

# ADVENTURES IN 54 1/2 CARDS

## THE UPDATED INSTANT TALES RPG



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# ADVENTURES IN 54 CARDS RPG

« A deck of 54 cards, A door to any role playable world, A 5 minutes notice to start »

## What is this game?

This game is a simple role-playing game designed to allow you to start playing as quickly as possible after you've seen a movie or read a book that enthralls you. Our motto is:

***“Take your poker deck, we gonna roleplay this world RIGHT NOW”***

To make that possible we have found that it was necessary to relentlessly track down and eradicate most typical space-fillers, (namely lists and computations) and - Gods & Saint Gygax forbid us - showstoppers like dice.

Yes, we use cards instead of dice. Why you ask? Because it's much easier to find a deck of poker cards at 3 AM in an unknown suburb than to get D20s or loads of D6s.

## CREDITS

Our cover is by **Luigi Castellani**, the CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE does not include his work.

Thanks to the people that advised, tested and helped fulfill this project. Please follow us at **CartomancieJdr** on Twitter for daily scenarios.

## Getting this game

We want this game to be accessible for as many players as possible. For this reason this game will be placed as a **“Pay What You Want”** on the most logical site possible:

**rpgdrivethru.com**

## The license

This game has a fresh, welcoming touch. That makes playing a game on a five minute notice a routine operation. It also makes it very easy to introduce new players to roleplaying games. So we decided to make this game a “free game”:

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*You are free to distribute these rules and to use them to publish your own works on the conditions that:*

(1) you keep their name:

**Adventures in 54 cards**

(2) you name the two authors:

**Gaël & Emmanuel DELVA**

(3) you send us a pdf of your work by mail

at [cartomanciejdr@gmail.com](mailto:cartomanciejdr@gmail.com)

or send us a lil' twit at **CartomancieJdr**

(4) you do write cool things.

ABOUT THE HERO

ADVENTURES IN 54 CARDS RPG

GAME WORLD IS

Blank scroll area for notes or character details.

ATTITUDE CARD  
If all else fail, only the card placed here may help you.

Muscles  
[Heart icon] [Four empty boxes]

Accuracy  
[Diamond icon] [Four empty boxes]

LOSE BODY [ ]  
If -

LOSE MIND [ ]  
If +

Influence  
[Club icon] [Four empty boxes]

Lucidity  
[Spade icon] [Four empty boxes]

EQUIPMENT WORN

1-10 numbered list for tracking equipment worn.

CARDS DRAW RULES

You are given ONE free card to draw if your suit level is > to the test level of difficulty OTHERWISE

you can draw ONE card by sacrificing:  
- a suit's [ ]  
- a lot of time  
- one of your items  
- the quality of the result

You can draw ONE LAST card by risking a FUMBLE

DRAWN CARDS PER SUIT

MAX HAND SIZE [ ]  
[Four suit icons]

WEAKNESSES & CAPACITIES

Vertical list of 18 empty boxes for tracking weaknesses and capacities.

# 1 - CHARACTER GENERATION

## Suits meanings

The game uses a single deck of 54 cards to resolve tasks and skills uses and also to describe characters. Each **SUIT** has a single specific universal meaning:

♥ is **MUSCLES**

= *physical activities* that involve strength, raw power and health.

♦ is **ACCURACY**

= *technical activities* which require carefulness and dexterity.

♠ is **LUCIDITY**

= *mental activities* that include thinking, assessing and choosing.

♣ is **PRESENCE**

= all *social activities* involving different persons at once.

For example:

If you want to break down a door or beat a guard it is a ♥ matter, to pick a lock or to hit a target with an arrow is a ♦ one, to find the answer to a riddle or prepare a necromantic ritual is obviously a ♠ and seducing the lich queen or threatening her mook is ♣.

Is that okay with you?

Ok, now, dive further.

## The outside game world

When you want to start a role playing game in five minutes you need three things to be settled quickly:

The world must be described clearly so nobody is off subject. If you have only five minutes, investing two of them to give a minimum list of 5 or 6 main ideas is a pretty good deal:

For example:

Just compare the atmospheres in the movies *The good, the bad and the ugly*, *Dances with wolves* & *The outlaw Josey Wales*...

