

MERIDIAN

*A Story Game of Journeys
Wondrous and Fantastical*



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Inspirations

- *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll
- *Demon's Souls* and *Dark Souls* by FROM Software
- *Ink* by Jamin Winans et al.
- *Labyrinth* by Jim Henson et al.
- *Mirrormask* by Neil Gaiman
- *Montsegur 1244* by Frederik J. Jensen
- *The Neverending Story* by Michael Ende
- *Silent Hill 2* by Konami
- *The Smoke Dream* by Jackson Tegu
- *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum

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INTRODUCTION

There are journeys that instill in us a sense of wonder and magic as they take us through worlds of imagination and sensual evocation. Whether it's Alice exploring the Wonderland, or Sarah finding her way through the Labyrinth of the Goblin King, their amazing journeys are the heart of these stories. This is a game for three to five daydreamers and explorers of the imagination who will embark on their own journey through a world of kaleidoscopic wonder: *Meridian*.

Meridian is a collection of strange, fantastical, and sometimes unsettling places that exists beyond our own reality. It beckons those who feel powerful emotions or desperate longing. In *Meridian*, places and other inhabitants can be near or far depending on how strongly the Journeyer feels about them. If they are craving the presence of the Regent of Grace, the Scarlet Masquerade might be just around the corner. But if they are filled with guilt and remorse, any road they take might lead them to the Halls of the Harrows. Because of this, each journey only ventures through a few Locales before the Journeyer reaches their intended destination. Each Locale is filled with people and creatures of all kinds, from talking animals to friendly monsters to mythical beings of legend.

One of you will play the central character who makes this journey, and who is called the Journeyer. Another called the Guide will primarily introduce and narrate the wondrous Locales that the Journeyer visits. The remaining players will be in charge of the illustrious people and creatures encountered along the way, and they are known as Touches. If one of those characters should follow along with the Journeyer, a Touch becomes a Companion, now focusing on playing that character.

By the end, the journey will have changed the Journeyer, and they will face a final choice that reflects who they were and who they will become.



PREPARATIONS

Before you gather to play Meridian, the person who will be the Guide should read through this booklet and familiarize themselves with the different Locales that might come up during play.



Each Locale is shown on two large cards, one with a short description, specific Laws of its reality, and Notes and Characters that provide evocative material for scenes set there, and another with the Locale's Nexus (its central figure) and two ways of progressing on the journey.

You don't need to memorize anything about the Locales ahead of time, but the Guide should know what the options are and what kind of mood they provide. They come in three sets:

- **Bumpy Rides**, which includes whimsical places for playing light-hearted and carefree journeys
- **Capricious Festival**, which features sensual, mature, and thematically charged locations
- **Dark Reflections**, which presents more sinister, often gruesome and horrific corners of Meridian

The Locales you visit during a particular journey are chosen by the Guide during play, following the established mood and arc of the journey. For your first game with adults, sticking to the Capricious Festival set is a good bet (and saving the Scarlet Masquerade for last is popular). If you're playing with children or want a less intense game, choose Bumpy Rides instead.

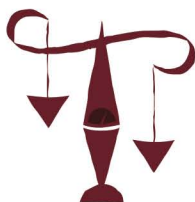
There are also three sets of Cadence cards from which you will assemble your Cadence deck.



You can use just one set (though this might make things tight with more than 3 players), but I suggest mixing two, depending again on the mood you're going for:

- **Quirky Creatures**, which provides suggestions for unusual characters to encounter
- **Fleeting Moments**, which includes prompts for sensual and noteworthy moments
- **Dread and Doubt**, which features creepy and haunting tidbits and characters

You can choose these beforehand or make your selection right after the Prelude to match the mood you've established. For a first game, Fleeting Moments and Quirky Creatures are usually a safe bet. If you're going for something darker, replace Quirky Creatures with Dread and Doubt.



OVERVIEW

The following sections of this booklet guide you through playing the game. Here's an overview of what's ahead.

Each player chooses a role: one Guide, one Journeyer, and the remainder are Touches. In your first game, the Guide is most likely you, the person who's reading this booklet.

Next, the Journeyer creates their character with the help of a set of questions on their first role card, as well as suggestions and feedback from the other players.

As the journey begins, you will play through a Prelude that sets up the Journeyer's background and ends with their transition into Meridian.

The Journeyer then travels to several Locales. This is the main part of the game, during which Touches play Cadences and possibly switch to Companions, the Guide plays the Nexus of each Locale, and the Journeyer picks progressions to move on.

Once they reach the Finale, the Journeyer will have an important decision to make.

Lastly there is a Postlude scene that touches on how the Journeyer's choices have changed them and the characters met along the way.

The last two pages of this booklet called "Summary of a Journey" provide all of the steps involved in playing a complete session in Meridian. You can use them during play as a quick and easy reference of the pertinent rules.



CHOOSING ROLES

Once you get together, the player who will be the Guide introduces everyone else to the game and to Meridian by reading or paraphrasing the Introduction of this booklet, which includes a description of the roles. These are chosen by the players as follows.

