

# Fundamentals

## How To Win The Game

- Each Player begins with 20 Life Points.
- To win the game, reduce your opponent's Life Points to 0.
- Players can gain additional life beyond 20 using certain cards.
- Some cards allow players to pay life as a resource. ( risk...reward..... )
- If a player needs to draw a card from an empty Main Deck, they lose.

## Important Notes:

- There is no way to force your opponent to “deck out” in Manacaster. It only happens when a player gets greedy drawing extra cards.
- The only way to win the game is by attacking with Units. There are no “direct damage” effects in this game.

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## Setting Up The Game

*( If you are playing digitally, most of this will be done for you automatically! )*

## Game Components

To play Manacaster, each player needs:

- A Main Deck of exactly 50 non-mana cards. 1 copy limit per card.
  - A 13-card Mana Deck. No copy limit per card.
2. If playing with *tabletop cards*, you'll also need:
- *A score pad to track changes in life points. ( Don't trust dice! )*
  - *A way to track temporary changes to Units. (...maybe trust dice? )*
  - *An opponent, either human or otherwise ( definitely don't trust dice. )*
3. Set aside your Mana deck face-down. You may look at it any time.
5. Shuffle your Main Deck and place it face down. Neither player can look at it.
6. Randomly select who is the first Attacking Player.
7. Look at the top 14 cards of your deck and select your opening hand\*.

*\*This will be covered in full depth later in this rulebook.*

## The Turn Cycle

The most important concept to understand in Manacaster is that both players can deploy Units and Actions on each turn, which includes refreshing resources, deploying cards, and everything else a player could typically do during their turn. The exception is that one player is the “attacker” and the other is the “defender”, and *this role flips each turn.*

The player with the “attacker” role, usually called the “active” player, is not forced to attack unless one of their Units says so on the card.

The player with the “defender” role cannot attack and must only decide whether to block incoming damage or accept the loss of life points

## Starting The Turn

A turn starts with the active player either deploying a card or saying “pass”. If the player deploys a Unit or Action card, the defending player is now given a chance to deploy a card or say “pass”.

**If at any time both players say “Pass” without any deployment between, the turn progresses to the next stage**, which in this case is Combat. We’ll explain how that works later on, but after combat, there is another “deployment” stage in which the defending player has the first opportunity to deploy or pass.

The result of this system is a steady clockwork rhythm of alternating deployments and combats, which will feel familiar to players of games like Chess, for example.

## The Four Stages of a Turn

1. Deploy Stage, Pre-Combat. Player in Attacking role deploys first.
2. Combat: Declare attackers & defenders, resolve damage.
3. Deploy Stage, Post-Combat. Player in Defending role deploys first.
4. End Stage: Both players refresh mana, draw a card, clear damage on Units.

We will discuss each of these stages in more depth as we progress through this guide, so don’t worry about memorizing any of this!

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## The 3 Types of Cards

Manacaster is a simple game with complex interactions; Therefore, *there are only three card types in Manacaster; Units, Actions & Mana.*

**Mana cards are used to pay resource costs** of Units and Actions – more about Mana cards in a moment.

**Units are how you win the game;** you beat up your opponent with your army, while preventing them from doing the same. You cannot win the game without Units, since there are no ways to directly damage your opponent aside from attacking.

**Actions are one-time-usage cards that affect Units and players,** representing things such as magic spells, handy items, and forces of nature. They don't deploy onto the board, but they may leave temporary or permanent effects in their wake.

### Units: Your Army

- Remain in play until killed.
- Have Attack (ATK) and Defense (DEF) stats.
- Cannot *attack* on the same turn they're deployed, unless they have **Rapid**.
- Can attack the enemy payer and block incoming attacks for you.
- Can join together to block a single attacker, allowing a swarm of small units to contend with a single large Unit.
- Have at least one special combat ability based on its elements ( see below for example ).

- Cannot block if they attacked last turn, unless they have the special ability **Alert**.

After deploying a Unit, your opponent has a chance to deploy a card of any type if they wish.