## The hero within

The hero must be described in a single sentence that includes a WHO, a BUT or something else in order to acquire some depth.

For example:

I am a hardened veteran who has seen too many lost battles.

I've been a NYPD cop for years but I left the city to live a quieter life.

I am a young knight that left for the crusades and came home to find my family executed by the King.

I am a teacher from the Bayou in Louisiana who wants to write a book about voodoo lore.

## 2 - SKILL CARDS & SUITS LEVELS

### Making things clear

In this game, **only the players do draw cards**. If they attack something they draw cards to hit them. Now if the beasties strikes back, the players will draw cards to dodge them. You get the picture oki?

### The GM cards

The GM will first take all cards and keep all faces (jacks, queens and kings) along with any jokers close to him. They are the **OBSTACLES**. If he has no idea he can draw one at random and describe an event accordingly. Or when players are doing things he can interrupt them by playing any one of them. Once played these cards go to the **CEMETERY** at the center of the table, inside any kind of container if at all possible. Once they are here, the players can draw them when it will be their time to do so. The GM will never put his hands on them anymore.

### Players' cards

Now the other cards are given to the players that must order them by their ranks in a pile.

The pile is face up with the aces at the bottom, then the deuces up to the tens at the top.

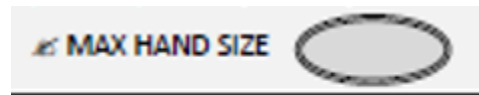
All these are the **SKILL CARDS**.

### The skills draw

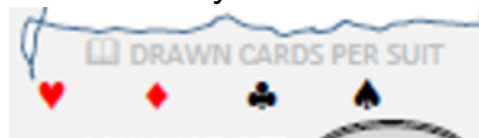
Starting with the first players that wanted to play the game (or the younger one if there is a tie) every player will pick one card from any suit that he wants. There is a limit to the number drawn:

A player alone vs the GM draws 10.  
With two players each will draw 9.  
With three players each will draw 8.  
With four players each will draw 6.  
With five players each will draw 5.  
With more players each will draw 4.

Note this number here:



These cards are what makes the heroes special: their **SKILLS** in short. Of course, the tens are better than other cards so get them first. Note the number drawn by suit here:



*We don't care that your character may have a +23 bonus because of this or that. No. What's important is that at a moment, you gonna play one of this card and say "thanks to my character's skill of this or that".  
Do you have a clearer view?*

## Suits levels

The cards you draw have a meaning both on what you want your character to be and what your assets will be.

For example:

A hardened veteran, a wrestler or a tough guy will be good at ♥.

An agile fencer, a stage magician or a swift dude at ♦.

A wizard, a professor, a priest or an especially educated person at ♠.

A talk show star, a courtesan or a very beautiful elf at ♣.

In each suit you have a **LEVEL**:

Level ONE is “being gifted”

Level TWO is “being a professional”

Level THREE is “being an expert”

Level FOUR is “being a master”

Your level depends somewhat of the number of drawn cards:

You are level **TWO** in the suit where you drew the most card. Two times level ONE if there is a tie.

Then you have **THREE** more levels to distribute on the other suits, none being above level 2.

*Can't be quicker to create his or her character. Oh btw, for text clarity we'll use HIS and HE from now on.*

*Because it's quicker, (s)he sucks, his/her is barely readable and s-he is discriminating against IT people.*

## Weakness

To get one more level per suit if you choose to take one **WEAKNESS** to your character. When it fits the scene, you are defenseless.

Some are **physical**:

You may be puny, or wear glasses, or you can fall ill easily etc.

Some are **technical**:

You can be illiterate, you can be shaky if you don't drink, or you can be color blind etc.

Some are **mental**:

You can have a dark secret or a duty to fulfill. You can have an attraction to the members of the opposite or same sex. You can have an addiction to drugs, to gambling or to social networks etc.

