

Monkey

The Storytelling Game of the Journey to the West

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D101
GAMES

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Ultimate Thanks to

The Monkey King

Matthew ‘Ginger’ Harrison

Maximum Thanks

Andrew Edwards, Neil “Uncle”Gow, Paul Mitchener, Dominic Mooney, Gwen Mott

The Mighty Monkey Army

A bunch of kind folk who cheered on development and have helped in various ways.

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Introduction

The story of the Stone Monkey

A new day dawns high upon an ancient mountain. From a stone egg, a fully-formed Stone Monkey is born. Immortal watchers report this auspicious event to the the Jade Emperor, ruler of the Western Heaven.

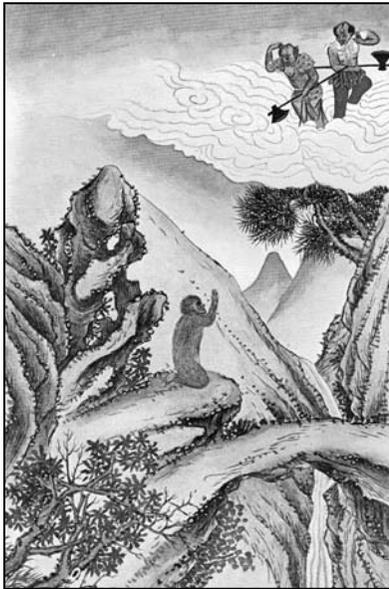
The Stone Monkey is bold and energetic and goes on to lead the other monkeys to the Land of Water Curtain Mountain. By being the first to leap the high waterfall and see what is at the top, he becomes their King.

Life in the Land of Water Curtain Mountain is idyllic, but after decades of bliss the Monkey King becomes restless.

“What is it, our Lord?” his old monkey advisers ask.

“I am ruler of all that I see, but one day I will be dead and forgotten,” the Monkey King anxiously replies.

“I have heard that in the lands of man, there are Taoist Sages who know the secret of Immortality,” says one of the old monkeys.



“Excellent! Then I shall find such a Sage, who will be sure to teach me. I will need not fear death and you will not need fear the loss of your beloved King, my little monkeys!” exclaims the Monkey King.

Greatly excited, the Stone Monkey prepares immediately for the journey and after saying goodbye leaves his subjects for the lands of men.

If, gentle reader, you wish to learn what became of the restless Monkey King, his quest for Immortality and the trouble into which it got it him, then please read on.

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The Journey to the West

This storytelling game draws its inspiration from the 16th century Chinese novel *Journey to the West* by Wu Ch'eng-en. It is more commonly known as *Monkey*, the name of its English translation by Arthur Waley (published by Penguin), in the West. The story is set in a colourful version of China, featuring Immortals and locations from popular Chinese mythology, weaving a tale that is at once fantastic, satirical, action-packed and spiritual in nature.

The novel tells the story of the exploits of the Immortal Monkey King. Born from a stone egg, he rises to become ruler of all the monkeys. Worried that he will not live forever, he leaves his little monkeys and searches the world in search of a Taoist Master who knows the secret of Immortality. Finally, he meets the Taoist Sage, the Patriarch, who takes him on as a student and he learns what he desires. Monkey's impatient nature soon lands him in trouble with his teacher, who dismisses him, warning him never to mention that he was his student. He returns to his Monkey Kingdom only to find the Little Monkeys enslaved by a Demon of Havoc. Immortal and now a master of Taoist magic, he makes short work of the demon. Then he sets his mind to attaining a place amongst the ranks of the Heavenly Immortals of the Western Taoist Heaven. On the advice of the wise Planet Venus, the Jade Emperor, ruler of the Western Heaven, makes Monkey the Heavenly Stable Boy, to keep him out of trouble. Monkey finally realises his lowly status in the ranks of Heaven. Feeling slighted, denied the honour his ego demands, he runs amok, causing all sorts of trouble. Meanwhile, Great Buddha in the Eastern Buddhist



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Heaven hears that there is trouble in the Western Heaven and pops over to see what is happening. Seeing the troublesome Monkey, he traps him under a mountain, saying that one day a passerby will release him and provide him with the means to re-enter Heaven.

The story continues as Monkey is released by the Buddhist Priest Tripitaka, charged by the Tang Emperor of China to recover sacred scrolls missing from the Chinese canon of Buddhist writings. In the priest's service, Monkey accompanies him from China to India to collect them. Two other fallen Immortals also seeking redemption join them, Sandy and Pigsy.

After many adventures, they regain the scrolls and Monkey, who has been judged to have redeemed himself, enters the Buddhist Heaven.

In this game, the players play Immortals who, like Monkey, Sandy and Pigsy, have fallen from favour with the Heavenly authorities and seek to regain their place in Heaven.



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Earth, Heaven's mirror

The game takes place in a mythological version of ancient China. Mortals swarm the great cities of the Tang dynasty (7th-10th century AD) and the earthly emperor is directly responsible to his Heavenly counterpart, the Jade Emperor, who sits in his court in the Western Heaven. The Jade Emperor is surrounded by a celestial bureaucracy of Immortals who are responsible for the smooth running of the cosmos. In the Eastern Heaven sits Great Buddha, who with the aid of the other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas offers the virtuous man release from the eternal cycle of rebirth for those prepared to follow the way.



