

SKYBOUND

If you're familiar with Tabletop Role-Playing games, or RPGs, then you should be familiar with the basic concepts of the game. If not, we are going to explain what kind of game you'll be playing.

Welcome to Skybound

Skybound is the game of epic adventure in the magical future. It is a game of imagination and improvisation, where people collaborate to create legendary stories of gunslingers, hackers, and wizards.

Skybound is typically played with one Game Master and several Players.

Players

Players control a single Player Character within the story, making choices, speaking with other characters, and assuming the life and desires of an adventurer. Players will create personalized fantasy characters of different sorts and breeds, creating their personality and backstory, and controlling them in a fantastic adventure. The Game Master will describe the world and other characters, while the players interact with the world.

Each player will need a deck of 52 playing cards to play, as well as a character sheet, a pencil, and lined paper for notes.

Introduction to Skybound

You are an adventurer in the Cael System, a cosmos where magic and technology overlap, and humans, angels, and robots all stand on equal footing. At the center of the Cosmos is the planet Cael, a concrete world where the sun has fled, and the crowded streets are

flooded in neon light. Once a handful of medieval kingdoms ruled by magic, Cael has erupted as the dominant figure in the cosmos.

Around Cael is the Elemental Ring, a torus infinitely larger than Cael, made of stone, fire, water, and air that circles the planet. The one thing keeping Cael from complete domination of the cosmos, the elementals of the Ring has proved to be an impassable blockade, keeping the governments of Cael out, and allowing the outer cosmos to remain an open frontier.

The Game Master

The Game Master tells the story of the game, directing the world and non-player characters. They will describe scenes and react to the actions of the players by describing the results of their actions. They will call for checks to test the abilities of the player characters, and will often fight against the players in combat as dastardly adversaries and strange monsters. As Game Master, you take on the bulk of the responsibility in managing and planning for the game. It's important that you understand the rules of the game, especially the basics. That being said, being a Game Master can be tremendously rewarding, and you can create any kind of experience, from a sandbox world to a railroad adventure.



Skybound Essentials

Skybound is a game about telling stories and playing cards. When your character takes an action in the story, the Game Master may ask you to draw a card from your deck to **Check** if the action is successful. When making Checks you always want a higher value on the card, and your Game Master will tell you the result of the action based on what you draw for the check.

During **combat**, players draw hands of cards and use those cards for both offense and defense.

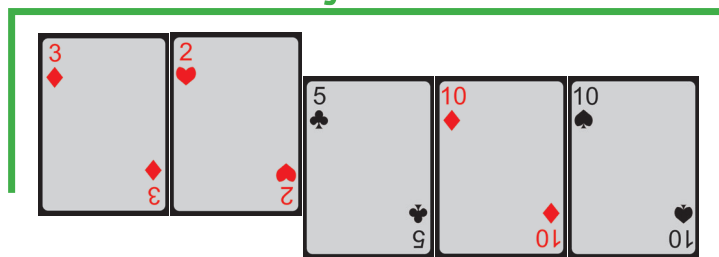
A character's defenses are called **Vitality** and **Wards**. Vitality is a stack of Face-Down cards that represent their health and tolerance for injury. Vitality is drawn directly from the deck. When you take damage and have no Wards, cards are discarded from this stack. If your Vitality stack is entirely discarded, your character becomes **Wounded**.

Wards are a stack of face-up cards that lay on top of your Vitality stack that represents their active defenses and their ability to avoid injury. You can add cards to your Wards stack by placing cards directly from your hand into the stack in a numerically sequential and descending order; the card at the top of the stack must always be one value lower than the card below it. When a character takes damage, they first discard cards from their Wards before discarding from their Vitality.

All cards used in checks, attacks, and discarded from their wards are sent to the **Discard** stack. These cards are unavailable until you take a **Rest**. When you run out of cards in your deck, your character becomes **Exhausted**, and can no longer fight or perform actions.

Wounded characters must discard 10 cards from their deck at the start of their turn until they become Exhausted, or until an ally stabilizes them.

Player Hand



Deck



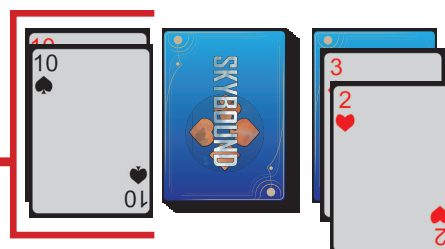
Vitality



Wards



Discard



Characters **attack** by playing **Sets** of cards from their Hand. A Set is a group of cards that are similar to each other, such as: a pair of cards of the same value, or five cards of the same suit. For each card used in a Set, the target takes damage. The goal of any battle is to force an opponent to discard their Vitality.