One player is the **Guide**, who is in charge of introducing the Locales, answering questions about them, playing the Nexus (the character at the heart of each Locale), and describing the transition between Locales. They should possess knowledge of and access to this booklet to facilitate the game, and they receive three role cards to remind them of what to do in specific circumstances.

Another player chooses to be a **Journeyer** with a specific arc. There are three arcs included in the game: Defiance, Obsession, and Devotion. If this is your group's first game, choose Defiance: it's the arc of an outsider who enters Meridian and traverses it in search of a way home. The Obsession arc describes a Journeyer on a quest for something they desperately seek, and if they are an outsider, they enter Meridian with purpose (but they can also be a citizen of Meridian). Finally, Journeyers of the Devotion arc are citizens of Meridian who seek to save their threatened home Locale. Once the Journeyer chooses their arc, they receive the three associated role cards.

All remaining players are **Touches** and receive a Touch role card each.

After roles have been chosen, place the five **Companion** sets separately on the table. Explain to the Touches that during the exploration of a Locale, they can pick a character that was introduced and trade their Touch card for a set of Companion cards. They acquire the character as their own, and the Companion will accompany the Journeyer henceforth (while other characters usually remain in their Locales). The kind of Companion set chosen reflects the role that the Companion plays on the journey. The role cards describe each one in more detail, and Touches might want to give them a quick look now, to know their choices later on.

PRELUDE

The Prelude establishes the Journeyer and shows us why they are on this voyage. Each Journeyer Prelude card has a set of questions to guide them through this process. The Journeyer should read one question at a time and can answer it themselves, but they are encouraged to seek some input from their fellow players so that everyone is involved. The character created can be a close representation of the actual player, or a very different kind of person, depending on the Journeyer's preferences.

You can play a scene in the daily life of the Journeyer, or you can start with the beginning of their journey. In either case, it's important that we know who the character is and what they're looking for.

During the Prelude, the Guide and Touches can add characters and circumstances to the Journeyer's background. Characters should be meaningful to the Journeyer, but they may or may not be involved in the circumstances that prompt the journey.

You then either play out or describe the start of the journey through Meridian and transition into the first Locale. The Guide takes the lead here. For Journeyers from outside Meridian this usually involves stepping through a portal (like a hidden attic hatch, a strange door in an unexpected place, or a mirror) or following a path that slowly transforms as they get lost along it (a garden or forest turns into the Midnight Conservatory, basement hallways lead to the Mausoleum of Mirrors, alleyways open into the Moonlight Market, and so on).

At the end of the Prelude, assemble the Cadence deck (by shuffling one or more Cadence sets together and putting them face down on the table) and let each Touch draw a hand of three Cadences. Then the Journeyer visits the first Locale of the journey.



LOCALES

Each journey in Meridian leads through several Locales, usually between three and five, according to your time and inclination. You can randomly draw the Locales as you go along, but it's more powerful if the Guide picks them as the theme of the journey develops, or sets them up more specifically for each arc.

The Guide is primarily responsible for the Locales. When a Journeyer enters a Locale, the Guide describes it (reading the description or paraphrasing it) and then reads the Laws aloud. Afterwards, put the Locale card with these items within easy reach of the other players (especially the Touches, for using the Notes and Characters with their Cadences).

To the citizens of Meridian and most people visiting it, the Laws don't seem weird or unusual. Instead, they are taken as granted and instinctively known, much like rules of reality in a dream. The citizens of Meridian cannot break the Laws of a Locale by any means (this includes Journeyers of the Obsession and Devotion arcs). Only a Journeyer of the Defiance arc can break a Law, and only using their special progression.

As the Journeyer moves through the Locale, the Touches will introduce characters based on the Notes and Characters of the Locale and the Cadences in their hand. They play those characters in interaction with the Journeyer. Whenever a Touch weaves the content of a Cadence into the scene, they place the card on the table face up and draw a new one to bring their hand back to three.

Any Touch can claim an established character in the scene and switch to a Companion set. For example, someone narrated that the "lone figure performing for an unappreciative audience" from a Cadence was a raccoon flutist in a tiny tux playing a beautiful melody in the midst of the strained hustle of the Moonlight Market. The player decides that this flutist will be a Companion: they put their Touch card aside, return their hand of Cadences to the top of the deck, pick up the 3 role cards for the Unbound Companion, and narrate how the

flutist befriends the Journeyer. *If ever all Touches become Companions, the Guide will gain a hand of Cadences to play at the Locales.*

When exactly **three** Cadences are on the table, the Guide introduces the Nexus.

Each Nexus has two ways of allowing the Journeyer to progress, which are listed on the second Locale card. The Guide is responsible for making these apparent to the Journeyer through playing the Nexus (you can also let the Journeyer read over the Locale options, so they know exactly what they're choosing). The Journeyer also has a unique progression in their card set that is available at every Locale.

