

Ascend Online: The Microgame

Want to experience your own story in the world of *Ascend Online*? In this collaborative storytelling microgame, you and your friends create a party of Adventurers and brave the virtual reality world. Can you build a home and help it prosper? What dangers await you in your quest?

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

- **1-4 players.** The game can be played solo, in person with friends, via voice or video conference, or even via text chat.
- **A deck of playing cards** with jokers removed. Each player can use their own deck if desired.
- **A pen and note paper, or a character sheet** (included at the end of this microgame) to record your party's story as it unfolds.
- **About 2 hours.** This play time can vary significantly depending how involved your group is in describing the world and developing your story.

CREATE YOUR CHARACTERS

Each player needs to create their own *Ascend Online* character. First, define three key aspects about your character: the species you play, your base class, and an interesting quirk about you. In addition, decide who you were in real life before you entered the virtual world. In this microgame, these characteristics have no mechanical impact on the game—instead, they inform the decisions you make and the way you describe your actions.

You can choose each characteristic by **drawing four cards** and referencing the **Character Creation table**—the result is determined by the type of card you draw. If you draw a **Jack, Queen, King, or Ace**, use that result regardless of its suit; otherwise, go by the **suit** of the card you drew. For example, if you're choosing your class and you draw a **4 of Hearts**, you're a **rogue**, but if you draw a **Jack of Hearts**, you're a **bard**.

CHARACTER CREATION

CARD	SPECIES	CLASS	QUIRK	REAL-LIFE IDENTITY
Jack	Catfolk	Bard	Cursed	Celebrity
Queen	Saurian	Monk	Lore expert	Reporter or writer
King	Ogre or half-giant	Scout	Former criminal	Unusually old or young
Ace	Goblin or orc	Combine 2 classes	Has a noble patron	Independently wealthy
Clubs	Dwarf	Mage	Expert crafter	Bohemian freelancer
Diamonds	Elf or dark elf	Priest	Remarkably strong	Athlete or military background
Hearts	Gnome or halfling	Rogue	Competitive	Powerful executive
Spades	Human	Warrior	Charismatic	Aspiring actor

Once you know these four basic facts about your character, introduce yourself to the rest of the group. What is your name in the world of *Ascend Online*? What does your character look like? Add as much—or as little—detail as you want. Like you, each of the other player characters has logged on to play this virtual reality game—do you already know any of them, or are you all meeting for the first time in *Ascend Online*?



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CREATE YOUR STARTING LOCATION

Every group of Adventurers needs a place to call home. In *Ascend Online*, Marcus—known as Lyrian Rastler in the game—begins by the village of Aldford, a farming community threatened by goblins that lies near an ancient Nafarran ruin. As a group, **draw four cards** and refer to the **Starting Location table** to determine the basic facts about how your adventure begins. Take turns and cooperatively decide how these elements work together, then add details. What's the name of this community? What are its people like? How does the complication affect it? Have your Adventurers been welcomed by locals, or do you need to prove yourself?

STARTING LOCATION

CARD	LOCATION	WHICH IS...	...WHO	COMPLICATION
Jack	Wizard's tower	Just taken from...	Undead	Tied to a major storyline
Queen	Fortress	Sacred to...	A powerful noble	Home to an important NPC
King	Capital city	At war with...	Dangerous Adventurers	Monitored by a Justicar
Ace	Prison	In the migration path of...	A mysterious force	Struggling with internal conflicts
Clubs	Inn	Suspicious of...	Goblins or orcs	Near an ancient Nafarran ruin
Diamonds	Farmstead	Controlled by...	Spiders or beasts	Claimed by a noble house
Hearts	Village	Threatened by...	Bandits	Built on a mysterious foundation
Spades	Town	Negotiating with...	Dark elves	Rich in crafting resources



DETERMINE YOUR MAIN QUEST

While playing *Ascend Online*, your Adventurers will face many challenges, but one major quest defines your story. **Draw two cards** and consult the **Main Quest table**, then work together to add details. If you need to banish an undead menace, is it a zombie plague or the ghost of an ancient tyrant? If you need to resolve a noble feud, who are these nobles and what are they fighting over? You may not know these answers right away; if you have to solve a magical mystery, part of the challenge could be learning the details of the mystery. But this driving goal defines your story—make sure you're all happy with it!

MAIN QUEST

CARD	YOU MUST...	WHILE...
Jack	Obtain a mystical relic	Restoring a corrupted shrine
Queen	Negotiate peace	Resolving a noble feud
King	Explore the region	Defeating a dragon
Ace	Secure an important resource	Securing sponsors for your stream
Clubs	Defend your starting location	Stopping a bloodthirsty Adventurer
Diamonds	Solve a magical mystery	Banishing an undead menace
Hearts	Reclaim an ancient ruin	Defeating a legion of monsters
Spades	Found a guild of Adventurers	Preventing an unnatural plague

PLAYING THE GAME

In *Ascend Online*, you have to log out of the game for one day every ten days. In this microgame, your main quest will last for **ten turns**, with each turn reflecting the action of **one day**. Choose a player to take the first turn—they are the first **active player**.

