

PRAXIS  
ARCANUM





# PRAXIS ARCANUM

TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING GAME

Beta Version 0.3.1

## CONTENT

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PLAYING  
PRAXIS  
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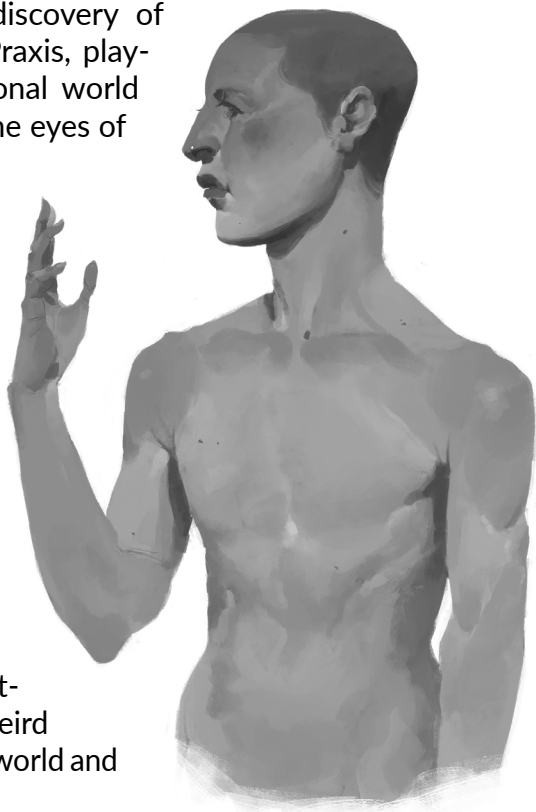
# What is Praxis Arcanum?

Praxis Arcanum is a game about designing a troubled world you want to explore, and discovering a single character through play. Build a deck of cards that represents your character's growth. When your actions define you, who will you become?

Praxis is a deckbuilding roleplaying game focused on cooperative discovery of character and setting. In Praxis, players create a troubled fictional world they will explore through the eyes of a character that hasn't yet come into their own. Who that character becomes depends on each character's choice of actions.

Praxis starts by collaboratively designing a custom world featuring an abnormal power called **The Weird**. The Weird can range from mutant superpowers, to elements of magic, to the existence of paranormal entities. Whatever you decide it is, the Weird has significantly shaped the world and the characters within it.

Stories told in Praxis range from misfit mutants fighting oppression in a world of water-hoarding oligarchs, to leading educational reform for teaching wild magic in a society where magic is heavily regulated. You play to discover your character's changing personalities, abilities, and desires through their actions.





# The System

Praxis is best enjoyed with 2 to 6 players, with one taking on the role of Game Master (GM). The GM acts as the facilitator of the game, and manages the GM Deck which contains the setting elements. Every other player will make up the Cast, each taking on the responsibility of managing an individual Player Character (PC) and their respective Character Decks.

Each deck will be written on with important elements to the characters or setting respectively. New cards are added to the deck to reflect the players' exploits and discoveries.

The most important elements of each PC's evolving identity are called **Praxes**. These features are permanently written down individually on playing cards of different suits. Each suit corresponds to a distinct personality trait. Together, these cards create a deck that represents the PC, changing and growing through gameplay.

A single session of sitting down to play Praxis Arcanum is called an **Episode**, and multiple episodes comprise a **Season**. A single Season of Praxis Arcanum is intended to last approximately 8-10 Episodes.

Before the first Episode, there is a world-building and character-creation session called **Episode Zero**, where the players will define the world with the guidance of a questionnaire. This is also where players start to define their PCs by creating their first few Praxes and where they establish the Goal of the Cast.



## Stories Told in Praxis Arcanum

Praxis encourages stories about self-discovery. The themes and mechanics of the game revolve around effecting change in a weird world and seeing how each character develops and adapts to their circumstances. Ideally, each new story would encourage players to answer the question “What does that say about you?”

LESS FUN FOR PRAXIS	MORE FUN FOR PRAXIS
Characters with predefined roles or archetypes: Praxis has no classes, each character starts off equal in all respects.	Getting to see your character grow: Experience is gained from each action taken, defining your character’s niche as you play.
Characters with rigid code of living: Praxis involves constant growth, and aspects of your initial character will be developed and challenged along the way.	Characters open to improvising and adapting: Where the story takes them may not be where they thought to end up, or who they wanted to become.
Players who want specific hit locations and damage numbers: Praxis has abstracted character aspects; no number tracking.	Players who are interested in interpreting the results: Each card is up to interpretation for what tells the best story.

All characters are intentionally designed to be equal, mechanically and socially. It is important to remember that the Character Deck does not define the entire character, just the mechanical essentials. While not necessary for play, players can feel free to explicitly define the appearance, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, physical ability, and other qualities of their characters if these are themes that they would like to explore.

# Setting Up

Starting a new game involves one deck of cards to each player. The GM uses the A to 5 of each suit to make the GM Deck. The Cast use the A to 3 of each suit to make each Character Deck.

Each player must have a standard playing card deck of 54 cards they are prepared to destroy or mark up. Players should use permanent markers to write on the faces of their cards. A custom deck box will help each player track their progression.



Players will split their deck of cards in two: GMs will have the **GM Arcana** and the **GM Reserve** whereas the other players will have **Character Deck** and the **Experience Queue**.

The cards in the GM Arcana track of the various aspects of the setting. The value of cards from this pile will represent the strength of forces opposing the Goal of the Cast. The GM will draw cards from the GM Arcana whenever players attempt a challenging action. Starting GM Arcana decks contain the A through 5 of each suit, but more cards will be added as the Season goes on.

The GM Reserve is made up of all the other cards and can be put away until new cards need to be added to the GM Arcana.

The Character Deck contains the A to 3 of each suit, and represents the thoughts and actions that motivate each character. Like the GM Arcana, it will be permanently written on. The Experience Queue contains the other cards, separated first by suit into four piles, and then placed in ascending order (i.e. 4 through K of each suit). Through play, cards will move off the top of the various piles of the Queue and be added into the Character Deck.

# The Player Deckbox

The player's **Deckbox** will help each player organize the components of the game for each Episode. The Deckbox:



- Holds the **Character Cards**, which represent everything the character is, was, and will be.

- Has a **card tracker** on the back to record the cards you have added to your Character Deck, and remembering the bonuses those cards enable.