Some are **social**:

You can be hunted by someone or an organization. You may have dependents that you need to take care of like an aunt or a lil' bro.

Each and every weakness must be agreed on by the GM or course. Each must be relevant to the suit where you want to improve your rating by one.

From now on just keep in mind that having a better level in a suit does not give “bonuses” or allow you to draw “more cards”. It will just allow you to draw a **free card** if your level is superior to the difficulty rating of what you attempt to do. But that's a LOT!

# 3 - CHARACTER'S BODY & MIND

## Can I get hurt with such a low card?

*NB: You may have noticed already but we are not simulationists. Well, in fact, we are for real, but not for roleplaying games. We are simulationists for our bank accounts, for the future of our kids, or the demise of our countries. We are simulationists in games for chess, for bridge, for wargames, but no. Not for one-shot short roleplaying games started in 10 minutes.*

We need to take into account that in some worlds, the half-naked barbarian gets less damaged by a sword blow than the average guardsman in a plate armor. Not matter how many cards will be drawn. And it's the same by enigmas and spells against strong-minded characters.

## The body

The **BODY** is simply the sum of your levels in the two RED suits. It tells you the minimum height of a card to make you lose ONE box.

For example:

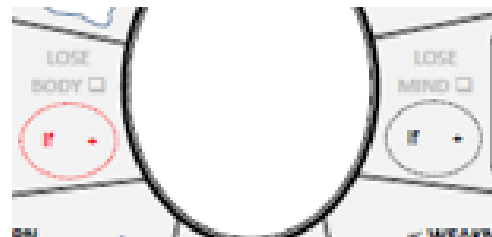
You are attacked and must make a ♥ test. If the card shows you are hit for real and is equal to or above your BODY you will lose one box in ♥, or ♦ according to the exact attack. If the card is below your BODY, you take a blow, you are hurt, you will lose your next action because of the pain, but you are not wounded.

*A armor can improve your current BODY but no matter how little of it he wears, that damn barbarian will still be damn hard to damage for real...*

## The mind

Yep, you guessed right, The **MIND** is simply the sum of your levels in the two BLACK suits. It has exactly the same effects, except that it is involved in magic, psionic, stress, fear and other mental attacks on your character.

Write BODY and MIND aside the character's portrait on the sheet.



# 4 - FINISHING TOUCHES

## Equipment

Each character bears on him up to ten **ITEMS**. He can own much more, but they won't be there when needed.

Any USEFUL item like a weapon, a cellphone or a helmet costs one item. Any BIG item that you hold with both hands like an assault rifle costs two items  
Any HIDDEN item takes one more room on the list because it takes so much energy to hide this dagger...  
Any VERY EXPANSIVE item costs one more room in the list too.

For example:

A helmet, a pair of greaves or a cuirass = 1 item.  
A .44 or a sword = 1  
A spear or a two handed sword = 2  
A M-16 or a Garand = 2  
A hidden knife = 2  
A golden knife = 2  
A hidden diamonded knife = 3.

If you have absolutely no idea just pick a card and read below:

- ♥ is a survival tool like an armor
- ♦ is a weapon or gadget
- ♠ is a tool, book or machine
- ♣ is something that looks good

Or start right now and build your bag along the way with the GM approval.

## Motivation

Nobody goes on a quest without reasons. And you need a pretty good one to enter "The fields of mayhem", "The damned spaceship", "The chamber of the damned" or "The library of perdition"...If you have absolutely no idea just pick a card and read below:

- ♥ is looking for money or rewards
- ♦ is looking for challenges
- ♠ is looking out of curiosity or duty
- ♣ is looking for fame or privilege

## Link with the group

If you are to spend some time with these guys you need to have a basic reason right? If you have absolutely no idea just pick a card for each other character and read below:

- ♥ is coming from the same place
- ♦ is having done the same job
- ♠ is having shared a previous event
- ♣ is having befriended on the way

Okay, all that was pretty obvious. Now let's have fun with the cards



# 5 - BASIC GAME RULES

## How to make a simple test?

If something that a player wants to do is neither impossible nor unmissable then the GM may ask for a test.

