

# *Arcana*

*Keeper's Guidebook*

# Welcome to Arcana!

This game is designed so that a complete newbie can pick it up and, with a group of two to four friends, start playing within a half hour.

## Setting up

### You will need:

A pen or pencil for each player.  
Note paper  
A deck of Tarot cards.

**To Do:** Read the pages called **How to Play**, **The Ratings**, **The Hunters**, and **Basic Moves** from the Hunter's Guidebook. Read **How to Run a Game** from this book.

**The Keeper** will **create** the adventure according to the Adventure Creation Guide. They will then **shuffle** the tarot deck as much or as little as they like. They will also choose which **Arcana table** they will be using, but will not reveal that to the players.

**The Players** **choose** a role and **create** their hunter. Once their Hunters are built, they will decide how they know one another. They may follow the optional **Team-Building** guide, or determine some other relationship.

## Before the Game Begins

It's important to be on the same page with your players. Have a short discussion about the tone of the game as well as the setting. Take note of their characters' names and any physical or personal details you might want to work into your narration.

# How to Run a Game

## Playing the Game

The basic mechanic of Arcana is very simple. The Keeper will describe a situation, and the Hunters will make a move in response, then reveal one or more cards from the Tarot deck.

## When Players Make a Move:

It's up to you to make sure the action is clear. If a player offers no more than what Move they are taking, ask them how they intend to go about that. If they still aren't able to describe their action, that's OK. Role play doesn't come natural to everyone! Offer them an option or two.

The player will then reveal cards equal to the appropriate rating and make their choice. You will then **read from the moves list** and narrate their relative success or failure. This process repeats throughout the adventure.

## Reading the Cards:

There are two types of information on each card. Some is public, some is known only to you, **First**, the number printed on the card is public information. **Second**, the cards in the Major Arcana will have an additional effect. This effect is secret until the card is chosen.

**When Major Arcana is Chosen**, check your Arcana Table to determine its effect. Take a moment to decide how (or whether) to narrate the effect of the card. **Read aloud from the Arcana Table**, then **read from the moves list** as normal.

## Making Sure the Deck Runs Low

Do not go easy on your hunters. Tension is an important part of the game, and players who feel like they are racing the clock will make decisions they normally wouldn't.

That said, don't force players to draw for things of no consequence or that are impossible to fail.

## By the Numbers:

All the Major Arcana (Face Cards) are marked with a number as well as a name. The number will determine success or failure just like the minor suits, and the name will determine its effects. In a standard game, cards without a number count as a success.

Use the tables below as a reference guide:

### Standard

Cards Numbered 0-5	Failure
Cards Numbered 6-10	Partial Success
11+, Page, Knight, Queen, King	Total Success

### Variants: Higher Difficulty

*The un-numbered cards (Page, Knight, Queen, King) count as partial success instead of a success.*

Cards Numbered 0-5	Failure
6-10, Page, Knight, Queen, King	Partial Success
Major Arcana Numbered 11+	Total Success

### Variants: Inferno

*The un-numbered cards (Page, Knight, Queen, King) count as a failure instead of a success.*

0-5, Page, Knight, Queen, King	Failure
Cards Numbered 6-10	Partial Success
Major Arcana Numbered 11+	Total Success

# The Tarot

**There are 78 cards in your Tarot deck.**

**Failure** is represented 26 times. These cards are the Minor Arcana numbered 1 to 5 of each suit, along with the major arcana numbered 0 to 5.

**Partial Success** is represented 25 times. These cards are the Minor Arcana numbered 6 to 10 along with the Major Arcana numbered 6 to 10.

**Total Success** is represented 27 times. These are Lesser Arcana (Page, Knight, Queen, King) and the remaining Major Arcana numbered 11 and higher.

## Major Arcana

Choose an Arcana Table at the beginning of the game. The instructions given for these will modify gameplay – giving them a narrative twist is fun, but not always sensible. As keeper, how this works is up to you.

## When the Deck Runs Out

Something major will happen – the ritual will be complete, or the Dark One will rise, or some other factor that either moves the story forward or (if it's the final act) ends the game.

If the deck runs out and there are more acts to enjoy, any ongoing effects wear off. Reshuffle the deck and get on with it!

### NOTE:

Some decks have slightly different Lesser Arcana.

