

# Magic : the Gathering

## Short Rules

by Jonathan St-Yves

**Abstract**—Magic is a card game where you battle your friend by casting spells and summoning angels, dragons and monsters. The last mage standing wins!

### I. PREPARATION

To play Magic, you will need:

- One other player
- Two decks of 40 cards (or 60 for experts)
- A way to track life (dice or pen & paper)

### II. STARTING THE GAME

Randomly determine who starts. That player won't draw on his first turn. Each player starts with **20 life** and draws a hidden hand of **7 cards** after shuffling his library (*deck*). **The goal is to bring the opponent to 0 life.** (If your hand has 0, 1, 6 or 7 lands, you can reshuffle and draw a new hand. Only when playing for fun.)

### III. PLAYING YOUR TURN

Players alternate at taking turns, always following these phases:

- 1) **Untap** (*refresh by turning upright*) all your permanents (*cards in play*). The **upkeep** referenced on some cards happens after untapping.
- 2) **Draw** a card. (*Not on the first turn if you play first.*)
- 3) You can **play** one land and use mana from lands to **cast** spells. (*Non-land cards are called spells*)
- 4) **Combat Phase** — see section V.
- 5) After combat, you can still **play** your land if you haven't yet and **cast** more spells.
- 6) **End** your turn. Indicate you are done to your opponent. If you have more than 7 cards in hand, discard until you have 7.

### IV. CARDS

There are a few types of cards. The type of a card is written under its picture.

#### A. Land

Lands are what you need to cast spells. You can play a single land for free on each of your turns.

Lands produce different types of mana. Plains make white mana, islands makes blue, swamps makes black mana, mountains makes red mana and forests produces green mana. These lands are the basic lands which make

the 5 colors of mana. Other special lands exist, some let you choose between mana colors.

**Casting Spells** —The mana cost of a spell is in the top right corner (lands don't have mana cost, they are free). Spells usually have both colored and colorless (any color) costs. For instance, a mana cost of **2♠** means 2 mana of any color + 1 black mana. It must be played with a total 3 mana, of which at least 1 is black. You could cast this spell by using 1 Island and 2 Swamps or alternatively with 3 Swamps.

To produce mana with a land, tap it (tap = turning sideways). Tapping indicate that it has been used this turn and cannot be used again. You can use lands to make mana as soon as you play them. Mana doesn't carry over between phases, you must use it right away.

#### B. Sorcery

Sorceries have an immediate effect when played. Their power is described in the text box. The card is put in the graveyard (*discard pile*) after the effect is applied.

#### C. Creature

Creatures are summoned to help you take down your opponent. They can attack, protect you and often have special abilities.

Creatures have two numbers in the lower right corner (*ex: 2/3*). The first number indicates the attack strength (*power*), which is the number of damages this creature inflict in combat. The second number indicates the *toughness* of the creature, which is how much damage your creature can take in a single turn. If damage equal or greater to it's toughness is done to a creature, it dies. *For instance, a 2/3 creature attacks for 2 damage and need to be dealt 3 damage for it to die.* You don't have to keep track of damage, creatures heal at the end of each turn and ignore the damage from previous turns.

Creatures are sick for a turn after being summoned and can't attack or tap. They can however block. You can only attack with a creature if it was already under your control since the start of your turn. Only creatures are sick this way, other cards can be used right away.

Some creatures have activated abilities that can be used anytime (*even during combat and the opponent's turn*). These abilities are written *Cost:Effect* such as "**♣**:Gain 2 life." The **♣** symbols means tap, which means the ability can only be used once per turn and only if you don't attack. You can't use tap abilities on the first turn, just like you can't attack.

### D. Enchantment

Enchantments are cards that stay in play like creatures but cannot attack or block. They usually have a powerful effect as long as they stay on the battlefield (in play). Some enchantments are Auras and only affect a single permanent to which they are attached (place the Aura card with the target). If the target leaves the battlefield, the Aura is also destroyed.

### E. Instant

Just like sorceries, instants have an immediate effect and are then discarded. What makes instants different is that they can be played *anytime*, just like activated abilities. Use them to surprise your opponent.

## V. COMBAT

The combat phase follows the following steps:

- 1) Declare attackers — The active player says which of his creatures attack and tap them.
- 2) Declare blockers — The defending player says which of his untapped creatures block the attacking creatures. Tapped creatures cannot block. A creature can only block a single attacker but multiple blockers can gang up on an attacking creature. Blocked creatures don't deal damage to the player (*even if the blocker dies before damage is done, the creature is still blocked, it has been distracted*). Note that no creature is forced to attack or block, they can stay safely on the sidelines.
- 3) Deal combat damage — Unblocked creatures deal damage to the defending player. This is usually how you kill your opponent. Blockers and blocked creatures deal damage to each other. If an attacker is blocked by multiple creatures, it distributes its damage between them. For instance, if a 3/3 creature is blocked by a 1/1 and a 2/2, it can distribute 1 and 2 damage respectively to kill both. It receives 3 damages and dies too.

If a player is at 0 life, that player loses the game and his opponent wins.

## VI. REACTING — THE STACK

Instants and activated abilities are special: You can use them anytime. You can even use them in response to the opponent's moves. When that happens, the last played card or ability resolves first. You can even respond to responses!

For instance, say your opponent uses a spell that kills one of your creatures. You have the opportunity to respond. You have an other 1/1 creature named *Carrion Feeder* in play which has an ability that reads *Sacrifice a creature: Put a +1/+1 counter on Carrion Feeder*. In response to the kill spell, you sacrifice the creature that would die and make Carrion Feeder bigger. Your opponent answers to Carrion Feeder's ability by playing an instant that deals 1 damage to it; killing it before it's too big to

handle. (*+1/+1 counters stay on the creature and makes them bigger forever. Use dice or small pieces to track them.*)

All the spell and abilities are then on what is called the stack and resolve in *last in, first out* order: 1 damage is dealt to Carrion Feeder, it dies. The counter isn't put on Carrion Feeder since it's now in the graveyard. The creature was sacrificed immediately when the ability was activated and the kill spell now has no target anymore. When a spell or ability has no valid targets, it is countered.

Note that you cannot respond to land plays and to the combat damage (all damage is dealt immediately and simultaneously). You can however use instants or abilities at end of turns or after drawing.

## VII. THE GOLDEN RULE OF MAGIC

**Anytime a card contradicts the rules, the card overrides the rule.**

## VIII. KEYWORDS AND VOCABULARY

A few abilities are really common and aren't explained on every card:

- Flying — Creatures with flying cannot be blocked by creatures without flying.
- Exile — Instead of going to the graveyard, the card is completely out of the game.
- First Strike — A creature with this keyword deals its combat damage before the other creatures. If it kills a creature in combat, the other creature doesn't strike back.
- Trample — When a creature with trample is blocked, it only deals enough damage to the blockers to kill them. The rest of the damage is done to the defending player.
- Haste — Creatures with haste are not affected by summoning sickness. They can attack and use abilities the turn they come under your control.
- Vigilance — Attacking doesn't cause creatures with vigilance to tap. They can attack and still be available to block on the opponent's turn.

## IX. BUILDING A DECK

Between games, you can mix and match cards to change your deck, or create a brand new one! There are only a few rules:

- The deck must have at least 60 cards.
- There cannot be more than 4 cards with the same name, except for Basic Lands. (*Plains, Forest, Mountain, Swamp, Island*)

## X. FULL RULES

If you want to look up more detailed rules you can google for "*mtg [card or keyword]*" or go to:

**[wizards.com/magic/rules/](http://wizards.com/magic/rules/)**