

DIVER **CORE LINK**

Playtest Kit 0 v2.1 – Intro Rulebook

At the heart of all worlds, lies

THE CORE

Built or grown – who can say? –
its light grows and sustains all life.

But life isn't just light:
the accumulated greed and malice of all
worlds, like psychic runoff, flows back
to the Core's strange gravity.

It forms a dark

EVERSTORM

made weird, terrible and hungry,
intent on swallowing everything.

Diver: Core Link is a noncommercial tactical card game (TCG) for two players, a love letter to JRPGs like *Kingdom Hearts* and their enduring weirdness.

In DCL, each player will play a **Diver** – someone touched by the light of the Core or desiring the darkness of the everstorm. Each game is played by a Light player, with a deck full of Light cards, and a Dark player, with a deck of Dark cards. Each side has their own pool of cards to build decks from, but the rules of the game are the same for both players.

This Playtest Kit contains all that's needed to play games between two players – a Light deck and a Dark deck ready to play, and this rulebook.

Once you're done playing, check out <https://divercore.link/> for other ways to play, and to send feedback to contribute to future versions of the game!

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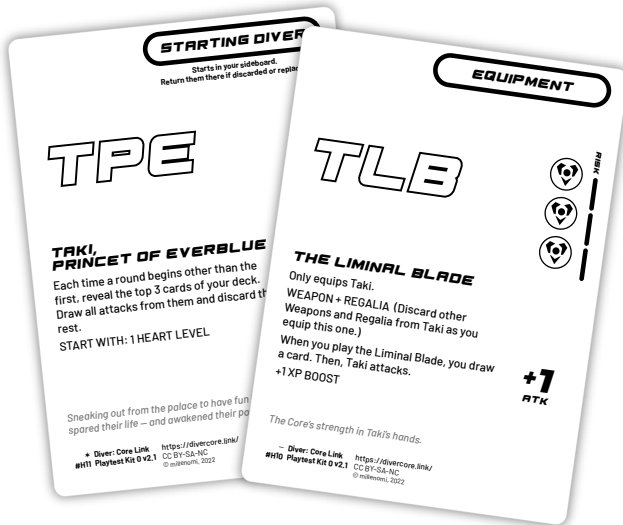
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WILL YOU HELP THE LIGHT?

Sometimes, people with great empathy touch the light of the Core and connect with it.

LIGHT DIVERS can listen to the worlds' pleas for help. They aren't helpless – their connection to the core can give them great strength and even crystallize in form of a special implement, a Regalia.



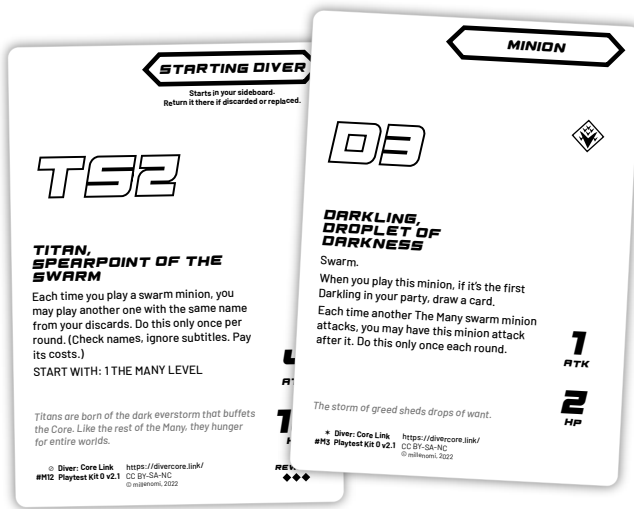
Taki is a ceremonial princet on the island-world of Everblue. Bored at the palace, they would sneak around town often – and that saved them one fateful night, when the sky was torn asunder and an oily darkness poured onto their home, destroying it. In their grief, they connected to the Core.

Instead of running away, armed with their new Regalia – the Liminal Blade – Taki ran back toward the palace. The darkness had strange forms and faces, and perhaps ending the towering presence that leads it may well save their home...

WILL YOU SEEK THE DARK?

Sometimes, people witness the power of the very core of the world – and want it all for themselves.

