

## The Lord of the Rings Tarot Card Game

Rules by Mike Fitzgerald

For 2-6 players, ages 10 to adult

The Lord of the Rings Tarot Card Game is easy to learn and quick to play. All players start out as Free Peoples of Middle-earth on a journey to Mount Doom with hopes of destroying the One Ring so it won't fall into the evil hands of Sauron. The journey is represented by the playing of cards from your hand onto the Journey Pile (discard pile). The players as a group reach Mount Doom (i.e., the round ends) as soon as one player has run out of cards. Along the way, players will be influenced by the forces in Middle-earth, and some may be pulled by the Dark Forces to join Sauron in his attempt to gain control of the Ring. This is represented by playing Dark Forces cards and earning Dark Points.

Players earn Victory Points in their journey, representing bravery and their dedication to the cause of either Gandalf or Sauron. At the end of the game, the player or players with the most Victory Points is the winner. Three rounds constitute a game. Each round represents one of the three books in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

To play, you need The Lord of the Rings Tarot deck; coins or counters to keep track

of Dark Points; and a score sheet (pp. 44-47) to keep track of the scores after each round and determine the overall scores at the end of the game.

Refer to the *Quick Reference rule guides* on pages 40-42, and the "Quick Guide to Victory Points" card included with the deck.

### Object of the Game

In their quest to reach Mount Doom, players try to acquire the highest number of Victory Points.

10 Victory Points are awarded at the end of each round to:

- The first player to go out (play all the cards in their hand).

5 Victory Points are awarded at the end of each round to:

- The player who has earned the *least* Dark Points at the end of each round. (5 bonus Victory Points are awarded if the Ring Affiliation is Free.)
- The player who has earned the *most* Dark Points at the end of each round. (5 bonus Victory Points are awarded if the Ring Affiliation is Dark.)
- The player who is the Ring Bearer at the end of the round.

**Note:** If players are tied in any of these Victory Point conditions, they are each given the full 5 Victory Points.

Players also earn 5 Victory Points each for having the most Dark Points at the end of the game, and for having the least Dark Points at the end of the game.

#### The Deck

The playing deck is the 78-card The Lord of the Rings Tarot deck, comprised of:

- 10 numbered cards in each of the four suits of the Minor Arcana (Swords, Wands, Cups, Coins). These are referred to in the rules as Minor Arcana cards.
- Four Court Cards (Page, Knight, Queen, King) in each of the four suits of the Minor Arcana.
- 22 Major Arcana cards ranking from the Fool (0) to the World (XXI).

In the upper right corner of each card is a symbol to delineate the affiliation of the card:



**1. Free Peoples Symbol:** These cards represent Gandalf and the forces of good in Middle-earth. There are 51 Free Peoples cards in the deck, each with a green background.



**2. Dark Forces Symbol:** These cards represent Sauron and the forces of evil in Middle-earth, and give players Dark Points which are used to determine how "good" or "evil" the player is in the journey. There are 20 Dark Forces cards in the deck, each with a red background.



**3. Neutral Symbol:** Neutral cards can be associated with either good or evil. During the game, a player declares a Neutral card Free or Dark when it is played. There are six Neutral cards in the deck, each with a gold background.



**4. One Ring Symbol:** This appears only on the Wheel of Fortune (Major Arcana X), representing the Ring in this game. At the start of each round, the Ring is placed in the center of the table; during the round, it is passed around among the players depending on who is the Ring Bearer (see p. 35). This card is not considered to have a numerical rank in this game.

#### Setup

1. Before play begins, remove the Ring (Wheel of Fortune) from the deck and place it face up in the middle of the playing area. This card represents the Ring that the group is carrying to Mount Doom to destroy.

2. Randomly designate one player to deal. Put about 30 coins or counters in the playing area where everyone can reach them. These represent Dark Points. The dealer now gives seven cards to each player.

In the second and third rounds of play, all players study their hands and select two cards to pass to another player. (See instructions to follow.)

**First Round** No cards are passed.

**Second Round** All players pass two cards to the player on their *left*.

**Third Round** All players pass two cards to the player on their *right*.

3. The dealer now turns up the top card from the Draw Pile and places it face up next to the Draw Pile to start the Journey Pile. The player to the left of the dealer plays first, and play proceeds clockwise.

