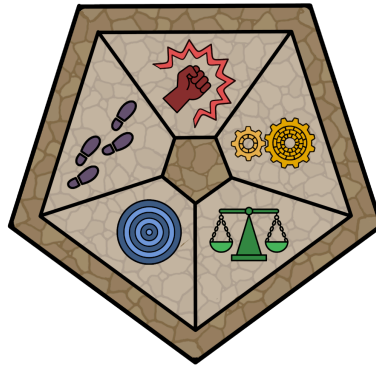


Gauntlet: The Twenty Trials



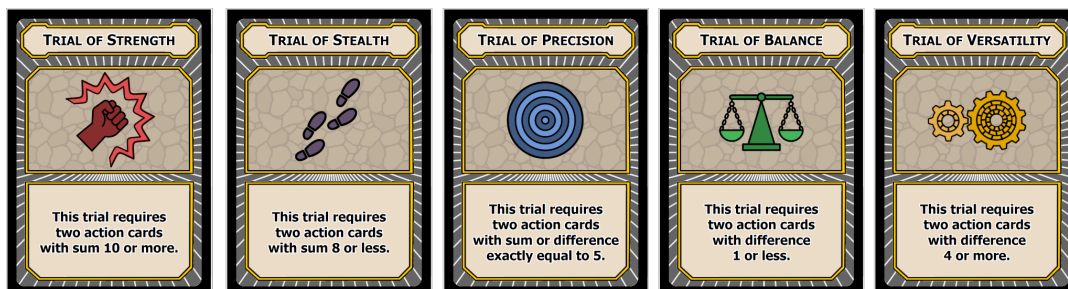
Gauntlet is a hand-management, puzzle-driven, abstract fantasy-themed card game in which a Challenger must endure twenty trials devised by a cunning Trialmaster. Each trial is completed by playing a pair of action cards that meet varying conditions. Will the Challenger conquer the Gauntlet, or collapse from exhaustion and yield to the Trialmaster?

Components

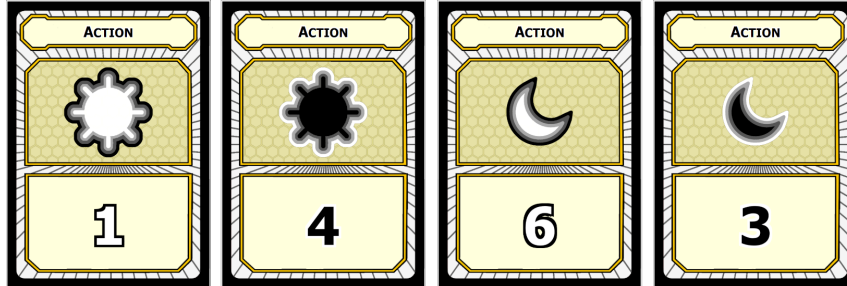
Gauntlet is played with a deck of cards with four types: trial, action, modifier, and refresh.

Trial cards (20 total) represent challenges to overcome by playing two action cards that satisfy a requirement based on a number called the *trial value*. There are five types of trials:

- **Strength** (5): the action value sum must be equal to or greater than the trial value
- **Stealth** (5): the action value sum must be equal to or less than the trial value
- **Precision** (4): the action value sum or difference must be exactly equal to the trial value
- **Balance** (3): the action value difference must be equal to or less than the trial value
- **Versatility** (3): the action value difference must be equal to or greater than the trial value

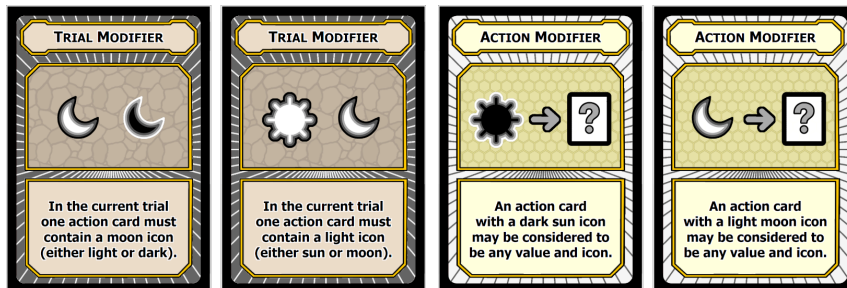


Action cards (16 total) have a *value* from 1–8 and an *icon* representing a *sun* or *moon* that is either *light* or *dark*. The value is used to satisfy trial requirements. The icon image and color are only relevant when playing with *modifier cards*.