A **TEST** is described the **SUIT** it relates to, what kind of activity it is:

♥ is for **physical activities** involving strength, raw power and health.

♦ is for **technical activities** which require carefulness and dexterity.

♠ is for **mental activities** that include thinking, assessing and choosing.

♣ is for **social activities** involving different persons at once.

For example:

If you want to break down a door or beat a guard it is a ♥ matter, to pick a lock or to hit a target with an arrow is a ♦ one, to find the answer to a riddle or prepare a necromantic ritual is obviously a ♠ and seducing the lich queen or threatening her mook is ♣.

*Okay, relax, we are just talking about a "simple test" here. There is more chrome to crunch, just be patient and try to understand the basics calmly. Or make a **LUCIDITY** test at ♠ now: Draw a card: if it is a ♠ you got the trick, at ♣ you are close enough to, and at ♦ or ♥ you'll get it in 2 minutes.*

## What's the result?

Draw a single card from the cards left and check its suit:

If the card is from the suit that the GM asked for it is a **CRITICAL SUCCESS** for the player. The best result you can think about.

If the card is from one of the two suits that are of the other color (be it red or black) then it is a **FAILURE** for the character.

Otherwise, if the drawn card is from the other suit of the color of the suit asked for (like drawing a ♠ when you were looking for a ♣) it is a **MINOR SUCCESS**.

For example:

You try to attack a smelly orc. It is a ♥ test because it is a physical task.

If you draw a ♥ it is a **critical success** and you probably dispatch the poor smelly creature.

If you draw a ♠ or ♣ then you **missed** it and it is going to counterattack (and that will be a ♦ test for you but that's another story).

And if you draw a ♦ which is red (like ♥) then it is a **minor success**: the orc is hit, will step back and lose its next attack, but it is probably still alive.

### How to be a little more realistic?

Ok, at this moment you are wondering If we are serious. What about the seventh set of tables? Where are the factors of this or the bonus of that? In fact there are none. As we wrote before, our ambition is to give a decent set of rules to immediately start playing. We do not pretend to “simulate” anything. Do you?

So each test may be given a rating for its **DIFFICULTY**. The number given indicates the **MINIMUM SUIT LEVEL** you need to have to be able to draw a free card AT ALL. If you don't reach it, you can't even draw a single one.

**Simple tests** are difficulty 0.  
**Harder tests** are difficulty 1.  
**Hardest tests** are difficulty 2.  
**Dreadful tests** are difficulty 3.

For example:

Remember our friend the orc? Imagine that instead of that loser we had been fighting a champion orc. Let's say it's a difficulty 1 opponent. Then against this orc champ' our level 1 ♥ suit means nothing. We are not superior to it. We need to raise your level in ♥.

### Being too fit to quit

If your character has a level in the suit that you were asking for the test that is superior to the rating of the difficulty you are given a **FREE REDRAW**.

You can redraw in order to **try again** a test that you first missed.

You can redraw in order to add a second simple success to a first and **eventually get a critical success** But if you succeed you can use that redraw to **add a description** to the test you passed.

Adding descriptions is what makes the game really fun both for the players and for the GM. It means that the players are part of the way things occur. And also that it does make sense to start in 5 minutes because gameplay is very reactive.

For example:

Stunning the above orc, pushing it down the stairs, disarming it or fleeing from good. Or why not killing it once and for all if it has been damaged enough before. All with your ♥ level.

Several tiny details need to be cleared right now however:

1: The GM is free to refuse the description added because he thinks it is too “Monty-hall-esque”. He may ask to down-size it.

2: He can ask for another suit for the description planned.

3: The GM can counteract a valid description with one of his remaining obstacles cards.

# 6 - HOW TO DRAW TWO MORE CARDS

## 1<sup>st</sup> is by sacrificing something

The way to draw **ONE MORE CARD** is the **SACRIFICE**. As before the plan is either to get a new chance to succeed or to score another special effect. You must chose one only:

The first option is to take a lot of time. It means **TARGETING** carefully.

