

Deckbuilder RPG

Overview

This game can be played as a single session card game adventure or a longer term campaign with role-playing like Dungeons and Dragons or Pathfinder. In any case, most of the players control members of a party of fantasy adventurers, each with special abilities and equipment. They may play a cunning rogue, a mighty warrior, an ingenious wizard, or other types. But over time, as the party members find treasures and gain experience, the players will customize, refine, and advance their characters into powerful, unique individuals.

One player, however, takes on the role of the monsters, traps, and treasures that the party goes up against. This Game Master is responsible for building and maintaining a fun and memorable storyline.

To enable this process, the game is made up of a plethora of cards representing creatures, rooms, skills, spells, weapons and equipment. A deck of such cards encompasses all the details of a character or monster. Each environment they interact in, from bright, sunlit castle courtyards to dank, dark dungeons is a series of decks defining each area and the creatures and items that inhabit it. GMs can use predefined adventure decks in their entirety, modify them, or even build their own from scratch.

Within each scenario, there will be puzzles to solve, quests to undertake, and strangers to interact with. Some of those interactions will lead to violence. At those times, the game enters a slow-motion combat mode. Players begin a new battle deck, deciding their offensive or defensive posture and the abilities and spells they wish to use by the cards they choose. As the battle progresses, the strategy is honed turn by turn until one side or the other prevails. And to the victor go the spoils; wondrous treasures, powerful equipment, and the experience to upgrade existing skills or learn new ones. The cards for each are added to the character deck to be drawn upon in future encounters until ultimately, the quest is concluded.

These starter rules will guide you in setting up and playing one such encounter.

Setup

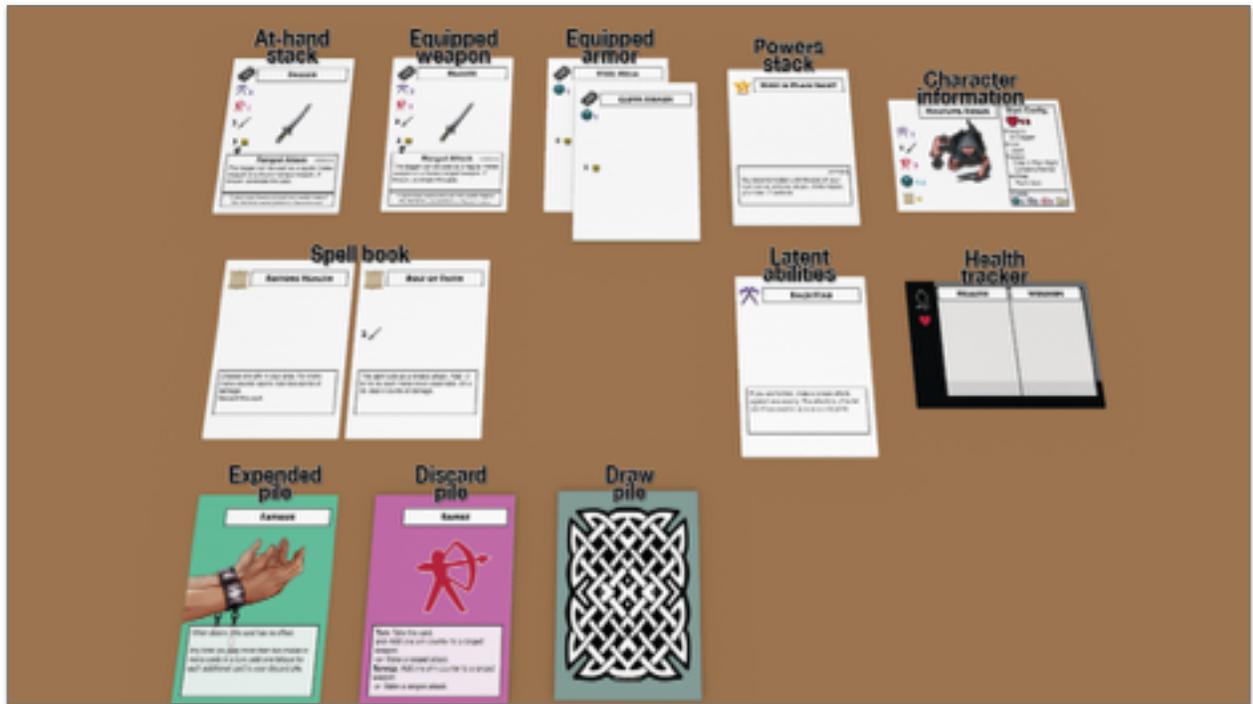
Action Tableau

There are 6 stacks of action cards that make up the action tableau. These are placed in the center of the table as shown.