During the game, players will decide whether they will try to align themselves with Gandalf and the Free Peoples, or join the Dark Forces of Sauron. The Free Peoples group will play as many Free Peoples cards as they can, while trying to avoid Dark Points (see pp. 36-37). Those aligned with Sauron's Dark Forces will try to play as many Dark Forces cards and score as many Dark Points as possible. While players will have a good idea whether they will try to be Free or Dark when they first look at their hands by noting how many Free or Dark cards they hold, they may change their associations in the course of the game. Neutral cards are declared to be either Free or Dark when they are played.

## The Play

There are four options for play:

1. Play a card from your hand to the Journey Pile that matches the top card on the Journey Pile in suit or rank.
2. Play a Major Arcana card to the Ring.
3. Draw a card from the Draw Pile, and then play a card as described in play option 1 or 2.
4. Draw a card from the Draw Pile, and then elect to end your turn without playing a card to either the Journey Pile or the Ring.

Playing onto the Journey Pile brings the group closer to their goal of reaching Mount Doom to destroy the Ring.

Playing to the Ring determines the forces controlling the Ring, i.e., the Free Peoples or the Dark Forces; playing to the Ring also determines which player is the Ring Bearer.

**1. Play a card from your hand to the Journey Pile that matches the top card on the Journey Pile in suit or rank.**

**Example:** Top card is the Two of Cups; play any Two or any Cup.

The Major Arcana cards are "wild cards"; players may play any Major Arcana to the Journey Pile at any time and declare a new suit. The next card played must match the declared suit, or be another Major Arcana card.

**Example:** Card played on top of King of Wands is Temperance; player declares

"Coins" as new suit. Next card played can be any Coin or any Major Arcana.

Similarly, if the first card in the Journey Pile is a Major Arcana card, the dealer declares the suit (Swords, Wands, Cups, Coins) for the first player to match.

**Note:** You may play a Minor Arcana card to the Journey Pile on top of a Major Arcana if it matches the numerical rank of the Major Arcana card. This only applies to the Major Arcana cards ranked I-IX.

**Example:** Top card is the Empress (III): play any Three or any Major Arcana.

But if the top card is the Hanged Man (XII Major Arcana), and the new suit is declared to be Cups, the next player can play any Cup or any Major Arcana wild card; in this game, no Minor Arcana card matches rank with a Major Arcana card above the rank of 9. The Court Cards do not have numerical ranks in this game.

## 2. Play a Major Arcana card to the Ring.

Major Arcana cards can be played to the Ring in order to gain control of the Ring. The rank of the card played to the Ring must be higher in rank than the last card played to the Ring.

**Example:** The Hierophant (V) is on the Ring. A Major Arcana ranked above V (5) may then be played to the Ring.

### Exceptions:

- The Ring, although a Major Arcana card, is not considered to have a numerical rank in this game. The first card played to the Ring, therefore, may be of any rank.
- Although the Fool (0) is the lowest ranking Major Arcana card, it can be played on top of any other Major Arcana card to the Ring. Once this is done, any Major Arcana card of a higher rank than the Fool (0) may be played on top of it.

When a player places a Major Arcana card on the Ring, they must immediately draw a card from the Draw Pile to their hand to replace that Major Arcana card (even if the card played empties their hand, the player must draw a new card and is not yet "out").

### Becoming the Ring Bearer:

Whoever plays a Major Arcana to the Ring gains the honor of becoming the group's Ring Bearer, placing the Ring in front of them with the Major Arcana card on top of it. This player represents the brave traveler who carries the Ring to Mount Doom. The player who is the Ring Bearer at the end of the round will earn 5 Victory Points.

In addition, the Ring Bearer may elect to add or remove one Dark Point to or from any player's score (including their own) in

the beginning of his or her turn. The Ring Bearer announces which player is to receive or lose one Dark Point before any other play action is taken. (A Dark Point taken away from a player is not given to another player; nor is a Dark Point assigned to a player taken from another player.)

**3. Draw a card from the Draw Pile, and then play a card as described in play option 1 or 2.** Remember that each time you play a Major Arcana card to the Ring, you must draw another card from the Draw Pile. Therefore, if you draw a card from the Draw Pile and then play a Major Arcana card on the Ring, you still must draw a second card into your hand.