Modifier cards (8 total) adjust the difficulty of the game and may be included or omitted as desired.

- **Trial modifiers** (4) increase difficulty for the Challenger by adding an additional requirement to a trial, based on the action card icons
- **Action modifiers** (4) reduce difficulty for the Challenger by allowing them to use an action card with a specific icon as any value and icon



Refresh cards (2 total) are used to replenish the deck of action cards when it is empty.



Game Modes

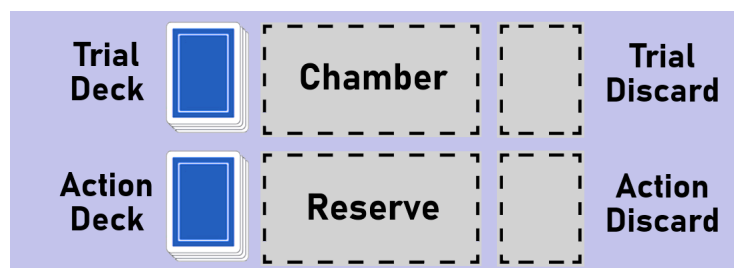
The Gauntlet features several ways to play, each using the same core concepts and mechanics:

- **Challenger Mode:** the primary version of the game, a solitaire mode where you play as the Challenger, striving to complete all twenty trials before becoming exhausted.
- **Trialmaster Mode:** a solitaire mode where you play as the Trialmaster, manipulating the sequence of trials to exhaust the Challenger as quickly as possible.
- **Moderator Mode:** a solitaire mode where you play as the Moderator, a third party that attempts to sequence everything so that the actions and trials are in perfect balance.
- **Versus Mode:** a two-player competitive variant, where one player is the Challenger and the other is the Trialmaster, competing head-to-head in a strategic showdown.

For your first playthrough, Challenger Mode with no modifier cards is recommended.

Setup

All the game modes use the same setup. The trial cards and action cards are each shuffled into face-down piles called the **Trial Deck** and the **Action Deck**. Optionally, the difficulty can be adjusted by adding trial modifier and action modifier cards to these decks, respectively. You will also need space for a **Trial Discard Pile**, an **Action Discard Pile**, and areas called the **Chamber** and the **Reserve**, each large enough to hold at least four cards side by side. The decks and areas are arranged as shown in the diagram. Place both refresh cards face up side-by-side in the reserve area.





Challenger Mode

All twenty trials must be defeated to win this game mode.



Gameplay

Gameplay proceeds in rounds, each consisting of the four steps below.

Step 1: Draw Cards

Draw from the action deck until you have four action cards in hand or until the action deck is empty. If you draw any action modifier cards, place them in the reserve area.

Step 2: Reveal the Trial

Draw a card from the trial deck and place it in the chamber area. If you draw and place a trial modifier, repeat this step until you also place a trial card.

Step 3: Engage the Trial









To defeat the trial, you must discard two action cards from your hand that meet the trial conditions.

- *Example: the Chamber contains a Trial of Strength requiring two action cards with sum 11 or more. Your hand contains 2, 3, 5, and 8. (The icons are not relevant in this example.) To complete this trial, you may discard either the 3 and 8, or the 5 and 8; no other pair of cards has a large enough sum.*

If there are also one or more trial modifiers in the chamber, at least one of the two action cards you discard must also meet each additional condition.

- *Example: the Chamber contains a Trial of Balance requiring two action cards with difference 1 or less, and a Trial Modifier requiring an action card with ☀ or ☀ (a light sun or a dark sun). Your hand contains 3 ☀, 5 ☀, 6 ☾, and 7 ☾. To complete this trial, you may discard 5 ☀ and 6 ☾; no other pair of cards meets both requirements.*

If there are action modifiers in the reserve, you may combine these with action cards to meet the trial conditions; used action modifiers are removed from the game.

- *Example: the Chamber contains a Trial of Precision requiring two action cards with a sum or difference equal to 4. Your hand contains 2 , 5 , 7 , and 8 . The Reserve contains an Action Modifier that allows a  card to be used as any value. To complete this trial, you may use the Action Modifier to convert 5  to a 3 , then discard this card and the 7 .*

If you are unable to meet the trial condition, draw an action card from the deck, then choose and discard an action card from your hand. Repeat this process until you are able to meet the trial conditions.