- Is **yours**, so personalize it with the character's name, drawing, and other decorations.



# Zones of Play

During play, each player will need a bit of table space to lay out some cards in different zones.

(1) The **Character Hand** is the set of cards a player works with to perform actions. These cards are kept in the player's hands. Players controlling new characters start with 3 cards in hand.

(2) Cards are played from the Hand to the **Discard**. This pile of cards represents how fatigued a Character has become. This pile should be face-up, in front of the player. The player can always look through the Discard and rearrange or organize the cards.

(3) Once cards are played from the Hand, players will draw new cards from the **Character Deck**. This pile of cards should be face-down, within easy reach. While players can't look through the deck, they can count the number of cards left.

(4) During play, some cards may be **Removed** from the Character Deck. Keep these in the Deckbox for easy future access. Removed cards are placed back into the Character Deck at the end of each Episode. The two Jokers and any deck inserts can also be kept here.

(5) The **Experience Queue** is an area containing the next card in ascending order of each suit to be added to the Character Deck. For setting up play with new characters, the Queue will contain the four 4s of every suit.

(6) Remember to place other supplies, like permanent markers and the X-Card within easy reach of all players.

# Etiquette of Play

Roleplaying games, by their nature, can simulate events and interactions in the real world that aren't always pleasant. These guidelines are intended to maximize the fun of all players at the table. Many groups have their own etiquette (i.e. don't leave a party member behind, no cell phones at the table, etc.). Groups are encouraged to discuss, adopt, or edit the following etiquette recommended for Praxis Arcanum:

- **Respect each other.** Give everyone your attention and acceptance.
- **Share the spotlight.** Care about everyone's ideas and build off their creativity.
- **Let everyone play.** Maintain and encourage the agency of each player.

## WORDS OF HATE

Hatred between people is a common source of conflict and drama that may arise in play. If players feel that communicating hate in the context of gameplay is necessary, they should be attentive to the words they use in doing so, however made-up that hate might be.

In place of using slurs in speech, they should consider narrating the conflict situation in the third person, indicating in a neutral way if something hateful is said. For example, "They are angry upon sight of you and immediately use a derogatory term or slur to refer to you."

# Safety Mechanics

Since Praxis is a thematically open game, safety mechanics are included to ensure that everyone at the table can be comfortable in the content of the game.

## LINES AND VEILS

During Episode Zero, define your Lines and Veils. **Lines** are themes that have a no-tolerance policy at the table. Some Lines to consider could be sexual violence or harm to dependents. **Veils** are used for subjects that can be present and called by their name, but the details aren't discussed and are left "behind the curtain". Examples of Veils to discuss are substance abuse or death.

## X-CARD

It is also recommended to use an **X-Card**. The X-Card is a physical card with an "X" drawn on it. It is placed at the center of the table, within reach of all players. If a topic arises that is upsetting for anyone at the table or makes them uncomfortable for any reason, they can simply touch the X-Card to signal that they would like to move on, no questions asked.

# Playing the Game

Each session of Praxis is an Episode, with a single Goal. Whether or not that Goal is reached, the repercussions of the Episode are carried forward via being recorded on one or more cards of the GM Arcana.

## Episode Zero

Before the first Episode, all players will contribute to building the setting in which the game will take place by collaboratively answering the **Worldbuilding Questionnaire**. Answering the questionnaire will generate a completely custom, supernatural setting and define the key elements in the game. This includes establishing the “The Weird”, situating each character’s place in the world, and identifying the party’s greater Goal.

It is recommended that everyone who intends to play the campaign be present for this session, so that they can contribute to the world.

## Setting an Objective

Each Episode, including Episode Zero, ends with players deciding on the party’s **Objective** for the next Episode. These objectives should be a smaller step towards realizing the **Goal** of the party. Record the Objective on one of the blank cards of the GM Arcana.

For example, the Objective to track down the government’s rogue telepathic spy might further the overall Goal of protecting the safety of telepaths. The Objective of stealing a cargo freighter carrying a shipment of medical equipment might fit a Goal of establishing a community away from the tyrannical Baroness.

Whenever players are ready to end the Season, their last Objective is to complete their Goal.



## Episode 1+

During an Episode, players drive the narrative forward by taking **Actions** towards achieving their Objective. It is important to note that both success and failure move the story forward, result in experience points for the player, and ultimately resolve the Objective – for better or worse.

The Episode ends when the players have resolved their Objective. Since the Objective of the Episode was previously written on one card of the GM Arcana, that card now represents the outcome and consequences of the Episode's Objective.

At the end of each Episode, players can also write down other important aspects of the setting that were defined through play to other cards within the GM Arcana.

## Epilogue

At the conclusion of the final Episode of the Season, players may choose to play through an Epilogue. The players revisit each card of the GM Arcana, one at a time, and describe the fallout of their actions for the immediate future of the world. This Epilogue may be the seed of future Seasons of Praxis.



# RULES FOR PLAY

# Characters: Who Are You?

Each suit corresponds to a character aspect: Clubs to Body, Hearts to Heart, Diamonds to Mind, Spades to Weird. A Praxis is a special ability written on a card. New cards are gained through playing suited cards.

Games of Praxis Arcanum will focus on how characters change as a result of the decisions they make. What would they sacrifice to save the environment? Would they rather stay true to their values or save their friends from harm? Characters are defined by four core aspects, each corresponding to a suits of cards and broad categories of actions they might take.



## Aspect Clubs: Body

Skills, Tools, Force

The physical self: reflexes, tools, and trained skills. A character would use their Body to force their way through situations.



## Aspect Hearts: Heart

Relationships, Passions, Expression

The emotional self: relationships, values, and means of expression. Heart confers strength through the ability to empathize with others.



## Aspect Diamonds: Mind

Facts, Reasoning, Intuition

The rational self: facts, intuition, and deductive reasoning. The Mind is used to think one's way through a problem.



## Aspect Spades: Weird

Superpowers, Magic, Occult

The supernatural self: how the Weird has shaped the character, making them better able to both wield it and understand it.

# The Cards

Each card of the Character Deck has a suit relating to the aspect and a number indicating its strength. Starting Character Decks contain the Ace, 2, and 3 of each suit with new cards added and removed through action.

If the Character Deck represents the total set of important aspects and thoughts that make up a character, then the **Character Hand** is their current state of mind and represents the thoughts the character is ready to use. Starting characters will draw three (3) cards from the Character Deck to make their Character Hand.