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For example:

Still circling around with this fiend orc champion. One step after another, a feint, a parry, a lunge, a step back, a thrust and then the opening you have been waiting for...

---

The second option is **HURTING** yourself and losing a  in a suit.

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For example:

Straining your back muscles to grab the orc and throw it through the window or over the edge of the cliff.

---

The third option is **LOSING AN ITEM**. Yes one of those cherished ten ones.

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For example:

Emptying all your ammos on the orc... or exhausting the horse on the race.

---

The last option is accepting to do a **MEDIOCRE** job. Having very low

expectancies allows for much quicker response routine and less efforts to do. The problem is just that the final result can't be improved after that kind of sacrifice.

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For example:

Now, what about the mediocre room scan card that allow you to at least know for sure that there is a live trap in? Or the plane piloting card that permit an uncontrolled crash that destroy the jet but saves the people inside? Or the basic unskilled truck repair that gives your engine the power to reach the safe point out of the radiations-ridden swamps with the orphans aboard?

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## Last is by taking risks

The last option allows you to **DRAW ONE LAST CARD** but it implies risking the **FUMBLE**. So you agree beforehand that if you fail (wrong color) the result will be a critical failure.

---

For example:

Getting back to our champion, imagine any heavily risked maneuver, the kind that makes you hit your foe... or sends you to the ground your belly opened and your guts dripping blood all around.

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# 7 - HOW TO FORGET DRAWING

## Fatigue cards

Remember you were asked to choose a few cards when game start? Now it's time to use them. What is important is to understand what they represent even if they are called **SKILLS CARDS**: they are your energy focused, your ability to pass over your limits and improve the results of your actions. As a result, not only do they diminish according to your fatigue. No. *They are a measure of your fatigue.* As such they are exhausted by being hurt, and come back when you eat a good meal or sleep enough.

One hot meal means one card to draw from the cemetery.

3 to 4 hours of sleep means one card to draw from the cemetery.

You've read it: these cards are drawn from the stock. It means that, as game proceeds on, the obstacles cards burnt by the GM, or the ones spent by the will rejoin the ones left from the draw at the game beginning. This way, statistically, the cards inside the cemetery gets higher and higher. And when we'll see combats it will have a meaning.

Please, you must respect the **maximum number of cards** AND the **numbers per suit** as initially drawn.

## Burning your own cards

All the cards you have represent your ability to surpass your limits. Now the problem is that you never know what life will gives you. You can replace any one cards that you draw with **THAT ONE CARD** that you will chose and expose **UPON** your character sheet. It is your **ATTITUDE**. You can use it at any time but you have to choose it wisely. Because as soon as there is action and someone is making a test, you can't anymore.

For example:

So you are expecting that geisha to come into your room and you planned on asking questions and all. So you decided to choose a queen of ♣ as your attitude. Unluckily, it was *that* orc champ (again?) that came into your room. And on all ♥ or tests, any ♣ counts as a failure. Nothing more.

Do you really thought that "tactical awareness" limited to the number of hexes between you and your target? You thought wrong buddy...

Last but not least. It's not only a matter of playing a card with a grin. Bringing on a little anecdote on what it relates to brings the fun at the table. And RPG are about having fun. You know that, right?

# 8 - COMBAT

## When the goin' gets tough

The basic pace of combat is very simple:

Unhurt, prepared characters act first.

Then it is their enemies turn.

Then hurt, surprised or unprepared characters do act last.

Basic combat procedure is simple:

Hand to hand attacks are on ♥

Missile fire are on ♦

Tricks and powers are on ♠

Negotiations and magic are on ♣

If you are successful you dispatch one enemy. But here we talk about basic ones, some critters are harder to kill.

Big enemies needs two hits

Awful ones needs three or more

We talk about "hits" nothing more, so if you can draw several cards successfully, it means you can sweep several enemies at once.

On a **mediocre** result you just push backward your enemy, preventing a counterattack from it this turn.

On a **fumble** you lose your weapons.

On a **critical** you score two hits. with special effects, you describe the effect the way you want it.

## The toughs gets goin'

When it is their turn, enemies strike back at characters.