DARK DIVERS may have been born of, scoured by, or become merely intrigued by the power of the everstorm, but all of them are driven by one instinct: to take that strength for themselves, until finally everything else is no more.



The Many are barely real: they are born of the congealed want and greed that forms the very winds of the everstorm. But this darkness has grown teeth, and hungers for the very Core itself – beyond all reason, even if it means the end of all things.

When the swarm falters, it grows a **Titan** to lead an expedition to another world. A hungry swarm follows them through the leylines, invading and consuming all to rebuild their strength. This Titan just crashed through to the island of Everblue, leading the swarm to the palace at the very peak of the island...

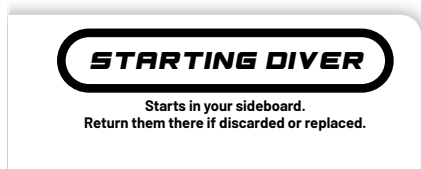
How To Play DCL

DCL is a **race** to see which player can dive into the Core's power first. The first player to do so will take the connection away from their opponent, winning the game.

DCL is similar to many console role-playing games: you will start with your own Diver, form a party to help them, engage in combat with your opponent, try to manage remaining HP, improve stats, and gain XP to level up.

This game is played in rounds. Each round, one Core Link will become available to you – a line of communication with the Core itself. You use your XP to permanently score these Links – **the first to three scored Links ends the game!**

Each deck is split into two parts: the draw deck proper, and a set of cards called the 'sideboard'. The cards that go in the sideboard have a note that say 'Starts in the sideboard' at the top:



To set up the game:

- Pick randomly who goes first.
- Separate your sideboard and your deck.
- From your sideboard, choose a **Starting Diver** and put it face down on the table ('in play') to add them to your party.
Once each player has picked, they all reveal the Starting Diver and turn it face up.
- Each Diver has a 'START WITH' ability that says which first level you start with. Pick the appropriate **Level** card from your sideboard and put it on the table as well.
- Shuffle your deck and put it beside your play area.
- Draw 8 cards. (If you don't like some of those cards, you can mulligan by discarding any number of them, then drawing back up to 8 again, only once.)

Then, **the first round starts!** The player who goes first will take the first turn within that round.

Playing Rounds & Turns

DCL is played in **rounds**. Each round is played by both players taking **turns** back and forth, until they both take consecutive turns with no actions, at which point the round will end and you will do a little bit of cleanup. If no one has won at that point, a new round will begin.

A round is split into three parts:

- First, it **begins**. Each player plays a Core Link from their sideboard.
- Then, players take **turns**.
- Finally, players will **end** the round by growing their power and refilling their hand. A new round will begin after that.

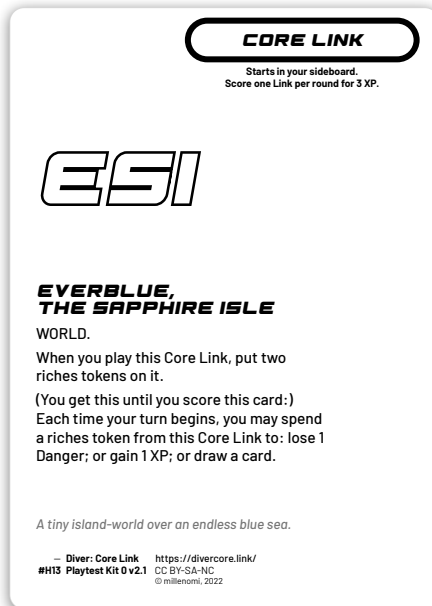
When it's a player's turn, they can perform any number of **actions** or pass:

- One action that is always available to you is that you can **play a card** from their hand, paying its cost.
- Some cards have 'ACTION — ...' text. You can pick any of them and use them as your action during your turn as well.

Most things that happen in the game happen as a result of playing a card.

Starting the Round & Core Links

When your round begins, you get to connect to the power of the Core a little more. For the first three rounds of the game, you get to play one **Core Link** from your sideboard.



You don't have to do anything in particular to get a Core Link – both players just get one, for free, and put them on the table in play on their side.

