

GM GUIDE

This guide is intended for a Deckahedron World Game Master (GM).

Read this guide if you are the volunteer among your friends to run the game. Your responsibilities are:

- pitch the idea of playing Deckahedron World to your friends
- know, teach, and follow the rules
- tell the lion's share of the story
- give Non-Player Characters (NPCs) names, voices, motivations, and behaviour
- confront the players with challenges and dangers
- take some notes
- and...

The last responsibility is so important it deserves its own paragraph:

The players will signal the *kinds* of fun they want to have. It is your responsibility to notice these signals and insert that kind of fun into the game.

SHOW, DON'T TELL

One piece of advice frequently given to anyone trying to convey information is "Show, don't tell".

In that spirit, you are invited to visit <https://www.deckahedron.com/world/examples>. There, you will see examples of Deckahedron World being played. For all the author's attempt to make this document clear, brief, and unambiguous, those examples may do a better job of conveying just what Deckahedron World is and how it is played.

To make your job of teaching the rules easier, this guide has **scripts**. The scripts are written

to be read by you to the players at the table.

Before sitting down with your group of players, you should read all the rules. Your players will have questions, you will need to answer them.

FIRST SESSION

If there is a player at the table who has never played Deckahedron World before, read the Start Script and play Sarukkan's Chamber.

START SCRIPT

Hi everyone! We're going to play Deckahedron World. This is going to be really fun, I'm glad you could join me for this! I'm reading directly from a script that was designed to get us started fast, by going over just enough of the rules for our first session, so please pay attention now so we can get to the fun of the game quickly!

Deckahedron World is a **narrative** game.

It's a storytelling game where we all collaborate and tell the story together.

I'm going to be the GM (it's short for Game Master), so I'm going to be responsible for the events in the world and the side characters (they're called NPCs or Non-Player Characters).

Each one of you is going to play a role, kind of like an actor does. You're going to control one character. You get to tell us everything they think and everything that they say and everything that they do.

Imagine we're making an awesome adventure movie with swords and magic. You're the actors just making stuff up as you go, and I'm a combination of screenwriter and director, trying to fill the story with excitement

and drama and also deciding how the scenes go together and where the camera cuts to next.

But let me pause for a minute and get specific about what I mean by "you decide everything your character **does**".

You can't just say "My character Tyrion runs up to the bad guy and punches him in the head and his head goes flying off". You **can** say "My character runs up to the bad guy and **tries** to punch his head hard enough to send it flying off". See the difference? When you describe an action where there's some uncertainty like that, It's my job as the GM to say you've **triggered** a move*. The rules will resolve the uncertainty and tell us if the bad guy's head actually goes flying off.

When a **move is triggered**, it's time to use the cards and dice to see what happens next. Triggering moves is a lot of fun. It's fun to succeed and it's fun to fail, because even in failure, new exciting stuff starts happening. When you trigger moves, you impact the narrative, consequences happen, and we're all going to get surprises when cards flip and dice roll.

The game isn't all triggering moves though.

Most of this game is talking. That's why "Say Stuff" is written so boldly on the character sheets. I'm going to be asking you questions, you'll probably have lots of questions for me, and we're going to put everything together to make an epic story. It's gonna have adventure, battles, chases, discoveries, and magic.

It's a fantasy story, so think dangerous, and take risks.

Be true to your character's personality. Remember it's sort of like acting.

Your character will start out as a scrappy adventurer, and rise in power to become a hero. Or villain. Or maybe they'll just die in the attempt. And maybe they'll be resurrected after that.

Each session will be about 3 hours. We might spend a long time bouncing ideas off one another and dealing with each consequence in an improvisational way, or we might engage in a long battle with lots of dice rolling and card flipping.

There's no predetermined story, we're all in this together, and we're going to play to find out what happens.

This first session will need about 40 minutes of preparation, though. Ten minutes has already gone by with this speech (it's almost over).

Next, we're going to play Sarukkan's Chamber, a pre-made adventure for you to get the hang of the rules. I'll set a timer for 10 minutes and then end Sarukkan's Chamber when it goes off.

Then we'll take 10 minutes to create a Touchstone List for our game.

Then we'll do 10 minutes of Character Creation.

And then, the adventure begins.

Let's start!

SARUKKAN'S CHAMBER

Give each player a Deckahedron.

Here's a stack of 20 cards, it's called a Deckahedron.

Notice the 4 different colored symbols on the edges. They're named Anchor (red), Bulb (yellow), Crescent (green), and Dart (blue).

When you *trigger a move*, I'm going to instruct you to flip the top card of your Deckahedron, and we'll see the result on the flipped-over side. There are 4 possible results:

- * ✓✓ : this means you succeed at the thing you tried

- * ✓ : this usually means something good happens, but maybe with a downside

- * X : this usually means something "ok", or not-so-good happens

- * XX : this usually means that I get to say what happens and make my own move

When I ask you to flip, I'm going to say something like "flip Anchors" or "flip red" or "flip green". That means you find the result on the edge that has that color or symbol.

When you flip it over, please face that edge towards me, so it's easy for me to read.

Let's try it: everybody put your Deckahedron on the table and flip yellow.

Step the players through "flipping yellow" using the instructions in the [Player's Guide](#)

Make sure each player understands how to execute a flip before you proceed.

Give each player a Move Booklet

Here are the basic moves. You don't

have to read this booklet unless you want to. I'll point out moves when they're triggered and we can read them together or you can just let me apply them.

It's hard for me to do everything though, so the more you can help me out, the smoother the game will run.

The move you'll be triggering the most will probably be Defy Danger, that's why it's on the first page. The moves in the back of the booklet are "downtime" moves which we won't need until much later.

Start a timer for 10 minutes.

Next, ask the players these 3 questions. This is an improvisation exercise. Its purpose is to get the creative juices flowing and to signal to the players that they have input over the story.