**4. Draw a card from the Draw Pile, and then elect to end your turn without playing a card to either the Journey Pile or the Ring** if you cannot or do not wish to play any card you presently hold in your hand.

#### **Dark Points**

During the round, players will acquire Dark Points (use counters or coins to keep track of each player's Dark Points during each round). These symbolize the extent to which each player is influenced by the Dark Forces of Sauron.

Dark Points are acquired in the following four ways:

1. Playing a Dark Force card or a Neutral card declared to be Dark to the Journey Pile = 2 *Dark Points*

2. Playing a Dark Force Major Arcana card or a Neutral card declared to be Dark to the Ring = 3 *Dark Points*

3. A Dark Force card held in a player's hand at the end of a round, or any Neutral cards in a player's hand at the end of a round that are declared Dark = 1 *Dark Point each*

4. At the beginning of each of the Ring Bearer's turns, he or she may assign or take away 1 *Dark Point* to or from any player (including themselves).

At the end of each round, all players record their total Dark Points on the score sheet, and start the next round with zero Dark Points.

#### **Ending the Round**

A player should alert the others when one card remains in their hand. To do this, the player announces "One Ring." There is no penalty for not doing this. The round ends as soon as one player has "gone out" by playing their last card to the Journey Pile.

If the Draw Pile is depleted before a player goes out, the round ends with no Victory Points given for going out. All other Victory Points are awarded normally.

If any player has more than seven cards in their hand at the end of a round, that player does not score any Victory Points. However, that player's Dark Points are added to their overall Dark Point totals for the game.

### Scoring

The player who goes out first is the best guide in the group. This player gets *10 Victory Points* for finding the quickest way to Mount Doom for the group.

The Ring Bearer at the end of the round has shown tremendous courage in bringing the Ring to Mount Doom, and gets *5 Victory Points* for bravery.

The player with the most Dark Points has been influenced by the Dark Forces and has joined Sauron in his fight against the Free Peoples, and receives *5 Victory Points* as a reward from Sauron for his loyalty. Add *5 more Victory Points* to this player's score if the Ring has a Dark Force card on it at the end of the round—an extra bonus from Sauron for keeping the Ring from being destroyed! This is shown as "Ring Affiliation" on the score sheet.

The player with the least number of Dark Points has remained true to the Free Peoples of Middle-earth and receives *5 Victory Points* as a reward from Gandalf and the good forces in Middle-earth. Add *5 more Victory Points* to this player's score if the Ring has a Free Peoples card on it at the end of the round, as an extra bonus from Gandalf for helping to destroy the Ring at Mount Doom. This is also shown as "Ring Affiliation" on the score sheet.

Record all players' Dark Points at the end of each round on the score sheet. At the end of the game, the player with the highest total Dark Points receives *5 more Victory Points*, and the player with the lowest total Dark Points also receives *5 Victory Points*. If more than one player has the highest or lowest total Dark Points, they each get *5 Victory Points*. After totaling all the Victory Points, the player with the highest overall total of Victory Points wins the game.

When playing with two players, note that the game will depend upon which player goes out first, which player is the Ring Bearer, and which forces control the Ring in the end, since each player will automatically get the Victory Points for having the most or least Dark Points.

## Quick Reference: Play Options for The Lord of the Rings Tarot Card Game

**option 1** Play a card from your hand to the Journey Pile that matches the top card on the Journey Pile in suit or rank.

- Play a Minor Arcana card: must match top card on Journey Pile in suit or rank
- Play a Major Arcana card: declare a new suit to be played by next player
- Take 2 Dark Points if you play a Dark Forces card, or a Neutral card that you declare to be Dark

**option 2** Play a Major Arcana card from your hand to the Ring

- Play a Major Arcana card of higher numerical rank than the last card played to the Ring

### EXCEPTIONS:

- > *The first card played to the Ring may be of any numerical rank. The Ring has no numerical value in this game.*
- > *Although the Fool (0) is the lowest ranking Major Arcana card, it can be played on top of any other Major Arcana card to the Ring. Once this is done, any Major Arcana card of a higher rank may be played on top of the Fool (0).*
- Take 3 Dark Points if you play a Dark Forces card, or a Neutral card that you declare to be Dark
- Always draw another card after you have played a card to the Ring
- You are now the Ring Bearer. You may assign or take away a point to or from any player in the beginning of each of your turns

**option 3** Draw a card from the Draw Pile, and then play a card as described in play option 1 or 2

**option 4** Draw a card from the Draw Pile, and then elect to end your turn without playing a card to either the Journey Pile or the Ring if you cannot or do not wish to play any card presently in your hand

## Quick Reference: Dark Points

Dark Points are awarded as follows. Keep track of Dark Points in each round with coins or counters. Players begin each new round with zero Dark Points.