## PLAYING CARDS

Whenever a character takes an Action in a way that has a significant risk, they will play cards from their hand. The strength of the Action is equal to the number on the card played. The suit indicates what aspect of the character is being used to try solving the problem.

Cards are played to the Discard, a space which represents the spent mental and physical energy of the character. Whenever cards are played, the player can draw back up to their starting Hand size.

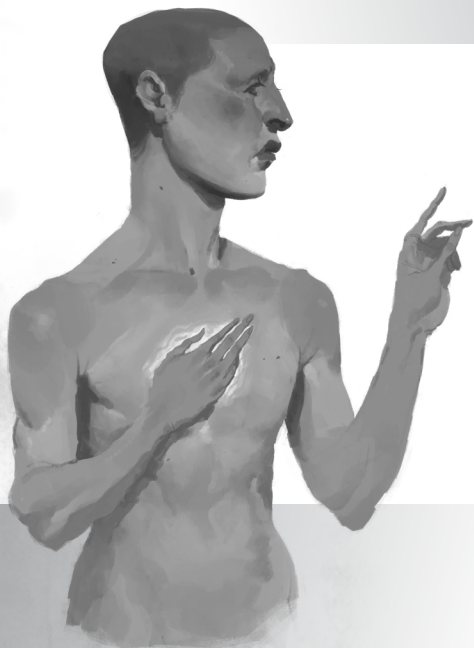
These cards are like your character's thoughts. As they are played, the thoughts are manifested, allowing that type of thought grow, become stronger and gain experience from each success and failure.

Through enacting them, new thoughts can become Praxes: intrinsic parts of the character's identity. Enabling a pattern of similar thoughts makes it easier for characters to overcome challenging tasks.

# BODY



Reflexes and skills acquired through training. A character's physicality is used to force their way through situations. These are represented by Clubs cards.



# HEART



Emotional connections and values. Characters who passionately espouse their values are better able to relate and empathize. These are represented by Hearts cards.



**MIND**



The facts and reasonings retained by the character. Characters who train their rational selves are better able to deduce or intuit information. These are represented by Diamonds cards.

**WEIRD**



The strange, paranormal, or magical element. Those who delve deeper into their Weird selves are better able to wield it, whether to channel, employ, or simply know of it. These are represented by Spades cards.



# Praxis

As characters grow through play, some cards of the Character Deck will have text written on them, called a Praxis. This is custom, unique feature about the character that underlies an important part of their identity. By the end of Episode Zero, each player will have written down the first four Praxes for their character, one for each aspect.

Whenever a character plays a card from their hand without a Praxis, a player may commit part of their character's identity to a card. This involves the player writing a fact or ability that has become an intrinsic part of their character on the card. Each suited aspect has a broad category of Praxes that it encompasses.



## Skills & Equipment

Ex: Lockpicker; Trusty spatula

Defining tools and equipment, or specially trained skills.  
What equipment has gotten you out of a jam in the past?



## Relationships & Morals

Ex: Fights injustice; Desire to be loved

Important relationships with others, ways to relate with others, or beliefs. What spurred you to act towards your Goal?



## History & Knowledge

Ex: Medical sterilization; Bird fanatic

Personal background and understanding of the logical world. What did your upbringing teach you?



## Special Abilities & Weird Knowledge

Ex: Turns into flame; Telepathy

The personal connection to abilities granted by the Weird. What happened the first time you wielded the Weird?



## Adding Cards

Regardless of outcome, each Action that is taken rewards the acting character with **Experience**. Experience is marked on the top card in the Experience Queue of the same suit as the Action taken.

For example, if the 2 of Spades is played for an Action, the character is taking a “Weird” Action, and would note a tick of experience on the Spade card in the Experience Queue. For starting characters, this would be the 4 of Spades.

Experience is marked on the front face of the card with a small symbol that you will recognize, like a tally mark or check mark. Once any card gains Experience equal to the number on the card itself, that card is immediately added to the Character Hand, and the next card of the same suit is revealed from underneath it in the Experience Queue.

In the example above, once the 4 of Spades had 4 experience marks, it would move from the Experience Queue to the Character Hand. The 5 of Spades would then be revealed as the top Spade card in the Experience Queue.

## Deck Box Perks

Players should mark off each new card added to the Character Deck on their Deckbox. Once enough cards of the same suit have been added, that character gets benefits, as noted on the Deckbox.



### Resist

Keep a card instead of discarding

A number of times per Episode, as you play an Action or Motif, keep one card in hand instead of Discarding it.



### Help

Play a Hand card to add Strength

A number of times per Episode, play a card from your hand to add its Strength to any player's Action. You do not gain Experience.



### Hold

Hold extra cards in hand

The maximum number of cards held in the Character Hand is permanently increased (from 3 to a maximum of 6).



### Swap

Exchange cards with any player

Until end of the Episode, exchange one card in your hand with a random card from ANY player's Hand, Deck, or Discard (including the GM).

## USING PERKS

Whenever a player uses a Perk, they can simply state it to the other players at the table. Players are encouraged to explain the action narratively, for example, how they use their card to help their friend.



# BODY

A	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Resist	0		1		2		3		

Keep a card instead of discarding.



# HEART

A	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Help	0		1		2		3		

Play a Hand card to add Strength.



# MIND

A	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Hold	0		1		2		3		

Hold extra cards in hand.



# WEIRD

A	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Swap	0		1		2		3		

Exchange cards with any player.