The Page is called the **Daughter**

The Knight is called the **Son**

The Queen is called the **Mother**

The King is called the **Father**

## Major Arcana – Standard Table

00	The Fool	Mark an additional experience point. Your Mind Rating is decreased by 1
01	The Magician	Do not mark experience for this Failure. Increase a Rating of your choice by 1
02	The High Priestess	You may discard this card to cancel or remove the effects of any other card
03	The Empress	You may discard this card to cancel or remove the effects of any other card
04	The Emperor	You may discard this card to deal 1 damage to anything.
05	The Hierophant	Mark an additional experience point. Your Ego Rating becomes 1
06	The Lovers	Your Ego rating is increased by 1
07	The Chariot	Your Body Rating becomes 2
08	Strength/Justice	You may discard this card to restore one Rating (of any Hunter) to its original value
09	The Hermit	Your Spirit Rating becomes 2
10	The Wheel of Fortune	Swap your 3 Rating with one of your 1 Ratings. If all your Ratings are 1, choose one to become 3
11	Justice/Strength	Discard this card to heal one damage of any player
12	The Hanged Man	All of your Ratings become 1
13	Death	A doom is upon you. Without intervention, you will die before the end of the night
14	Temperance	All of your ratings become 2
15	The Devil	All of your Ratings become 1
16	The Tower	Take 1 Damage
17	The Star	Take 1 Damage
18	The Moon	Remove 1 Experience
19	The Sun	Your Heart Rating becomes 1
20	Judgment	All of your Ratings become 1
21	The World	Mark Experience in addition to taking a Total Success

# Moves, in Depth

## Narrating a Move

Typically, a game will fall into a sort of rhythm. You will narrate an event or introduce a scene, then a player will want their hunter to take an action. It will be your job to describe the results of that action and how it progresses the hunters through the game. Players will respond to the results, and you to the moves, until a change of scene.

When a Hunter attempts a move, first allow them to reveal their card or cards and determine success or failure. Then read out loud, the text associated with that skill for success or failure. If the chosen card is Major Arcana, determine how the effect will interact with your game, then read out loud from the Arcana Table as well.

**Major Arcana should never turn a Success into a Failure.  
Major Arcana should never turn a Failure into a Success.**

**Note:** All of the moves have an associated Rating. If the player makes a good argument for being allowed to use a different score, exceptions are allowed.

# Act Under Pressure

This covers trying to do something under conditions of particular stress or danger. Examples of acting under pressure are: staying on task while a banshee screams at you; barricading a door before the giant rats catch up; resisting the mental domination of a brain-worm; fighting on when you're badly injured.

If an action doesn't seem to fit anywhere else, it's probably Act Under Pressure.

**Associated Rating:** Heart

- **On a total success** you do what you set out to.
- **On a partial success** the Keeper is going to give you a worse outcome, hard choice, or price to pay.
- **On a failure**, things go to hell.

# Give Aid

When a player **helps another hunter** with a move they are making, they decide how they are doing it and draw for the appropriate rating.

**Note:** If someone is about to suffer harm and another hunter can somehow prevent it, then they can try to protect them with this move.

**Associated Rating:** Varies by action.

- **On a total success** your help grants them +1 card to their draw, and choose an extra effect
  - You suffer little harm (-1 harm).
  - All impending danger is now focused on you.
  - You inflict harm on the enemy.
  - You hold the enemy back.
- **On a partial success** your help grants them +1 card to their draw, but you also expose yourself to trouble or danger. If you're protecting a character, you protect them okay, but you'll suffer some or all of the harm they were going to get
- **On a failure**, you expose yourself to trouble or danger without helping.



## Use Violence

This is used when a hunter is fighting something that's fighting them back.

**Associated Rating:** Body

- **On any success** (i.e., total 6 or more) you inflict harm on (and suffer harm from) whatever you're fighting. The amount of harm is based on the established dangers in the game. That usually means you inflict the harm rating of your weapon and your enemies inflict their attack's harm on you.
- **On a total success**, choose one extra effect:
  - You gain the advantage: For your next draw, you may reveal an additional card or give this advantage to another hunter
  - You inflict terrible harm (+1 harm).
  - You suffer less harm (-1 harm).
  - You force them where you want them.
- **On a failure**, you get your ass kicked instead. You suffer harm without returning the favor.

## Manipulate Someone

A hunter should give their target a reason to cooperate. Once they have given the target a reason, the player should tell them what they want them to do.

**Note:** Manipulation usually doesn't work on things that aren't human.

**Associated Rating:** Charm

- **On a total success** then they'll do it as long as you reward them as promised.
- **On a partial success**, they'll do it, but only if you do something for them right now to show that you mean it.
- **On a failure**, your approach is completely wrong: you offend or anger the target

# Investigate

Anything that might give a Hunter more information about what's going on is fair game for an investigate move.

