

EPIPHANY

The Journey of the Magi

The Game

Most of the players are Magi who have seen a star in the heavens signaling the birth of a new king. They are trying to find him to bring him gifts and honor. One player is King Herod, trying to prevent the Magi from reaching Bethlehem.

The Game Deck

The players use a deck of cards to create characters, introduce new situations into the game, and determine the outcome of each character’s efforts. Whenever you have to “read a card,” use its suit and its face value in combination to inspire some kind of description that is relevant to what’s going on in the fiction of the game.

Spades are about physical abilities and capacities.	Hearts are about emotion and interactions among people.
Clubs are about knowledge or observing the world.	Diamonds are about wealth, social status, and opulence.

Ace (THE ANGEL). Mastery; something unique, unusual, or singular; someone with a special ability or talent; a new beginning; origins.	
Two (THE SOLDIER). Conflict, duality, opposition. A fight or argument; a dilemma or difficult choice.	Eight (THE STRAIGHT PATH). Movement, travel, transportation; direct action.
Three (TIME). Creation; the passage of time; creativity; cooperation.	Nine (THE DESERT). Indirect methods; subtlety; stealth; something hidden; something waiting or lying in wait.
Four (THE CAVE). Solidity, firmness, reliability; stasis or stagnation; a home or dwelling place; a cave or pit.	Ten (MULTITUDES). The masses; a crowd or a crowded place; chaos or confusion.
Five (THE MOON). Change, transformation; a sudden reversal; something unpredicted, unexpected, or arbitrary.	Jack (THE CHILD). An innocent or naïf; someone able to be fooled. A ruse or disguise.
Six (THE SUN). Illumination; guidance; revelation; truth. Diplomacy or kind words.	Queen (THE MOTHER). A trusted counselor or advisor; someone to be honored, revered, or admired. Prudence.
Seven (THE STARS). Luck, good fortune, the action of chance. A voice from the past.	King (THE FATHER). A leader or ruler; someone who is to be obeyed. Stern commands.

Choosing King Herod

One player must volunteer to play King Herod and be the bad guy. If there’s more than one player who wants the job, cut cards to see who gets it—high card wins, but the King of Spades trumps all aces.

Creating Characters

Each player draws three cards from the game deck and reads them to describe three facts about the character—maybe something he is, something he has, or something he’s done. Remember that the character is a Magus, which means he might have strange powers or abilities. Additionally, each character starts the game with 2 points of Soul and 2 points of Body. He gets +1 Soul for each red card he has, and +1 Body for each black card he has. If either Body or Soul reach 0 in play, the character doesn’t make it to Bethlehem, but the player gets to say why.

King Herod draws a number of cards equal to the number of players, and uses them to create facts about the world—difficulties and obstacles that the characters might face on their journey—as well as individual flaws to the characters.

Players should record the color of the card used to create a character's ability, since that will restrict when it can be employed in play. King Herod should record the color of the card used to create character flaws, similarly.

Starting the Game

Once everyone has created his or her character. Each player gets a hand of 5 cards, except for King Herod, who gets one card per other player in the game. The initial situation is always the same: the Wise Men are in the desert, following the star to where it leads them. King Herod is in his palace. Each player sets his individual Treasure total to zero, and the Journey counter is set at 1 per player (including King Herod).

Playing the Game

Each player gets a turn in order. On his turn, the player draws a card and then either (a) says to King Herod, "What happens on my journey?" (or words to that effect) or (b) picks a card from his scoring pile and plays it.

Journeying. King Herod draws a card and then plays a card from his hand. He reads it as the situation the character faces, trying to make it as interesting and challenging as possible. The player plays a card from his hand and reads it as the character's reaction, which may be either words (red cards) or deeds (black cards). The basic **strength** of the character's response is equal to the value of the card (number cards have their value, face cards are equal to 10, aces are equal to 11). As the player describes the character's action, he may incorporate the character's abilities and relevant facts about the world that explain why the response is likely to be effective. For each such ability or fact introduced, the strength of the character's response increases by one. The color of the character ability or flaw (but not fact about the world) being narrated in must match the color of the situation card that King Herod played.

Other players can participate as well if they discard a card into the center of the table. They may "narrate in" their abilities as their characters acting in the current situation, and increase or decrease the strength of the character's response accordingly. King Herod may narrate in character flaws and facts about the world to change the strength in his favor (i.e., usually to lower it).

King Herod is allowed to overrule other players' attempts to use facts about the world if he doesn't find them persuasive, or if he intends to use the fact himself. Additionally, if a player narrates in an ability in a way that's too similar to a way he's narrated it in previously, King Herod can tell him, "Say it a different way." It is King Herod's job to make sure that the fiction of the game makes sense, and players should take his remonstrances to heart.

After a single round, **the player wins** if the strength of his response is greater than the value of the card King Herod played. If King Herod's card is greater than the player's strength, **King Herod wins**. If the two results are even, **there is no winner** and all cards in the center of the table are discarded into the discard pile.

The winner of the scene chooses one of the cards on the table and then immediately scores that card. The loser chooses another card and adds it to his scoring pile.

Scoring. If the player wants to score a card, he either (a) describes the journey of the Magi making progress, and scores a black card, or (b) describes a gift that his Magus has obtained, acquired, created, or discovered, and scores a red card. He discards the card from his scoring pile. He may add a new ability to his character, or restore a point of Body (with a black card) or Soul (with a red card) that he has lost. If he has scored a red card, he adds +1 to his personal Treasure total. If he has scored a black card, he counts down the Journey counter total by -1.

When King Herod gets a turn, he may score two cards, one of each color. King Herod can add new flaws to characters and new obstacles to the world. He increases his personal Treasure total, and either adds or subtracts one to the Journey total.

Ending the Game

A player whose Body or Soul reaches zero leaves the game. If Body reaches zero, the player must describe how his character was somehow physically prevented from reaching Bethlehem—death, imprisonment, or illness, e.g. If Soul reaches zero, the player must describe how his character quit, lost heart, or was somehow dissuaded from completing the journey.

Otherwise, all players whose characters are still active make it to Bethlehem when the journey marker reaches zero. At that point, the player with the highest Treasure total (whether still active in the game or not) is the winner. Go around the table and provide an epilogue for your character: what happens to him or her after leaving Bethlehem?