To dodge critters attacks it's on ♥

To escape missile fire it's on ♦

To resist magic it's on ♠

To manage tricks it's on ♣

If you are successful you dodge or else soak the attack. With a basic success you just lose your next action in pain. Otherwise you are **HURT** and you lose ONE level in a suit or color appropriate to the attack:

For example:

After a body attack like fangs, guns or swords, you lose one red level, in ♥ or in ♦.

After a mind attack, like magic possession, psionic control or fright you lose one black level, in ♠ or in ♣.

## Comin' back to front

24 full hours of rest gives you back one level lost in any one suit. If you are helped by healers, scientists, medibot or shamans it can be up to one per 12 hours.

However, a single test, a single card played or drawn, and it is the bad move that cancels all this patient healing time. You've been warned...

# 9 - ADVANCED COMBAT

## Why an “advanced” combat?

Combat is easy but some players like to add to it some complications. The basic ones being the **DAMAGE RATING** of a characters' weapons and the **ARMOR CLASS** of their protections. To take these two factors into account we will use the actual value of the cards drawn.

The lowest cards is the ace the highest ones are kings then jokers.

## What does it change?

**In a character's dodge**, if the card that indicated that the dodge failed is superior to the armor rating of the character's armor, the character will take TWO hits (i.e.: he has to tick off two boxes).

For example:

Azarat the never happy has an armor class of 5- and fails his dodge. The final card drawn is a 4 so he just takes one hit (a box or an armor line). However if the final card is an 8 it would be two.

Please note that if you take a 2-hits blow you can spend *one armor only*, the second hit *must* be a suit box lost.

**In an attack** (a character's attack), if the card that indicates the damage is superior to the damage rating of the character's weapon, the monster will take TWO hits (i.e.:2 suit levels lost).

If Azarat connects a blow with his trusted mace (value of 7+) and draws a final 10: the monster will lose 2 hits

## How to compute AC then?

There is an easy way to do it:

Basic AC equals your Body value (average of actual level in ♦ + ♥). Then you add +1 per of equipment that says you wear a piece of armor. Once a line is ticked off because it was used to absorb one hit of damage, your AC will decrease.

## How to measure damage rating?

For example:

A house knife is 10+  
An improvised mace is 9+  
A wicked dagger or weak gun is 8+  
A spiked mace, short sword is 7+  
A good axe, sword or gun is 6+  
A rifle or two handed sword is 5+  
An heavy rifle or battle-axe is 4+  
Anything worse is 3+ or even 2+

# 10 - AFTERWORD

## How to get better?

All characters start at experience **RANK** one, the lowest possible. To improve by one rank, the character needs to make a number of exploits equals to the number of the rank to reach.

For example:

To go from rank one to rank two, the character needs to do TWO different exploits that your GM agrees on.

The GM is the only authority able to designate what is, or what is not an exploit. But players can complain, bribe, coerce or blackmail the GM as they see fit. That may result in the end of years of friendship or the hiding of bodies. Manage as you can.

## Being better?

Getting one rank of experience higher brings several benefits:

You get one more level in any suit of your choice. If you want, you can also get one more weakness to get one more.

Starting with the highest ranked characters, being of a higher rank also gives you one CARD DRAWN before the other even start to draw

their cards. And this is meant by rank of experience that you are above the others. It does NOT change the number of cards you will have at all, but it gives you one or more choice picks before the rabbles awaken to the drawing party.

## Capacities & friends

A **CAPACITY** is something that you are good at and that you can perfectly succeed at ONCE per adventure (be it a 30 minutes rush or a whole evening). Yes, once per capacity.

For example:

Seducing men or women, Hitting the bullseye, Fast drawing, Winning a race, Surviving torture, Winning at craps, Finding a clue, Being alert etc.

You get a number of **CAPACITIES** equal to the level you reached. I.e.: 2 at 2<sup>nd</sup> rank, 5 at rank five etc.

You also get one **CONTACT** in the game world that will be able to help you according to its job.

A not-so-mini RPG By  
**Gaël & Emmanuel DELVA**  
Thanks for reading.