# Play Structure

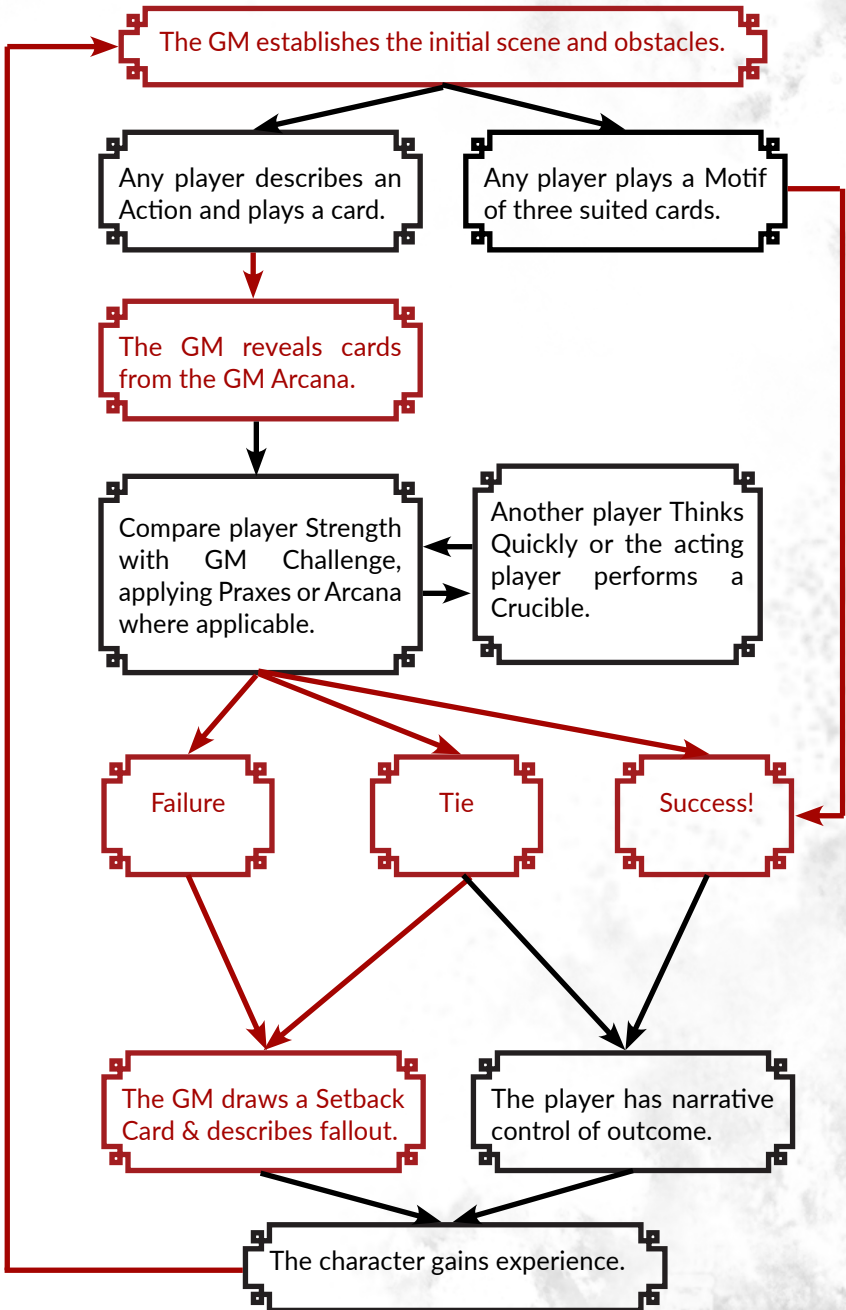
The GM facilitates the story until players choose to take action, typically by playing a card in a relevant suit to their action. The GM then reveals cards from the GM Deck, and compares the sum of cards following suit to determine the outcome. Praxes, Setbacks, and Thinking Quickly can modify the outcome.

Episodes focus on the players working towards the Objective they set at the end of the last Episode. Throughout, the GM sets the scene, describes the environment, and reveals any number of obstacles that are in the way between the players and their Objective.

Players may then describe what their characters do towards overcoming the obstacles or advancing the plot. This is usually resolved by either taking an Action or by consuming a Motif.

Praxis has no fixed turn order, which means anyone can act at any time. It is the responsibility of all players to make sure that everyone has equal opportunity to contribute to the narrative. The GM in particular is encouraged to act as the mediator for action.

# Flowchart of Play Structure



## Actions

When a player wants to do something where their success is highly consequential, or where the chance of failure is high, the player must take an Action. The player then selects and plays one card from their Hand to the Discard.

The most appropriate suit depends upon the narrative approach described by the player: clubs for physical actions, diamonds for rational, hearts for emotional, or spades for weird. The most appropriate suit will be called the Action Suit. If the suit of the chosen card matches the Action Suit, then the Action gets a **Strength** equal to the number on the card played. Cards of other suits will have a Strength of 0.

Based on how difficult the GM perceives the Action to be, they assign a difficulty number. Generally, 4 is average difficulty, lower numbers are easier, and higher numbers are harder. The GM then shuffles, draws, and reveals cards from the top of the GM Arcana equal to the difficulty. Revealed cards matching the Action Suit are summed together to create the **Challenge**.


The Strength of the character's Action is compared to the Challenge. If the Action Strength is greater than the summed total, the character succeeds in their Action. If it's strictly less than the total, they fail. Whenever the totals are exactly even, the result is a Draw: succeeding, but at a cost.

- **Success.** When players are successful in their Actions, they are rewarded with the ability to narrate the outcome.
- **Failure.** In failure, the GM narrates the fallout, and receives a Setback card.
- **Tie.** Both Success and Failure happen, in that order.
- **In every case,** the characters learn from their Actions and can gain Experience for their attempts.

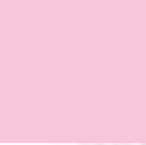
## SUCCESS

The character succeeds in the Action! Ask the controlling player to narrate the ensuing Actions taken by their character. The success should relate back to the task that was attempted so as to not overstep what is reasonable in the fiction.

Players should keep the outcomes reasonably relevant to the task at hand. If they're trying to hide in a closet, succeeding in keeping quiet is okay, but it's less okay to have that closet lead to an alternate magical dimension.



That's the Ace of Clubs, the 2 and 4 of Spades, and the 5 of Hearts. Ooh, close one! Using your Praxis doubled your Strength from a 3 to a 6; just enough to pass the Challenge!




Nice! I think the councilwoman confides that she's personally invested because her family member just got into home rehab and needed the funding.

## FAILURE



The character fails in the Action! The GM narrates how the forces that oppose the player actively prevent their moving forward. In order to fail in a satisfying way, it's important to show how there are other agents who are being active in preventing the character's intent.

If there is no clear way to show how, try looking at the cards that were revealed in flipping up the GM Arcana. Let the suit inform what kind of unexpected challenges are present. For example, if some of the cards are Hearts, this could be interpreted as an emotional turmoil – maybe the team was let down by someone they trusted.



That's the Ace of Clubs, the 2 and 5 of Hearts, and the 4 of Spades. Yikes, a loss! I draw a Setback. I get to decide the consequences.