That was the **Essential Skybound gameplay**! There are more rules, but these are all you need to get started.

Game Mastering: Exploration

A Game Master should create a Scenario or Campaign for the players, involving locations, conflicts and obstacles. Call for checks when players are overcoming an obstacle. You, or the players, can suggest relevant skills required for the task, as well as a difficulty.

Game Mastering: Combat

The GM has one turn per round where they take actions for all their characters. They have one hand and one deck. The characters under their control have individual movements, attacks, vitality, and wards.

When drawing a hand, draw for the character with the largest hand, then add an additional card for each additional combatant. The average GM-Character has a 3 card hand.

Each of the GM's characters are **Uncoordinated**. They can each make an attack, but no two characters can attack the same enemy. Player-Characters are Coordinated.

GMs do not shuffle their deck while in combat. When you run out of cards in your deck, your character's will **Break**. Broken GM-Characters will either surrender, retreat, or be too exhausted to continue fighting.

Game Mastering: Social

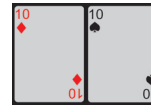
A Game Master should fill their world with characters to speak or interact with. GMs play these individual characters, giving them life and personality. Social interactions typically do not require Checks or drawing cards, unless it involves lying, threatening, or bargaining.

Attack Sets

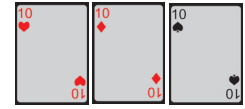
High Card



Pair



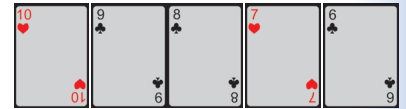
Three-Of-a-Kind



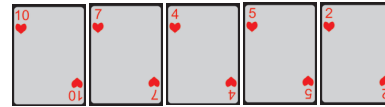
Four-of-a-Kind



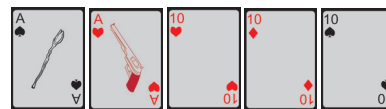
Straight



Flush



Full House



GM Vitality & Wards



3 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 6 card hand



Exploration & Adventure

The Window into a World

The Game Master is your window into the world of fantasy and adventure. They describe the world in sight, sound, and touch, and will embody the people you meet on your adventures. They will give you the details of a journey or situation, and will occasionally offer actions or checks that your character could make in response to these details. As a player, you embody a single character within the world, and respond to the Game Master with your character's actions. The Game Master will tell you the result of your action with a description of your success or failure based on the value of the cards played.

Overcoming Obstacles

During any adventure, there are sure to be obstacles that complicate the road ahead: picking a lock, jumping a chasm, or investigating a trap to name a few!

You can attempt to overcome an obstacle by making a Check, which is done by drawing and discarding a card from your deck. The value of the card will determine the success of the action. If the value of the card is higher than the complication of the check, the action is successful. If the value of the card is lower or equal to the check's difficulty, then the action will fail.

Untrained complications come in three tiers: Simple, Medium, and Hard. A simple complication is something that is not difficult, with little chance of failure. A medium complication is difficult, and has an even chance of success and failure. A Hard complication is very difficult, with a low chance of success.

Most checks have an associated skill in which you can be Proficient. When you are proficient in a skill, you may draw two cards and add their values together. All face cards have a value of 10. Proficiency makes checks easier, while also allowing characters to

complete checks that are otherwise impossible for unskilled characters.

There are three tiers of Proficient Complication: Trained, Professional, and Master.

When you are proficient in a skill, you can choose to only draw one card, and recycle it instead of discarding it, representing how easy the check is for the character.

Simple Checks need higher than:



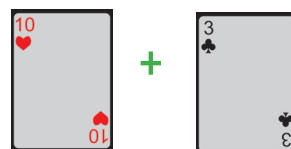
Medium Checks need higher than:



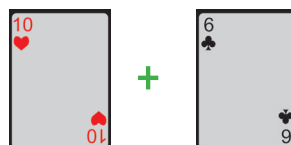
Hard Checks need higher than:



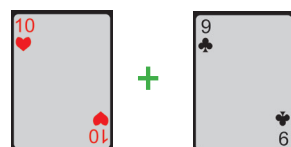
Trained Checks need higher than:



Professional Checks need higher than:



Master Checks need higher than:



Drawing Blindly

Many actions may ask you to **Draw #c**. This means to draw that number of cards blindly from the top of your deck. Even while in combat, players must draw and play these cards from the top of their deck, and cannot play them from their hand.