Each Core Link has a specific effect that you get for free. In addition to this, if you can hold on until the end of the **round** while gaining enough XP, you will get to **score** a Core Link – it leaves play, and you don't get its effect any more, but it counts as a 'victory point' for you. The first player to three score Core Links wins the game! (See 'Ending the Round', later.)

Players get to pick which Core Link they get from their sideboard. Choose carefully!

Playing a Card In Your Turn

Cards in your hand change what's happening in the game. What they do depends on their type, shown in the box at the top right of the card:



Allies and **minions** will get added to your party; **equipment** can be equipped to characters in your party to improve them and their stats; **attacks** will let your party engage in combat with your opponent; and **Power-Up Diver** cards make your Diver more powerful.

(You can also find **defenses**, which can help stop an opponent's attack. You play those cards as a reaction to your opponent attacking, rather than in your turn.)

A thing in common with all these cards is that they may have a **cost**, indicated in symbols on the top right of the card:

- One or more **emblem** symbols. These correspond to those on the level cards you have in play. You need as many levels as the emblems on the card to pay the cost; if you don't have enough, you generally can't play it. (*For example, this card has two Heart level emblems.*)
- Many cards carry **risk**. You start your turn with no risk spent, and every time you play a card with risk, you add the risk in the cost to that you have spent. (*For example, this card has a risk of 3.*)



Risk & Danger

Each turn, you can spend 2 **risk** 'safely'. As long as you spend 2 or less risk, you can continue taking actions, and this spent risk will not carry over across turns.

As soon as you pass this, any excess risk above 2 is turned into **danger**.

When you increase your danger, the turn is done – you finish what you were doing, and the next time you would be able to pick an action, instead **you must pass**. Your opponent's turn will be next.

If you accrue too much danger – **7 danger or more** – not just your turn, but your entire **round** will be over! You must pass, *and* you don't get any more turns for the rest of the round.

Any danger you accumulate remains with you and becomes a **resource for your opponent**.

When you have danger, your opponent can spend it to play cards whose cost is of a **higher level** than they currently have – and so can you when your opponent accumulates danger.

Each **2 danger** a player spends lets them get **one temporary extra level** just for this card play, to pay for one extra emblem that they couldn't otherwise pay for. (4 danger pays for two emblems, 6 for three, and so on.)

*For example, if you have two Heart levels, and a card has three emblems, you **can't** usually play it...*

*... but if your opponent plays a card with 4 risk, then they will go **over their safe amount**, get **2 danger** from the excess, and end their turn!*

*Now, not only it is your turn, but you **can** play that card – by spending the 2 danger your opponent has to gain one temporary level for that card play.*

Even if your opponent spends danger, if your round ended because you had 7 or more danger, **it's still over** – you don't get any more turns.

Danger carries over throughout the round and will go away at the end of it. Take care when taking a lot of risk – it may let your opponent counterattack!

Playing Allies & Minions

Some cards represent characters that you can add to your party. These are **allies**, for the Light player, or **minions**, for the Dark player.

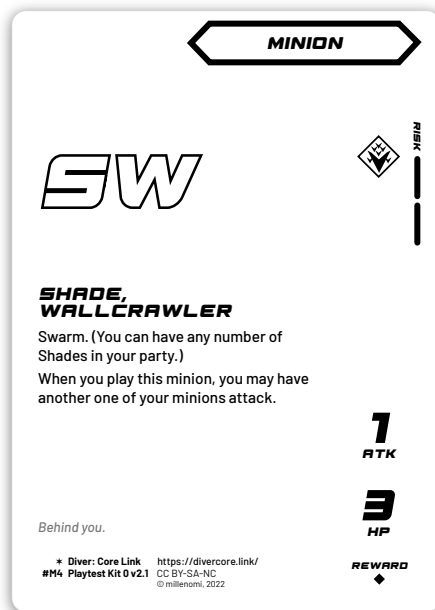
When you play an ally or minion, add it to the board beside your character. Many of them have beneficial effects that will help you throughout the game.



If the card doesn't say otherwise, the card will be **unique** — you can only have one card of each unique character in your party.

