



The Fool's Journey



a storytelling game by Cheyenne Grimes

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The Fool's Journey is a storytelling game based on the 22 Major Arcana cards of a tarot deck. You'll be bidding against the other players to arrange the cards in an order that you think tells a good story. At the end of the game, each player will have a chance to interpret the story in any way they like, telling a tale about the characters, events, and images in the tarot cards.

The Fool's Journey is a storytelling game. It's not quite like a traditional card game, where your focus is on outsmarting and outmaneuvering your opponents – the real goal is to tell an awesome story, so strategy and victory points are just meant to guide you toward that goal. And it's not quite like a traditional roleplaying game – instead of taking control of an individual character, you're aiming to shape the overall story, whatever its characters might be.



What you need to play:

- ☞ One to three of your friends (two to four total players)
- ☞ One tarot deck. Our examples in this rulebook use the Rider-Waite-Smith tarot deck, the best-known classic tarot deck. But you can play the game with any of the thousands of different tarot decks in existence. Your story may come out very differently if you play with a kitten tarot deck versus a zombie tarot deck!
- ☞ A large pool of 6-sided dice (Generally a box of 36 will do)
- ☞ Paper and writing implement, just for note taking as needed

The Journey Track

The Journey Track is the main component of the game. The Journey Track consists of 9 (to start – cards may be added or subtracted) of the Major Arcana cards arranged in a line. As you read from left to right, the cards act as prompts for major events, places, and characters in the story.



The Journey Track

We start the game with The Fool (0) as the first card in the Journey track, and Death (XIII) as the last card. Traditionally, when looking at the story that the Major Arcana tells, it is the tale of The Fool taking a trip that changes their life, in which they meet Death and eventually, through all of these experiences, reach enlightenment.

While the other 7 cards that make up the Journey Track start out random, the gameplay allows players to rearrange, remove, and add cards within the story. You'll use one suit of Minor Arcana cards to bid on making changes to the Journey Track. If you want the Empress to enter the story before the characters reach the Tower, bid to swap those cards around! If you don't

think the Chariot should be involved in the story, bid to remove it altogether! As you bid, you'll gain dice, which you'll roll at the end of the game for victory points. If you want to be the first storyteller to interpret the meaning of the Journey Track, making sure to gain as many dice as possible from bidding should be a priority for you.

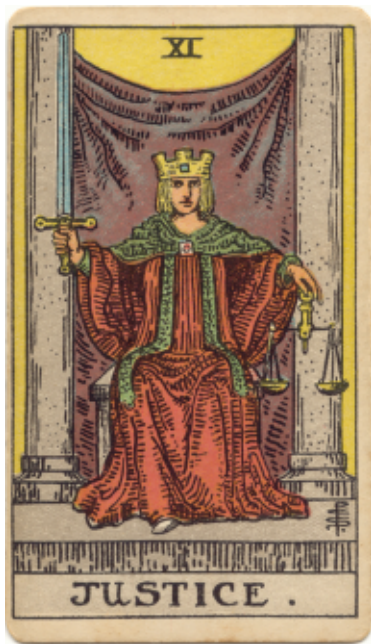
The story you tell doesn't have to be about the Fool. If a more compelling story about The Hermit or The Devil appeals to you, make it happen. Likewise, if you don't want Death to be a part of the story, you can get rid of it. Having 22 cards means this game can tell so many different stories.

Storytelling

The finale of the game is telling the story of the Fool's Journey. Each player will take a turn telling the whole story, using anything from the cards – whether it's the titles, pictures, or meaning of the cards – as prompts. Each story can be completely different. Just because a previous storyteller interpreted a certain card one way, doesn't mean later storytellers have to follow along.

It can be fun to not be the first storyteller, so that you can hear other stories and try to make something entirely different. It is also completely fine to decide to not tell a story, for whatever reason. It is the ultimate goal of the game to come up with your own story, but sometimes, the muse just doesn't strike every time.