Advantage and Disadvantage

Situations or abilities may rule that you have a particular edge or difficulty with a check. When you have an advantage or disadvantage, you draw an additional card from the deck. If you have advantage on a check, discard the lower valued card; if you have disadvantage, discard the highest valued card.

Recycling Cards

When tasks are particularly easy or the advantages are numerous, you may be able to recycle drawn cards instead of discarding them. Recycled cards have their own pile, and are shuffled into the deck immediately while not in combat. During combat, the recycling pile can be shuffled into the deck as an action, and will automatically be shuffled into the deck after combat has ended.

Preparing for a Fight!

Your defenses are dynamic, not static, and most characters cannot rely on their constitution alone to protect them from an impending attack. When kicking down a door, walking down a suspicious corridor, or when you hear rustling in the nearby bushes, it is often best to prepare for a tussle and declare that you draw your weapons.

Drawing is your character being fully prepared, physically and mentally, for a fight.

Drawing early has benefits and detriments. If you are surprised by a trap or enemy, you will be able to participate in the surprise round and will have the Wards to survive the attacks. However, if you were wrong in your suspicions, you will have to discard your hand and Wards, essentially wasting cards.

Because of this double-edged sword, it is common practice to have one forward scout who prepares for danger, while the rest watch from a distance and remain alert.

Rest

Your deck is more than just cards: it is your entire character. It is the life, the energy, and the driving force behind every action.

All actions require a card to be discarded. As a day of adventuring wears on, characters will find themselves weary from their activities, requiring varying degrees of rest. Your deck is your daily stamina, and is slowly whittled down during a day until you are forced to make camp.

It doesn't take much to get your breath back. A **Breather** will only take five minutes, and will restore most of your stamina. A wounded or unconscious ally may require at least an hour to recover from a wound, bandaging lesions and massaging the stiffness out of muscles. A full rest of about 8 hours will completely reinvigorate a character.

A **Breather** takes five minutes, during which you perform only lightly taxing tasks, such as marching, practicing, and scouting the area. After the five minutes have expired, shuffle your discard pile and remove half of the pile from the game. Shuffle the other half of the discard pile into your deck. The cards that are removed from the game can only be returned by taking a Full Rest.

A **Short Rest** takes one hour, during which you perform only lightly taxing tasks, such as cooking, bandaging wounds, or drawing up plans. After the hour has expired, you may redraw your Vitality up to your maximum amount; for each Vitality replaced this way, remove 5 cards from your deck from the game. At the end of the hour, you may also replenish your deck as though you had completed a Breather.

A **Full Rest** takes at least eight hours, during which you are expected to perform no taxing activities, and instead only sleep, sit, and eat. After the eight hours have expired, you may shuffle all 52 cards back into your deck and draw for Vitality.





Combat

Combat Basics

Each battle consists of Rounds, Turns, and Actions. A **Round** is a moment of battle, representing six seconds of time. During this moment, each character gets a Turn to act. All Turns happen simultaneously during this six second Round.

A **Turn** is a character's activities during the round. These activities includes their Action, Movement, as well as any Checks or Free Actions they make as part of their Action or Movement.

An **Action** is an activity that requires a great deal of physical or mental concentration, such as attacking with a sword, casting a spell, or unjamming a firearm. Actions are exhausting, and require a card to be discarded to perform. Characters can perform multiple actions in a turn, if they have the cards.

Movement dictates the total distance a character can travel during a Round. Movement can be used all at once, split up between the Action, and even used as a reaction to retreat during another character's Turn.

A **Reaction** is an activity a character can take when it is not their Turn in the Round, and is always in response to another character's actions or an event. Reactions are commonly used to: Advance on an enemy, retreat from an enemy, or complete a prepared attack.

Free Actions are very quick activities that are often done as part of a Movement or Action. Free Actions can be used for an associated activity, such as drawing a weapon before you attack with it, or picking up an object as you pass by it. Free actions are not stressful, and do not require characters to discard any cards to perform them.

Attacking

Characters attack by playing Sets of cards from their hand. A Set is a group of cards that are similar to each other, such as: a pair of cards of the same value, or five cards of the same suit. For each card discarded in a Set, the target takes damage.