If you play a new card of a character you already have, **heal all damage** from it, discard the old card and replace it with the new one. It will keep any effects, equipment, tokens and so on.

Some minions are **swarm** minions. That means that they're not unique and if you play one of a character you already have, the new one will just join your party as a different party member.

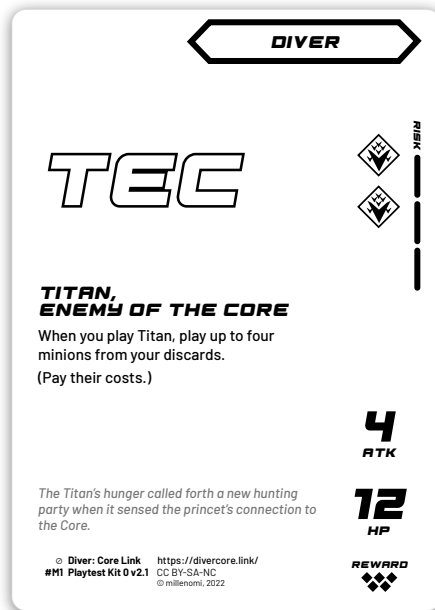


Allies and minions, just like Divers, have stats in the lower right corner:

- **ATK**, which says how good they are in combat;
- **HP**, which is how resilient they are to damage. When a character has damage on it at least equal to their HP, it is defeated and discarded from your party.
- **Rewards**, which is how many **XP** your opponent will get if they are defeated.

Playing Divers From Your Deck

Some cards represent your Diver becoming more powerful and unlocking more of their own potential. Play a **Diver** card to replace your Diver with a more powerful version of themselves.



Just like unique allies and minions, these cards replace the Diver card that you are using – when played, heal all damage from your Diver, then discard the old card you were using for it and put down the new card in its place, keeping all equipment, tokens and so on.

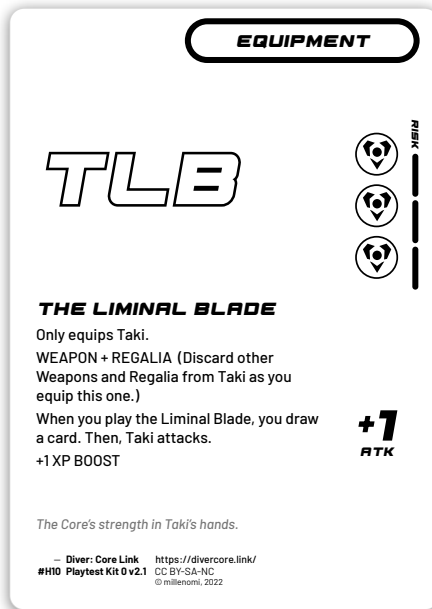
The Diver card must be the same character as your current Diver. If you have Diver cards of another Diver, you can't play them at all.

If you replace a Starting Diver, it returns to your sideboard instead of being discarded!

Playing Equipment

Equipment cards represent powerful items that increase the abilities of a single character.

When you play equipment, equip it to a character in your party (your Diver or any ally or minion).



Most equipment has categories. For example, The Liminal Blade is a Weapon and a Regalia. Each character can carry only one equipment for each category — if they already had one or more of the same categories, discard the old one.

Equipment stays with the character as long as they're in your party. If the character is defeated, discarded or leaves play otherwise, discard anything it had equipped.

Playing Attacks

When you play an **attack**, one of your characters is taking the lead in striking your opponent's party.

Some effects also let you attack without playing an attack card from your hand!



The basic steps that happen when you attack are:

- **Pick who is attacking** from your party. If the attack you're using specifies an ATK bonus, they get that buff during the attack!
- **Pick** which characters are being **attacked**.
- If there's **anything else on the attack card** you played, do it now.
- Your opponent gets to play one **defense** card, if they have one (and only one).
- **Deal damage** to all attacked characters.

1: Pick who is attacking:

Most attacks will tell you who is allowed to attack with it. For example, “Your Diver attacks” means only they can; “Any character in your party attacks” lets you pick anyone.

