

Malice

Introduction

Decades ago a rumble went through what seemed like half the world. All at once great stone structures erupted from the ground, air which hadn't flowed in millennia hissing as it escaped its prison. Not long after that the curious began to explore them. Most never returned, but those who did became fabulously wealthy. Now nearly every dungeon which hasn't been cleared has a boom town, if not a city, associated with it and adventuring is a well respected, if often short-lived profession.

What You Need

In order to play Malice, you'll need the following:

- A tarot deck
- A set of seven d6
- Recommended: paper and a pencil to play this as a journaling RPG.

Introduction to Tarot Decks

Much of a tarot deck is set up like a normal playing card deck: cards in suits going from an ace to a king. These cards are called minor arcana. The Page, Knight, Queen, and King (like the Jack, Queen, and King of playing cards) are called the court cards rather than face cards. In the game these represent normal dungeoneering, either finding resources in the case of number cards, or challenges to be overcome for a reward in the court cards.

A Tarot deck features four suits, each of which has its own meaning in Malice:

- Cups are temporary boons which can be spent to overcome events. A potion quaffed at the right time, a fellow delver who owed you a favor, a lucky circumstance. Anything which helps you now, but not in the future.
- Swords are permanent boons which help you on your journey. An excellent piece of equipment, a trustworthy companion, or just lessons learned from your adventure.
- Wands are objects of divinatory power. You can use them to see and perhaps even change your fate.
- Pentacles are valuables from gems to gold to books. These are what you want to bring back to strike it rich.

In Malice, the numbers of minor arcana do not matter. The Ace of Wands is exactly the same as the Five of Wands. The value of court cards **does** matter, however.

The remaining cards, the ones numbered from 0 to 21, are called the major arcana. These represent special events in the game. If you're journaling, these are where most of your detail will likely go. They're kept in a table at the end of this book.

Generating A Character

In Malice you have 6 attributes:

- **Might:** Your ability to exert power by your own hand.
- **Agility:** Your quickness and flexibility.
- **Luck:** The mother of all abilities. A wildcard which can be used for any roll, but you can't gain it back.
- **Intelligence:** The depth of your knowledge.
- **Charm:** Your ability to bring intelligent beings to your side.
- **Evocation:** Your skill in the magical arts.

These are your innate and gained abilities which will help guide you through the dungeon in search of your fortune. To generate a character, roll 6d6 and read them from left to right for your attributes.

Playing The Game

Your Goals

Your goal in Malice is to dive into a dungeon and not only live to tell the tale, but to escape with stacks of loot as well. In order to do this you'll be making use of your attributes as well as whatever you can scavenge while in the depths. You'll flip cards from the deck, collecting Pentacles cards until you either hit 0 in an attribute and die, or you flip The Fool and make your way out of the dungeon. If you make it out of the dungeon, the number of Pentacles in your hand is your score.

Beginning

After generating your character, draw cards equal to your intelligence and shuffle any major arcana back into the deck.

Checks

Most events in Malice are resolved by checks. In order to make a check, look at your skill in the relevant attribute. If the event is harder than normal, subtract from your skill. If you've used cups to improve your chances, increase the skill (your skill can't go above 6 or below 1 for a check.) Then roll a d6. If the result is at or below the target number, you overcome the check. In other words you're attempting to roll at or lower than [relevant skill] + [bonuses from cups] - [minuses from the event]. Rolling a 6 is always a failure. If you fail a check, then reduce your skill in that attribute by the amount you failed by (for example: if your target roll was a 3 and you rolled a 6, reduce it by 3.)

You may re-roll a failed check and decrease your luck by 1, unless you roll a 1.

The Play Area

The game state consists of the following:

- Your attributes at the moment.
- Your hand of cards.
- The deck (always face down.)
- The discard pile (always face up.)

In addition to these there's another face-up pile called the Corpse. When you die, place your entire hand face up as the Corpse. If you encounter a ghost and successfully guide them out of the dungeons, all of their loot is yours.