Each progression is listed with a certain symbol. The progression can only be chosen by the Journeyer if there is a Cadence on the table, played by the Touches at this Locale, that matches this symbol. This includes the Journeyer's own progression.

To choose from the available progressions, the Journeyer picks up a Cadence with that symbol from the table and adds it to a Finale stack, which will grow over the course of the journey (this stack will not otherwise be used until the Finale). Then the Journeyer, Guide, and possibly Companions play out the chosen option. The other two Cadences on the table are discarded.

Sometimes a Companion will want to use a progression instead (each Companion can do this once per journey). Just as with the Journeyer, this requires a Cadence matching the symbol on their progression card on the table. In this case, they simply follow the instructions on their progression card. Most of the time, this progresses the journey, with the Companion keeping the Cadence rather than the Journeyer. In other cases, the Companion's action forces the Journeyer to use the progression from their arc or pick something specific from the Locale. This is detailed on each Companion's progression card.



TRANSITIONS

Once you've resolved the progression of a Locale, it's up to the Guide to narrate the transition between the current and the next Locale. Most of Meridian is a sprawling city, which connects the various Locales, so the Guide will often describe moving through alleyways or lonesome roads. Depending on the Locales, the Journeyer (and Companions) might also travel through tunnels, over bridges high in the sky, through sewers, inside a large castle, via pneumatic tubes, or through parks or even wilderness. The mood of the transition should match the connected Locales. Once that transition is complete, start with the description of the new Locale.

FINALE

After playing through several Locales and running close to the end of your available time, or when it seems fitting, you reach the end of the journey. It can take place in the last Locale, in transition out of it, or in a place that the players make up on the spot (and that may only come into existence for this particular moment).

If you have Companions, give them time to interact with the Journeyer at this point, as they cannot follow where the Journeyer goes next. They often have a way of influencing the Journeyer's upcoming decision.

Now the Journeyer makes their final choice. This depends on their arc and is described on their arc's Finale card.

After the risk of the final choice has been determined, the Journeyer, Guide, and Touches each draw a Cadence from the deck and add it to the Finale stack that the Journeyer has accumulated throughout their journey, while Companions follow the instructions on their Finale cards. Afterwards, the Journeyer counts the number of sun symbols in their stack: if there are at least as many as the number of Locales they've visited, the risk comes to pass. Otherwise it does not. Play out the ending to this scene accordingly.

POSTLUDE

You'll play one more scene, or a quick montage, based on the outcome of the Finale. Depending on the type of journey and its outcome, this scene is often set after the Journeyer returns home. Don't worry about tying up all loose ends. This journey does not have to make complete sense or wrap up like a tightly drafted story. Instead, it's the individual moments of experience that matter, and the ways in which the Journeyer was changed overall by the journey.

Some of the Companions might also add tiny scenes or moments of narration, depending on where they ended up.

Thus the game concludes and your journey ends. Hopefully some of its moments will stay with you for a long time.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

You can find answers to frequently asked questions as well as a document laying out advice for advanced techniques, choosing Locales, and more on our website (www.berengad.com).



SUMMARY OF A JOURNEY:

Setup: The Guide reads or paraphrases the Introduction. Each player chooses a role and takes the associated role cards: one Guide, one Journeyer of a specific arc, and the rest Touches. Place the sets of Companions in reach of the Touches.

Prelude: Answer the questions on the Journeyer's Prelude card; optionally play a Prelude scene. Play out how the journey starts. Shuffle together one or more sets of Cadences. Each Touch draws a hand of three Cadences.

The Journey: Play through *Locales* (three to five, depending on time and flow). See the steps to a Locale on the next page.

Finale: Set a scene with the Journeyer's goal within reach and let them interact with any Companions. The Journeyer makes their final choice according to their Finale card. The Journeyer, Guide, and Touches each add a random Cadence to the Finale stack, while Companions follow the instructions on their Finale cards. Afterwards, count the number of sun symbols in their Finale stack. If there are at least as many as the number of *Locales* visited, the risk comes to pass, otherwise it does not.

Postlude: Play a scene or montage in the aftermath of the journey.



PLAYING THROUGH A LOCALE:

1. The Guide selects a Locale and reads aloud its description and Laws. All characters follow the Laws.
2. The Journeyer plays their character exploring the Locale, the Guide elaborates on the Locale, and Touches provide little moments and play characters based on Cadences and the Locale's Notes and Characters.
3. After a Cadence is narrated, place the card on the table face up and draw a replacement for your hand.
4. *Optional:* Any Touch can claim an established character and trade their Touch card for one of the Companion sets.
5. **Once 3 Cadences have been played**, introduce the Nexus.
6. The Guide plays the Nexus in interaction with the Journeyer.
7. The Journeyer chooses a progression from their own card or the Locale by picking one of the Cadences on the table with a matching symbol. The Journeyer adds this card to their Finale stack. The other two Cadences on the table are discarded.
8. *Optional:* Sometimes a Companion uses their progression instead of the Journeyer.
9. The Guide describes the transition to the next Locale (or the Finale, if you're close to done).