One of the best aspects of this game is how different each game will be. Having different players at the table makes for different tales. Also, using different tarot



decks will completely change your game. The Rider-Waite-Smith tarot deck will be where most people start, due to it being one of the most well known decks, but I encourage you to play with different decks. With so many options out there, this game can take on whatever tone suits you.

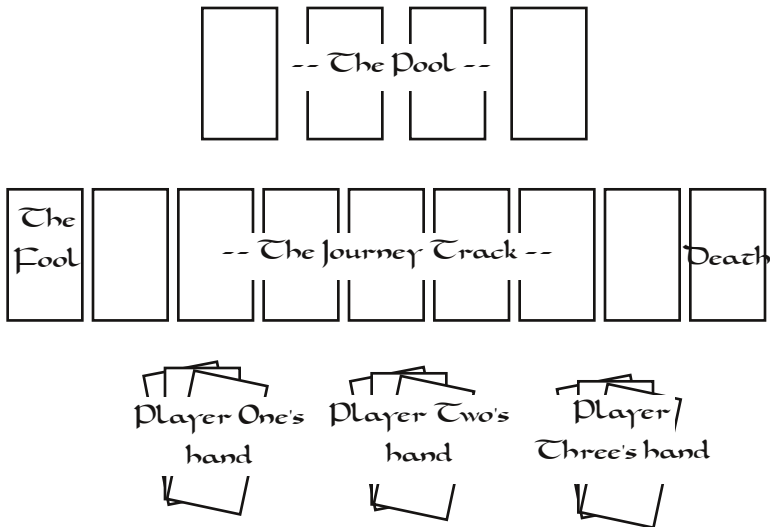
How to Play

Initial setup

Pull The Fool (0) and Death (XIII) out of the deck and place them beside each other, with some space in between, on the table. Shuffle the rest of the Major Arcana cards (the ones with no suit and names like The Chariot and The Moon) and make a stack of 7 cards near the Fool and Death. Place others to the side for now.

Separate the Minor Arcana cards by suit. Give one suit of cards to each player. The entire set of 14 forms the player's hand.

Example setup for a three-player game



Phase I

In the first phase, players will be creating the initial Journey Track. Taking turns, each player draws one card and places it somewhere between the Fool and Death. The cards may be moved on either side of placed cards except the Fool and Death – those two must remain end caps. Once those 7 are placed, draw additional cards from the stack of Major Arcana equal to the number of players + 1, and place them face up above the Journey Track to form the “pool.” Each player takes a turn either replacing a card in the Journey Track with one from the pool (discarding the card from the Journey Track) or discarding one of the pool cards. Every time a card is taken from the pool, replenish it with one from the stack.



Phase II

Next, the bidding system starts. Each player has one of the suits of the minor arcana (cups, wands, daggers, pentacles). There will be 14 cards (1-10, Page, Knight, Queen, and King) in each suit. These will be used to further rearrange the cards in the Journey Track, to produce the story that each player wants to tell.

On their turn, a player announces which card in the Journey Track they'd like to change (the “target card” for this turn), and places one card from their hand face-down on the table as their bid. The target card cannot be Death or the Fool unless the player is using a face card (see below).

Going around the table, each player has a chance to make a counter-bid,



also placing one card face-down on the table. When the bidding reaches the initial player, that player may add another card to their bid if there have been any counter-bids made. Bidding then continues around the table. Bidding ends when one player adds a card to their bid and no other players wish to increase their bid. Players may only increase their bids one card at a time.

Players may declare or discuss their intentions when making a bid. That is, someone may say “I’m bidding on the High Priestess because I want to move her down the line to the spot right after

the Star.”

Once bidding is finished, all players who placed bids reveal the cards they bid and count up their value. Number cards count for their face value, and face cards are worth 11 (Page), 12 (Knight), 13 (Queen) and 14 (King). The player with the highest bid wins the turn. If there is a tie, the winner is the player with the single highest card among those in the tie. If there is still a tie, roll a die to decide.