Taking A Turn

The game progresses through a series of events, revealed as flipping cards from the top of the deck. A turn is played as follows:

- Use one Action from your hand if you'd like.
- Flip a card from the deck to trigger an event.
- Optionally play Cups cards from your hand to reduce the difficulty of the check.
- Resolve the event.

Using Actions

Before the turn's event occurs, you have the option to use one action from your hand. You can either strengthen yourself with Swords, or to try to peer into the future with Wands.

In order to use a Swords action, pick one of your attributes. Discard Swords from your hand equal to your skill in that attribute, then increase your skill by 1. For example: if you have a Charm of 2, then discard 2 Swords cards, regardless of value, and increase your Charm to 3.

To use a Wands action, discard 1-3 Wands cards from your hand then make an Evocation check. If you fail the check, you still lose the cards. If you succeed, you receive an effect matching the number of cards you discarded:

Wands Spent	Effect
1	Look at the top card and put it back on top.
2	Look at the top card, put it back on top or on the bottom.
3	Look at the top 3 cards, put them back in any order, and put 1 on the bottom.

Revealing An Event

After you've taken or skipped your action, flip the top card of the deck. If it's a numbered minor arcana, put it into your hand and go to the next turn. If it's a court card then check one of the suit's attributes at the associated penalty. You cannot spend cups to help overcome a cups court card; the check is pure luck. If you overcome it, add the card to your hand. Remember: your skill can **never** raised above 6, even temporarily.

Rank	Temporary Skill Change
Page	0
Knight	-1
Queen	-2
King	-3

If it's a major arcana you must either undertake the event or attempt to skip it with a check, if allowed. If the card's description says to “overcome with [attribute]” then it's skippable with a check. If you fail the check then you experience the event on top of the damage from the failure. If it says “roll” then that roll is just part of the event and isn't subject to damage.

Using Cups

You may discard cups cards to temporarily boost your skill in an attribute. You must spend your skill in cups cards to boost it by 1 as many times as you like. For example: if your skill in Might is 2 and you want to boost it by 2, you must pay 5 cups cards. 2 for the first boost and 3 for the second.

Resolving The Event

If it's a court card or an event you're skipping with a check, make the check. If you're taking a major arcana event, then follow the instructions for the card. Make any changes to your skills as needed, then the turn ends.

Persistence

There are two persistence mechanisms in Malice: The Corpse and success. When you die, set aside your non-World cards in the corpse pile. You can retrieve this if you pull The Hierophant and guide the dead adventurer's soul out of the dungeons. The other method of persistence follows your score. When you leave the dungeon, count up your score in pentacles. At the start of your next game if you choose to delve with the same adventurer (you don't re-roll your stats,) your starting hand size is that adventurer's score on their last delve plus their intelligence. Put any major arcana back into the discard pile.

The Cards

The Minor Arcana

Beyond its effect in your hand, each suit is associated with one or more attributes:

Suit	Associated Attribute
Swords	Agility and Might
Wands	Evocation and Intelligence
Pentacles	Charm and Intelligence
Cups	Luck

The Major Arcana

The Fool

A way out! Escape the dungeon with your life, if you so choose. If you've led a ghost here, take its Corpse pile.

The Magician

A statue of a figure cloaked in robes sits in front of you, one hand pointing to the sky and the other to its feet. The inscription on the base is faded and somehow ever-changing. Roll Evocation. On a pass, increase it by 1. On a fail, decrease it by 2.

The High Priestess

Place 3 cards face down in front of you. Pick one. If it's a number card, nothing happens. If it's a court card, overcome it at double difficulty. If you pull a major arcana, +1 to luck. Discard them all.

The Empress

Discard 2 cards from your hand to weigh down a pressure plate which holds closed a door in your way. Overcome with Intelligence.

The Emperor

The ceiling crumbles above you and your pack is pinned underneath the rubble. Discard a card while you waste time trying to rescue it, then discard 5 cards at random for what was crushed. Overcome with Agility or Might.