Ask the players for the name of a medieval fantasy city name. Write down the answer. That will be the name of the setting.

Ask "What's a store where women buy clothing?". Use that to create the female protagonist's name. (eg, "Forever 21" can turn into "Forva", "La Senza" can turn into "Senza")

Ask "What's a city in Europe?". Create the male protagonist's name with that. (eg, "Paris" can just be "Paris", London can be "Donalo")

This mini-game is a GM tool. Often, the players will look to you to come up with names of characters or places on the fly. Instead of sitting still and thinking for 30 seconds, you can use this technique to keep them engaged. See [Appendix 1] (#appendix_1) for more

Distribute a player card to each player and ask them to write down the names you just came up with.

Next, instruct the players to fill out the attribute boxes like so:

- Both characters have 1 Int (Anchor)
- The female protagonist has 3 Dex (Crescent) and 2 Str (Bulb)
- The male protagonist has 2 Dex (Bulb) and 3 Str (Crescent)

INTRODUCE SARRUKAN'S CHAMBER

Begin narrating the set-up.

[Addressing her]
_ (female protagonist), you are an acrobat.
Your troupe of performers set off on the road to perform in the big city _ (city name). You were really excited, because your big brother lives there, and you haven't seen him since you were 13, and that was 10 years ago.

But your excitement soon turned to horror and despair. On the road, your troupe was overrun by masked horsemen. They attacked fiercely and without mercy. All the women of the caravan were captured, and by the cries and what you glimpsed through your stained blindfold, all the men were slain.

You remember one phrase uttered by the marauders,
"Deliver them to Sarrukan."

After days of travel shackled in a box, you found yourself imprisoned in a small, dark, musty cellar room. Windowless, the only illumination is whatever lamplight filters through the cracks of the door.

[Dramatic pause]

[Addressing him]

_ (male protagonist) you are a thief-catcher.

You're not too bright, but your boss, Gandlin, has taken you under his wing and taught you street wisdom. Merchants employ him to recover stolen valuables or they pay for simple retribution against the pilfering scoundrels. You provide the muscle. Gandlin sniffs them out, you beat them up, and each shares in the reward.

That's how it had been. Gandlin has now gone missing.

He was investigating a series of thefts from private homes. There was some pattern to it -- artifacts or books taken, but no smashed windows or doors. The mystery of it had Gandlin obsessed, working sometimes until dawn.

Then one dawn it was he that was taken, with a trail of blood to tell of it. Following the path, you came to the locked gate to the yard behind Sarrukan's estate. Sarrukan was a powerful player in _ 's (city name) noble circles, but not much was known of him.

After jumping the wall, you didn't get much farther before you were surprised from behind and knocked out, waking up in a tiny, dirt-floored room in the cellar.

[Addressing both]

But tonight, something changed. It was noisy tonight. Footsteps and conversations could be heard upstairs. It was some kind of party.

And there were no guard patrols of the cellars. In parallel, but without bumping into each other, you both used the lapse to escape.

You freed yourself from your cell.

In some dark corner you grabbed a reveler and took their elaborate costume and mask for a disguise. Tonight must be a masquerade ball.

With no easy opportunity to exit, you kept evading attention by going upstairs, until you reached the third floor.

From different doors, you simultaneously enter an empty bedchamber.

[At this point, take out a blank sheet of paper and draw this incomplete map]

Draw maps, leave blanks

You turn from the door you carefully and silently closed to see across the room, an apparent party guest in full wardrobe.

[Dramatic pause]

One last thing, with these masks on, you don't know this, but you're brother and sister.

What do you do?

This last question "What do you do?" is very important.

When you describe a situation, always end with this kind of prompt. Portray a situation that demands a response. Always.

As a GM, this is what you will be doing most of the time.

Describe the immediate situation around the players at all times. This is how you start

a session, how you get things rolling after a snack break, get back on track after a great joke: tell them what the situation is in concrete terms.

Use detail and *senses* to draw them in. The situation isn't just an orc charging you, it's an orc painted in blood swinging a hammer and yelling bloody murder. You can leverage a lack of information, too. The sound of clattering armor and shuffling feet, for instance.

The situation around the players is rarely "everything's great, nothing to worry about". They're adventurers going on adventures -- give them something to react to.

3RD PC VARIANT - THE RELUCTANT GUARD

If you've got a 3rd player at the table, add a guard character.

Add another 5 minutes to the timer, so now Sarukkan's Chamber will end after 15 minutes, not 10.

Ask "What's a domestic brand of beer?". Use that to create the 3rd character's name. The guard can be any gender, has 3 Int, 2 Str, and 1 Dex.

Let them know that they'll get introduced about 5 minutes into the story.

After the first two PCs have had a chance to inspect their surroundings, and maybe have a dialogue with each other, introduce the 3rd PC

```
[Addressing guard]
_ (guard), you are a guard.
You're the newest hire in Sarukkan's
staff, but you're already thinking of
changing careers. There's some
sketchy stuff going on here. You're
not too
sure what exactly, since you mostly
patrol the yard, but you're sure you
heard the sounds of women crying when
```

```
you patrolled near the cellar door
a couple days ago.
```

```
You got called into the house just
now. Apparently a guest of the ball
had been assaulted and stripped of
their clothing. The culprit might
still
be inside, so Yogran, a fellow guard
pulled you to help him investigate.
```

```
One other thing, Sarukkan is rumoured
to be a practitioner of dark magic
and all staff are forbidden to enter
his chamber. You think Yogran is
going
to use you as a guinea pig to do just
that.
```

BUT NOW WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

```
Where's the *rest* of the script?
```

If this is your first time being a GM, you might feel intimidated. That's ok. Remember, this is not high art, this is improv. You are *playing* to find out what happens.

Here are 5 gems to come back to whenever you don't know what to say next.

