distance, striking first (R)

MIGHT - Lifting and carrying heavy objects, moving while encumbered, striking multiple foes at once (G)

Attempting a Task

Each time increment can be used to attempt a task in one of two ways:

I'll Use My Skills: The character's player draws 7 cards from their deck, then chooses a number of those cards up to their ranks in the corresponding sphere to match with the mana symbols for the task.

- A land contributes one mana of a color it can produce toward the task.
- A spell contributes an amount of mana equal to the mana symbols of that color in its casting cost.
- Colorless mana symbols do not contribute.

I've Got a Spell for This: The character's player searches their library for a spell, reveals it, and explains how they use it to complete the task narratively, based on one or more of the following elements: **CARD NAME**, **CARD EFFECT**, **FLAVOR TEXT**, and/or **ART**.

The GM assesses this explanation and proceeds in one of three ways:

- If the GM decides that the spell completes the task narratively, no further effort on the part of the character. Then the spell is exiled.
- If the GM determines that the spell is not sufficient to complete the task on its own, but can help, then each element of the card that the GM agrees matches the task at hand counts as one mana of the player's choice contributed to the task. Then the spell is exiled.
- If the GM does not agree that any element fits, the player shuffles the spell back into their library.

Resolving a Task

After an attempt is made, if the contributed cards have mana symbols matching the task's difficulty, the task is accomplished.

Otherwise, the GM reduces the time of the task by 1.

- If at least 1 time increment remains, a character can make another attempt.
- If 0 time remains, the task is failed as the window of opportunity closes.

Other Rules for Tasks

Assistance: At the GM's discretion, after a character spends 1 or more time attempting a task but does not complete it, another character may **ASSIST**, making their own attempt at resolving the task as described on page 6, adding to any symbols contributed. For each task, the first attempt by an assisting character does not use up a time increment.

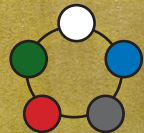
Converting Mana: A character can treat two mana symbols of the same allied color as one mana symbol of the chosen color. This reflects using the other mana's expertise to supplement the effort.

For example, a character might substitute UU for B by using Reason to call up an obscure economic model that supports an effort to Negotiate for price, or substitute RR for G by relying on Speed to use momentum to help carry a heavy object that normally requires Might.

A character also can treat three mana symbols of the same enemy color as one mana symbol of the chosen color. This represents the character putting forth a much greater effort to achieve the same outcome.

Allied and Enemy Colors

Each color is allies with the two adjacent to it in the color wheel. Each color is enemies with the two across from it.



Linked Tasks: Sometimes, the GM will decide that a single task is insufficient for a given goal. In these cases, the GM can create linked tasks, presenting multiple tasks simultaneously or in specific sequence. If the tasks are presented simultaneously, the player can add cards to the steps in any order. The steps can have independent time values, or a single shared time value.

End of Scene: Each character resolves the following in this order:

- Gain 1 life.
- Move all cards still committed to unfinished tasks to your graveyard. These tasks count as being failed.

Card Recovery, Healing, Travel, and Other Rules

Card Recovery: Cards in a character's graveyard and exiled zone can be **RECOVERED**, restoring them to their library. This can occur at a mana nexus (see below), or via talents. **Note:** At the end of each scene, **do not** shuffle your character's graveyard and exiled cards into your library.

Deck and Collection: All cards in a character's library, graveyard, hand, exiled zone, and command zone are considered to be part of their deck. All cards a character possesses that are **not** in their deck are considered to be part of their **COLLECTION**. A character is also considered to have 20 of each basic land from their home plane (set) as part of their collection.

Mana Nexuses: Some locations are **MANA NEXUSES**, leyline convergences or sites of power where spellcasters quickly recover mana. For every hour you rests at a mana nexus, recover two cards from your graveyard or exiled zone (shuffle them into your library). After you rest for a full day (24 hours) at a mana nexus, recover all cards in your deck.

After you rest for one or more hours at a mana nexus, you may also **SWAP** any number of cards in your deck with cards in your character's collection. A swapped card goes to the same location as the card it was swapped for (library, graveyard, exiled, etc). After you rest for a full day at a mana nexus, you may increase or decrease your deck size, if able, then **ADD** or **REMOVE** cards to accommodate the new deck size.

Some nexuses are **ENRICHED** in a particular color of mana, letting you recover twice as many cards of that color for every hour you rest. Others are **DEVOID** of certain types of mana, preventing you from recovering any cards of that color at that nexus (even if you rest for a full day).

