

The GameMaster's Apprentice

Quickstart Guide

by Nathan Rockwood





**OVER 1.7 MILLION NPCS, ENCOUNTERS, AND MORE,
ALL IN ONE DECK OF CARDS!**

FEED YOUR CREATIVITY WITHOUT HUNTING THROUGH TABLES!

The GameMaster's Apprentice (GMA) decks help plan and run tabletop RPGs--in any system, genre, or world--by providing everything from randomized story seeds, encounters, and NPCs, to the results of a pickpocketing roll or a perception check.

With more than a dozen randomizers on each card and 120 cards in each deck, the range of content is incredible; drawing just three cards can produce more than 1.7 million unique NPCs or random events. For those interested in solo- or GM-free gaming, the GMA decks can even be used as a game engine, moving the action forward the same way a human GM would.

This Quickstart Guide begins with an overview of what is on each card, and then demonstrates them in action as tools for generating NPCs, random events, adventure prompts, and the answers to specific questions a GM might not have prepared for ahead of time! Whether you use the cards as shown here, or just take advantage of their content in your own way, you'll be gaming in no time--and you can always check out the full instructions for much more detail and many, many more examples!

CREDITS

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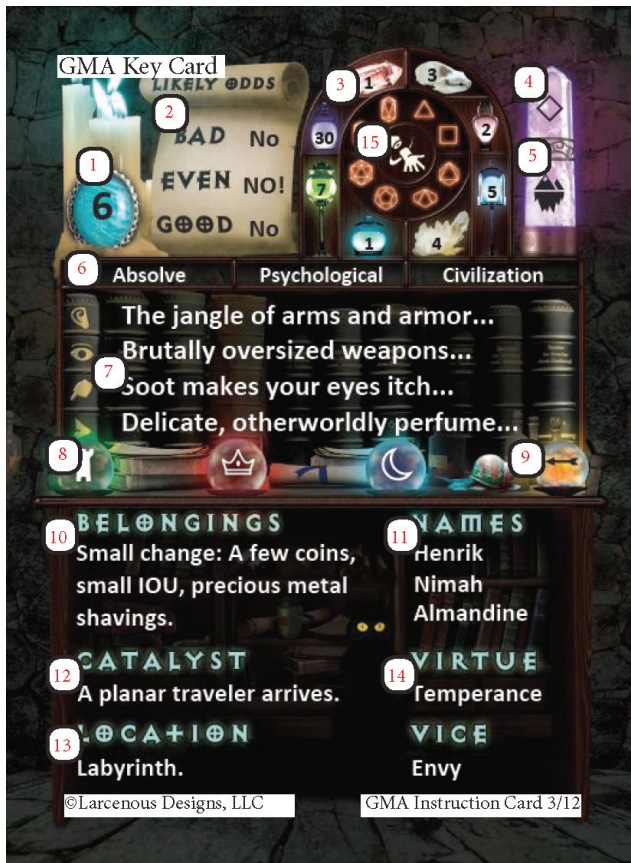
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Additional icon design for the Fantasy Deck: Carl Olsen, Cathelineau, Delapouite, Lorc, Skoll, and Willdabeast, all under CC BY 3.0 from www.game-icons.net.



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Card Contents Overview

1) Difficulty Generator: A bell-curved number from 1-10, which can be used to set the relative or absolute difficulty of an event, determine an NPC's reactions, or similar.

2) Likely Odds: Answers to Yes/No questions; "Bad" odds gives a Yes 25% of the time, "Even" gives a Yes 50% of the time, and "Good" ups it to 75%. Includes YES! and NO! as critical results.

3) Dice Wheel: Starting with the number marked by the triangle at the 1 o'clock position, the results of a d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, d20, and d00 (using two d10).

4) Norse Runes: The 24 runes of Elder Futhark; can be used for Tarot-style 'divination' or arbitration of actions and events. This field is replaced with another in the Demon Hunters GMA Deck; see the full instructions for details.

5) Elemental Symbols: Earth, Fire, Air, and Water. This field is replaced with another in the Demon Hunters GMA Deck; see the full instructions for details.

6) Random Event Generator: A verb, an adjective, and a noun; draw a card for each and combine them into a phrase, such as "Absolve Supernatural Criminal." Interpret the phrase in context with your game--this example could mean that an imprisoned mage is freed, or perhaps a demon is transfigured into a celestial.