The Hierophant

You meet the remains of the last unlucky adventurer and their lost spirit. If you have a Corpse, set The Hierophant on top of the corpse pile. It's now your time to guide the lost soul until you reach the dungeon's exit.

The Chariot

Wide caverns and smooth floors stretch out ahead of you. Discard the top 3 cards as you progress deeper into the dungeon while paying little notice. Overcome with Intelligence.

The Lovers

You find a lost adventurer in the dungeon, hardly clinging to their sanity. If you choose to help them, draw 5 cards from the deck face down and place The Lovers above it. If you guide the adventurer out of the dungeon all the loot in their backpack is yours. Otherwise you leave them to their fate.

Justice

You meet a fellow adventurer in the depths and swap tips. If your last skill check was a failure, raise that skill as your experience is helpful to them. If it was a success, lower it; we learn from mistakes, not successes. Overcome with charm.

The Hermit

You find a cool, well-lit room whose burbling fountain drowns out the horrific noises which echo through the labyrinth outside. Take a moment to rest and consider your journey so far. Gain +1 in any one skill except Luck.

The Wheel of Fortune

Everything changes, you even find yourself unfamiliar in these crushing depths. Make an Intelligence check. If you succeed rotate your stats left or right, whichever you choose. Otherwise, rotate them left. Might will become Evocation and every other skill moves one to the left to make room for this.

Strength

A room in the dungeon gapes wide. Within is the very picture of one of your greatest fears. Your body would have no problems slipping past, if only your mind could cooperate. Roll against charm or intelligence. -2 to whichever you used on failure.

The Hanged Man

You narrowly escaped a room with your life and resolve to never let that happen again. Figure out what went wrong and right it. Discard 1 card of a suit, then check one of its related attributes. If you **fail** the check, then gain +\$ in the skill you failed. If you pass the check, nothing happens.

Death

A fissure opens up before you with jagged stairs leading downwards. The way behind has closed off, you have no choice but to descend deeper into the dungeon. Reduce all of your skills by 1, place the discard pile back into the deck, and shuffle it.

Temperance

The passageways tighten, jagged edges of rock grabbing onto your and your equipment like the hands of the damned trapped within this hell. There doesn't seem to be a way to fit through with all that you have. Discard cards in your hand until all suits have the same count. This number can be 0. Overcome with Agility.

The Devil

You stumble upon a pile of loot left by a presumably-dead adventurer. Reduce a skill of your choice by 1. Draw cards equal to that skill's value; if it's a suit card, put it into your hand. Overcome with Intelligence.

The Tower

A trapdoor opens beneath you, shooting you into an elaborate series of passageways fed by gravity. All of your possessions are thrown from your body from the speed and the jostling before you're finally deposited into a whole new room. Discard your entire hand. Check luck. If you overcome, draw a hand 1 bigger. If you did not, draw back at half the size (rounded up.)

The Star

You've come to a dead end. There's no clear path forward and you're unsure of the way back. Look for a new way to continue. Overcome with Agility or Intelligence. If you choose not to overcome, discard 3 cups cards.

The Moon

Water splashes around your ankles in this room and an eerie, pale light filters in through a hole in the ceiling. As you look down you see something you've lost. Roll Evocation or Intelligence. On success, take the top minor arcana from the discard pile into your hand. Otherwise discard a random card from your hand.

The Sun

You swear that you feel the sun on your face for the first time in what feels like an eternity but it's something far better: a treasure room bathed in warmth with a banquet set in the center. Rest, relax, and regain your strength. Gain +2 in any one skill.

Judgment

Cursed! You're unable to make use of any of your inventory until you've passed the next challenge. Overcome with Intelligence.

The World

The well runs dry. You've chanced upon the dungeon's greatest treasure and there's no doubt about it. Keep it; it counts as 10 pentacles cards, but if you die it doesn't stay with your corpse.

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Notable Characters

- Polnath: 21 loot across 2 runs, 1 dungeon cleared.
- Hiram The Lucky: 17 loot, 1 dungeon cleared.