

MAGICIANS *of* *England*

**Being a game of their
exploits, their passions,
their triumphs, and
their failures**

Magicians of England

Magicians of England being a Victoriana game of rival magicians and the honor of the British Empire.

The Rules of Magicians of England

These rules ought to serve you just as they are for a session or two, thereafter success being largely a product of lucky chance and the virtues of the individual or group who employs them.

Some Useful Terms

The Story World

The story takes place in a world not so different from Victoria's England, but in this world there is magic, and faeries are altogether more often seen. This world is the story world.

Scenes

The story you create will be made up of *scenes*. Just like in a movie or a play, a scene is a series of related events that move the story along and then comes to a natural end.

Plot Elements

Plot elements are all the things that appear in the story, including characters, places, and things. Every plot element in Magicians of England is represented by a card, as in only right and proper.

Designers comments

Designer's comments look like this.

A Note on Playing for the First Time

The first time you play Magicians of England, all the player characters in the game are students of magic. This means they have never used magic before. The purpose of your first session is to discover which player character will be the first historian of magic in England to practice magic, and so become a fully fledged magician.

Playing the Game

First, someone needs to read these rules, preferably before anybody gets together to play. It's best if everyone reads them, but that's not necessary as long as one person understands them and can explain them to the rest

Now here's what you do:

1. Talk about the Game

Sit down with all the other players and have a short, polite conversation about the premise of the game. The purpose of this conversation is to share ideas that may turn into plot elements.

2. Collect Story Chips

Each player should collect 10 story chips. You can use poker chips or coins or any other convenient object. Maybe 10 isn't the right number. I'm still tuning this.

3. Make up Player Characters

At least one person must make up a player character. See the section *Making a Player Character* for how to do this. Anyone who doesn't have a player character can make one up at any time.

4. Create the Theories of Magic

Magic is dangerous and unpredictable. Once upon a time, people in England understood magic and did magical things, but that was a long time ago. Nobody today understands much about it.

For more information on how to make up the theories of magic, see the section on *Magic* below.

5. Pick a Narrator

Choose someone to be the first narrator.

6. Set the Scene

Magicians of England is played in rounds called scenes. Each scene is made up of a series of story events and at least one plot twist.

The narrator decides where the scene starts and who is present. You'll have to spend some story chips to do this. See the section on *Narrating Events in the Scene* below for more information on this.

Once you've finished setting the scene, you may narrate a short action of some sort to kick it off.

7. Narrate the Story

When you're done, the next player takes their turn as narrator. You will proceed around the table, letting each player have a chance to tell part of the story.

On their turn a player may do as many of the following things as they can pay for with their story chips:

- Tell a bit of the story (see *Narrating events in the Scene* below)
- Add a story element to the story (see *Creating a New Story Element* below)
- Introduce an existing story element back into the story (see **Error! Reference source not found.**)
- Add a plot twist to the story (see *Adding a plot twist to the Story* below) OR resolve a plot twist (see *Resolving a Plot Twist*), **but not both**
- Pass

There are certain things that can only be done using magic. A player may not narrate any of these things happening when they narrate the story. The only time these things can be done is during the resolution of a plot twist. This is explained in more detail below.

Players always have the option of passing on their turn.

Play continues around the table until the scene ends.

You may not narrate the story when it is not your turn, but you can still participate. When it's *not* your turn, you may:

- Make suggestions and discuss the scene with the narrator while they're taking their turn. Chances are that if you have a cool idea about how the scene should go, they'll like it too.

- Carry on dialog. You may always speak for characters you control at no cost whatsoever.
- Take control of a supporting character and play them in the scene.
- Initiate a plot twist. This is the only time you may interrupt another player's narration. See *Adding a plot twist to the Story*, below.

8. Wrap the Scene up

A scene ends when at least one plot twist has been introduced, and all plot twists have been resolved. At the end of a scene, every player may spend one story chip to narrate a small addition of the scene. The purpose of this is to wrap up loose ends, foreshadow future events, and so on. Once the scene ends, everyone gets seven new story chips from the pot. Should it really be seven? I'm not sure. This is just a number that worked with our group.

9. Run another Scene

You can play as many scenes of Magicians of England in a session as you wish. If you feel like you're not done, then go ahead and start a new scene with the next player in line as narrator.

Plot Elements

Plot elements are people, places, or things that appear in the story. Each plot element has its own card. If anything becomes important to the story, it should have a card.