Hmm, maybe the councilwoman is upset with me for prying into her personal affairs?




Good idea, but I'm going to add a twist. Let's say she's upset because she thinks you could have done more to help.



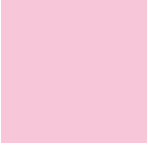

## TIE

The character succeeds in their Action but causes trouble elsewhere! The controlling player must think of how they succeeded, but also work with the GM to describe added trouble towards the team's path to success. The GM can take the top card of the GM Arcana and add it to their hand to represent a Setback.



That's the Ace of Clubs, the 2 and 4 of Hearts, and the 5 of Spades. That's a tie! I draw a Setback. You get to narrate the success, and I'll add a complication.

Nice! I think the councilwoman confides that she's personally invested because her family member just got into home rehab and needed the funding.



The complication is that you notice her PA system was left on the entire time! The whole council now knows the councilwoman's secret.

# Modifying the Action Result

## WITH A PRAXIS

HOW IT WORKS	EXAMPLE
<p>When playing a card for an Action, a Praxis written on the card may be used to lend extra Strength to the Action. Whenever the Action is something that is directly aided by the relevant Praxis, then the Strength conferred by that card is doubled.</p>	<p>Alex has a Praxis “Rock climbing expert” written on the 2 of Clubs. When Alex tries to rock climb along a wall to the other side of a chasm, they could play the 2 of Clubs and get their normal Strength of the card (2) doubled (to a 4) from incorporating the Praxis.</p>

## WITH A GM ARCANA

HOW IT WORKS	EXAMPLE
<p>The GM Arcana has cards with text written on them called Arcana. Arcana usually represent the forces in the world, natural or otherwise, that are important hazards for players. During Actions, when a card with an Arcana is revealed, the GM can determine whether or not this Arcana applies to the given situation. If it does, the Challenge added from that card is doubled.</p>	<p>The 4 of Clubs has the Arcana “Frozen Earth”. When Alex is using their bare hands to rock climb across the wall, they are coming in contact with Frozen Earth. When the 4 of Clubs comes up during that Action, the GM might interpret this as a brutally frigid wall. The normal Challenge of the card (4) would then be doubled (to an 8), making the task very challenging.</p>

## THINKING QUICKLY

Players other than the active player can help tip the balance of an Action by **Thinking Quickly**. This involves another player revealing and discarding the top card of their Character Deck. If the card is of a suit that matches the Action Suit, the value of their card is added to the Active Player's total Strength. Each player can only Think Quickly once per Action.

## CRUCIBLE

Sometimes, one can only grow from recognizing their own failing. Once per Episode, a character can choose to undergo a **Crucible** when they would fail an Action.

First, they must choose a Praxis they possess in hand (of any suit) and tear that card apart immediately. They must describe how their character is leaving behind that part of their identity to grow and change. If they do, they can add the Strength of that Praxis one last time to their Skill, no matter the suit.

This powerful action may change the result of the skill check from a failure to a success if their total strength is now greater than the strength of the GM cards.

## Setbacks

When a character Ties or Fails an Action, the GM must draw a Setback Card from the GM Arcana. These setbacks represent unwanted consequences that could befall the party. There are three ways in which the GM could use Setback cards:

- **Harm.** The GM immediately plays the Setback card and the player must Remove all cards of the suit from their Hand. Removed cards are returned to the Character Deck at the end of the Episode.
- **Challenge.** The GM keeps the card in hand and plays it as another Action is happening. The number value is added to the Challenge of the test, no matter the suit. Double the challenge if the Arcana is suitable.
- **Twist.** The GM keeps the card in hand and plays it outside of an Action to create a narrative twist in the story. Each suit can be loosely interpreted to represent different kinds of twists.

## Example Setback Twists



### Physical Hinderance

Impairments to the character, barriers, or loss of important items.



### Emotional Turmoil

Past pain returning, loss of reputation, or escalating hostility.



### Mental Block

Confusion, exhaustion, or information being revealed as false.



### Weird Occurance

Implications vary depending on the Weird of the setting.

# Motifs

Through chance or planning, a Character Hand might contain at least three cards of a single suit. This is called a Motif: a powerful tool which lets the player briefly direct the narrative of a scene.

A Motif is used in place of an Action. Instead of one card, they must play all three of the cards that make up the Motif to the Discard pile. They still mark experience for the relevant suit, but instead of checking the GM Arcana for Strength, the player immediately succeeds and gets about 30 seconds of narrative control to describe a scene, with some restrictions based on the suits that make up the Motif.

## Action Sequence



A Motif of Clubs allows the player to narrate a “long shot” action sequence where the character’s skills are on display. Any physical challenge facing the character can be overcome.

## Monologue



A Motif of Hearts allows the player to narrate a monologue from either their character’s perspective, or from the perspective of another non-player character in the world.

## Flashback



A Motif of Diamonds allows the player to narrate a flashback, detailing how the character planned for the situation they currently find themselves in.

## Supernatural Event



A Motif of Spades allows the player to narrate a scene where their character wields the Weird into something that has never before been described, and never will again.

## Managing Cards

As players continue to play cards from the Character Deck to the Discard, they will eventually draw and Discard all the cards in the Player Deck. In order to reshuffle the Discard into their Character Deck, players can choose to **Collect Thoughts**.

When a player chooses to Collect Thoughts, they pick up all of the cards from their Discard pile, add a **Joker**, and shuffle them all back into their Character Deck. If there are no Jokers left to add, you cannot Collect Thoughts. Otherwise, players could Collect Thoughts at any point in the game.

### JOKERS

The Jokers represents your character's mental and physical exhaustion, and are added to the Character Deck whenever a player Collects Thoughts. When drawn to the hand, they act as a dead card, unable to be played, swapped, or used to Help. If a Joker appears when Thinking Quickly, the action immediately Fails.

## End of an Episode

At the end of each Episode, players should collectively review what has happened with everyone at the table. Start by pulling out the card from the GM Arcana that had the Objective for the Episode written on it. This card now represents the outcome of the session, so feel free to edit the Arcana to better match what happened.

So long as there are blank cards in the GM Arcana, everyone should feel free to write new Arcana. If there were important people, factions, events, or objects that came up over the course of the Episode, writing them down on a card of the GM Arcana means they are important to the story, and should recur in later Episodes.