### Actions: Your Magic

- Are one-time effects that can:
  - Strengthen your own Units.
  - Weaken or deal damage to opponent's Units.
  - Weaken or deal damage to all Units.
  - Gain Life.
  - Draw cards.
- Used to enhance your Units or disrupt your opponent's Units.
- Resolved immediately and discarded after use.
- May have permanent or temporary effects on gameplay.

After deploying an Action, your opponent has a chance to deploy a card of any type if they wish.

### Mana: Your Resource

- Each Mana provides one resource per turn. The type(s) of mana depend on the card.
- Refreshes at the end of each turn so you can use it again next turn.
- Players *must* deploy one Mana per turn until they reach the max capacity.
- The maximum mana capacity is 12, but certain gameplay modes may increase this.
- Can be deployed before or after Combat.

After deploying a Mana, **you may deploy a Unit or Action** without yielding to your opponent.

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## The Resource System

### Card Costs

- Units and Actions all cost at least one Mana. There are no zero-cost cards.
- Each card shows its Mana cost on the upper left corner. *Costs can include:*
- Specific Elemental requirements, represented by a circle with a single Elemental symbol within it..
- Hybrid Elements are represented with 2 or more symbols, and can be paid with **your choice of either Element**.
- A quantity of Nonspecific Mana, paid with any Element, represented by a white circle with a number within it.

### Multi-Element Mana

- Some Mana provide a choice among more than one type of mana.
- Mana cards offering multiple mana types *still produce only one mana each turn*.
- Cannot be used on the turn you deploy it unless you pay life points.
- Mana cards with a choice of **two** mana can be used immediately for **-1 LP**.
- Mana cards with a choice of **three** mana can be used immediately for **-2 LP**.
- The -LP costs are also displayed on the card so you don't need to memorize this.

### Mana Strategy Tips

- You can deploy a multi-element Mana *tapped* when you'd otherwise waste a mana.
- Get max value from your multi-mana by *deploying them early and often!*

- *Don't fear the life point payments.* Deploy that triple-mana on turn 1 untapped.
  - Don't deploy a mana until you actually need it. Things change *fast* in Manacaster.
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## The Combat System

### Select Attackers:

Active player declares which Units they will attack with, if any.

Units with **Must Attack** keyword are automatically declared.

### Select Defenders:

Defending player declares which Units they will block with, if any, and assigns their blocking Units to an attacking Unit.

Defender can assign **multiple blocking** Units to one attacking Unit.\*

*\*The specifics of this interaction will be covered in Advanced Combat Details.*

### Resolve Engagement Triggers

After blockers are declared, keywords or triggers requiring “On Engage” activate.

A Unit is “engaged” if it is either blocking another Unit, or being blocked itself.

This is when the keyword **Riposte** activates. The details are covered below.

## First Damage Step

Units with **Twinstrike** and/or **Ambush** deal damage simultaneously.

Keyword abilities like Extract, Leech, and Revenge trigger and resolve.

Units with lethal damage die.

Unblocked damage is dealt to the defending player. If they reach 0 they lose.

## Second Damage Step

Units with Twinstrike and units WITHOUT Ambush or Twinstrike deal damage.

Keyword abilities like Extract, Leech, and Revenge trigger and resolve.

Units with lethal damage die.

Unblocked damage is dealt to the defending player. If they reach 0 they lose.

After the Second Damage Step is complete, the Post Combat Deployment Stage begins.

## Notes on Combat

- Units attack the opposing player; they do not attack other Units directly.
- Damage within each Step is simultaneous.

- Units dead in the first damage step aren't in the battle for the second damage step.
  - Units that help you gain life points in combat can sometimes save you from death.
  - Players cannot deploy cards during combat.
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## Keywords

In Manacaster, you'll see some specific words in **Big Bold Fonts** on a card. These are Keywords, which serve as concise names for Unit abilities. When you see a **Keyword** on a card, make sure you understand what it does, because each and every one of them has a profound effect on combat!

### Elemental Keywords

There are 9 Elemental keywords; each is assigned to a pair of elements.