- Dark Force card or Neutral card declared to be Dark played to Journey Pile = 2 Dark Points
- Dark Force Major Arcana card or Neutral card declared to be Dark played to Ring = 3 Dark Points
- Dark Force card held in a player's hand at the end of a round, or any Neutral cards in a player's hand at the end of a round declared Dark = 1 Dark Point each
- Optional points given to or removed from any player by Ring Bearer = plus or minus 1 Dark Point

### Quick Reference: Winning the Game

To win the game, you must score the highest number of Victory Points.

10 Victory Points are awarded at the end of each round to:

- The first player to "go out" (play all their cards)

5 Victory Points are awarded at the end of each round to:

- The player who has earned the least Dark Points (5 bonus Victory Points awarded if the Ring Affiliation is Free)
- The player who has earned the most Dark Points (5 bonus Victory Points awarded if the Ring Affiliation is Dark)
- The player who is the Ring Bearer at the end of the round
- *At the end of the game:* The player with most Dark Points overall and the least Dark Points overall

### About the Creators of

#### The Lord of the Rings Tarot Deck & Card Game...

From the first time he read Tolkien's books, *Peter Pracownik* knew he would one day paint the scenes and characters. He painted the Dragon Tarot and Wyvern. Peter has lived in Glastonbury and Tintagel, England, for most of his life, has held art exhibitions throughout the world, and runs an art gallery in Glastonbury.

*Terry Donaldson* is a professional Tarot reader, astrologer, and counselor, and the founder/director of the London Tarot Centre. He is the author of *Step-By-Step Tarot*, *Principles of Tarot*, and *The Dragon Tarot*, and was co-creator of the Dragon Tarot deck and Wyvern. Terry is married and has a daughter, Claudia.

*Mike Fitzgerald* is an accomplished game designer. He created the collectible card game Wyvern for U.S. Games Systems, as well as Charlie Brown Plays Baseball and Peanuts™ Comic Strip card games.



<b>PLAYERS</b> .....→					
Game Out +10					
Ring Bearer +5					
Ring Affiliation +5					
Most Dark Points +5					
Least Dark Points +5					
<b>First Round Totals</b>					
Game Out +10					
Ring Bearer +5					
Ring Affiliation +5					
Most Dark Points +5					
Least Dark Points +5					
<b>Second Round Totals</b>					
Game Out +10					
Ring Bearer +5					
Ring Affiliation +5					
Most Dark Points +5					
Least Dark Points +5					
<b>Third Round Totals</b>					
Dark Points 1st Round					
Dark Points 2nd Round					
Dark Points 3rd Round					
<b>Total Dark Points</b>					
Most/Less Dark Points +5					
<b>FINAL SCORES</b>					

Also refer to the "Quick Guide to Victory Points" card included with the deck.  
Players may reproduce this score sheet.

<b>PLAYERS</b> .....→					
Game Out +10					
Ring Bearer +5					
Ring Affiliation +5					
Most Dark Points +5					
Least Dark Points +5					
<b>First Round Totals</b>					
Game Out +10					
Ring Bearer +5					
Ring Affiliation +5					
Most Dark Points +5					
Least Dark Points +5					
<b>Second Round Totals</b>					
Game Out +10					
Ring Bearer +5					
Ring Affiliation +5					
Most Dark Points +5					
Least Dark Points +5					
<b>Third Round Totals</b>					
Dark Points 1st Round					
Dark Points 2nd Round					
Dark Points 3rd Round					
<b>Total Dark Points</b>					
Most/Less Dark Points +5					
<b>FINAL SCORES</b>					

Also refer to the "Quick Guide to Victory Points" card included with the deck.  
Players may reproduce this score sheet.