- 1. Establish the Challenge of the Day.** The active player should **draw one card** and refer to the **Challenges and Consequences table** to determine today's **challenge**. The player to their right draws an additional card, determining the **forces** involved with the challenge. Continuing in a circle, the next player should **draw one card** to determine the **reward** that could be gained through success. The last player should draw **one final card** to determine the **consequence** of failure. If you have fewer than four players, this just means that some players will draw more than one card.
- 2. Develop the Challenge.** Once you have all four elements, work together to add details to the challenge. If you need to fight an evil Adventurer, who are they? Do they have an army or are they alone? If there's a resource shortage, what is it—food? Crafting supplies? Is the challenge targeting your starting location, or are you venturing away from it? Most important, **how is this challenge connected to your main quest?**

- 3. Describe the Scene.** The active player describes how their character **leads the effort to resolve this challenge**; whatever they're doing, their character is at the center of it and will be the one to gain the reward or suffer the consequences.
- 4. Resolve the Challenge.** The active player and the player to their left **each draw one card and compare them**; aces are high. If the **active player's card is equal to or higher than** the other player's card, they are victorious and receive the reward; if the active player's card is lower, they (and their companions) have failed and that character suffers the consequences determined by the Challenges and Consequences table. As a group, discuss the outcome and how the day ends.

Once the turn is complete, the player to the left of the active player becomes the new active player and begins a new turn. As the active player, they may choose to either introduce a new challenge, or if they prefer, engage a challenge from a previous turn that wasn't defeated.

At the end of each turn, discuss how everyone feels about the events of the day and your progress on your main quest. At the end of the tenth turn, look back at your accomplishments. You're all about to log out of the game: Did you complete your main quest? You're all about to log out of the game: Did you complete your main quest? Are you celebrated as heroes, or are you leaving the starting location in peril? There's no right or wrong answer, but this is the end of this chapter of your story. Are you returning to the real world in triumph, or are you afraid of what you'll find when you log back in? When you play again, you can keep your characters and starting location, creating a new main quest and considering the impact of your previous adventures, or you can start over with an entirely new cast and location!

AN ONLINE WORLD

As you tell your stories, remember that *Ascend Online* is a virtual reality game. Death isn't permanent—though it hurts, your Adventurer ultimately just suffers embarrassment and a temporary penalty. Within the novels, characters improve skills and ability scores, gaining levels and choosing class specialties. This microgame doesn't have that level of mechanical detail, but you can add those details to your *story*. Did you succeed in a diplomatic challenge? You can describe how your Speechcraft has improved. Did you get crafting materials as a reward? Describe who is working with those materials and what they're creating.

No matter the outcome, remember that that this is a collaborative storytelling game, and even if you fail in your quest, you can't lose as long as you have fun creating the story!

CHALLENGES AND CONSEQUENCES

CARD	CHALLENGE	FORCES	REWARD	CONSEQUENCE
2	Wandering monsters	An evil Adventurer	Crafting materials	Death (temporary)
3	Enemy building strength	A rival guild	Improved skills	Imprisonment
4	Enemy attacks!	A god or its servants	New spells or a Spellbook	Ætherwarped (magical mutation)
5	Rumors of treasure	Bandits	Magical weapon or armor	Lingering injury
6	Ruins discovered	An Eberian noble	Pure Æther (magical energy)	Your starting location is damaged
7	Dangerous weather	An old friend	Gold or jewels	A resource is lost
8	Mysterious stranger	Goblins or orcs	Magical treasure	An enemy gains power
9	Resource shortage	Ogres or giants	Valuable secret	Something is stolen
10	Diplomatic negotiations	Elves or dark elves	Fame and Renown	Your reputation is hurt
Jack	Allies need help!	Undead	A loyal companion	You gain a Nemesis
Queen	A fetch quest	Unusual animals	A new alliance	An alliance is lost
King	Problems IRL	The locals	A mystical blessing	A sinister curse
Ace	A world event	A malevolent force	Video ratings soar!	Video ratings plummet!

Character Sheet

You can use this sheet to record pertinent details about your characters and their adventures as they explore the world of *Ascend Online*.

PLAYER NAME
CHARACTER NAME
SPECIES
CLASS
QUIRK
REAL-LIFE IDENTITY

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STARTING LOCATION

NOTES

MAIN QUEST