

SKULL KING®



AHOY THERE!

Yo! Ho! Ho! Maties!

Welcome to me ship! As we sail the seven seas there be time to compete in hours of game play. Pull up a stool around a barrel, and experience the thrill of me favorite game!

Treasure awaits, but only fer the bold, as mermaids and pirates be after it, too! Every hand can be a winner. It's up to yer bidding and cunning to come out victorious!

- THE SKULL KING



OVERVIEW

Skull King is a trick-taking game played over ten rounds. In each round, players bid by predicting the number of tricks they'll win. A correct bid scores points; an incorrect bid loses points. The player with the highest score at the end wins.

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www.gbecks.com/sk-vid



KEY TERMS

Trick: Each player plays one card, face up, in clockwise order. The highest-ranked card wins the trick.

Bid: A player's prediction of how many tricks they'll take per round.

Round: One or more tricks. The number of tricks in a round is determined by the number of cards dealt to each player.

Example: *In round 3, three cards are dealt to each player. Three tricks will be played.*

Suited Cards: Green, Purple, Yellow, and Black cards numbered 1-14.

Trump Suit: The black suit (Jolly Roger) ranks higher than the other colored suits.

Special Cards: Any card that does not have a number.

Example: *A green 14 is a lower rank than a black 1, because black is the trump suit.*

Leading: The first card played leads a trick, setting the suit that must be followed.



SETUP

1. Remove the following from the deck before starting: the blank cards, the Loot cards, the Kraken, and the White Whale. These are used in the optional advanced rules.



2. Separate and distribute the player aid cards and a set of bid reminder cards to each player.



3. Shuffle the remaining cards.
4. Deal cards to each player. The number of cards is determined by the round of play. One card is dealt in the first round, two are dealt in the second, and so on ending with ten cards dealt in the tenth round.

Note: *When playing with eight players, the card count allows dealing a maximum of 8 cards to each player. For rounds 9 and 10, deal 8 cards to each player.*

This concept can be applied to any group size, as long as each player is dealt the same number of cards in each round.

GAME PLAY

Skull King is played over ten rounds. During each round, players bid how many tricks they believe they can win, and then play cards in tricks until all cards dealt are played.

BIDDING

Once the cards are dealt, players examine their hand and decide how many tricks to bid for that round. When a player is ready to bid, they place their fist on the table. Once all players are ready, they pound fists on the table in unison three times while chanting, “Yo-ho-ho!” On the third pound, players extend the number of fingers equal to their predicted bid or a closed fist if bidding zero. If bidding more than five, a player verbalizes their bid.

Note: *Bid reminder cards help players recall their bid. Place one over the other to indicate the bid (refer to the diagram below). In case of a bid of 10, place both cards face down. Record each player's bid on the score sheet.*



PLAYING

The player left of the dealer begins by playing any card from their hand, and play continues clockwise. If a suited card (numbered) is led, and players want to play a suited card, they must play the same suit, if they have it. Special cards (not numbered) may be played on any turn.

Once all players have played a card, the highest ranked card wins the trick (see The Cards). The winner takes the cards played in the trick. Stack each trick separately. The player who wins a trick leads the next trick.



THE CARDS

Refer to the player aid cards for a reminder of how various cards and suits interact.

SUITED CARDS

There are three **standard** suits; Parrot (green), Treasure Chest (yellow), and Pirate Map (purple). There is one **trump** suit: Jolly Roger (Black). Each suit is numbered 1-14.



Again, when a suited card leads a trick, players must play the same suit if choosing to play a suited card. If a player doesn't have the lead suit, they may play any card from their hand. A special card may be played on any turn. If all cards in a trick are the same suit, the highest numbered card wins the trick.

Example: Samuel plays a green 7, Bonny then lays down a green 12, and Henry plays a green 8. Bonny wins the trick.



When a different suit (non-trump) than the lead suit is played, that card will lose, even if it is the highest number played.

Example: Scarlet plays a yellow 12 and Thomas plays a yellow 5. Jack doesn't have a yellow card and plays a purple 14. Scarlet wins the trick.