Players can only make one attack per turn. If the player has Cohorts, they can make more attacks through their allies, but they are considered Uncoordinated, and cannot attack the same character twice in one turn.

Damage is determined by the number of cards played in a set, and therefore all weapons do the same amount of damage. Each weapon will also have special features which make them more dynamic, such as a Charger's ability to pierce armor, or a Shotgun's ability to knock down armored enemies.

An Attack that removes cards from the Wards stack but does not remove any Vitality are considered near-misses, grazing hits, or flesh wounds. These attacks do not injure the target, but any special ability the weapon has, such as bleeding or poison, will still take effect.

Weapons will each have strengths and weaknesses in different situations, and it is recommended that Players prepare a weapon for multiple ranges and enemy types.

Checks in Combat

When making a check during combat, in addition to drawing blindly, you are also able to discard cards from your hand. You can discard two cards if you have proficiency in the check, play one card and draw another blindly, or draw two blindly as normal. Similarly, if you have advantage, you can choose to draw both blindly or draw one card blindly and play one card from your hand. Some checks will be reactive, such as when you are grappled or attacked by magic, and other checks will come as part of other actions, such as an observance check as part of an attack or a climb check as part of a movement through a window.

Draw!

Your hand represents your given circumstances in a situation, and you are forced to play through those circumstances. When in battle, if you have no cards in your hand at the beginning of your turn, you draw cards up to your hand's limit.

Immediately after drawing, you may discard any unwanted cards and draw up to your hand limit. This is called a **Redraw**.

Ante up

Your **Ante** represents your quickness, and determines the order of a battle. At the beginning of combat, and during your turn, you may Up Your Ante. Players with more cards in their Ante have their turns sooner in the round than players with few or no cards in their ante.

As combat begins, you may add any number of cards in your hand to the ante. Once per turn, as an action, you may add a single card or set to your ante.

The relative turn orders of characters with the same ante is determined by the GM at the start of the combat.

Vitality

Vitality represents your constitution and tolerance for injury. At the end of each Full Rest, characters will draw cards face-down to their maximum Vitality. When a character's Vitality is reduced to zero, they are Wounded, and the injury exhausts them until they pass out.

A wounded character will require a Short or Full Rest to regain any lost Vitality. More Vitality can be gained by different Breeds, Sorts, and Traits.

Wards

Your Wards represents your plan for survival, a dynamic protection that includes magic charms, parrying strikes, and dumb luck.

Any card can be played from your hand in a stack on top of your Vitality, but when

adding onto an already established Wards, cards must be directly sequentially, and lower in value. When you would take damage, you may instead remove cards from the top of your Wards.

Armor

Armor will have both a **Piercing Rating** and an **Armor Complication**. Your armor will provide an Armor Complication, or "AC," which determines the total coverage of the armor, while the Piercing Rating, or "PR," determines the strength of the armor and the type of weapons it negates.

When attacked, characters with an Armor Complication can ignore any damage dealt to them by cards with a value equal to or below the Armor Complication. This can cause a partial or complete reduction in damage.

The Piercing Rating of the weapon refers to the rating of the armor that they can successfully penetrate. If an armor has a higher PR rating than a weapon, then that weapon cannot penetrate it, and vice versa. If a weapon has a higher PR than an armor, then the armor provides no Complication for the attacks.

Find Cover or Fall!

Defending against ranged weapons means getting where the attacker can't see you, or where they can't hit at you. Hiding behind heavy poles, walls, and machines will give your enemies attacks complications, and make hitting you more difficult.

You can also hide yourself in shadows, behind thin walls, or run out of your assailant's range to give yourself a Sensory Complication, which will reduce the total damage dealt to you, or avoid the attack altogether.

If all else fails, drop to the ground. Going prone will give you minimal, but often life saving protection from attacks.





Social Encounters

Whether chatting up a bartender for information, beating a confession out of a criminal, or begging for your life before a dragon, your adventure is sure to involve social encounters. A social encounter is the dialogue of an adventure between your character and the NPC's played by the Game Master.

Similar to battles, social encounters have goals and obstacles. Typically during this time, Players and Game Master will Role-Play, taking on the personas of their characters to interact with one another. Most Social Encounters involve no checks.

Skill checks in Conversation

Certain checks can be made in conversation. These checks are usually to manipulate someone through some trick or ploy. The main proficiencies for manipulation are Coercion and Blandish.

Coercion checks are made to intimidate or threaten a person, contesting the target's ability to stay calm. Among other features, this ability can be used to convince others of an impending threat from a nearby barbarian horde, or to make a bandit surrender his weapon and run away.