#### Alert ( Solar-Earth )

Units with **Alert** remain able to defend on the next turn after attacking.

#### Ambush ( Solar-Lunar )

This Unit deals damage in the First Damage Step during Combat.

#### Extract ( Lunar-Flame )

When this Unit receives combat damage, you gain Life equal to damage received, capped by this Unit's DEF.

### Leech ( Water-Earth )

When a Unit with Leech deals combat damage:

If blocked: Gain Life equal to the lesser of:

- The amount of combat damage dealt.
- Total damage needed to destroy the blocker(s).
- If unblocked: Gain Life equal to the damage dealt to opposing Player.

### Parry ( Solar-Metal )

When this Unit is dealt combat damage, prevent an amount of incoming damage up to this Unit's ATK.

### Heavy ( Water-Metal )

When this Unit attacks and is blocked, if this Unit's ATK exceeds the amount needed to destroy the blocking Unit(s), the excess damage is dealt to the defending Player.

### Revenge ( Flame-Water )

When this Unit receives combat damage, deal damage to the enemy Unit(s) that dealt it, equal to the received damage, capped by this Unit's DEF.

### Riposte ( Lunar-Earth )

When this Unit is Engaged, give this Unit +ATK equal to its DEF, capped by the enemy Unit's ATK.

### Twinstrike ( Flame-Metal )

This Unit deals damage twice, once in the First Damage Step and once in the Second Damage Step.

## Neutral Keywords

There are also 3 Neutral keywords and 2 Neutral weaknesses.

### Rapid

Unit may attack on the turn it is deployed (if played by the Attacking Player).

### Rally

Unit gets a temporary +1/+1 *each* time you deploy another Unit.

### Focus

Unit gets a temporary +2/+0 *each* time you deploy an Action.

## Negative Keywords

### Must Attack

If this Unit is eligible to attack, it must.

### Can't Block

This Unit cannot block on your behalf.

*Note: Units with weaknesses like the two above are often significantly more powerful than other Units of the same mana cost!*

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## Selecting Your Opening Hand

1. Look at the top 14 cards of your main deck.

2. Select up to 8 cards to keep as your starting hand. Keeping 0 cards is permitted.
3. Depending on the number of cards kept:
  - If you have 8 cards, you won't draw a card at the end of turn 1 as normal.
  - If you have 6 or fewer, draw randomly until you have exactly 7.
  - If you already have exactly 7, you're already done!
4. Shuffle all unkept cards into your Main Deck and begin the game with your hand. **Important: There is no maximum hand size in Manacaster.**

### Opening Hand Strategies

If your 14 initial cards don't present a clear line of play through turn 4, you should attempt to solidify your early-game with random cards. If you see 8 cards that form a clear sequence of plays, don't take a random card for no reason! Pay attention to the composition of the 14 cards you're looking at; if you see all of your high-mana-cost Units, you can be sure that the other 36 cards of your main deck contain a ton of low-cost Units. When deciding about drawing randoms, you can estimate what's left in your deck based on what 14 cards are showing.

### Keep 8 Cards When:

- Your 8th card is clearly more valuable than a random draw.
- You have a perfect mana curve *and* synergy, with ways to kill enemy Units..
- Your deck requires a specific combo of cards to work properly and you have them all.

### Keep 7 Cards:

- You have a good curve (plays for turns 1-3 or at least 2-4).
- Your cards have natural synergy.
- You have both proactive and reactive options.

### Keep under 7:

- Visible options conflict with optimal strategy.
- Random cards are likely better than being forced into suboptimal choices.
- Clear path to victory requires specific draws or unlikely circumstances

### Keep zero cards:

- You're tired, confused, bored, or feeling spicy.
- Your opening hand makes absolutely no sense.
- You trust in the soul of the cards.

### Important Notes!

- Players make their hand crafting decisions in secret and announce simultaneously.
  - You will know how many random cards, if any, your opponent has taken.
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## Advanced Combat Details

### Duplicate Keywords Don't Stack

- If a Unit gains a keyword it already has, for any reason, the duplicate keyword is ignored.
- If a Unit has both Ambush and Twinstrike, Ambush becomes redundant.