- Portray a fantastic world
- Fill the characters' lives with adventure
- Ask the players
- Refer to your moves for ideas
- Drive towards your next point in the *Good Bank*

Firstly, **portray a fantastic world.**

Deckahedron World is about characters who have decided to take up an adventure in the hopes of some glorious reward. It's your job to participate in that by showing the players a world in which their characters can find that adventure. Without the player characters in the world, calamity would ruin something precious. Maybe even the whole world would fall into chaos or destruction -- it might still even with them. It's up to you to portray the

fantastic elements of that world. Show the players the wonders of the world they're in and encourage them to react to it.

Filling the characters' lives with adventure

means working with the players to create a world that's engaging and dynamic.

Adventurers are always caught up in some dangerous situation or another -- encourage and foster that kind of action in the game.

Deckahedron World adventures **never** presume player actions. A Deckahedron World adventure portrays a setting in motion -- someplace significant with creatures big and small pursuing their own goals. As the players come into conflict with that setting and its denizens, action is inevitable. You'll honestly portray the repercussions of that action.

Deckahedron World is a conversation. The GM is the main storyteller, but not the only storyteller. **Ask the players questions** and use the answers. Embrace your curiosity.

The easiest question to use is "What do you do?". Whenever you make a GM move, end with "What do you do?". You don't even have to ask the person you made the move against. Take that chance to shift focus elsewhere.

The questions that gave the characters flesh during character creation are examples of asking questions and using the answers. You can always revisit and pull more buckets up from that well. If a character is religious, ask them what their gods would have to say. If there's a halfling in the party, ask how hungry the current scene makes them.

Other questions to ask are [improv game questions](#). These are questions that have nothing to do with the current scene, but prompt everyone, especially you, to *think laterally*. These can be great to inspire you:

- If you just need a name for an NPC or location

- If you want to insert a danger into a scene
- If you want an NPC to respond, but don't have dialogue, voice, or personality ready
- If you need an idea for a puzzle or a monster

TODO example with improv question and Sarukkan's chamber

TODO

MOVE THE SPOTLIGHT

TODO

The general attention of people sitting at the table is called "the spotlight". People tend to talk one-at-a-time, while all others wait in excited anticipation.

The GM is tasked with managing the "when" of the spotlight. When does one player's contribution end, and the next player's begin? When has a player said something that triggers a move? When is it time for the players to all sit back and suffer or delight as the GM describes the consequences of their decisions?

Never let a player's time in the spotlight be inconsequential. A player might wait 10 minutes for their friends' moves, so if their whole turn in the spotlight ends with "nothing happens" this game will be very unfun. Give them an opportunity for something. This doesn't mean they have to slay a demon on every turn, merely getting a big laugh can be "something".

Remember, this is a collaborative story. Laughter and excitement are the rewards for everyone.

Allow the players to naturally move the spotlight among themselves.

As the GM, you may take a turn in the spotlight:

- when someone flips **XX** (or sometimes just **X**)
- as specifically instructed by a move a player is executing
- when everyone looks to you to see what happens
- when the players give you a golden opportunity

Usually your turn in the spotlight will be spent making a **GM move**. But it may also just be general narration.

MAKE GM MOVES

Often the players will move the story forward by having their characters talk and do actions that are certain (you don't call for flips unless actions or consequences are uncertain), so there may be long stretches where a GM doesn't need to jump in.

- Use a monster, danger, or location move
- Reveal an unwelcome truth
- Show signs of an approaching threat
- Deal damage
- Use up their resources
- Turn their move back on them
- Separate them
- Give an opportunity that fits a player's cards or character's background
- Show a downside to their appearance, reputation, or equipment
- Put someone in a spot
- Offer an opportunity, with or without cost
- Tell them the requirements or consequences and ask

If a player resolves a flip with the *critical failure* card, the GM may use 1 point from the *Bad Bank* to make an additional move.

During the execution of a GM move, tools may be employed to generate ideas and make decisions:

- Ask players questions

- Ask players to reveal a card from their Deckahedron (this doesn't count as a flip, this is just the GM using randomness to help make a decision)
- Put on some music
- Use an improv game

Try to keep up the excitement and pace of play with your GM moves, but also know that it's ok to invest a little in making them significant and to pause for a second to think through some repercussions. Will the move you make drive the story toward your next point in the *Good Bank*?

Note that the move you execute in play may actually overlap multiple moves on this list. That's ok, creating honest fictional responses sometimes demands it. For example, "deal damage" is a move, but other moves may include damage as well.

A GM MOVE IS NOT RESTRICTED TO THE PLAYER MOVE THAT CAUSED IT

Understand that when a player resolves a flip with **XX**, that doesn't always mean that the thing they were attempting fails.

The GM is free to let the character accomplish the thing, but may use the flip result to bring new action and intrigue into the story.

Let's say a player's character is a thief infiltrating a stronghold, hired to steal a fabled yellow amulet. Maybe the character attempts to climb over a wall to avoid being seen by guards. Consider the following consequences of an **XX**:

- You fail to get over in time and the guards start yelling and pulling at your boots (Use a monster, danger, or location move)
- You climb over, but as you do so, you overhear the guards in friendly conversation with someone that sounds a lot like the fence that hired you for

- this caper (Reveal an unwelcome truth)
- You climb over. You pause for a second to listen for the guards' passing. You hear their footsteps slow, then stop. Have they found something? Suddenly, one barks an order "Get to the tower and sound the alarm. Run!" (Show signs of an approaching threat)
- You climb over. The camera pans up to the dark sky, we see grey feathered beasts with the faces of birdlike wolves, the flaps of their wings loud and ominous. Each of their tails ends in a glowing yellow shape extremely similar to the description of the amulet. (Show signs of an approaching threat)

The first example is pretty straightforward, a thing was tried, it failed, the character suffers the direct consequences.