The winner may make one of the following changes to the Journey Track.

- ☞ Move the target card to a different place in the Journey Track, sliding all other cards left or right to make room. The target card cannot be moved into the very first position (before the Fool) or the very last position (after Death) unless the player used a face card (see below).
- ☞ Swap the target card with a card from the pool, placing the new card in the same position in the Journey Track, and placing the card taken from the Journey Track into the pool.
- ☞ Do nothing. Sometimes a player will be bidding defensively to stop another player from messing up an important bit of their story. Other

times a player may bluff that they're going to move a card just to bait the other players into wasting cards bidding against them. Regardless of the reason, it is permissible for a player to use their winner status to preserve the status quo in the Journey Track.

If the winning player has used a face card (Page, Knight, Queen, King) as part of their bid, they may also do one of the following moves:

☞ Move or swap the Fool or Death. Because the Fool and Death are so important to the traditional tarot story, they're a bit tougher to manipulate in this game. A winning bid that targets the Fool or Death and includes a face card allows the winning player to perform a normal "move" or "swap" on that card (as described above). This restriction applies regardless of where in the Journey Track the Fool and Death are located. If the winner of a bid targeting the Fool or Death does not include any face cards, the player may not make any changes to the Journey Track.

☞ Move a target card to the other side of the Fool or Death. Other cards can't hop past the Fool or Death unless the winning player has a face card in their bid. This restriction applies regardless of where in the Journey Track the Fool and Death are located. That is, if part of the Journey Track goes Chariot–Fool–Moon, and the bid targets the Moon, the winner could only move that card to the front – creating the sequence Moon–Chariot–Fool – if they used a face card.

☞ Remove a card from the game. Ordinarily, when a player swaps a card in the Journey Track for one in the pool, the old card goes into the pool, ready to be brought back later by another player who wanted that card in the story. However, if a player has a face card in their bid, they may elect to remove a card in



the Journey Track from the game entirely. (This will make the Journey Track one card shorter.)

When a player makes their first bid on a given turn, they take a die. The player who wins the bid takes an additional die. These dice are kept by each player, for use in the final phase.

Phase III

The final phase of the game begins when one player has used up all 14 of their Minor Arcana cards in bidding. Finish out that bid and let the winner make their desired change to the Journey Track.

Now, each player takes their dice accumulated from bidding and rolls them, then counts up the total value of all their dice. This is their total victory points. Whoever has the highest score gets the honor to be the first story teller.

In order of most victory points, each player takes a turn telling the story that they see in the cards in the Journey Track. The player may use any aspect of a card – the title, the picture, its traditional tarot meaning, or anything else – as a prompt. But they must incorporate something from each card, and they must use the cards in order along the Journey Track. The story should have a beginning, middle, and end. A good story will usually raise some sort of conflict, then show how that conflict either is resolved or tragically backfires on the characters. The style of the tarot deck can help to shape the genre of the story, but that is not required -- you can use a traditional medieval-style tarot deck to tell a science fiction story, or vice-versa!

A player may take inspiration or ideas from a previous player's story, but they do not have to. Each story can be completely different!

The game ends when all players have had a chance to tell a story based on the Journey Track.

Example Stories



Here are a set of a stories that could be told with this Journey Track.

"The Devil and the Fool Were Lovers"

Once upon a time the DEVIL was wandering in the wilderness, where he came upon the FOOL. Though the Devil usually likes to torment people, in this case he took pity on the Fool and befriended him. Their friendship grew until the two of them became LOVERS. They decided to go to the TOWER, where they would be able to get married. However, the HIEROPHANT in the tower did not approve of their romance, and so he gave them a task. He said, "if you can move the moon in the sky, I will believe your love is true, and allow you to get married." At first the Devil and the Fool were upset, but then the Fool said "our great love gives us the STRENGTH to do anything, even move the MOON!" However, this proved a tougher job than they bargained for. While trying to gain leverage to move the moon, the Devil and the Fool accidentally moved the whole WORLD. This caused widespread chaos and many people died. The Fool was ashamed of what he had done, and he ran away to be a HERMIT for the rest of his life.