Blandish checks are made to flatter or charm a person, contesting the target's better judgement. Among other features, this ability can be used to convince someone that a flaw is really a strength, or to make a barmaid want to help you by listening in on another table.

Social Manipulation

Social Manipulation is used to get what you want without violence. It can be used to intimidate or shame creatures, both while socializing and while in combat. Characters can take on a **Social Posture**, then use a **Social Maneuver** to affect a target's behavior or mood. Characters with a weak **Ego Score** are easier to manipulate.

Characters can take a **Aggressive**, **Reclusive**, **Friendly**, or **Cautious** posture as an action. Taking a posture will allow you to use social maneuvers associated with that posture, but will force you to act a certain way to maintain it. If you do an action that's contrary to your posture, you cannot use Social Maneuvers for the rest of the encounter.

Aggressive characters cannot move away from enemies.

Reclusive characters cannot purposefully end their turn beside other characters.

Friendly characters cannot refuse assistance.

Cautious characters cannot move towards known dangers.

Social Maneuvers allow you to socially manipulate a target. You can cause an enemy to run away in fright, goad them into chasing you, or cause them to become emotional. When a target is in an emotional state, they are forced to take on the posture associated with that emotion. Some Maneuvers require the target to be in an emotional state. In combat, characters must discard their Wards stack to exit an emotional state.

To perform a Social Maneuver, characters discard any number of cards from their Wards as an action. If the number of cards discarded is equal to or great than the target's Ego Score, then the Maneuver is successful.

An **Ego Score** is a character's capacity to resist social pressures. Most characters only have an Ego Score of 2, and are easy to manipulate.

Hacking

Hackers can hack a system they are connected to via a cable hardline, wifi, or Aethernet connection. A **Hack** can be used to temporarily disable or enable a system.

A hack is initiated by discarding a Diamond Card from the player's hand. The Hacker then discards any number of cards from their Wards. If the number of discarded cards are equal to or greater than the target's **Firewall Rating**, then the system is **Hacked**.

Most systems have a Firewall Rating of 2.

A Hacker does not have control over a hacked system, but can enable or disable pre-established protocols. They could force an automatic door to open or remain shut, but not to remain half open. Similarly, it could not turn a Turret into a Cohort, but could activate its weapons and tracking protocols.

Hacks can be **Maintained** to continue their effects. Maintaining stops when the hacker chooses to stop, they take a Long Rest, or they are forced to stop. When a hacker's Wards are damaged, they must make a Calm Check with a Simple Complication or stop concentrating on the hack. If their Vitality is damaged, the check has a Trained Complication.

A Hacker can only concentrate on maintaining one Hack at a time.

Casual Hacking

When not in combat, Hackers can discard the top card of their deck instead of a Diamond card. Similarly, instead of discarding their Wards, cards are drawn face-up from the deck one at a time, until the player chooses to stop. Once they stop, the player can place the drawn cards in a sequential order based on their values, such as: 876, 5432, or K,Q,J,10. All cards drawn this way are discarded, regardless of the action's outcome.

Magic

Spellcasters can cast spells by discarding a Heart Card from their hand. The Heart Card used determines the difficulty to Resist that spell. When a character Resists a spell, the spell no longer affects that character, but the spell will remain active.

If multiple Heart Cards are used in the spell, such as with a Spell Attack, the Spellcaster chooses which Heart Card is used to cast the spell.

When outside of combat, any card can be used to cast the spell. This card is drawn randomly from the top of the Spellcasters deck.

Once cast, spells can be maintained until the Spellcaster chooses to stop, they take a Long Rest, or they are forced to stop. When a Spellcaster's Wards are damaged, they must make a Calm Check with a Simple Complication or stop concentrating on the spell. If their Vitality is damaged, the check has a Trained Complication.

Each spell that is being maintained reduces the hand of the Spellcaster by one for as long as it is being maintained, and they cannot maintain more spells than the size of their hand.

Resisting Magical Effects

Magic is very old in Cael, and mothers sing protection spells and counter curses to their children as they fall asleep, hoping to better prepare them for the dangerous world of wizards.

When a spell directly affects a character, they can make a check to negate the effects the spell has on them. The card must be of a heart suit, and the value of the card must match or exceed the value of the card that was used to cast the spell. If a spell has a limited duration, characters who are still affected by a spell may make a check during their turn to end the effects of the spell on them.