In the remaining three examples, the character got to the other side of the wall safely. A fictional cue triggered the move, the mechanisms of the rules were engaged, and then the GM chose to create new, separate, fictional badness. The fiction produced by the engaging the rules does not have to be constrained to the fiction that engaged them.

The last example does something even more strange. It talks about a disembodied "camera" and portrays a scene to the *players*, but not to the *characters*. This can be a fun style of play in Deckahedron World, but it may not please every group because it "breaks immersion". If you describe the world like a movie, you're asking players to be audience, not actors.

Always be on the lookout for signals from the players for the kind of fun they want to have.

REVEAL AN UNWELCOME TRUTH

An unwelcome truth is a fact the players wish wasn't true: that the room's been trapped, maybe, or that the helpful goblin is actually a

spy. Reveal to the players just how much trouble they're in.

SHOW SIGNS OF AN APPROACHING THREAT

This is one of your most versatile moves. "Threat" means anything bad that's on the way. With this move, you just show them that something's going to happen unless they do something about it.

DEAL DAMAGE

When you deal damage, choose one source of damage that's fictionally threatening a character and apply it. In combat with a lizard man? It stabs you. Triggered a trap? Rocks fall on you.

The amount of damage is decided by the source. In some cases, this move might involve trading damage both ways, with the character also dealing damage.

Most damage is based on a die roll. When a player takes damage, tell them what to roll. You never need to touch the dice.

TODO * Stamina/Harm/Wound damage *
Damage their weapons and armour

USE UP THEIR RESOURCES

Surviving in dangerous places often comes down to supplies. With this move, something happens to use up some resource: weapons, armor, magical item charges, ongoing magical effects. You don't always have to use it up permanently.

A sword might be flung to the other side of the room, crossing the shimmering barrier might end any ongoing magic effects, etc.

TODO * Wealth / Equip * Player loses confidence in the skill they just tried. Put a white-side red card on it until they use it and flip a ✓ or ✓✓

TURN THEIR MOVE BACK ON THEM

Think about the benefits a move might grant a character and turn them around in a negative way. Alternately, grant the same advantage to someone who has it out for the characters.

If Ivy has learned of Duke Horst's men approaching from the east, maybe a scout has spotted her, too.

SEPARATE THEM

There are few things worse than being in the middle of a raging battle with blood-thirsty owlbears on all sides -- one of those things is being in the middle of that battle with no one at your back.

Separating the characters can mean anything from being pushed apart in the heat of battle to being teleported to the far end of the dungeon. Whatever way it occurs, it's bound to cause problems.

GIVE AN OPPORTUNITY THAT FITS A PLAYER'S CARDS OR CHARACTER'S BACKGROUND

Every character has unique move cards for skills that they shine at, or has a fictional backstory that can overcome social obstacles or tests of knowledge.

Present an opportunity that plays into one character's domain.

It doesn't have to be a character that's in the current scene though. Sometimes a locked door stands between you and treasure and there's no lockpicking expert in sight. This is an invitation for invention, bargaining, and creativity.

Traps, ambushes, and locked doors are great examples. Need some Derring-Do to avoid giant clock-tower gears? Maybe proof of religious or guild affiliation would confer a backstage pass?

SHOW A DOWNSIDE TO THEIR APPEARANCE, REPUTATION, OR EQUIPMENT

Just as every character shines, they all have their unique weaknesses too. Do orcs have a special thirst for elven blood? Is an ongoing flow of magic disturbing dangerous forces? The torch that lights the way also draws attention from eyes in the dark.

OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY, WITH OR WITHOUT COST

Show them something they want: riches, power, glory. If you want, you can associate some cost with it too, of course.

Remember to lead with the fiction. You don't say, "This area isn't dangerous so you can make camp here, if you're willing to take the time." You make it a solid fictional thing and say, "Helferth's blessings still hang around the shattered altar. It's a safe area to rest or plan, but the chanting from the ritual chamber is getting louder. What do you do?"

PUT SOMEONE IN A SPOT

A spot is someplace where a character needs to make tough choices. Put them, or something they care about, in the path of destruction. The harder the choice, the tougher the spot.

TELL THE REQUIREMENTS OR CONSEQUENCES AND ASK

"Ok, everyone flees from the hammer-camels into the water, but let me ask this first: Samwise is wearing plate armour. If he leaves it behind on the bank of the river, will someone else provide a distraction so he can remove it? Or, Samwise, if you keep it on and try to swim, I'm going to ask for a Defy Danger flip with your Strength."

This move is particularly good when they want something that's not covered by a player move, or they've failed a move. They can do it, sure, but they'll have to pay the price. Or, they

can do it, but there will be consequences.

Base the requirements or consequences in the fiction and make them clear to the characters, not just the players.

This can also be a good move to underscore particularly tricky dangers. Let the players know that if they attempt to dive between the giant clockwork gears, you're going to spend points from the *Bad Bank* to increase the difficulty.

SARUKKAN'S CHAMBER DETAILS - TAKE THEM OR LEAVE THEM

- Luxurious canopy bed in the middle
- Chamber is full of esoterica - bookcases and desks overflowing with books, sculptures, candlesticks, and votives
- Chamber is empty of any adornments, the only feature is a bed and a precise circle of white powder in the center of the room
- A window at the front of the room - an escape route?
- An alarm triggers when a guard enters the room?
- A creepy portrait of Sarukkan, whose eyes follow you as you move

GOALS FOR SARRUKAN'S CHAMBER

Ideally, Sarukkan's Chamber should demonstrate what kind of game Deckahedron World is.

Deckahedron World creates questions for players to answer:

- Will the brother & sister who haven't seen each other in a decade discover each other's identities?
- Will the brother & sister escape Sarukkan's imprisonment?
- (3rd player variant) Will the reluctant guard choose to obey an evil master, or

rebel?