2: Pick who is being attacked:

Generally, you can attack anyone in your opponent’s party. You can attack up to one character for each point of ATK the attacker has, including any bonuses they got. (So, a character with 5 ATK can attack one, two, three, four or five characters in the party.) The more you attack, the more your damage will be spread thin, so choose carefully!

3: Apply the rest of the attack card:

Some attacks will tell you to do more things. Do them now before your opponent has a chance to do anything else.

4: Your opponent gets to play a defense:

If they have a defense card in hand and can pay its cost, your opponent can do so now! Most defense cards change how much damage an attack deals by preventing some of it.

5: Deal damage:

each attacked character gets damage. If there’s just one, they take damage equal to the ATK of the attacker; if more than one was attacked, divide damage equally among them. (If it doesn’t divide exactly, your opponent chooses which characters each get 1 damage from the remainder.)

If damage is being prevented, it isn’t dealt at all — you get to divide less damage among the attacked characters.

If any character got enough damage to equal or go past its HP, they are defeated and you get XP equal to their Reward, if they have one.

When you’re done with the above, the attack ends and you discard any attack or defense cards that were played for it.

Defeating Characters

When a character has no more HP remaining, because damage reaches its HP stat or exceeds it, it is defeated. Its player will deal with it, while the opponent will gain XP equal to its 'Reward' stat.

What happens to the character depends on the kind of card it was:

Allies and minions are discarded when they're defeated. Anything equipped on them is discarded as well.

Even if they were defeated, you can still play a card of the same character later to add them back to your party!

Divers are discarded in the same way. On top of that, you must immediately **replace** them, and their player **loses any accumulated XP**.

When a Diver is defeated, you pick a different Starting Diver from your sidebar and it becomes your new Diver. Even if they are a card of the same character, the old Diver is gone – no equipment, tokens, damage, or anything the old Diver has will carry over.

Unlike allies and minions, **if your Diver is defeated, you lose one life.**

You start the game with 3 lives. The moment you run out, you lose the game.

Ending the Round

When both players pass without taking actions, usually because they run out of cards, the round ends.

At the end of the round, you spend XP you have gained to connect to the Core. You do so through **Core Links**, special cards you get to play from your sideboard.

These cards have powerful effects, cost nothing, and remain on your side of the field indefinitely until they are scored.

When the round ends:

- Get more XP via any **XP Boost** cards you played this round.
- **Grow in power**, either by **leveling up** or **scoring** a Core Link.
- Check if anyone **won!**
- If the game continues, **clean up & refill** your hand.

1: Get More XP with XP Boost

Some cards in the game have an XP Boost ability, written “+[Number] XP **BOOST**”.

If you played any of those cards this round, check which ones are still in your party right now – for each of them that survived in play to the end of the round, you get to add that number of XP for yourself. This is on top of any Reward you may have gotten for defeating characters so far!

2: **Grow in Power:**

Each player can **spend 3 XP** to play a **level card** from their sideboard, increasing their level; or to **score a Core Link** they already have, taking it out of play and setting it aside for the rest of the game.

Core Links that are scored no longer give you their effects – besides having been scored, they are gone and no longer have an effect on the game.

3: **Check if anyone won:**

If **at this point** any player has scored 3 Core Links, **the race is over and that player wins the game!** If both players scored their third Link, check how much XP is left – the player with the most wins the game. (If there's still a tie, the game continues to a Showdown – see next page.)

4: Finally, **Clean Up & Refill:**

First, refill your hand: discard any number of cards in it, if you want, then draw back up to 8. (Be careful: your deck is empty at this point, you may lose the game – see next page.)

Once hands are refilled, also clean up any danger players still have – they will start the next round with zero.

After you've done all this, a new round begins, with whoever took the last action last round going second (and their opponent going first).

Ending & Winning The Game

Continue playing rounds until either a player loses, or one player wins it all.

There are two ways to **lose** the game:

- One player's Starting Divers get defeated to the point they have **no more in the sidebar** to replace their Diver with. They lose as soon as they are not able to!
- You lose if you **run out of cards in your deck a second time**. The first time your deck becomes empty, instead shuffle your discards to make a new deck (and if it emptied because you were drawing, continue drawing from where you left off).