Characters

A character is anyone who has a role in your story.

In order to keep track of characters, each character must have a card (3'x5' index cards work great for this). The name of the character will be written on the card, along with some important facts about them and sometimes a portrait. These facts are called characteristics. It's as simple as that.



Example Character: Sir Charles, Marquis of Herbertshire

Member of the nobility
 Fabulously wealthy
 Crack shot with a rifle
 Despises all magicians as charlatans



Player Characters

Each player is allowed to own one player character who only they control. Nobody *has* to have a player character, but it usually makes the game more interesting when you do.

When you own a player character and they're involved in a scene, you control them. This means that you are the one who says what that character does and how they do it. You can reveal facts about their past and decide upon their relationships with other characters. You control their

destiny. No other player can say what your player character does, says, or thinks or what motivates them. No other player can take control of your player character.

In addition, your player character may never die without your permission.

You can also choose to retire a player character. In either case, put the card for your player character away. You may then make up a new player character and bring them into the game at any time.

Supporting Characters

Supporting characters are just like player characters, except that they don't belong to one person. A supporting character may be controlled by one player at one time, and another player later. The player who controls the character is still in charge of saying what that character does while they are in control.

On the Matter of Control

A character who does anything in the story will be controlled by somebody. A player character is always controlled by the person who created it. When a player controls a character, they keep a hold of its card (though other players can always look at it). The player who controls a character is in charge of saying what that character does while they are in control. During their turn, a player can take control of a supporting character by spending a story chip (more on this below), so supporting character's may change hands multiple times in a game.

Making a Player Character

To make a player character, choose a portrait card or a blank index card. On the back, write a very short description of your character. 3 sentences are more than enough.

In *Magicians of England*, player characters start out knowing something about magic, but not being able to use it. An important part of the story is characters learning about magic and learning how to use it.

Once you've written your character description, write their name on the front of the card. Under their name write "student of magic". Under that, write down five other important things about your character. These are the character's characteristics.

A player character always starts out as a student of magic, and never starts out as a magician. How does a character become a magician? They work magic. This is explained in the section on magic.

HINT: Include something your character knows about magic. This might be a book they know, they might be a scholar or historian, or maybe their nanny told them tales of faerie magic when they were a kid. I want this to be like a rule. When your character knows something about magic, that becomes a rule about magic. I'm still working on how to do this in the game, though.

HINT: The best characters have some kind of ambition. Include at least one characteristic that is an ambition for the character. It might be that they want to improve their station in life, overcome their feeling of inferiority, claim the faerie realm for the Queen, or anything else that sounds like fun. This should be a reason for the character to do things and not sit around at home.

HINT: Good characters have relationships. When you create your character, consider making one of their characteristics a relationship with an organization, a character, or even another player character, like "is the brother of Bob's character Harry Birthstone" or "is a member of parliament," or even "believes Mortimer must be stopped at all costs".



Example Player Character

Character Description

Mortimer Boyde's success as a tradesman has given him a great deal of free time, which he dedicates to studying faerie tales and books about magic. His fascination is such that he urgently desires to visit the faerie realm on his own. Mortimer Boyde is always exceptionally well dressed.

Mortimer Boyde

Tradesman

Well off

Snappy dresser

Has read many faerie tales, perhaps TOO many

Urgently desires to visit the faerie realm



Characteristics

Characteristics are things that are written on cards.

Characteristic Sets

A characteristic set is a group of characteristics that always go together as if they were one characteristic. These are on the reference card.

For example, Social Class: Middle is a characteristic set. Anyone of this class has a trade and a hobby.

Important: Write *only* the name of the characteristic set on the plot element, not the characteristics it includes, because the characteristic set can change during the game, and if it does, that effects every card that has that characteristic set. Sometimes you get a choice of options when you choose a characteristic set. In this case, choose just one of the options and write it on the plot element under the name of the characteristic set.

Characteristic sets can change during play. For example, let us say that during your game, someone proposes that "all members of the upper class are loyal to the Queen," and no one objects. You would then write "loyal to the Queen" on the *Upper Class* characteristic set. Everyone who is upper class, also automatically becomes loyal the Queen.

Templates

A template is a design that can be used to create new plot elements. For example, Faerie (on the quick reference card) is a template. When a new faerie appears in the game, it receives all the characteristics on the Faerie template at no extra cost.