Deckahedron World creates tension and action:

- Potential combat against guards or kitchen staff or Sarukkan himself
- Potential chases involving outsmarting or outmaneuvering pursuers
- Potential to hatch plans and use available resources to set traps or defy traps that been set for them
- Potential to use stealth and social manipulation with guards and party guests

Your group's playing of Sarukkan's Chamber doesn't have to *all of this*, just give players a taste.

It should also help teach the rules of Deckahedron World.

- Get each player to have an opportunity to do a Deckahedron flip
- If a player flips the Critical Success card, that's an opportunity to explain the Critical Flip move
- Ideally there will be a combat scene. (see the [Combat guidelines](#)) Try to get the PCs to attempt *Hack & Slash* or *Volley*
- The brother & sister may trigger *Discern* and *I Know This* moves when they try to reveal each others' identities
- The *Discern* move often comes up when having a look around Sarukkan's Chamber itself.
- If any player-versus-player combat happens, remember to use the PvP combat rules

It should also be a warm-up for your GM skills.

- Remember: "Yes, and..."
- Move the spotlight - be fair, let all players impact the narrative
- Manage the pace. Let the PCs have some dialogue, but when it feels like they're hesitating, push quickly to the

- approaching dangers.
- Get the guards into the room for a quick fight.
- As the PCs gain the upper hand, show signs of another threat (maybe the wizard himself approaches - it's ok to tell the story of what's happening *off-camera*)
- Play Sarukkan's Chamber *honestly*. Set the stakes the same as you would when you play a campaign
- Go back into the rules instruction after no more than 10 minutes.

After Sarukkan's Chamber, the players should now understand how the Deckahedron works with character attributes to produce results that affect the narrative. Ask the players if they get it, and explain again if there's still any confusion.

BEGIN A CAMPAIGN

ESTABLISH TOUCHSTONES

First, the table needs to get on the same page about the adventure's setting, themes, and tone. Give the players an overview of the steps in creating a Touchstone List, and tell them its purpose. Then start executing the steps.

STEP 1

Brainstorm some cultural "touchstones". Ask everyone to call out titles of books, movies, games, comics, and TV shows that feel inspiring, and write them all down, no matter how silly. Everyone at the table can add as many titles as they want.

It's good to explicitly tell the players you're looking for *titles*.

TODO: touchstone list
illustration

STEP 2

Each player gets a chance to circle *one* of the titles on the list.

Remind the players that Deckahedron World has rules for swords and limited magic, and no rules for machine guns or interstellar travel. So choosing sci-fi touchstones might help with themes and tone, but won't have much to offer for establishing setting.

This list of circled titles becomes the "touchstone list".

STEP 3

The GM, using their knowledge of the rules, should read the list and call out any potential conflicts between circled titles and the rules of Deckahedron World.

Will the players expect their characters to pull off the same feats and use the same powers of the chosen touchstones?

Die Hard is a great touchstone for tone, themes, and relationships, but Deckahedron World doesn't have rules for helicopters or machine guns.

The GM should not *reject* any circled titles, they should just address what's going to be possible.

Everyone will have more fun if expectations are set at the beginning.

THE TOUCHSTONE LIST

Invite players to imagine what kind of world would be the one where all the circled titles are mashed together. What does this world look like? What are its dominant features? What secrets are hidden away in the small places? Who are the folk that populate it, do their children happily play in the sun? What monsters lurk, what weakness do the ambitious and powerful exploit?

It's not necessary to answer these questions, just to start thinking.

The "touchstone list" may be consulted when the table needs to make a judgment about whether facts under proposal make sense in the shared universe you're creating or whether a character's action should be possible. You can ask the question "Would this kind of thing be possible in _?" (fill in the name of one of the titles in your touchstone list).

The touchstone list is also an early way that the players can signal to the GM the kind of fun they want to have.

CHARACTER CREATION

CREATE A GM SHEET

The GM needs a sheet of paper to make notes and track information.

At the top of the sheet write the headings "Good Bank" and "Bad Bank". Leave enough space to track the points under each of those headings.

SET EXPECTATIONS

Deckahedron World is a game about a group of scrappy adventurers who grow to be powers to become reckoned with. Let your players know that. Establish that their characters will start the game with skills and gifts beyond ordinary folk, but they'll still have to work and struggle through adversity to become really powerful.

CHOOSE CARDS

Lay out the cards with an A, B or C in the corner

Tell the players they can choose 3 cards.

They may only choose 1 A card each.

They may only choose 2 B cards each.

Choose cards: Rules for first-time players

If this is your players' **first** experience with a role-playing game, tell the players to also choose a "Risk Driver":

- Expose an embarrassment
- Locate a prize
- Extract a secret
- Become enamored
- Sell your services
- Break down a barrier
- Choose a side
- Be an agent of justice
- Take pity on the desperate
- Start a grudge

- Consort with the unsavory
- Believe an impossible claim
- Get called out on your boasting

Write the chosen phrase on a blank card and hand it to the player. Place two green tokens on each player's Risk Driver card. When their character first *takes a big risk* by the method or for the reason written on their card, they player takes the tokens.

ADD FLESH

As they are choosing cards, ask the questions on this list, one-at-a-time, and make notes from the players' answers. Don't ask each question to each player, address a question to just one player, then move on, asking the next question to the next player. This exercise gets the players thinking about their characters, and gets the table talking, so it's ok for players to blurt out responses out of turn. This conversation might also add details to the world, like what kinds of species and religions exist.

- What species is your character, human, or something else from our Touchstone List?
- Does your character steal things, or do they respect the concept of private property?
- Before the adventure starts, is your character engaged in any kind of profession?
- Does your character believe in gods? Is there some kind of religious practice or religious organization for them?
- Does your character enjoy the outdoors, or city life? Are they extreme in that preference?
- Roughly how old is your character? Have they ever killed a person before?
- What's your character's social standing? When they first walk into a room full of people, do they provoke any reaction?