... and there are two ways to **win** the game:

- You **score the last Core Link** with your XP! If you scored more Core Links than your opponent, you win outright; otherwise, you win if you have more XP left than your opponent.
- If all the last Core Links are scored and there's a XP tie, you enter a Showdown.

When you enter a Showdown, you play **one last round**.

If a Diver is defeated during the Showdown round, its player loses the game immediately...

... and if that doesn't happen, check at the end of the round for what player has the most XP. They win!

If there's a tie, each player adds to their XP the 'Reward' stat of everyone in *their own* party – the player with the most wins.

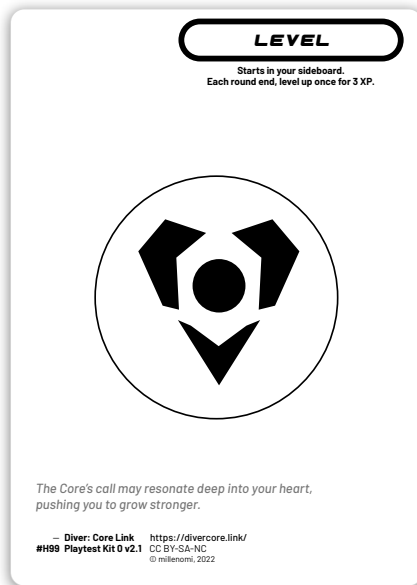
If it's still a tie, the game ends in a draw – there are no more rounds after a Showdown ends.

Play Tips: The Light Deck

The connection with the Core that a Light Diver has is empathic and personal. Each emblem represents how a Diver interprets the call of the worlds in their own, powerful way.

The emblem the Light deck in this kit has is Heart.

Heart channels the power of the Core as a call to better oneself. Through discipline and growth, Heart-emblem Divers find the strength to strike true against insurmountable odds.



Heart's approach is pure aggro. Your attacks carry more punch than you think, and they get even better as you equip and power up your Diver. Your allies are important, but the ability to sustain the game will come down to how much you can attack with your Diver and for how long you can sustain the damage output.

Keep In Mind:

Your Attacks

Do not underestimate just how much this deck wants to play attack cards – from small but efficient ones like Taki's Flourish to ones that actively prolong your party's life like Watch the Back.

Haste Banglet

The ability for your 3-risk attacks to combo into a second strike before your opponent can respond is invaluable. Make sure you deploy it strategically – if the equipped character is defeated, you will lose a significant source of advantage. Remember also that Taki can wear one and Maru another!

Maru, Beleaguered Bodyguard

Taki's stats begin a little on the lower side. Maru's role is to both be able to help pick off early threats, but also to run interference while you get your equipment and Diver game up and running.

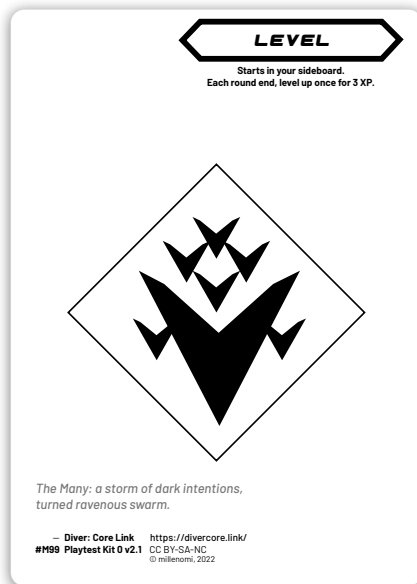
The Coresong Beckons

While Everblue, The Sapphire Isle is perhaps the Core Link that will tempt you most at the beginning of the game, finding your extra Diver card early can tip the game faster in your favor, as Taki's ATK will get in range to strike down most minions in a single attack.

Play Tips: The Dark Deck

It is said that the pseudoreal sludge borne by the winds of the everstorm is sapient. No one quite knows if it is true. However, it is definitely hungry.

The emblem the Dark deck in this kit has is that of The Many.