- *Example: the Chamber contains a Trial of Stealth requiring two action cards with sum 8 or less. Your hand contains 4, 5, 7, and 8. (The icons are not relevant in this example.) There is no pair of cards that meets the trial condition. You draw a card from the action deck with value 2 and add it to your hand. First, you choose to discard the 7 from your hand in exchange for drawing a card. Then, to complete this trial, you may discard either the 2 and 4, or the 2 and 5.*

If the action deck is empty and the trial condition can not be met, use a face-up **Refresh** card:

- flip the refresh card face-down to indicate it has been used
- return all action cards from the discard pile and the chamber to the action deck and shuffle (action modifier cards remain where they are)
- draw four cards from the action deck

However, if the current trial can not be completed, the action deck is empty, and both refresh cards have been used (both are face-down), the Challenger is exhausted and you lose the game.

Step 4: Reset the Chamber

Move the trial card (and any trial modifier cards) from the chamber area to the trial discard pile.

If the final (20th) trial is completed, the Challenger has finished the gauntlet and you win the game! Otherwise, return to Step 1.

Game End

The game ends in one of two situations:

- The current trial can not be completed, the action deck is empty, and both refresh cards have been used: the Challenger is exhausted and you lose the game.
- The final trial is completed: the Challenger has finished the gauntlet and you win the game!

Optionally, you can rate your performance by adding the number of cards in your hand and the number of cards remaining in the Action Deck. 0–3 is a bronze victory, 4–7 is a silver victory, and 8 or more is a gold victory (a perfect game). Congratulations!



Trialmaster Mode

As a Trialmaster, you help train Challengers by pushing them to their limits. Can you arrange the trials to exhaust the Challenger before they finish the gauntlet?

In this variation, you take on the role of a Trialmaster, working *against* a Challenger. Your goal is for the Challenger to run out of action cards and refresh cards before all twenty trials are completed. The Challenger's action cards are visible to you. As the Trialmaster, your hand contains trial cards; action cards are placed in the Chamber. Your strategy is to select trials that can not be completed with the revealed action cards, and minimize the chance that additional action cards will satisfy the trial conditions. It is recommended that you achieve at least one silver victory in Challenger Mode before attempting Trialmaster Mode.



Gameplay

Gameplay proceeds in rounds, each consisting of the four steps below.

While playing, keep any action cards in the Chamber arranged in a row. Add action cards to the left side of the row. When an action card must be discarded, always select the right-most card in the row.

Step 1: Draw Cards

- If there are less than three action cards in the Chamber, draw cards from the action deck and place them face up in the Chamber until there are three action cards or until the action deck is empty. If any action modifier cards are drawn, place them in the Reserve.
- Draw cards from the trial deck until you have four trial cards in your hand or the trial deck is empty. If any trial modifier cards are drawn, place them in the Reserve.

Step 2: Reveal the Trial

- Select a trial card from your hand and place it in the Chamber.
You may also move trial modifier cards from the Reserve to the Chamber if desired.

Step 3: Engage the Trial

- Check if there are two action cards in the Chamber that satisfy the trial condition. If any action modifier cards are in the Reserve, they may be used if necessary. If the trial condition can not be met, draw an action card and add it to the Chamber; repeat until the condition can be met.
- When the trial condition can be met, move two action cards satisfying the condition from the Chamber to the action discard pile, remove any action modifier cards used from the game, and proceed to Step 4. If there are multiple pairs of action cards that satisfy the condition, choose the pair closest to the right.
- If the action deck is empty and the trial condition can not be met, use a face-up **Refresh** card:
 - flip the refresh card face-down to indicate it has been used
 - return all action cards from the action discard pile and the chamber to the action deck and shuffle (action modifier cards remain where they are)
 - draw four cards from the action deck and place them in the Chamber
- However, if the current trial can not be completed, the action deck is empty, and both refresh cards have been used, the Challenger is exhausted and you win the game!

Step 4: Reset the Chamber

- Move the trial card and any trial modifier cards in the Chamber to the trial discard pile. If the final trial has been completed, the Challenger has finished the gauntlet and the game is lost.
- If there are more than two action cards left in the Chamber, discard action cards until only two remain, and return to Step 1.



Game End

The game ends in one of two situations:

- The current trial can not be completed, the action deck is empty, and both refresh cards have been used: the Challenger is exhausted and you win the game.
- The final trial is completed: the Challenger has finished the gauntlet and you lose the game.



Moderator Mode

As a Moderator, you oversee the Gauntlet itself, ensuring that trials and actions remain in perfect balance. With knowledge of what lies ahead, can you plan ahead and sequence everything so that the challenges are always possible?

