

Down The Well

A Game for the Island Deck

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Introduction: *Down the Well* is a game for the Island Deck. This game is still a work in progress, so please try it yourself, and [let us know](#) what you think!

Players: 2 to 6

Equipment: The Island Deck.

Summary: Players take turns playing cards into the center of the table, where discards are sorted into piles of the same suit. The game may have one round, two rounds, or more, depending on when the first player runs out of cards. The goal is to “last the longest,” which means playing the last card in the final round.

The Deck: The Island Deck contains 54 cards in 6 suits. The ranks are Ace (high), King, Queen, and the numbers 2 through 7. You can print your own copy with the PDF from [Crab Fragment Labs](#), or buy a deck from our store at [DriveThruCards](#).

The Deal: Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of cards to each player. The number of cards in the starting hand depends on the number of players:

Players:	2	3	4+
Cards:	12	10	9

Pass Three: Each player passes three cards to the left.

Lead Suit: After the pass, turn over the top card of the deck. The suit of this card indicates the lead suit. (Exception: With six players, there is nothing left in the deck, and the lead suit is always Crabs.)

Play: The player holding the lowest card in the lead suit (established above) must play first. If there are no cards of that suit, which is quite rare, choose the next suit alphabetically. In order they are *Anchors, Boats, Crabs, Dolphins, Flowers, Trees*. From there, play moves to the left.

Discards will be sorted into six piles, by suit, as shown above.

Any card can be played as long as it is higher than the top card of that suit's discard pile. For example, if the top card on the Anchor pile is rank 6, then any Anchor ranked 7 or higher is playable, and Anchors 5 and below are not.

You must play a card if you are able. If you are not able to play any cards, lay your hand down on the table and say "pass" to show that you are finished. Play continues to the left, skipping players who are out, until no one can play. One player might be able to play several cards in a row, even when everyone else is out.

End of Round: When no one can play cards, the round is over. If anyone has run out of cards, then this is the last round of the game. If all players have at least one card left, there will be another round. Sweep away the discard piles and play again, starting to the left of *whoever played the last card*.

Winning: The final round is called when at least one player empties their hand. The goal is not necessarily to run out of cards, but *to play the last card in the final round*.

Scoring: Typically, each hand is treated as a separate game. But if you want to keep score over several hands, the winner of each hand scores points as follows:

- If they can play the last card of the round and still have cards left in their hand, one point for each.
- If their opponents still have unplayed cards left in their hands, one point for each.
- In this case, play to a total score of $10N+1$ points, where N is the number of players.

Example of Play:

There are five players in this game. Player 1 shuffles the deck and deals 9 cards to each player. Each player looks at their hand and passes three cards to the player on their left.

The top card of the deck is revealed to be the 5 of Crabs. So, Crabs is the lead suit. The lowest Crab must open the round.

No one holds the 2 of Crabs, so Player 3 reveals and plays the 3 of Crabs. This card goes to the center of the table, starting the Crab discard pile.

Player 4 is next, and plays the 4 of Boats. This card starts the Boat discard pile, next to the Crabs. Play continues to the left, with each player discarding one card at a time, and skipping over players who have no more playable cards. Finally, Player 4 plays the last card of the round, the Ace of Flowers, after which no one else can play another card.

All players still hold at least one card, so this is not the last round. The players sweep away the discard piles and play another round, starting with Player 5, because Player 4 played the last card on the prior round.

In this round, Player 4 runs out of cards, meaning that this will be the final round. Play continues until Player 3 plays the last card, and wins the hand.

Scoring Example: Player 3 had one more card left to play, but since every other player passed, that card is worth a point. Other players had a total of 4 additional unplayed cards, and these are also worth points to the winner. Altogether, player 3 scores 5 points for this hand.

Basic Strategy: You want to save as many playable cards as possible for the final round, which is usually (not always) round 2. Be mindful of what cards you pass, learn what you can from the cards that were passed to you, and try to ensure that other players can't run out before you are ready. You can learn to guarantee that a round will not end, especially with fewer opponents, by tracking which cards are definitely locked in someone's hand. None of this is easy to explain, but all of it is possible to achieve!

"Burying" Cards: In the vernacular, burying a card just means rendering it unplayable in the current round. If the 7 of a suit is played, then the 6 and below are "buried." You can do this to your own cards, to preserve them into the next round, or to your opponent's cards, to give them fewer choices of what to play. Obviously there are good and bad times to do either.

Passing Aces: Aces are strange. You will find that beginning players tend to hold on to Aces, because they are guaranteed high. However, they are also problematic because they can never survive into the second round, where a large number of the games will end. Eventually you will learn when to pass Aces (usually because you have no matching cards) and when to hold them (when they can lock other cards into your hand, or render your opponents' cards unplayable).

Credits: Down the Well was designed by James Ernest during a game design demonstration at KublaCon 2022. Testers included Jenn Boyer, Phil Boyer, Stephen Capper, Anthony Gallela, Debbie Guskin, Craig Stockwell, and Jeff Wilcox.