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Restless and disobedient Immortals

Each player controls an 'Immortal'. This is their alter-ego in the story which the Narrator describes to them. In Chinese myth, Immortality is not only granted to the gods. They may be awakened intelligent Animal Spirits, whose bestial nature gets them into all sorts of mischief yet gives them abilities beyond that of any mortal. They may be Immortals who serve in the Celestial Bureaucracy. Or they may be Ascended masters, Kung fu experts and Taoist sages who have trained hard in the mystic arts and attained Immortality

as a result. They may even be demons seeking to change their evil nature. An Immortal has a number of numerical scores, known as **Ranks** which are attached to short descriptive words for quick reference. Each **Rank** measures how powerful or skilful an Immortal is in a particular area.

Each Immortal has **Skills** which represent areas of expertise. For example, Cat Kung Fu will cover not only the fighting methods of this martial art, but also associated skills of perception, stealth and balance. They fall into three broad categories: Mind, Body and Spirit.

Attitudes describe an Immortal's personality or physical traits. These are strong and noticeable to anyone meeting them. If skills tell you what an Immortal can do, attitudes tell you how they do it. Attitudes give a bonus when used to perform actions. They can be divided between the Yin (feminine, passive) and Yang (masculine, active), neither of which is more effective than the other.

All Immortals have **Magical Powers**. These may stem from mystic items that they have acquired, spells that they know, or abilities gained through Kung-fu practice.



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Virtue measures the standing of the Immortal in the eyes of Heaven. Evil demons have a Virtue of 0, while saintly Priests have a Virtue of 6. The players represent Immortals who have fallen out of favour with the Heavens, and thus have a starting Virtue of 1. Through right action, they seek to increase their Virtue to 6 and be readmitted into one of the Heavens. Players set the goals which will gain them Virtue and thereby steer their Immortal's story.

Fortune represents a pool of good luck upon which the Immortal can draw. It can create long-term effects, such as improving an Immortal's scores, or temporary effects, such as giving a bonus when performing Actions. Once spent, Fortune is lost. It can be gained through harmonious or virtuous behaviour and lost through disruptive or non-virtuous acts. Unlike Virtue, increases in Fortune are awarded by the Narrator.

What you need to play

A group of two to seven players.

One player takes on the role of Narrator, who describes the game's setting and plays all the supporting Immortals, while the other players play the Immortals who take centre stage in the story. While the game can work as a very intimate and intense 'one on one' game (one Immortal run by a player, with a Narrator) the game works best with a group of three to six Immortals.

Pencils/pens and paper

For writing out the player Immortals' details, drawing rough maps and making notes during the game.

A deck of cards

Each player and the Narrator has a deck of cards. Players and Narrators draw cards from the deck to resolve actions during the adventure, such as fights and lively debates.

An adventure

This can either be pre-written, such as the ones in the back of this book, or created by the Narrator. Guidance on how to create adventures is given in the Narrator's section of the book.

Some time

A game of Monkey typically takes between three and four hours.

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Imagination

Since the game does not have a physical board, all the action takes place in the imagination of the players and takes the form of a conversation between the players and the Narrator. The players describe their Immortals' actions and the Narrator describes the reaction of the non-player Immortals or environment.

The Narrator

One of the players needs to be the Narrator. The Narrator is responsible for describing the surroundings and the situations in which the player Immortals find themselves. The Narrator also describes the actions and plays the part of any other Immortals and mortals, called non-player characters (or NPCs), that the player Immortals encounter. They may range from an elderly woman who works the ferry that the Immortals are using to cross the mighty river that bars their way, or the angry Dragon King of the Western Sea whom they have just offended by their impolite behaviour.

Narrators need to know the rules and guidelines in the players' section, for they are the person that the players will look to in order to clear up any misunderstanding or disputes about the rules.

While the role of Narrator is pivotal, the Narrator's section provides a great deal of help and tips on how to run the game smoothly and effortlessly. It also gives an overview of the many interesting locations and Immortals that populate the world of Monkey.

The Game System

Most actions that the player Immortals attempt can be resolved using common sense; there isn't any need to use the rules in this book. Simply by talking it through between players, the action will be resolved. When the outcome of an Immortal's action is uncertain, the Narrator may ask for an Action. Each player has a deck of playing cards, which is used in this situation. Aces are high; Jokers count as twenty, a much higher score, that when drawn usually means an automatic and resounding success. The Narrator can call for one of two types of Action:

A **Simple Action** is called when a Narrator wishes quickly to resolve a conflict in the story, such as climbing a mountain or checking to see if they can hear the rustling of the ghostly breeze behind them. The player randomly draws a number of cards equal to the skill he is

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using. He gains an additional card for using an appropriate Attitude, such as drawing on his Very Determined in scaling the mountain. The opposing Immortal or force, in this case the Mountain, draws a number of cards equal to the skill or resistance they are using, with a bonus card for appropriate Attitudes or environmental conditions. For example, the Mountain pulls an extra card because of the weather: it has been raining heavily. The two players add the total of their cards, with victory going to the higher score.

A **Dramatic Action** is resolved in exactly the same way by pulling cards. However, Dramatic Actions are called when a Narrator wishes to focus the game session on an important and lengthy scene in the story, such as a long, tough fight against a River Dragon. The Action is not resolved in one draw of the cards. For each lost round, a participant gains a Strike and when they have three Strikes against them, they are knocked out of the action. The eventual winner(s) are the characters who have knocked all their opponents out of the Action

For more detail about the Action system, see Chapter 3.

Now that you have an introduction to this game, yet are anxious to start, please be patient, gentle reader and read the next chapter, where you will learn how to create your own Immortal.