Characters

Each player has a character information card, health tracker, equipped and at-hand items, weapons, and armor, and powers and abilities. Some characters also have a spell book. There is also a draw pile, discard pile, and expended pile. A possible character layout is shown below. Note that not all characters will have all the cards/stacks shown at all times.



Game Master

The GM will set up the current room and will have monster decks, the dungeon deck, and possibly larger decks like adventure decks and the campaign deck.

Encounter zone

The current encounter zone is created by laying out a series of arenas, some of which may have associated monsters or items. Connections and barriers such as doors are labeled and attached to each arena to show adjacency. An example setup is shown below.



Monsters

Each monster type has a card or cards that are placed in an arena. They have a stat card, similar to the characters' information card, that is placed in front of the GM, and the more powerful monsters have their own deck.

Bosses and Minions

There are two types of monsters that the party may encounter. Minions are lowly retainers with little training and ability. They all share a minion deck, which doesn't have new cards added to it during the battle. Rather than health points, minions simply take a certain number of hits before dying, usually one or two.

The creatures that the minions work for are called bosses. They have full stats and decks just like the player characters. Usually there is only one boss per battle lest the GM be overwhelmed trying to manage cards.

Dungeon Deck

The arena and monster cards for each encounter zone other than the current one are stacked to form the dungeon deck. As characters move through the dungeon, new arenas will be revealed and their decks set up for play.

Battle

Initiative

Whenever combat is imminent, it is necessary to determine the starting character. Everyone takes their character's defense score, subtracts their armor's defense score(s), and adds 1d6. The highest total is the start player. Ties go to the character with the higher defense. If it is still a tie, reroll. After the starting player's turn, play continues clockwise around the table.



A character information card. It lists the melee attack bonus, melee damage, ranged attack bonus, defense score, and mana bonus on the left. Health points and starting weapons, armor, powers, abilities, and battle cards are listed on the right.

A Turn

Combat is in fact a continuous, tumultuous brawl. All the creatures within the same area are fighting each other on opposing sides. For an orderly game, however, play must be broken down into turns. To simulate the actions being taken and the current state of the fray, the player will choose a card representing their most recent focus: melee (hand-to-hand combat), ranged combat, spell use, item or ability use, or resting. In addition, the player rolls attack dice to see if any damage was inflicted on enemies. Success will be more or less likely based on the action the character performed (i.e. the cards the player plays.)

Mechanically speaking, a turn consists of the currently active player performing a Turn action, followed by all other players who are in the same arena performing a Synergy action.

First, the active player chooses a card from the action tableau (see Setup, above). At that time, they can also play any matching cards from their hand. Follow the instructions labeled "Turn:" on the cards. This will likely result in further actions which are resolved according to other cards. The specifics of the action tableau choices are as follows.

Action Tableau

Melee

The melee card's Turn action reads: "Take this card. and- Add a counter to a melee weapon. -or- attack with it." If the player chooses this action, the card is placed in front of them, and they may play any other cards from their hand if they have a melee symbol. Basic melee cards each add a counter to a weapon. Ability cards may allow special attacks or other actions. Once the cards have been played and the counters tallied, the melee attack is rolled following the attack rules (see attack section.) If you take the melee action, you must make a melee attack this turn.

For example, you choose the melee action. This allows you to add an attack counter to a weapon or make a melee attack. If you have 2 other melee cards in your hand, you can play them as well and use their actions. You would use 2 of the cards to add 2 attack counters to a melee weapon. The final card would be used to attack with it.

All of the cards you played, including the action card just gained, go to the discard pile.

Range and Mana

Both of these choices is very similar but each applies to a different aspect of combat. Range is attacking from a distance, and mana is using spells.

Their Turn options read thus: "Take this card. and- Add one X counter. -or- Make a X attack."

The main difference between these actions and the melee action is that attacking with a ranged weapon or casting a spell may wait more than one turn. You may wish to spend extra time aiming to be sure to hit the target, or you may need to charge up a lot of magical energy to power a spell.