Even if the players are done picking cards, finish asking all these questions.

Not everyone will get asked every question, but everyone will *start thinking* about how *each* of these questions applies to their character. With some depth and dimensionality in mind, a player will be better able to imagine creative outcomes to the situations their character is confronted with.

As you're asking the players these questions, listen for how the answers signal the kind of fun the players want to have and also measure the expectations they have for the game.

Deckahedron World is a game where characters start off as scrappy adventures. If a player is telling you their character is a fire demon or a ten year old shoe-shine boy or a computer hacker, a conversation is needed to establish how that character can fit into the Deckahedron World rules.

If a player's character reads as too exotic, that might be the player signaling that the fun they want to have is playing a different game.

CHOOSE A NAME

When players have finished picking cards, ask them what their character is called. Have them write the name on the top of their character sheet so that the name faces you. Using a felt-tipped marker is recommended.

CHOOSE INT / STR / DEX

TODO: illustration

Tell the players to choose how to distribute 6 points among the attributes. No attribute may have a rank of zero. They must all be at least Anchors.

Looking at which attributes get applied to their chosen move cards will help the players decide how to distribute these 6 points.

HOME / COMFORT

Before the game begins, ask *every* player where their character feels most at home, or what their favourite activity is.

Write down the answers.

Use this information to get your first point in your *Good Bank*, by starting the story out in a place of normalcy, vitality, and comfort. Remember, it doesn't have to be a Hobbit hole. Characters might be most at home in the middle of a bloody battle.

RISK TAKERS

Ask this question to each player: What about your character's personality causes them to overreach? What makes them take risks a normal person avoids? Are they brave, foolhardy, driven, greedy, curious, grieving? Caught between two worlds? Unsure of who they are? Do they have a deathwish?

Write down the answers.

CHOOSE ITEMS AND WEAPONS

Each player may choose 2 items in addition to any items they got by choosing move cards with the RECEIVE CARDS tag.

One of these 2 new items may be a magic item.

Other popular choices are weapons or armor.

If the player wants their character to have an unusual weapon, that's fine. Explain to them that at the beginning of the game the die they will roll will be a d4, even if they describe something epic.

If there is not a card in the deck with the name of the item already, just write the item's name on the blank side of another card.

TODO: link to weapon and armor lists

CHOOSE SPEED / WEALTH / EQUIP

TODO: illustration

Give each player 6 Speed / Wealth / Equip tokens. For each item card they have, tell them to place one token on it. (Except any weapon that is a Signature Weapon)

The players can choose to put any remaining tokens in either Speed, Wealth, or Equip. Explain to them that if they don't have 4 Speed, they will not be able to perform any move tagged UNENCUMBERED. Also explain that with less than 4 Speed, there will be a Stamina penalty to Bravely Run Away.

These rules are split up into sessions. During the first 3-hour session, the players will probably just be getting the hang of the the flow of the game. In session 2, they will probably experience downtime, and be ready to understand how moves interact with each other.

FILLING THE *BAD BANK*

When a player flips and *resolves a move* with a **X**, mark a point in the Bad Bank.

MOVES TAGGED IMMEDIATE

The exception to this is if the move is tagged **IMMEDIATE**. Do not mark points in your Bad Bank when resolving a move with this tag.

CALLING FOR FLIPS DURING A GM MOVE

Sometimes you will be making a GM move and want to use randomness to decide which direction to take the fiction, and call for a player to flip a card from their Deckahedron. This is not considered *resolving a move* and thus if they get an **X** as a result, you should *not* mark a point in your Bad Bank.

CREATING A COMBAT ENCOUNTER

BALANCE

Grab a piece of paper and write down the names of each opponent. Beside their name, draw ticks for their Stamina points. Beside that, write their attack power die (d2, d4, d6, d10).

Opponents' Stamina points should be realistically scaled to the "scrappy adventurer" level of the players. This table should help.

	Stamina points	Attack power
Dotards, Children	2	1d2
Civilians	4	1d2 - 1d4
Bouncers, Guards	5-6	1d2 - 1d4
Trained Soldiers, Elite Guards	7-10	1d4 - 1d6

Generally, human opponents will have d2 attack power when unarmed and d4 attack power when armed. Save greater attack powers for monsters and special villains.

CALCULATE PARTY POWER

Party Power is an easy number to calculate, based on each Player Character (PC) in the scene.

Party power = $(10 \times (\# \text{ of PCs})) + (\# \text{ of green tokens the PCs have})$

CREATE YOUR FOES

Create set of enemies that challenge them to the desired degree.

A challenging fight for new players is made by creating foes with Stamina points equal to the Party Power.

You can also use Party Power to give the foes:

Party Power cost

One armor slot that can absorb Harm	3
One armor slot that can absorb Harm or Wound	6
A weapon that does 1d6 damage	4
One Stamina point beyond the norm	1

You can also augment foes by spending points from the *Bad Bank*. See below.

Sometimes you just want to punctuate the plot with some action by throwing in a quick-and-easy fight. In that case, use half of the Party Power to create foes, but put something else in jeopardy (information, resources, social standing, risk of alarm)

GIVE HINTS

Don't surprise the players *too* much. Always describe the encounter in a way that hints at the difficulty.

- The two guards *exchange an unsure look and step forward*
- The salty pirate flashes his blade, but *simultaneously takes a step backwards towards his ship*
- The golem is *gargantuan and covered in scars from many battles*
- The *horde* of undead wolves stare at you with *unrelenting hunger*
- The old man with the walking stick is *unfazed by your threats* and, *after looking you up and down, turns away with an air of dismissal*

THE FEEL OF COMBAT

In combat, it's ok if play gets more formulaic. Some players enjoy the "abnegation" of a tit-for-tat combat scene that lasts tens of minutes. This can be a combination of exciting and relaxing. Give your players opportunities to press their favourite buttons.