When doing so, try to get an intuitive sense of the new Arcana in order to match it with a card of an appropriate suit, but don't worry about making the associations work perfectly every time. Cards can also be left blank for filling in after future sessions.

For example, recording that the cast "accidentally" released a void monster into the sea might fit well on a Spades/Weird card, but it doesn't mean that it couldn't also be written on a card of any other suit. Try to phrase the Arcana differently for each case!





# EPISODE ZERO

# Worldbuilding Questionnaire

The GM facilitates creating the setting through a worldbuilding questionnaire. Define your Goal and first Objective in the world, as well as your starting Praxes. Designate Lines and Veils for content.

The purpose of Episode Zero is to make sure that everyone at the table is on the same page. Roleplaying games can cover lots of subject matter, so narrowing what will and what will not be part of the game defines the space for everyone to be creative within.

The first Episode of a campaign of Praxis Arcanum, the players will collaboratively create the setting and determine the focus for their campaign. The Episode Zero Questionnaire plays three important roles in getting the game running:

- **First**, it asks every player what they want to be part of their game. This makes sure that everyone at the table buys in to the story they will be writing together.
- **Second**, it sets up a rich world with plenty of opportunities for danger, mystery, and adventure. This means there will always be something to explore or to accomplish.
- **Third**, it will build a starting framework for each character's background and their emotional attachments. This key step makes sure that every character has a compelling reason to work towards a goal in the world.

Before getting started, make sure every player has their deck of cards ready, and that they've been separated into their respective sections:

- **The GM Arcana** contains the Ace, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of each suit.
- **Character Decks** contains the Ace, 2 and 3 of each suit.

This is also a great opportunity to establish your Lines and Veils before any problematic content arises.

## Leading the Questionnaire

When asking the worldbuilding questions, GMs are encouraged to take as much time as they can with exploring the world. The best experience is treating worldbuilding as its own dedicated Episode. Everyone should make sure that every other player can add or contribute to the creation of the world during this step.

When starting the Questionnaire, the GM facilitate by asking setting questions to every player around the table, one at a time. Once that player gives their first thoughts, everyone else at the table can add on. Once all players agree on an answer, the GM can write a summary down on one of the cards in the GM Arcana. The player who was first asked for their opinion has final say."

In answering one setting question, other questions might arise in conversation that don't have an answer yet, such as "How do people do X?" or "What does that mean for X?". Consider these questions, but do not feel like they need answering. These mysteries may be defined later or revealed in the plot. In future sessions, players might have to choose between their Objective and uncovering the answer to one of these mysteries.

# Worldbuilding Questionnaire

CARD	QUESTION	EXAMPLES
A-D	What is a theme, element, or location of the game?	Pirates, Fish in the Ocean, Airships, Greek Islands
A-C	What is a prominent piece of technology?	Laser-rifles, trains, breathing masks, warp drive
A-S	What is supernatural about this world? It's the "Weird"	Mutants, paranormal creatures, leylines of magic
A-H	What is the cost/limit to the Weird?	Requires blood sacrifice, doesn't work at night
2-S	What is dangerous about wielding the Weird?	Psychic backlash, draws attention from the Feds
2-H	What is the nature of a current or recent conflict?	War of York and Gastown, monarch exiled their heir
2-C	What is one of the deadliest hazards in this world?	The Ice Beast of Ith, sandstorms, zombies
2-D	What faction exists and what do they represent?	The Order rules with an iron fist, eco-terrorists
3-H	What is a mystery you don't know the answer to?	Sign language of Templar, location of a moon colony
3-D	What is the most valuable good or service and why?	A stimulant, travelling traders, human lives
3-S	Name a figure of authority in the world.	The Tax Collector, Mrs. Bryne the principal
4-H	What Goal do you collectively seek to accomplish?	Become independent, save Kor from destruction
3-C	Who opposes you in your Goal?	Chemically-enhanced psionic assassins, mom

# Character Questionnaire

CARD	QUESTION	EXAMPLES
3-D	Where is your character from?	Bellwood Docks, the Deadlands, planet X11-b,
3-C	What mundane skill has helped your team before?	Pro Gambling, marksmanship, making music
3-S	What does it mean for you to Wield the Weird?	Commune with spirits, cast spells, regrow limbs
3-H	What incited you to act towards your goal?	Rescued from drowning, birth of my child

For a deeper character experience, answer the following questions:

Answer one of:

- How did the location of the setting hurt your character?
- What important thing did your character lose due to technology replacing it?

Answer one of:

- What does your character feel when wielding the Weird?
- What has your character lost to the Weird?

Answer one of:

- Who does your character side with in the recent conflict and why is the other side wrong?
- What did you give up to get the valuable good/service?

Answer one of:

- Why is this goal so important to you?
- What scarred you from your last encounter with the opposing force?

Answer one of:

- How did you meet the character to your left?
- What is your first impression of the character to your left?

## What do players do?

The most important thing a player can do here is to relax and feel comfortable throwing out ideas of what kind of world they're interested in building. Players should make sure to try to build on the answers other players give to the questionnaire. Even rephrasing an answer or mentioning a reference to other similar fiction is helpful.

The best tools for building a world are to use "yes, and..." or "no, but..." strategies. When a player says "yes" to someone's idea, they should try building on it with more exposition. This is called a "yes, and..." approach. Sometimes, they might disagree with the direction of another player's suggestion. When that happens, they should feel comfortable saying "no", but should always try to offer an alternative. This is called a "no, but" approach.

P1: "I'd like our world to have floating ships that use magic to fly!"

P2: "Yes! I like that idea! And maybe they use little autonomous vessels to send messages to each other, like carrier pigeons!"

P1: "Hmm, no, I'm not as into the idea of autonomous ships. But, maybe instead the ships are designed to be piloted by a powerful magic users, including animals!"

# What does the GM do?

These worldbuilding questions are broad and can be intimidating for players to answer. The role of the GM is to be a facilitator, which means they should be trying to offer guidance.

Some of the best tools the GM has available are to offer examples, and to ask probing follow-up questions. For each question in the Worldbuilding Questionnaire, there is a list of follow-ups and examples already provided, but the most effective guidance flows from the conversation. Asking “What about this do you like?” or “What are the things about this idea that you’re excited to explore?” are ways of getting more input from a player.