Defend

The defend action means that the character is fighting defensively, trying harder to protect himself than injure the opponents. "Take this card. Make an attack at -2. and- Add one defense counter to an armor. -or- Retreat from engaged opponent to an adjacent arena." Just as before, the player takes the card in front of them.

This time, an attack is rolled with a penalty, and one of two other options is also chosen. The player may place a counter on a card. Defense counters build up on armor cards. Then, when the character is being attacked, the points can be spent to increase their defense score (see attacks for more details.)

The other option is to retreat. This allows the player to move their character to an adjacent arena, however, any enemies get one parting melee reaction.

Rest

The rest action is very similar to the defend action but with different options and a stiffer attack penalty. First, "Take this card. Make an attack at -4." Take the card as usual, then roll an attack with a -4 penalty. Then the three rest options are "Draw 3 cards. -or- Expend up to 3 cards from your hand. -or- Restore 2 battle health."

The first is self-explanatory, take three cards from your draw pile into your hand.

The next option is to expend cards from your hand. As the battle progresses, you may find that some cards in your deck are no longer useful. Your character will also build up fatigue cards. By using this option, the player chooses up to three cards from their hand and removes them from the game for this battle. When the battle is over, the cards are returned to the character deck.

The final choice is to regain a bit of health. As opponents wound a character, the character loses health. By taking this option, the player restores two points of their character's health.

Item/Ability

The final action card causes an attack with a -2 penalty and allows a player to utilize their character's equipment or powers. It offers three options. "Take a latent ability card into your discard pile. -or- Activate a power. -or- Equip an at-hand item, spell, or power."

Abilities are special actions that are specific to an individual character. At the start of a battle not all of the character's abilities are active. The first option enables a player to activate an ability by putting it into their discard pile. This enters the card into the character deck so that when it is reshuffled, the ability may be drawn and usable.

Powers are permanent abilities. Some pertain to a character, and others are associated with items. Choosing activate a power allows the character to perform the action of one card's power.

Finally, during a battle a character may need different equipment than what they started with. The character's cards include a set of at-hand items. Cards in the player's hand

are also at-hand. This option takes one of these cards and puts it active and available in the character area.

Draw

After performing their action, the player draws one new card up to a hand limit of eight.

Synergy

When characters on the same team fight side by side, they bolster each other. In the game this is simulated by synergy actions. Ally characters in the same arena as the active player's character are allowed to perform synergy actions as soon as the active player has completed their turn. Synergy action cards come from the player's hand.

The player looks at their hand for cards **the same as the action the active player just took**. They may play as many matching cards as they wish and take the Synergy action for each.

For example, the priest and the wizard are in the same arena. The priest player chose the mana action and healed the wizard. Now on the synergy phase, the wizard's player has three mana cards in their hand. They choose to play all of them, adding two counters to their mana missile spell and then casting it.

If the character doesn't have any matching cards in their hand or chooses not to play them, they are allowed to draw one card.

Synergy actions are taken in clockwise order around the table. When they are complete, play moves on to the person to the left of the active player who takes a Turn action.

Attacks

When a player chooses the attack action, the result is resolved by the following procedure.

1. Calculate the attacker's to hit value. Start with the character's appropriate attack modifier—melee, ranged, or magic—as shown on their character sheet. Add the attack modifier of the weapon or spell being used. Finally, add the number of attack counters the character has on the weapon or spell they are using times two. The attack must use all of the built up counters. These counters are then discarded.
2. Calculate the defender's defense value. Start with the character's base defense score from their sheet. Add any bonuses for armor they are wearing. If the character has any defense counters on their armor, they may choose to use any number of them toward this attack (including zero). Add the number of counters used times two and discard them.
3. Roll. The attacker rolls 2d6, adds their to hit value, and compares the total to the defender's defense value. If the to hit is equal to or higher than the defense value, damage is done. Otherwise the attack is dodged or deflected.
 - Critical hits: Any time the attack roll is at least 10 more than what was needed to hit, and one of the dice rolled was a 6, critical damage has been done. The player rolls 1d6 to find the critical hit damage.
4. If necessary, calculate damage. Add the weapon's damage to the character's damage bonus. Then add critical hit damage and/or subtract the target's damage resistance, if any.
5. If applicable, apply damage. The defender marks the damage taken by moving counters on their character sheet from the health column to the battle damage column. If all of their health is gone, they fall unconscious.