7) Sensory Snippets: From top to bottom, these four lines are something to hear (the ear), see (the eye), feel (the poking hand), and smell/taste (the nose).

8) Tag Symbols: Three of ten possible symbols, in the three leftmost positions across the middle of the card, for 120 unique combinations. Interpret symbolically or make up a meaning for each symbol that fits the current situation.

9) Scatter Die: In the rightmost position, see one of 8 directional arrows, or dash for a miss, or a starburst for a direct hit. Use it for grenade throws, or to randomly generate the passages of a dungeon.

10) Belongings: A category, such as Small Change or Camping Gear, and three possible examples of related items (to inspire you to come up with your own; don't be limited by what is listed on the card); can be used for looting, pickpocketing, or merely describing what a character has or finds.

11) Names: Three genre-appropriate names. Each card has one probably-male, one probably-female, and one probably-ungendered/gender neutral name.

12) Catalyst: An inciting incident for a story seed or a random encounter.

13) Location: A place to set a story seed, random event, or quest.

14) Virtues and Vices: 10 possible virtues and vices, to inspire character motivations, strengths, and weaknesses.

15) Prompt Icons: This field is exclusive to the Fantasy Deck, which has a unique image on each card. Meant to inspire story or character elements, they can be interpreted by themselves or combined with any of the other fields. Create a random event, trap, character backstory, or quest with them: a dagger and a rose could indicate sudden betrayal by a romantic interest, or the beginning of an espionage storyline; a sword and shield could mean a challenge to a duel, or the arrival of a new warrior companion; a severed hand, like the one pictured above, might suggest a thief having their hand cut off as punishment, or a dangerous blade trap.



Generate an NPC

If you drew these three cards for an NPC...

Card 1 - Name: [Hamid]

Card 2 - Virtue & Vice: [Charity and Fear]

Card 3 - Belongings: [Blessing of Eternal Life]

Interpretation: Hamid was a humble priest doing charitable works in a village, but he caught the attention of his deity and was blessed with eternal life—however, he is merely unaging, and not invulnerable. He still tries to do his good works, but is growing paranoid and fearful of all danger.

Adding a Prompt Icon: Optionally, you might consider the Prompt Icons. If you include the tripwire from Card 3, perhaps that means Hamid is accident-prone, or has become so since being granted immortality... Death will not be cheated!

Generate a Random Event

Alternatively, if you drew these three cards for a random event...

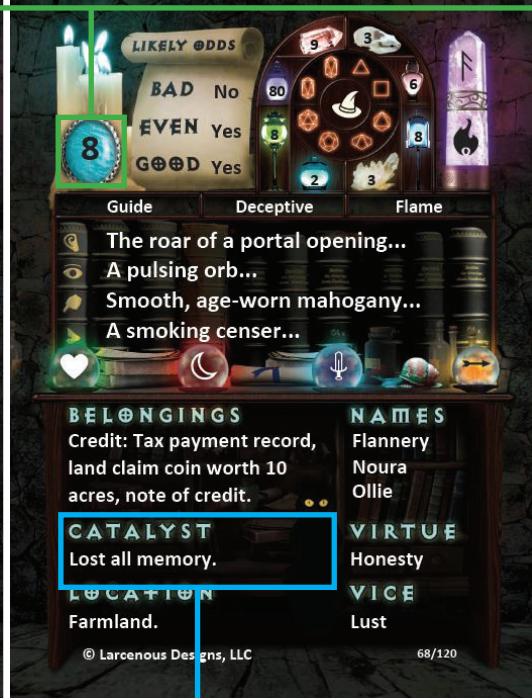
Card 1 - Verb: [Fight]

Card 2 - Adjective: [New]

Card 3 - Noun: [Purity]

Interpretation: The party witnesses a confrontation between villagers and the zealous warriors of a new faction, bent on 'purifying' the local populace. Will they intervene, or will they let the soldiers beat and arrest the unarmed locals?

Adding a Prompt Icon: If you are so inclined, you might notice the campfire icon on Card 2. Rather than hauling off the locals, the soldiers are preparing to burn them (or one of them) at the stake as an example to others!



Create a Story Seed

If you drew these three cards to launch a new adventure or campaign...

Card 1 - Location: [Spellfueled ship.]

Card 2 - Catalyst: [Lost all memory.]

Card 3 - Tag Symbols: [Crown, Shield, Wand].

Random Sensory Snippet for Inspiration: From Card 1, [The sounds of a fight...]