That said, some players don't seek abnegation.

What kinds of signals are your players giving you? Maybe they want to get through combat faster. If so, when you make your moves, you can think cinematically. Continually raise the stakes for both sides during the scene. Think dangerous. No character or set piece needs to be safe or sacred.

THE COMBAT SPOTLIGHT

Combat can play out in whatever way feels natural and follows from the fiction. That said, it can be taxing on a GM to come up with new, creative responses in combat because flips are happening frequently. So, to relieve some of that pressure on the GM, here are some formats available to follow to get you through a fight scene.

Deckahedron World doesn't have turns, but it's ok if moving the spotlight during combat makes it feel that way.

Format 1

This format is simple, and gives the players the most agency.

- Give each player a "turn" where they will probably trigger an aggressive combat move like Hack & Slash or Volley
- Pay attention to IMMEDIATE combat moves that may have triggered
- Execute the moves, make cool stuff happen as consequences
- Go around the table until all the opponents flee or are incapacitated
- Any **XX** results may usually be interpreted as "your enemies attack". Choose some opponents that weren't *just* in a Hack & Slash, and declare they attack one of the player's characters. Apply attack power against that character. Use an attack power die from one attacker, and add 1 attack power for each other attacker

Format 2

This format makes the opponents more of a threat.

- Give each player a "turn" where they will probably trigger an aggressive combat move like Hack & Slash or Volley, call that a "player round"
- Pay attention to IMMEDIATE combat moves that may have triggered
- After player turns are complete, and the players look to you to see what happens next, execute an "NPC round"
- Identify the opponents that didn't interact during the "player round"
- Describe how all of those opponents team up on one of the player's characters, and call for one Defy Danger flip. (move the "danger" spotlight fairly, but also try to put pressure on any players with more than 3 green tokens)
- Failing the Defy Danger flip results in the player's character suffering the opponents' attack. You can calculate attack power thusly:
 - ▣ **XX** : one attack power die from the lead attacker, and add 1 attack power (not die) for each other attacker
 - ▣ **X** : no attack power die, but 1 attack power per attacker (so 3 foes = 3 attack power)

Format 3

This format imagines the opponents as particularly quick and aggressive.

- Give each player a "turn" where they will trigger a move
- Pay attention to IMMEDIATE combat moves that may have triggered
- When describing the outcome of a player's move, also describe how the opponents take aggressive action.
- Keeping the spotlight on that player,

have them respond to the actions of their foes, usually by needing to follow their first flip with a Defy Danger flip.

- Allow players to avoid the opponent's aggressive action if their first flip specifically provided for it, and it makes sense in the narrative. (See Backstab, Bum Rush, Volley)

TODO This is just guidelines You have power - it's mostly in the narrative What kind of GM move do you do in response to failed flips?

LOOT

After combat, the players may propose that their characters sift through the battlefield looking for valuables. Let the characters find whatever you think would be most fun.

Sometimes you don't know what loot is appropriate.

If the characters slay a pack of werewolves, and ask to search the bodies, and you don't immediately have a great idea about what kind of beneficial gear could be found on nearly naked bodies, you can write "What we found on the werewolves" on a blank card, and give it to one of the players. Tell them to place a token from their SPEED pile on the card. Later in the game, when the rules demand either a WEALTH or EQUIP to be spent, the "What we found on the werewolves" card may be spent, if the players can justify it.

PREPARE

Before your next session starts, you should run through the events of the previous session in your head. Think especially about signals you got from the players. What kind of fun did each player seem to seek out or respond to? Was a player particularly keen to create backstory, to get into combat, to ask a lot of questions about how the world works? Can you think of things to go into the next session

to provide that kind of fun?

Think about the plot and how to get your next couple points in the Good Bank. Do you think the characters will make certain decisions? You might imagine 2 or 3 key decisions the party will be confronted with. For every fork in the road, try to imagine how the world and NPCs will respond when the characters choose either branch.

That's important. Prepare for *either* case.

There is no *correct* answer for the characters. Never punish a player for making a choice you didn't expect.

Being prepared is different than having a plan. No game ever goes according to a plan. The purpose of preparation is to use your imagination to assemble a cabinet of narrative spices. Wait until you play to find out what happens.

START OF SESSION

SPECIAL MOVE: THE SESSION OPENER

At the beginning of all sessions but the first, ask this question and give out green tokens for correct answers.

Start of simple - Ask each player for either a thing they learned about the world or a way they expressed their character's personality. If they can give a reasonably correct answer, give them a green token.

ASK FOR NOTES

Lead each player through a quick check-in. Everyone, including the GM will ask if there's any way they could improve their style of play.

GMs should particularly try to improve their ability to listen for signals. Tell players about the content you added last session in response to a signal you got from them.

Look at your touchstone list. Are you still playing the setting and the themes and tones you all wanted when you started?

GIVE NOTES

Beyond what you may have in mind, here is a note to give to new players at the beginning of their second session.

After session 1, your players will be realizing that they fail often, maybe more than they'd like. This is a good time to talk about the odds with your players and particularly to discuss generating advantages.

Some psychological studies have shown that odds feel "fair" only when players get wins 60% of the time. Now look at the Deckahedron statistics reference. You'll see

that if your players are mostly doing standard flips (flips without advantage), they are likely to feel the game is unfair.

Explain to your players that getting good at playing Deckahedron World means *creating advantages*. There are built-in moves like Discern, Defend, Do a Flashback, and Good Thing I Brought that can be used to create advantages. In this session, explain each one of these moves. Discern should be particularly encouraged if you'd like more opportunities to describe the world, environment, and NPCs that you're creating.

APOLOGIA

After running through the events of last session in your mind, you may realize you're painted into a corner. When the characters are in a situation where you can't imagine a way to keep the game exciting, you need to have a conversation with your players.