Templates can also change during the game. For example, someone might propose that all *English Servants* know the Legend of Tommy Tip. You would then write "Knows the legend of Tommy Trip" on the card for the *English Servants* template. All servants created from that template would thereafter know the legend. As with characteristic sets, above, you can create exceptions to a template rule as well.

What Happens in the Story

Players determine what happens in the game by taking turns telling the story. This is called narrating. Sometimes, an event happens that is too important for the characters in the story to ignore. This is called a plot twist. Occasionally, players may disagree about how the story should be told or how the game should be played. This is called a dispute. All these things cost story chips.

Narrating Events in the Scene

When you are narrating, you say what happens in the story. Spend a story chip whenever you:

- Change the location of a scene (like everyone boards the train and now the scene is inside the train car).
- Narrate an important event or component of a scene (such as stating that a terrible storm is raging, or that the butler puts a sleeping elixir in Mortimer's tea).
- Making a leap in the time of the scene (either by narrating a flashback or by jumping ahead in the action).
- Change a character or thing that's involved in the scene by adding or removing a characteristic from its card.
- Introduce a plot element into the scene (either by creating a new plot element, or bringing in one that was created before). When you do this, you take control of the element.

However, you don't get to:

- Say what anyone else's player character says or does.
- Say what a character controlled by another player says or does.

Creating a New Story Element

You can create new plot elements:

1. Pay a story chip.
2. Take a blank index card and write the plot element's name on the card.
3. Add characteristics, paying one story chip for each characteristic.

A couple of rules:

- No supporting character may be a magician until at least one player character is a magician.
- Faeries are never magicians. They are magical. This means they can do everything a magician does. Player characters are never faeries.

Creating a new Template or Characteristic Set

This is like creating a new story element. I haven't explained it in detail yet.

Ownership

Some things belong to a character. Maybe Lady Eleanor keeps a revolver in her boot and Lord Granville owns an ancient tome of magic. When somebody owns a thing that has its own card, you will write on that card the words "owned by" and that character's name. If the thing ever changes ownership, then you should change the card accordingly. Just like with any other characteristic, adding or changing the ownership of a plot element costs a story chip. A thing that is owned always stays with the character who owns it. Whoever controls that character should also keep a hold of all the things they own.

I'm not sure we need these rules. Do you ever use them?

Adding a plot twist to the Story

A plot twist is a significant turn in the story that the characters cannot ignore. Players bid for the right to decide how a plot twist turns out.

At any time, any player may introduce a plot twist, even if someone else is narrating.

If someone else is narrating, announce "plot twist" in a loud voice.

A plot twist should always be phrased as a yes-no question that can be answered in the scope of the current scene.

When you create a plot twist, write your question on an index card with your name under it, then place it face-up in the center of the table with a story chip on it.

After you have stated your plot twist, the player you interrupted becomes the narrator again. They may choose to complete their narration, pass, or resolve the plot twist immediately. Creating a plot twist is the only time you may interrupt another player's turn with your own narration.

Resolving a Plot Twist

A player may not choose to resolve a plot twist they set up. They have to wait for someone else to decide to resolve it.

When it is their turn, a player may announce they are resolving a plot twist in play. They become the protagonist. Each player bids for the right to narrate all or part of how the plot twist is resolved. The winners of the bid then narrate how the characters resolve the plot twist. The losers do not get to narrate the results, but they do receive compensation in the form of free story chips from the bank.

The person who chooses to resolve the plot twist is called the protagonist.

The person who created the plot twist is called the antagonist.

I need better terms for these. Any suggestions?

Bidding to Resolve a Plot Twist

When players participate in resolving a plot twist, they assemble bids using their story chips and bonus story chips based on the characteristics of plot elements:

1. The protagonist states their answer to the plot twist, yes or no.

2. Now they look at the story elements involved in the scene. If any of these elements have characteristics that they think support your proposed narration, they collect one story chip from the bank for each characteristic and put it in front of them. This is their bid.
3. Now the protagonist may add as many or as few additional story chips from their own supply to their bid as they wish.
4. The antagonist is responsible for assembling an opposing bid. If the protagonist answers the bid “yes”, the antagonist answers “no” and vice versa.
5. The player who created the plot twist now takes the plot twist and any story chips on top of it. This is their bid. They then add story chips from the bank based on characteristics of story elements that they think should oppose the resolution the protagonist suggested. They may also add chips from their own supply. **IMPORTANT:** a story element may only be called upon to support one bid, so even if it seems relevant, a player may not use a story element that has already been used by someone else.
6. Each other player, proceeding around the table clockwise from the antagonist, may now contribute to a bid, or make their own.
 - a. When a player contributes, they put chips from their supply next to another player’s bid. Their chips count as part of the bid. Keep them separate, because it matters which player contributed how much.
 - b. Or a player can start their own bid, with an answer of “yes” or “no”.
7. Continue around the table until no one wants to bid any more.
8. The highest bid on the table wins. If it’s a tie, the protagonist chooses who wins the tie.
9. Total the story chips in all bids. Every player who created or contributed to a losing bid now collects half that many story chips (rounded up) from the bank. The losing bids are then returned to the bank.
10. The player whose bid won now narrates how the plot twist is resolved. Their narration has to follow their answer to the question. They must spend any story chips in their bid that were not contributed by other players in narrating the resolution. Once they are finished, any other player who contributed to the winning bid may narrate additional results using the story chips they contributed (though they may not contradict what the winner has already narrated).

Magic

I want magic to be a source of wonder and conflict, a way of doing things you couldn’t do otherwise, but also a risky proposition. I’m not sure I’ve succeeded yet. Does magic work this way in your game? Do you have any ideas how I can make it work this way?

Here’s how it’s supposed to work: during their turns, one or more players get the stuff they need to do magic. Then a plot twist comes along that people care about. Players start fighting over narration so they can not only work magic, but control the consequences through narration. Sometimes this happened in playtest, sometimes it didn’t.

Theories of Magic

At the beginning of every session of Magicians of England, everyone at the table collaborates on creating a theory about Magic. Magic provides a pool of story chips that characters can call upon to narrate in addition to their own story chips, or when they have no story chips to spend.

Magic is risky and arcane, but it can do amazing things. To reflect this, every theory of magic has risks, arcana, and strictures associated with it.

A **risk** is some unpredictable, dangerous, or troubling thing that can happen whenever Magic is used.

An **arcana** is something that can be used to invoke magic, such as a rhyme, magical object, book, or location.

A **stricture** is something that you cannot do unless you use magic.

At the start of the game session, take an index card and write on it “Theories of Magic”. Now each player may add either a risk or an arcane to the theories. Pass the theories card around the table and have each player add a risk, arcane, or stricture. If the theory does not have *any* items in one or two of these categories, the last player should add one item in each category that doesn’t have any entries yet so that in the end, the theory has at least one of each.

If there are fewer than five players, continue to pass the card around the table until there are five total risks and arcana on the card.

Now put the theory of magic face up in the center of the table and place one story chip on top of it for each player in the game.

Do we need more risks, arcane, and strictures? Less?

Working Magic

To work magic, a character must fulfill at least one requirement. The only way to do this is to spend story chips while narrating. A character may not fulfill a requirement and narrate on the same turn.

By its very nature, magic lives and thrives in situations of crisis, ambition, and uncertainty. *A character may only work magic as part of the resolution of a plot twist.* You can always make Magic itself the plot twist. All you have to do is say “plot twist! Does my character work magic or not?”

Finally, if a player character who is a student of magic works magic, cross “student of magic” off their card and write in “magician”. This is how player characters become magicians.

Originally, supporting characters were never allowed to become magicians. I go back and forth on this. Should the players be the only ones with magician characters?

Taking Risks

Any time a magician works magic, they run the risks written on the theory of magic. Any player who is spending story chips from a bid during the resolution of a plot twist where magic was involved may choose to invoke the risks of magic. When they do, they take a story chip off the theory of magic (if any are left) and add it to their supply.

In essence, narrating effects of the risks of magic are free.

Inspiration

Fiction Books

Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell by Susanna Clarke

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Faeries by Brian Froud and Alan Lee

10,000 Leagues Under the Sea

Sherlock Holmes

Around the World in 80 Days

The Flashman novels

The Difference Engine

The Drawing of the Dark

Non-Fiction Books

A Short History of Nearly Everything

The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia

Games

Fairy, Queen, and Country

Movies

Fairy Tale: a True Story

Television Shows

Manor House

Upstairs Downstairs

Comics and Graphic Novels

The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen

Steamboy