Interpretation: The party finds themselves standing in various battle poses around the upper deck of a spellfueled ship, currently sailing between realities! They have no memories of their past, though they have a general knowledge of their world and abilities. Are they all friends? Were some of them on opposite sides? Regardless, there is a similarly amnesiac woman dressed as a queen (the Crown symbol) present, holding a magical staff (the Wand) that may be responsible for the memory loss, and no matter who was originally on what side, the battle on the ship has attracted the attention of arcane creatures. Everyone must team up to fend them off (the Shield) if they want to live long enough to restore their memories!

Answer Detailed Questions

If you drew these cards one at a time, answering specific questions, that might go like...

Question 1: "Can the party find a decent blacksmith in this town?"

Card 1 - Good Odds: [No.]

Interpretation: The blacksmith died not long ago, and her apprentice has taken over--but this new kid doesn't know much more than how to make horseshoes and farm equipment!

Question 2: "How far is it to the next village with a blacksmith?"

Card 2 - Difficulty Generator: [8/10]

Interpretation: It's pretty dang far, since the smith here served all the local communities! Days of travel, at least.

Question 3: "With no smiths nearby, is there maybe at least a retired adventurer, who might sell us their gear?"

Card 3 - Bad Odds: [Yes.] Prompt Icon: [Imprisoned figure.]

Interpretation: There is! Sadly, they were locked up by a corrupt local lord for refusing to serve them... a new quest awaits!



All Together Now!

If you want efficient adventure creation, or to create a fiction-writing prompt, you can probably get everything you need with just three cards.

- 1) Draw and lay out three cards, and pick your favorite combination of Catalyst and Location.
- 2) Sticking with the same cards, pick any Name, Belongings, and Virtue and Vice, and combine them into a friendly NPC. Remember that the list of three items after the Belongings category are merely examples; use them to inspire something that fits your context!
- 3) Repeat step two, but create a villainous NPC.
- 4) Interpret this villain, friend, and story seed in relation to each other.
- 5) Scan all the Sensory Snippets (or Tag Symbols, or Prompt Icons, or the Random Events...) to add a twist or change.

For example:

- 1) From Card 2, I select [Rising fame] and [Secret society].
- 2) From 1 and 2, and I choose [Ciara]/[Loyalty and Fear]/[Communications: Telepathic vision-sending].
- 3) From all three, I get [Errando]/[Courage and Gluttony]/[Arcane Trinket: Psychic-dampening Bindings].
- 4) I decide that Ciara's power has made her critical to a secretive religious order, but this leads to her being abducted by Errando so he can intimidate her into using her powers for his gain.
- 5) Taking notice of the puppet in the Prompt Icon on Card 3, I decide that Errando is actually just a patsy; lots of fire imagery in the Sensory Snippets suggests that he also sets fire to the secretive order's headquarters when he kidnaps Ciara.

In the end, it seems that my story begins with Errando making off with the psychically-restrained Ciara, having set a fire to cover his tracks. Are there any survivors? Who hired--or blackmailed--Errando? Does he feel any remorse over the collateral damage (the scent of burned hair being rather ominous)?





From this point, the rest of the story could be fleshed out either entirely from the author's whim, or by drawing further cards. Simply asking and answering Yes/No questions can be a great way to make snap decisions, but a more thoughtful approach could include referencing the Tag Symbols, Norse Runes, and Random Event Generator.

The Symbols

The symbols in the GMA decks can be used in any number of ways, so consider this a quick primer to get you started, rather than a complete list of everything they can be used for! Even more examples can be found in the complete instructions document.

Elemental Symbols











The four 'classical' elements. You can assign them specific meanings for important scenarios, or interpret them symbolically to add broad-stroke ideas to characters, scenes, encounters, enemies, etc. For example:

-  Fire brings aggression and energy.
-  Water brings nurturing calm and hidden depths.
-  Air brings movement and curiosity.
-  Earth brings endurance and stability.











Tag Symbols

The Tag Symbols are a set of 10 individual icons that appear on each card in a unique set of three; you are meant to use all three on one card, because every possible combination occurs exactly once in the deck. Use them to add nuance to characters, scenes, encounters, enemies, etc. Read them symbolically or make a table; see the instruction document for more examples. The tables below could be used when looking at the Tag Symbols to provide ideas for an upcoming scene or encounter, and you could make a new table for almost anything: treasures, secrets, clues, the monsters patrolling in a dungeon...