Retroactively edit.

Collaborate.

Get consent.

USING THE GOOD BANK

The good bank is used to create certain kinds of "Deus Ex Machina" situations to benefit the players' characters.

CREATE ADVANTAGES

One point from the *Good Bank* may be spent to let a player as though they had the highest amount of advantage (flip-3-take-best). You may do this preemptively or after a flip, like a flashback.

Let's say a character encounters two guards who, in an earlier scene, humiliated and bullied him. The player says they're going to use the Go Berserk! move. Because of the narrative set-up, it makes sense that it should be easier for the character to enter an enraged state. It would make sense for them to have an advantage.

- You can hint to the player they already have sufficient narrative set-up to Do a Flashback
- You can storytell to resolve the situation. Maybe the guards run away or an additional event makes the conflict irrelevant. Make sure your storytelling is fun for the player. They've already indicated that they want to have fun by Going Berserk.
- You can use a point from the *Good Bank* to create the advantage - this gives the maximum amount of advantage, causing a flip-3-take-best flip. You've only got a few points in the *Good Bank*, so make sure it's worth it.

Here is what you can **not** do: you cannot tell them to flip with an advantage just because you're the GM and you think it makes sense.

If an advantage is to be had, the price must be paid, either by the GM or by the player.

Creating an advantage by spending a point from the *Good Bank* always results in a flip-3-take-best flip, even if the character is at the "wild" level in the move, even if the character is disadvantaged by some previous situation or effect.

Flipping a wound card on these flips will still override the **Complete flip rule**.

AN NPC TO THE RESCUE

When the players find themselves in a situation that looks dire:

- There's no hope and no way out
- They're surrounded and outnumbered
- They've lost the majority of their Stamina points and the foes in the scene are still healthy and looking to fight
- There's a puzzle they need to solve, but haven't got a clue

In a dire situation, you can spend a point from the *Good Bank* to have an allied NPC enter into the scene.

The NPC should be someone (or some thing) the players' characters have met before and should have an honest reason, based on the fiction, to assist the players' characters.

As you move the combat spotlight around the scene, the NPC should get a turn to act as often as each player does.

- The NPC may use the Defend move
- The NPC may assist any player character's attack, adding an appropriate die to the attack power
- The NPC may get into a scuffle with one foe, effectively preventing that foe from acting as the combat spotlight moves around
- The NPC may convey or reveal information valuable to the players

RESURRECT A CHARACTER

If a player character dies, you may spend a point from the *Good Bank* to bring them back to life.

You may not resurrect player characters without spending a point from the *Good Bank*.

Take care to be honest to the fiction. Try not to degrade or insult any emotional journey that the death provoked.

Resurrection can have many forms.

Resurrection can come at a high cost.

USING THE *BAD BANK*

FICTIONAL DISADVANTAGES

In real life, some actions are more difficult than others. The GM has some tools to reflect this in the game.

There are strict rules. Be realistic *and* work within the boundaries.

Let's say the party of adventurers is in a dark cave at nighttime and no torches are lit. A multi-winged bat creature swoops down at them, claws slashing. The first player declares they're going to dive out of the way (Defy Danger with DEX). Because of the set-up, it makes sense that this will be more difficult than if the character could clearly see the creature and the cave floor they're diving into.

- You can use 2 points from the *Bad Bank* to create one level of disadvantage

This level of disadvantage should now be applied *consistently* whenever any character attempts to avoid a swooping attack in a dark environment from a bat creature without further expenditure from the *Bad Bank*.

Consistency prevents players from feeling the game is unfair or that you are especially aiming negative consequences at one player.

CRITICAL FAILURES

If a player resolves a flip with the *critical failure* card, the GM may use 1 point from the *Bad Bank* to make an additional move.

CREATING DEADLY COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

TODO

- Give a foe an extra starting Stamina point - 1 point
- Increase a foe's attack power die - 2

- point
- Give a foe a spot for a wound - 3 points

CREATING DEADLY PURSUITS

TODO

- When a player uses the Bravely Run Away move, you can spend 1 point from the Bad Bank to put them in a situation where they are again in immediate danger
- Make a player's move cost 1 physical or mental Stamina to execute

IT'S A DECOY

TODO

If you spend 3 points from the *Bad Bank*, you can move the MacGuffin one level deeper into a dangerous place. Or have it swiped away at the last second by a dangerous foe.

You can do this even if all facts led the players to think they were just about to acquire their prize.

CREATING CHALLENGES FOR PLAYERS

PUZZLES

MONSTERS

Monsters are just puzzles that can be brute-forced.

Monsters represent something about the theme

VILLAINS (AKA "BOSSES", AKA "THE BIG BAD")

3-WAY NPC CONFLICTS

Rock-Paper-Scissors, or 3-virtues-pick-2.

Puzzles that have an unavoidable cost - there's no perfect solution. Sometimes it's about choosing an imperfect side.

Powerful ways for players to say something about the themes of the story and the personality of their characters.

Campaigns

TODO

- the resources they choose, particularly move cards
- body language - smiling, how animated they get
- when they take a long time to make one decision
- usually a good sign, but also gauge others' reactions to delay
- when they argue amongst each other - and the degree to which they argue
- this one is a tricky balance
- the tone they take when acting out player dialogue

- bored? excited?
- What's a city in Europe?
- What vegetable did you eat yesterday?
- Who is the worst Hollywood director?
- What was your worst childhood injury or illness?
- Name a one-hit wonder musical group.
- Name a shop where women buy clothing.
- What's something you buy at a hardware store?
- What's my mother's favourite TV show?
- What do kids find when turning over stones in a garden?
- Name something people believe in that isn't real.

ATTRIBUTION

Some of this text is from Dungeon World
Copyright 2012, Sage Kobold Productions;
Authors Sage LaTorra and Adam Koebel.

See LICENSE.txt