The Many may start as undifferentiated, congealed darkness, but its key advantage is that it differentiates. The deck employs a go-wide minion strategy that will see you fill your party with as many minions as possible — including as many copies of the same minions as possible — and if they get defeated early, there are multiple ways to make them return from your discards and get increasing value out of them.

Keep In Mind:

Aegis, Vile Interceptor

Unlike your opponent, it is much harder for your Diver to get to the point where it can attack. Aegis serves the important function of running interference and divide your opponent's attention away from your Diver.

Your Minion Payoffs

Irum, Ember and Muis are your premium go-wide payoffs. The first two convert your large party into multiple attacks, passive taxing through damage, whereas Muis can use the high amount of risk you generate as an immediate two-shot threat to your opponent.

An Amorphous Mass & An Unnatural Twist

Given that your opponent is all in on large attacks, your defenses becomes key. Negating a large attack means perhaps being able to power up your Diver or use one of its rare attacks next turn, by having your opponent expend risk you can convert into extra levels for Titan, Enemy of the Core or Ender Storm.

Darkling, Droplet of Darkness

Your eyes may have gone to the larger Diver cards in the deck, like Titan, Ender Form – but do not underestimate the riskless, rewardless Darkling. Extra attacks, especially when equipped with A Dark Aura, and card draw that functions whether you play it from your hand or discard pile, can be quite precious in pushing your opponent before your endgame can start.

Building your Deck

After you play your first few games of *DCL* with the preconstructed decks, you may want to build your own. *DCL* gives you two ways to start customizing your deck.

Packet Sealed

The two *DCL* preconstructed decks are actually three packets, shuffled together. *DCL* has two kinds of packets, common and rare — opening any Light or Dark rare packet and adding any two Light or Dark common packets (including copies of the same packet if you want) produces a new deck ready to play.

This kit contains three common packets and two rare packets each for the Heart emblem and the The Many emblem. Use the extra common and rare packet to play with new strategies for both emblems!

Constructed

You can build your own deck with all the cards in the *DCL* card pool if you would like. The only restrictions are:

- The deck must be exactly **40 cards**. You can't have more than **4 copies** of a card with the same name and subtitle. (Same name but different subtitles do not count as copies — you can have as many as you'd like, 4 of each.)
- Your sideboard can contain any number of cards, but it must contain exactly **2 Starting Divers** and at least **3 Core Links of different names**.
- All cards must be of the **same side** across your sideboard and deck — Light or Dark.

Note that if you start from a Packet Sealed deck, you may need to change it a bit — some Packet Sealed decks may have multiple Core Links with the same name or more than 4 copies of a card.

In this kit, you can distinguish sides by looking at the shape around the type box. The rounded box indicates a Light card, and the angular box indicates a Dark card.

Light

Dark



WHAT'S NEW

This game is still under construction. As things change, they are recorded below:

Version 2.1

- Added this **What's New** section.
- Added four new packets (one common and one rare for each of the two emblems, labeled HC3, HR2, MC3 and MR2) for Packet Sealed. This introduces 9 new unique cards to the game (with codes H30 and higher and M30 and higher).
- Added monograms to all cards. They allow for distinguishing the card on tabletops like Untap, TTS or TTP or on camera, where it may be shown very small.
- Core Links are now played when a round **starts**, not when a round ends. This also means they can be scored in the same round.
- To prevent danger farming and address the toning-down of comeback mechanics, if a player's Diver is defeated, they **lose all current XP**. Also, for similar reasons, when a player reaches **7 danger**, their **round is over**. (They must pass for the rest of the turn and do not get any more turns.)
- "Power-Up" divers are now just (non-Starting) **Divers**. It's now spelled out more clearly that they must be the same character as your Diver to be played.
- Setting aside Starting Divers was unnecessarily confusing. Replaced that with **3 lives** – once a player gets 3 Divers defeated, whether Starting or not, they lose the game.
- Added a description of the round structure when rounds are introduced.
- On-card has been made clearer or tightened wherever possible.
- Actions that cards grant you are now more prominent as special cases on the card (they say "ACTION – ..." rather than "As your action...", and they have reminder text.)
- Rulebook card images are now prepared & generated from the master card document, and update with each release.