Remember that for each answer, the GM should write down a quick summary on one of the cards in the GM Arcana, starting from the lowest cards in the deck (Aces) and going up in ascending order to write on cards. Each card can only have up to one written answer on it.

Once complete, consider allowing players to add new cards to define any other aspects of the setting that were not previously covered in the worldbuilding questionnaire.

## Exploring the Weird

Every character in Praxis Arcanum has been strongly influenced by the Weird, and possesses some ability to work with the Weird, however that can be interpreted in different ways.

A character may wield the Weird of vampirism by actually utilizing it (super strength, draining blood, etc.), while another might wield that Weird in an academic sense, knowing so much about vampirism that they are able to track vampires to their lair.

A character may possess the ability to commune with ghosts innately, through magical means, or instead as the consequence of diligent study into the ways of the paranormal. How to interpret “wielding the Weird” is dependent on the player, the setting, and the individual characters.

## The Party

The party of characters are all working together for a common cause, called the Goal. When defining the Goal, the GM should pay attention to make sure every player voices their opinion, including themselves! Characters can have different motives or personal goals, but this is the unifying cause for everyone in the party.



## The Character Questionnaire

The last part of Episode Zero focuses on the characters, so the GM Arcana can be set aside for now. The first four questions define the first Praxis in each suit for each character. Character players can grab the four 3's from each of their Character Decks and record their answers down on each card.

There is also a list of recommended questions that to which the answers aren't intended to be written down anywhere, but just to be spoken aloud in fleshing out the characters.

## Preparing for Episode One

The last thing part of Episode Zero is to ask the players to define their first Objective towards the greater Goal — this will help the GM mentally prepare for the next episode.

While Praxis is designed to encourage improvised play, some GMs may prefer to prepare a structure to the session, and establishing an Objective can help steer the narrative. In preparation to the next Episode, the GM might look up references to other fiction that may have come up when discussing the setting, or may think of a couple ways in which the Weird could be used that might be in different ways.



# THE GAME MASTER

# The GM's Influence

The Game Master has a critical role to play in facilitating the action of the game, helping to direct each Episode towards a satisfying, dramatic conclusion. Seeing the game from the lens of Game Master means you aren't concerned with success or failure, but that are concerned with establishing opportunities for each player to experience drama and intrigue along the way.

## Tools for Building Investment

Players will have the most fun when they are invested in the story and engaged in the action. Praxis Arcanum's Worldbuilding Questionnaire during Episode Zero requires players to build a world of their collective imagining, which makes it easy for players to add the elements that make them excited to play in that world. In defining their characters, players have built a small sample of what their character's stories were, and what matters to them emotionally. Latch on to the elements of their stories that feel human. These are the strings that can be most compelling to pull, challenge, and play with throughout the Season.

One of the biggest tools at the GM's disposal is the ability to ask players questions throughout play, just like during the worldbuilding session. The game requires that, at the end of each Episode of play, the players answer "What is your objective for the next Episode?" Just by answering this question, the players are investing themselves in accomplishing that task.

A good technique is to continue asking players questions like "What are you worried will happen next?", or "How does your character feel about this NPC?". These probing questions can create for a better understanding of the characters in the story and will allow everyone at the table to think of creative ways of pushing the limits of their emotions.

## Allow the Players to Improvise

The single greatest tip to running Praxis Arcanum successfully is to welcome improvisation from every player at the table. The GM does not need to know whether this town has an apothecary, or even the motivation for the Season-long villain. Those are elements are flexible until defined, and should be defined by every player at the table.

Remember that the goal is to tell a great story together. Be receptive to the ideas of the other players you choose to play with, and you will experience a story that any one of you alone could never have imagined.

## Interpreting the Cards

The GM Arcana contains a set of cards of which many contain a written summary of one of the key elements of the world. This is a powerful tool for reviewing the elements of the world. During the game, the GM interacts with the Arcana whenever players take Actions. As cards are revealed from the GM Arcana, any revealed card that has an Arcana matching the current fiction causes that card's contribution to the Challenge to be doubled.

These cards, whether used during Setbacks or just for inspiration on the fly, have a lot of creative power behind them. First, each suit relates to broad aspects of reality. Clubs relate to the physical, Hearts to the social, Diamonds to the rational, and Spades to the Weird. When uncertain on how to add drama to a scene, the GM can always draw a card for inspiration.

Perhaps a drawn heart means there's a social drama – a person needs help, or an injustice is occurring in front of the players. If it were diamonds, maybe some information is revealed, or a mystery is introduced.

## Running a Campaign

It is recommended that an ongoing campaign game of Praxis Arcanum be played over 8-10 episodes, with roughly 1-2 cards being gained by each player per episode. This will ensure that each character will have an ample opportunity to grow and develop in a unique way.

While the GM is responsible for managing the resources of the world outside of player control, they can also distribute narrative control to any player they wish. For example, when a player overcomes a huge obstacle, or the party visits a player's hometown, it might be an opportunity to allow that player to define a part of the game world.

## Alternatives to Basic Actions

In some circumstances, the standard Basic Action can be modified for better effect. Take for example a scenario where all characters need to traverse hazardous terrain. The GM may request that one player take the lead and perform a basic action to overcome the challenge for the whole party, or alternatively, might ask each character to describe their own approach and each play a card. The GM can then reveal a single set of cards from the GM Arcana, representing the Challenge, and compare the results to each player's Strength.

### **SIMULATING FATIGUE**

At some points, the GM may opt to narratively increase the tension on the characters. This can be done through assigning **Fatigue**. When a character takes Fatigue, the player immediately discards a number of cards off the top of their Player Deck to the Discard. How many cards to Fatigue in this way can be up to the GM, but they should be careful not to use Fatigue as a tool to antagonise the players.

## Adding Card to the GM Arcana

Cards should always be added to the GM Arcana in an even spread across suits (example, all 6's should be added at once) and be added only between Episodes. The specifics of which Episodes in which to do this is left entirely to the discretion of the players, depending on the challenge desired from the game. As a rule of thumb, consider maintaining a gap of 2 between the highest card of the GM Arcana and the highest player card in a Character Deck.