### Multi-Blocking an Attacker

- Regardless of configuration, all blockers must be declared and assigned simultaneously.
- Attacking Player has full control over damage assignment.

- Can split damage between blockers however they select.
  - Cannot assign excess damage beyond what's needed to destroy a Unit.
  - Damage must be assigned until either no damage remains to be assigned, or until all blockers are destroyed, whichever comes first.
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- All combat damage within each Step is dealt simultaneously.
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- For Units with **Heavy**: They must destroy all blocking Units before any excess damage hits the Defending Player.
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- For Units with **Leech**: Treat all blocking Units as a single Unit when calculating its Life gain cap.
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- For Units with **Riposte**: Treat all blocking Units as a single Unit when calculating its ATK increase. This is still capped by the attacking Unit's DEF.

### Simultaneous Triggers

When a game state causes multiple triggers to be activated, resolve in this order:

1. Apply any beneficial effects that *don't* require choice.
2. Apply any beneficial effects that *do* require choice.
3. Apply any detrimental effects that *don't* require choice.
4. Apply any detrimental effects that *do* require choice.
5. If any Units are to die as a result:
  - Place them in their respective Discard Piles.

- If this includes any Units with “when this dies” triggers, resolve those triggers.

### Beneficial Effects

- Effects that increase your life points.
  - Effects that raise an allied Unit's ATK and/or DEF.
  - Effects that grant an allied Unit one or more keywords.
  - Effects that draw cards for the player..

### Detrimental effects

- Effects that cost life points.
    - Effects that lower an enemy Unit's ATK and DEF.
    - Effects that lower ALL Units' ATK and DEF.
    - Effects that deal damage to an enemy Unit.
    - Effects that deal damage to ALL Units.
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## Multiple Keyword Interactions

### Extract & Revenge

- Apply the following order of operations:
  1. Extract's Life gain resolves first.
  2. Revenge's damage resolves second.
- This applies even when a Unit possesses both Keywords.

### Parry & Extract or Revenge

- Parry absorbs incoming combat damage, therefore, Extract and Revenge only act upon any combat damage that wasn't prevented.
- Order of operations for a unit that has both Parry, and Extract or Revenge:

1. Apply Parry's damage reduction.
2. Unit receives reduced damage amount.
3. Calculate Extract/Revenge based on received damage.

### Parry VS Leech

When a Unit with Parry Engages with a Unit with Leech:

- The damage absorption from Parry is applied first.
- The Life gain from Leech is only applied upon the damage that isn't absorbed, if any.
- Leech is still capped by the other Unit(s) DEF.

### Heavy & Leech:

When a Unit with Heavy and Leech attacks and is blocked:

- Leech no longer becomes capped by the blocking Unit(s) DEF.
- Must still follow Heavy's rule about destroying all blockers first.

### Heavy & Twinstrike

- Both strikes can deal excess damage to the defending Player.
- If the attacking Unit destroys the blocking Unit(s) during the Ambush

Damage Step:

- The attacking Unit deals its full damage to the defending Player during the Standard Damage Step.
- Excess damage from both strikes is cumulative.
- Must still follow Heavy's rule about destroying all blockers first.

### Leech & Twinstrike:

For Units with both Leech and Twinstrike:

- Leech triggers separately for each strike that deals damage.

- This applies whether the Unit is blocked or unblocked.
- The second Twinstrike can trigger Leech if the first strike didn't destroy the blocking Unit.

### Parry & Twinstrike

For Units with Parry Engaging Units with Twinstrike:

- Parry triggers both in the Ambush Damage Step and the Standard Damage Step.
- For example, a Unit with 2 ATK and Parry is blocked by a Unit with 3 ATK and Twinstrike:
  - During the Ambush Step, the Parry Unit absorbs 2 damage, and takes 1 damage ( $3 - 2 = 1$ ).
  - If it survived the previous Step, then, during the Standard Damage Step, the Parry Unit absorbs 2 damage again, taking another 1 damage, for a total of 2.