— Stentor Danielson

"The Man in the Bowler Hat"

A man walks into a bar. He's tall – too tall – and he stoops to get through the door. The man wears a bowler cap and a DEVILish grin. He's come to collect on a debt tonight. The bar is vacant, but for a few scattered patrons. At the far end of the room a drunk nobody (FOOL) laughs at his own joke, mumbling a story to everyone that no one hears. The LOVERS in the corner lend him a venomous glare before returning to each other's eyes.

The bar is dark – too dark – lit by the ambient glow of the TOWER Motel's neon sign across the street. The sign flashes blue, then red, then blue again. "We Never Close. We Never Close."

They tried to clean this place up once but that was a long time ago. No gods, no holy men (HIEROPHANT), no law anymore. Now, the patrons here are tired. When the man in the hat comes to collect not a one has the STRENGTH to say no.

The nobody at the far end of the room stops laughing. He looks to the window but can't see the MOON beyond the glow of the neon sign. He wonders for a moment about every part of the WORLD he's never seen. The man in the hat gestures and the nobody stands. They leave the bar together, alone (HERMIT).

— *Hannah Shaffer*

"A Way to Defy Angels"

One day, while the DEVIL spied on the goings-on of humans (for this was his favorite pastime), he saw a beautiful youth (FOOL) in a flowered tunic, out enjoying the lovely morning with his dog. Lust grew in the devil's heart, for while he had seen LOVERS strolling together with the blessings of angels upon them, he had never before known the feelings that caused lovers' eyes to soften and their cheeks to blush when they looked at

each other. The devil was jealous, for he knew the angels would scorch the land with lightning (TOWER) before they would allow him happiness, but now that he had a taste of love, he wanted more.

So the devil hid within the headdress of the wisest priest in the land (HIEROPHANT), and he listened carefully to his pontificating and homilies, seeking a way to be with his love. But when he discovered the priest had sworn off carnal love and laid with no one, the devil scoffed at the priest's claim to wisdom and flew away. The devil found a holy woman in the wilderness, who could calm the wildest beast (STRENGTH), so the devil turned into a lion and suffered her caresses, for surely the holy woman knew more of love than the wise priest. But the holy woman had also forsaken the company of others, and the devil shook himself in disgust at her folly and ran away.

He turned into a scorpion and gazed at the MOON, yearning for help, for the moon took pity on all the odd creatures that howled to her at night. Yet she had no wisdom for the devil and remained silent, so he traveled the WORLD over, shifting from man to bird to every beast of the field in search of a way to be with his love. And so the devil still travels the world in disguise, with only a lantern to light his way (HERMIT), as he searches for the boy he loves, and a way to defy angels.

— *Sarah Richardson*

Credits

Game concept and design: Cheyenne Grimes

Cover art and layout: Stentor Danielson

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This is an "Ashcan" version of the game – a basic, low-priced edition to get the word out. We'd love any feedback you have, or just to hear the stories you came up with while playing. Follow us on Facebook or Twitter to hear more about our products – including a crowdfunding campaign for a deluxe edition of this game and a new fully-illustrated tarot deck, the Map Tarot, by Stentor Danielson.



The Fool's Journey is a storytelling game based on a deck of tarot cards. Nine of the Major Arcana cards form a story waiting to be told. Bid against the other players to rearrange the cards into the story you want. Then use the cards as prompts to tell the tale of the Fool (or another character). Try the game with different tarot decks for different stories and different experiences. There is no end to the stories waiting in The Fool's Journey.

All you need to play is this instruction book, two to four players, a bunch of 6-sided dice, and any deck of tarot cards.