**Associated Rating:** Mind

**As the keeper,** choose up to five of the following questions that your player may want answered. You may ask the Hunter probing questions that lead you to these choices, or base them on the action taken, or the situation at hand.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>What's my best way in?</i></li><li>• <i>What's my best way out?</i></li><li>• <i>Are there any dangers we haven't noticed?</i></li><li>• <i>What's the biggest threat?</i></li><li>• <i>What's most vulnerable to me?</i></li><li>• <i>What's the best way to protect the victims?</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>What happened here?</i></li><li>• <i>What sort of creature is it?</i></li><li>• <i>What can it do?</i></li><li>• <i>What can hurt it?</i></li><li>• <i>Where did it go?</i></li><li>• <i>What was it going to do?</i></li><li>• <i>What is being concealed here?</i></li></ul>
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- **Total success** The player may ask 3 questions.
- **Partial success** The player may ask 1 question
- **On a failure,** you might misread the situation, or you might reveal tactical details to your enemies (which means the Keeper can ask the questions above of you).

**If a hunter acts on the answers,** they get an additional draw as long as the information is relevant. For example, if they ask for the best way into the monster's lair then they'll get an additional draw while they are infiltrating it. But once they're in, the information doesn't help them anymore.

# Use Magic

When a hunter **Uses Magic**, they should clearly state what they're trying to achieve and how they do the spell before revealing cards.

**Associated Rating:** Spirit

- **On a total success** the magic works without issues: choose your effect.
- **On a partial success**, it works imperfectly: choose your effect and a glitch. The Keeper will decide what effect the glitch has.
- **On a failure**, you lose control of the magic. This never ends well.

By default the magic has one of the effects listed below, lasts for around thirty minutes, and does not expose you to danger, unwanted attention, or side-effects. If there's a glitch that might change.

## Effects:

- Inflict 1 harm
- Enchant a weapon. It gets +1 harm and becomes magical
- Do one thing that is beyond human limitations.
- Bar a place or portal to a specific person or a type of creature.
- Trap a specific person, minion, or monster.
- Evict a spirit or curse from the person, object, or place it inhabits.
- Summon a monster into the world.
- Communicate with something that you do not share a language with.
- Observe another place or time.
- Heal 1-harm from an injury, or cure a disease, or neutralize a poison.

## Glitches:

- The effect is weakened.
- The effect is of short duration.
- You take 1-harm
- The magic draws immediate, unwelcome attention.
- It has a problematic side effect

## The Keeper may require one or more of the following:

- The spell requires weird materials.
- The spell will take 10 seconds, 30 seconds, or 1 minute to cast.
- The spell requires ritual chanting and gestures.
- The spell requires you to draw arcane symbols.
- You need one or two people to help cast the spell.
- You need to refer to a tome of magic for the details.

## **On Combat**

**These are guidelines. Not rules.**

Any small weapon deals 1 damage.

Any large weapon deals 2 damage.

Any magical weapon deals 1 additional damage.

Powerful weapons should come with drawbacks. Discuss these with your players before the game begins.

A standard enemy should deal 1 damage.

A boss should deal 2 damage.

A standard enemy should have 5 hit points.

A Boss should have 10 to 12 hit points.

## **Building An Adventure**

Arcana is a game that lends itself well toward the dark and mysterious side of adventuring. It's suited to everything from ghost stories to eldritch horrors. Using a Tarot deck instead of dice gives an air of mystique to the game – use that to your advantage!

The following pages are meant to guide your adventure, but not intended to put it in a box. If something doesn't work for you, throw it out. If something is missing, add it.

## **The Adventure**

What type of story do you want to tell?

What themes do you want to convey?

Where will the adventure take place? Keep in mind that an inescapable space creates tension.

Who or what will the Hunters face, as their main enemy?

What does it want?

What is its weakness?

What cannot harm it?

Is there some condition that must be met before it is defeated?

List five different areas for the players to explore. This can be anything from a bedroom to an entire hotel floor. Give several of them an additional space to discover, and decide whether or not that space is hidden.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Create three characters for the hunters to encounter. Give them a name, a trait, and a goal. These may be friends or enemies

1.

2.

3.

Create three clues the hunters may encounter along the way. Place them in rooms on the fly, or give them a set location if you want to give players a chance to miss them.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Create three helpful items for the hunters to encounter. As with clues, place them either on the fly or set their location now.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List two or more dangers or traps the hunters might encounter.

- 1.
- 2.

List two or more side-quests or distractions the players might face.

- 1.
- 2.

List three ways the adventure could conclude successfully.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List three ways the adventure could fail.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.