Healing: In addition to healing at the end of each scene, if you dedicate a full day to resting, your life total becomes 20.

Traveling the Planes: To move to a new plane, name a plane and search your library for one land card from that plane, then exile it. If you do, you and up to 5 willing others travel to the location that card depicts.

During a challenge scene, you may skip your draw step to perform the above action. If you depart, you cannot return during that challenge.

Character Progression (aka “Did We Level Up Yet?”)

Character progression takes several forms, all of which occur at the GM’s discretion:

Milestone Unlocks: The GM has each player open one pack of the set that represents the plane the characters are currently in, then the players draft the cards from those packs into their collections (each player takes one card, then passes to the left; repeat until the pack is empty). The draft must be conducted using only in-character conversation, without discussing the cards by name (or in silence, if the GM prefers).

Talent Unlocks: After each milestone unlock, each player may unlock one talent for which they meet the prerequisites by permanently removing one or more cards from their character’s collection (the cards stay part of the player’s out-of-game collection, however). Cards can be removed to unlock talents (see the list on page 12) as follows:

- 5 Common Cards - 1 Common Talent
- 3 Uncommon Cards - 1 Uncommon Talent
- 1 Rare or Mythic Rare Card - 1 Rare Talent

Experiential Unlocks: Some threat decks and mage decks have **EXPERIENCE CARDS** assigned to them by the GM. When a player resolves a threat deck condition with one or more experience cards assigned to it, they add those cards to their character’s collection. When the group defeats a mage deck, the players divide add any listed experience cards among their characters’ collections as they see fit.

Trading Knowledge: PCs can teach each other some tricks of the trade easily enough. After each session, each player may make up to one trade with one other player in the campaign. At the GM’s discretion, some NPCs may also have cards for trade, in the same way as PCs.

Training Sessions: In addition to the one free trade after each session, each player who plays one or more games with another player in the campaign using their character decks may make one trade with that player. So, in theory, you could trade once with each other player after each session if you play the requisite games. These games are played with your full deck and 20 life, so note your life total and which of your cards are in your graveyard and exiled if you haven’t rested.

Talent List

Talents represent unique abilities possessed by PCs, and can be unlocked as described on page 11. Each talent fills one **NODE** corresponding to its rarity on the back of your character card. Each talent can be selected a number of times equal to the number in parentheses after its name. If you select a talent multiple times, its effect stacks.

Some talents contain *italicized* prerequisites. If your deck ceases to meet this requirement, the benefit is lost until it meets the requirement again.

Common Talents

Arcane Endurance (6): Increase your maximum deck size by 10.

Favored Ally (3): Choose a nonlegendary creature card in your collection. Mark it as favored and rename it. It becomes legendary.

Grave Lore (3): *Requires 5 or more black cards.* At the end of each scene, recover 1 card from your graveyard at random.

Knowledge Broker (3): *Requires 5 or more blue cards.* Between sessions, you may make 1 additional trade.

Memories of Home (1): Choose up to two non-basic lands in your collection from your home plane. Mark them as favored. At the start of each scene, recover these cards.

Quick Reflexes (3): *Requires 5 or more red cards.* When you roll for initiative (see page 4), roll an additional 1d20 and choose one result.

Selfless Defender (3): *Requires 5 or more white cards.* Up to one creature you control may block for other players per turn.

Signature Item (2): Choose a nonlegendary artifact card in your collection. Mark it as favored and rename it. It becomes legendary.

Tinkerer (1): *Requires 3 or more artifacts.* When you use an artifact to contribute mana to a task, count the colorless mana in its mana cost as allied to the required color.

Tough Hide (3): *Requires 5 or more green cards.* At the end of each scene, recover an additional 1 life, to a maximum of 20.

Uncommon Talents

Favored Enchantment (1): Choose a nonlegendary enchantment in your collection. Mark it as favored and rename it. It becomes legendary.

Mental Transfer (1): After you rest for one hour or longer (whether at a mana nexus or not), you may mill up to 7 cards from your library to have another character in the scene recover that many cards.

Practiced Spell (2): Choose an instant or sorcery in your collection. Mark it as favored and rename it.

Planar Hideout (1): Choose a nonbasic land card in your collection. Mark it as favored.

Skilled Healer (1): When you would gain 1 or more life, you may choose another character in the scene to gain that much life instead.