General Symbolic Meanings

-  Tower: Obstacle, fortress, location.
-  Crown: Royalty, intrigue, power.
-  Heart: Family, friendship, romance.
-  Skull: Loss, change, death.
-  Sun: Clarity, revelation, discovery.
-  Moon: Confusion, misunderstanding, subterfuge.
-  Sword: Conflict, disagreement, battle.
-  Shield: Protection, defense, safety.
-  Target: Goals, objectives, distance.
-  Wand: Magic, technology, strangeness.

Sample Dungeon-Delve Encounter Table

-  Tower: A locked door or sealed passageway; possibly a trap locking the party in a room.
-  Crown: A significant treasure is available, but the difficulty of reaching it should be fair.
-  Heart: A chance or opportunity to heal and possibly rest. Potions, fountain of health, etc.
-  Skull: Poison or disease, possibly delivered by a monster or trap.
-  Sun: The party's stealth, illusions, tricks, etc will be more difficult here for some reason.
-  Moon: The danger is concealed; an ambush, an illusion, or a hidden trap.
-  Sword: Frontal assault!
-  Shield: A feature of the area offers protection or an advantage of some kind; possibly this is the high ground...
-  Target: Either a quest element is present, or perhaps there is a lead on a new quest.
-  Wand: The enemies are especially well equipped with unusual arcane (or simply unexpected) powers or skills.

The Norse Runes

Elder Futhark (the alphabet most people think of as 'Norse Runes') was, in the 20th century, adapted into a fortune-telling system similar to Tarot-card reading. My version, explained further in the Instructions document, can be used to add details to scenes, quests, or even characters, or even used for in-game runecasting!

- ᚱ **Fehu:** Livestock/Wealth. Property, prosperity, fertility, increase, social success.
- ᚹ **Uruz:** Auroch/Wild Ox. Energy, health, strength, tenacity, courage.
- ᚦ **Thurisaz:** Thor/Giant. Reactionary, defensive destruction. Instinct, willpower, and regeneration; lightning, electricity.
- ᚦ **Ansuz:** Ancestral Spirit/A God. Revelation, insight, power of words/names; divine intervention.
- ᚱ **Raido:** Wagon/Journey. Travel, evolution, moving forward, gaining perspective.
- ᚫ **Kenaz:** Beacon/Torch. Creativity, inspiration, harnessed power, world-changing ability.
- ᚷ **Gebo:** Gift/Exchanges. Generosity, balance, contracts, relationships, partnerships.
- ᚰ **Wunjo:** Joy/Happiness. Harmony, spiritual reward, pleasure, comfort, glory.
- ᚨ **Hagalaz:** Hail/Weather. Uncontrollable forces, (nature, the subconscious); crisis before harmony.
- ᚵ **Naudiz:** Need/Distress. Resistance, requirements to be met, endurance, patience, survival, trial, test.
- ᚲ **Isaz:** Ice/Frustration. Mental blocks; confusion to be unravelled; stalled until knowledge is gained.
- ᚿ **Jera:** Good Year/Harvest. Effort realized, fruitful results, hope, earned success, cycles of time or life.
- ᚷ **Eihwaz:** Yew Tree/Reliability. Dependability, trustworthiness; protection; honesty; well-chosen, achievable goals.
- ᚦ **Perthro:** Dice Cup/Mystery. Chance, secrets, the occult; initiation, destiny; setting out on the path.
- ᚷ **Algiz:** Elk/Protection. Shield, shelter, wards against evil, a guardian; connection to the gods.
- ᚱ **Sowilo:** The Sun/Life-Force. Success, honor, life, positive changes, victory; cleansing fire, power.
- ᚲ **Tiwaz:** Tyr/Leadership. Authority, justice, rationality, success in competition, self-sacrifice.
- ᚷ **Berkano:** Birch Tree/Birth. Fertility, birth, growth, liberation; renewal, new beginnings, love, family.
- ᚱ **Ehwaz:** Horses/Travel. Physical transportation; slow but steady progress; teamwork, trust, ideal marriage or partnership.
- ᚱ **Mannaz:** Mankind/The Self. The individual, skill, forethought, ability; humanity, social order.
- ᚲ **Lagiz:** Water/Regeneration. Healing, rest, renewal; dreams, the underworld, the imagination.
- ᚫ **Ingwaz:** Monarch/Seat of Power. Control, answering to nobody; authority without implying justice.
- ᚧ **Dagaz:** Dawn/Day. Awakening, breakthrough; a new venture, positive change; hope, security.
- ᚫ **Othala:** Birthright/Home. Inheritance, spiritual heritage, fundamental rights, source of safety, the most important thing.