In this variation, you take on the role of a Moderator, who has complete visibility of all cards in play. Your goal is to select both action cards and trials so that each challenge can always be met with the available cards. Moderator Mode is a planning puzzle, where your success depends on choosing which trial to resolve and when, so that future trials remain solvable.

Modifier cards are not used in this game mode.



Gameplay

Gameplay proceeds in rounds, each consisting of the *two* steps below.

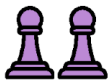
Step 1: Draw Cards

- Draw from the action deck and place cards face-up in the Chamber until there are four action cards in the Chamber. If the action deck becomes empty (there should still be two action cards in the Chamber when this happens), then Refresh the action deck as follows:
 - return all cards from the action discard pile (but *not* the chamber) to the action deck
 - shuffle the action deck
 - resume drawing until there are four action cards in the Chamber (the two action cards previously in the Chamber remain there)

- Draw cards from the trial deck and place them in the Chamber until there are four or the trial deck is empty.

Step 2: Engage a Trial

- Select one trial card in the Chamber and two actions that satisfy its condition. Move the selective cards to their respective discard piles, and return to Step 1.
- If you cannot complete any of the trials with the action cards present in the Chamber, you lose the game; there is no "draw and discard" mechanic in this game mode.
- If you complete the final trial, you win the game.



Versus Mode

A Challenger and a Trialmaster go head-to-head in a strategic showdown. Each tries to outthink the other: the Challenger acts quickly to complete the twenty trials, while the Trialmaster manipulates the trials to exhaust the adventurer. Who will emerge victorious?

In this two-player variation, one player takes the role of a Challenger, controlling the action cards; the other player becomes the Trialmaster, controlling the trial cards. As in the solo games, the Challenger's goal is to complete all twenty trials before becoming exhausted, while the Trialmaster's goal is to prevent this from happening by selecting trials that are impossible or unlikely to be completed with the action cards in play.

When setting up for Versus Mode, each player will require their own Reserve area; the Refresh cards are added to the Challenger's Reserve.



Gameplay

Gameplay proceeds in rounds, each consisting of the four steps below.

Step 1: Draw Cards

Each player draws from their deck until they have four cards in hand or until their deck is empty. Any modifier cards drawn by a player are immediately added to their Reserve area.

Step 2: Reveal the Trial

The Challenger selects three action cards from their hand (if they have less than three, select all) and places them in a face-up row in the Chamber. After the action cards have been placed, the Trialmaster selects one trial card from their hand and places it face-up in the Chamber next to the action cards.

Step 3: Engage the Trial

Throughout this step, both players should remain alert: as soon as any two action cards (along with any action modifiers used) in the Chamber meet the trial condition, announce it immediately, move the two action cards to the action discard pile, remove any action modifiers in the Chamber from the game, and proceed to Step 4.

Beginning with the Challenger, players alternate turns.

During each player's turn, they may choose *one* of their available options below.

Challenger Options:

- Play an action card from their hand to the Chamber.
- Play an action modifier card from their Reserve to the Chamber.
- Draw a card from the action deck. If it is an action card, then they place it in their hand and then either discard a card from their hand or discard an action card from the Chamber. If an action modifier card is drawn, they place it in their Reserve and do not need to discard.
- Use a Refresh card, following the same procedure as in Challenger Mode.

Trialmaster Options:

- Exchange the trial card currently in the Chamber with a trial card in their hand
- Play a trial modifier card from their Reserve to the Chamber.
- Pass: do nothing; it becomes the Challenger's turn again.

If the current trial can not be completed, the action deck is empty, and both refresh cards have been used, the Challenger is exhausted and the Trialmaster wins the game.

Step 4: Reset the Chamber

The trial card and any trial modifier cards in the Chamber are placed in the trial discard pile.

If the final trial has been completed, the Challenger wins the game. Otherwise, any remaining action cards in the Chamber are returned to the Challenger's hand. Return to Step 1.

Game End

The game ends when one of two conditions are met:

- The current trial can not be completed, the action deck is empty, and both refresh cards have been used, the Challenger is exhausted and the Trialmaster wins the game.
- The final trial has been completed: the Challenger wins the game.

Credits

Gauntlet: The Twenty Trials was designed and created by Lee Stemkoski for the BoardGameGeek.com 2025 54-Card Game Design Contest.

software used

Inkscape for designing the card background

GIMP for drawing card art

nanDECK for generating the card files

playtesters

Special thanks to everyone who took time to provide feedback, especially Reid B., Jarred N., MrKuricat, and the team at Side Room Games!

*Thank you for playing,
and good luck on all your adventures!*