Alignment [One Color] (5): *Requires 10 or more cards of the chosen color.* You treat all mana nexuses that are not devoid in that color of mana as enriched in that color of mana.

Rare Talents

Advanced Spell Research (1): Choose a card you own and add it to your character's collection. This card must be of rarity lower than or equal to the rarity of the card you used to unlock this talent, and from the same set as that card. Mark it as favored.

Empowered (2): Increase one of your spheres by +1.

Favored Transformation (1): Choose a nonlegendary creature in your collection. Mark it as favored and rename it to your character's name (or an alias). It becomes legendary and gains the following ability:

EMBODIMENT (If this card is in your deck, it begins play in your Command Zone. Whenever this card would be put into your graveyard, you may pay life equal to its converted mana cost. If you do, put it into your Command Zone instead).

Powerful Ally (2): Choose a planeswalker you have met within the story and with whom the GM agrees you are on favorable terms. Add one planeswalker card representing that character to your collection.

GM Stuff

This game is written with a lot of GM leeway in mind, but GMs do need some guidance to create challenges in Journeys, included here and expanded in supplemental materials. Players, just trust that they're not *completely* making this up as they go.

Mage Decks: Mage decks represent enemy powerful NPC spellcasters. Mechanically, they are treated as characters controlled by the GM, and follow most of the same rules governing PCs. However, the GM can break the deck-building rules as they see fit (increase or reduce life total, starting hand, begin with certain cards in play, etc). Further, they can include cards from any set, including Archenemy and Un-sets. Not every challenge scene needs to include one.

NPCs represented with mage decks can perform tasks if the GM desires, although often it works better to simply narrate the result of NPC's action and ask the PCs to perform tasks that react to it. They can travel between planes in the same manner as PCs if narratively appropriate.

Threat Decks: Threat decks are decks of Magic cards that represent groups of enemies, environmental dangers, or other hazards to overcome. They are not treated as characters, and do not have a life total, hand, or normal turn. Each threat deck does have a library, battlefield, graveyard, and exile zone, which players **can** interact with as if the threat deck were a player in a normal game.

Each threat deck has a **DRAW VALUE** (a value from 1 to 7), which is the number of cards it draws and suspends each threat step (see page 15).

Each threat deck also has one or more **CONDITIONS** that PCs can resolve. Example conditions might include: "Remove all of this deck's artifacts," "Suffer no damage from this deck for 3 consecutive turns," or "Kill 10 of this deck's homarids."

After all of a threat deck's conditions have been resolved, remove that threat deck from the scene, along with all of its cards. If a threat deck has multiple conditions, the GM may stack them in an order of their choosing (so only the topmost condition can be attempted by the PCs), present multiple conditions at once (so both can be attempted simultaneously), or both.

Threat Step

The threat step is resolved by the GM once per turn cycle, before the player with the highest initiative result takes their turn. Each threat step, the GM does the following in this order:

Step 1 (Manage Threat Decks): The GM may look at the threat decks and reorder them, if desired.

Step 2 (Remove Time Counters): The GM removes 1 time counter from each suspended card from a threat deck.

Step 3 (Suspend Cards): The GM draws a number of cards from each threat deck equal to its draw value. Then the GM rolls that many d6's (six-sided dice). For each result of 6, the GM plays one of the cards they drew. For each other result, the GM places one of the drawn cards under the d6; that card is suspended with that many time counters.

Step 4 (Threat Deck Main and Attack Phases): The threat decks do a main phase, attack phase, and second main phase for the purposes of their cards in play. During the attack phase, a threat deck should allocate its creatures toward the players as the GM sees fit.

Step 5 (Add or Alter Conditions): The GM can add to or alter a threat deck's conditions as appropriate, especially if the PCs have done something to alter the situation that might narratively remove a condition (even if it hasn't been fulfilled mechanically).

Step 6 (Describe the Situation): The GM narrates to the players what has gone on during the threat step, describing enemies rushing forward, dangers in the distance (those that have been suspended), and generally setting the scene.

Threat Decks and the Rule of Common Sense

Many cards interact oddly with threat decks. For example, Wing Shards causes a player to sacrifice attacking creatures - but the threat deck isn't a player! What happens? In these cases, the GM should interpret generously, not legalistically. The threat deck isn't a player, but it does have attacking creatures and the GM can choose which to sacrifice. Thus, Wing Shards and similar effects should be allowed to work even if they *technically* wouldn't.

Tact Quick-Reference

When a PC attempts a task, consult this list of colors by tact.

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