Using the Cards as a GM

First, please note that this system is much more fleshed out in the full GMA instruction document, and even more so in the ALONe: A Solo Game Engine beta game (as of this writing, available for free from DriveThru).

If you treat the GMA Deck as an inexperienced GM, and ask it plenty of leading questions--whether you look for Yes/No answers, or ask things like "What happens when I...?" and look at the other available fields--you can run an entire campaign for one or more players without needing a human Game Master.

However, even if you always get interesting answers to your questions out of your interpretations, this would mean that you never have to react to anything completely surprising.

To fix that, I suggest the following system, called Tension.

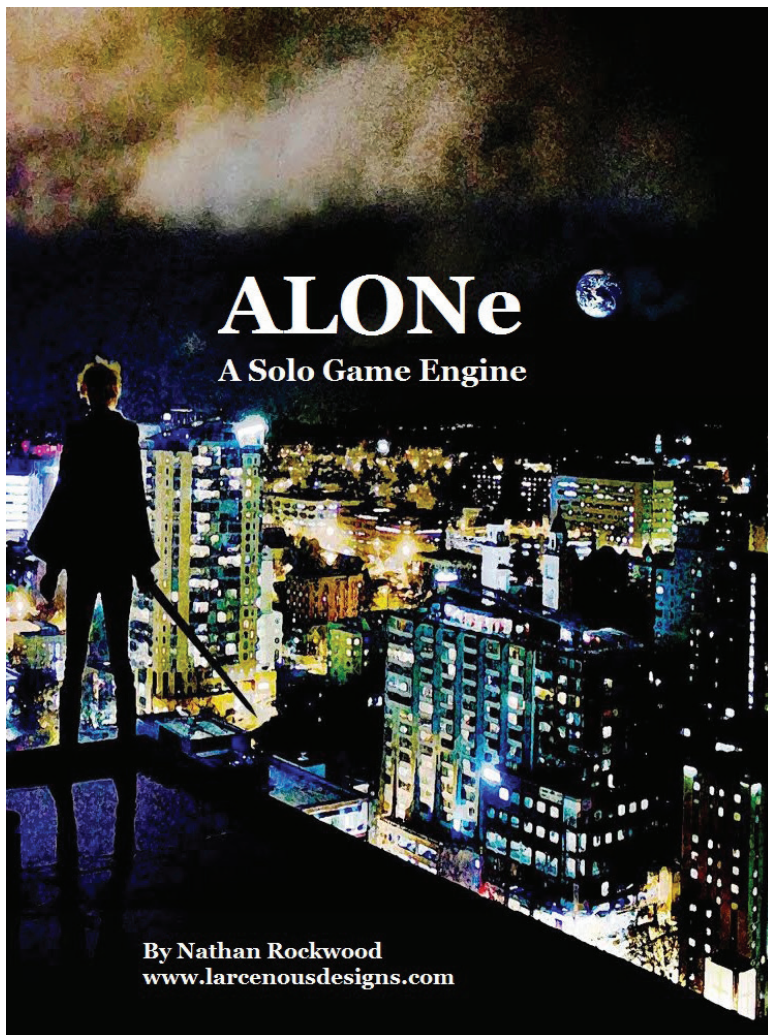
At the beginning of each game session, the Tension starts at 1.

Whenever you ask a Yes/No question (or any question, if you find you avoid Yes/No ones), also look at the Difficulty Generator on the same card.

If the DiffGen number is higher than the current Tension, nothing unusual happens; add 1 to the current Tension.

On the other hand, if the number there is equal to or lower than the current Tension, draw for and resolve a Random Event (usually three cards, looking at the Verb, Adjective, and Noun, but you can also use the Catalyst, the Tag Symbols, and/or the Prompt Icons). Then the Tension is set back to 1.

This ensures that a truly Random Event will occur at least once every 11 questions, keeping things interesting; of course, some of these events will be extremely minor fluff, but others might introduce new characters, story branches, and plot hooks.



Thank you for reading!

There are, of course, nearly infinite other ways to use these cards; I hope you enjoy them!

Happy gaming,
~Nathan Rockwood