## Tips and Tricks

- If you don't want to mark up the cards of the deck, consider getting a few packs of plastic penny sleeves at your local games shop to write on instead.
- If you are starting Praxis with a setting concept already in mind, fill in some or all questions to which you already have answers ahead of Episode Zero.
- When assigning the difficulty for an Action, consider any situational bonuses or impediments. For example, trying to negotiate a deal with an irate senator will be more challenging than with one that owes you a favor. The maximum difficulty for any check is half the number of cards in the GM Arcana.
- The role of the GM isn't to be an antagonist to the players, but to be a facilitator of drama. Consider what each card means or could represent, or if any Praxes are written on it as you put it down — that will help create a convincing description of the scene.
- When narrating a Motif, it is important that no player remove the agency of any other player. If you feel this is happening, feel free to have the narration interrupted by asking the player for their approval or their thoughts on how their character would act.
- This game has a custom Discord Bot available for online play that requires no physical components!

# Reference

## Glossary

**Action:** the way in which Characters take control. This includes Basic Actions and Motifs.

**Basic Action:** action taken by a player when they want to take narrative control. Involves playing a card from the Character Hand.

**Challenge:** during a Basic Action, the measure of the Challenge a player needs to overcome through their Strength.

**Character Deck:** the deck of cards used by a player to draw cards into their hand.

**Character Hand:** the set of cards a player holds, from which they play cards to empower actions.

**Crucible:** when a player would fail a Basic Action, they may destroy a Praxis card from their hand to gain extra Strength.

**Deckbox:** the container for a player's set of cards.

**Discard:** the zone in which played cards go. These cards are reshuffled when a player Collects their Thoughts.

**Episode:** a single session of Praxis Arcanum.

**Episode Zero:** a session of play, used to define the characters and world, before the story begins.

**Experience:** whenever a player takes an Action, they gain experience, denoted by a tick on one of the cards in the Experience Queue.



**Experience Queue:** the zone of play where the next cards to be added to the Character Deck sit, gaining experience after each action.

**Fatigue:** an alternative to drawing Setbacks, this involves discarding a number of cards off the top of a Player Deck.

**GM Arcana:** the deck of cards used by the GM to resolve actions and draw Setbacks.

**GM Reserve:** the set of cards not currently in use by the GM.

**Goal:** the overall objective of the party of players. This will usually take a Season to achieve.

**Harm:** an alternative to drawing Setbacks, the player Removes cards from the Character Hand for the rest of the Episode.

**Joker:** a Joker in a Character Hand, that cannot be played, discarded or exchanged until the end of the Episode.

**Lines:** a hard line in the game's subject matter, these topics will not come up during play. Works with Veils.

**Objective:** a small step towards the party's goal. This is usually the focus of one Episode.

**Praxis (pl. Praxes):** a defining feature of a character's identity, written on a card in the Character Deck.

**Removed:** cards may sometimes be removed for the Episode, such as through Harm. Put removed cards in your Deckbox.

**Strength:** during a Basic Action, a reflection of a character's ability to succeed over the Challenge.

**Season:** a collection of 8-10 Episodes that make up the full play experience of Praxis Arcanum.

**Thinking Quickly:** when another player might fail a Basic Action, another player can Think Quickly, flipping up the top card of their Character Deck, adding its value to the Strength.

**Veils:** a soft line in the game's subject matter, that can come up but never described. Works with Lines.

**The Weird:** the supernatural or magical aspect of each character and world created.

**Worldbuilding Questionnaire:** a set of questions, asked during Episode Zero, that ask you to define the world and characters of your game.

**X-Card:** A tool used to moderate content in each Episode live, during play. Tapping an X-Card means you'd like to skip over that content.

# Worldbuilding Questionnaire

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A-D	What is a theme, element, or location of the game?	Pirates, Fish in the Ocean, Airships, Greek Islands
A-C	What is a prominent piece of technology?	Laser-rifles, trains, breathing masks, warp drive
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A-H	What is the cost/limit to the Weird?	Requires blood sacrifice, doesn't work at night
2-S	What is dangerous about wielding the Weird?	Psychic backlash, draws attention from the Feds
2-H	What is the nature of a current or recent conflict?	War of York and Gastown, monarch exiled their heir
2-C	What is one of the deadliest hazards in this world?	The Ice Beast of Ith, sandstorms, zombies
2-D	What faction exists and what do they represent?	The Order rules with an iron fist, eco-terrorists
3-H	What is a mystery you don't know the answer to?	Sign language of Templar, location of a moon colony
3-D	What is the most valuable good or service and why?	A stimulant, travelling traders, human lives
3-S	Name a figure of authority in the world.	The Tax Collector, Mrs. Bryne the principal
4-H	What Goal do you collectively seek to accomplish?	Become independent, save Kor from destruction
3-C	Who opposes you in your Goal?	Chemically-enhanced psionic assassins, mom



# Character Questionnaire

CARD	QUESTION	EXAMPLES
3-D	Where is your character from?	Bellwood Docks, the Deadlands, planet X11-b,
3-C	What mundane skill has helped your team before?	Pro Gambling, marksmanship, making music
3-S	What does it mean for you to Wield the Weird?	Commune with spirits, cast spells, regrow limbs
3-H	What incited you to act towards your goal?	Rescued from drowning, birth of my child

For a deeper character experience, answer the following questions:

Answer one of:

- How did the location of the setting hurt your character?
- What important thing did your character lose due to technology replacing it?

Answer one of:

- What does your character feel when wielding the Weird?
- What has your character lost to the Weird?

Answer one of:

- Who does your character side with in the recent conflict and why is the other side wrong?
- What did you give up to get the valuable good/service?

Answer one of:

- Why is this goal so important to you?
- What scared you from your last encounter with the opposing force?

Answer one of:

- How did you meet the character to your left?
- What is your first impression of the character to your left?

# Card Summary

SUIT	CLUBS	HEARTS	DIAMONDS	SPADES
Aspect	Body: Physical Self	Heart: Emotional Self	Mind: Rational Self	Weird: Super- natural Self
Praxis	Skills or Equipment	Relation- ships or Values	Facts Known or Histories	Occult Knowledge or Talents
Setback	Physical Barriers or Traps	Heartbreak and Betrayals	Inaccurate Informa- tion	Weird Occurance
Perk	Resist: Prevents discarding	Help: Adds Strength to Friends	Hold: Increases hand limit	Swap: Exchanges player card
Motif	Action Sequence	Monologue	Flashback	Super- natural Event

All Character Decks begin play with the A, 2, and 3 of each suit. The GM Arcana begins play with the A, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of each suit. Additional cards will be added to each deck throughout play.