The trump suit will beat any standard suit card, even those of a greater numerical value.

Example: Scarlet leads with a yellow 12. William plays a yellow 5. Jack doesn't have a yellow card, and plays a black 2. Even though the 2 is the lowest number played, Jack wins the trick because black trumps all suits.



SPECIAL CARDS

Special cards don't belong to a suit. They can be played regardless of the lead suit.



Pirates (5): Pirate cards rank higher than all suited cards, including the Trump Suit. They are of equal rank to each other. If more than one Pirate is played in a trick, the first one played outranks the other Pirate cards.



Tigress (1): The cunning Tigress chooses her battles wisely. When played, the player immediately declares whether it plays as a Pirate or an Escape.



Skull King (1): As the fearless captain of the seas, he beats all suited cards and Pirates (including the Tigress when played as a Pirate), the only cards that outrank him are the Mermaids.



Mermaid (2): Mermaids outrank the Skull King and all suited cards. They lose to the Pirates. If both Mermaids end up in the same trick, the first played outranks the second played.

Note: *If a Pirate, the Skull King, and a Mermaid are all played in the same trick, the Mermaid always wins the trick, regardless of order of play. The only bonus points earned are for the Mermaid capturing the Skull King (see Bonus Points).*



Escape Cards (5): Escape cards always lose to other cards in a trick. They can help a player avoid exceeding their bid. In the rare event that all players play Escape cards, or cards that act as an Escape, the first played escape wins the trick.

LEADING WITH SPECIAL CARDS

When a special card leads a trick, the rules for the lead suit in play change as follows:

When leading with an Escape card or the Tigress as an escape, the next player sets the lead suit to be followed. If the next player also plays one of these cards, the third player will set the lead suit, and so on.

When leading with a character card (a Mermaid, Pirate, Skull King, or the Tigress as a Pirate), there is no lead suit to follow. Players may play any card they choose in the trick.

ENDING A ROUND

After all dealt cards are played, the round ends, and scores are calculated. The player who played first that round shuffles and deals the next round. The player to their left starts the first trick of that round.

ENDING THE GAME

At the end of ten rounds of play, the scores are totaled, and a winner is declared. In the event of a tie, play another round until the tie is broken.

SCORING

Points are earned only if a player bids correctly. If a player bids incorrectly, points are lost.



Bidding One or More

A player who takes the exact number of tricks that were bid is awarded **20 points** for each trick taken. A player who takes **more** or **fewer** tricks than bid loses **10 points for every trick by which they were off**.

Example: *Calvin bids three, and takes three tricks that round. This earns him 60 points (20x3). Angela bids two, but takes four tricks. She's off by two, and loses 20 points (-10 x 2) that round.*

Bidding Zero

If a player bids zero and takes zero tricks, their score is **10 times the number of cards dealt that round**. The higher the card count, the greater the reward!

However, if a player bids zero, and takes **one** or **more** tricks, **10 points per card dealt that round** are lost. Zero bids are risky, but fortune favors the bold!

Example: *Kate bids zero on round 7, and takes zero tricks. Her score is 70 points (10 x 7). Johnny bids zero in the ninth round, but takes two tricks. His score is -90 points for the round (-10 x 9).*

BONUS POINTS

Certain cards award bonus points when taken in a trick. They are earned only if the player gets their bid. Order of play within a trick is not relevant.

Suited Number 14 Cards

Cards numbered 14 captured in a trick earn bonus points at the end of a round, regardless of whether the card was played by you or an opponent.

- **10 points (green, purple, and yellow)** for each standard suit #14 card taken at the end of the round.
- **20 points (black)** for the trump suit #14 card taken at the end of the round.

Character Cards

Character cards captured in a trick earn a bonus:

- **20 points** for each Mermaid taken by a Pirate.
- **30 points** for each Pirate taken by the Skull King.
- **40 points** for taking the Skull King with a Mermaid.

Example: *Lawrence leads with a yellow 14 and Charlotte plays a Pirate. Anne plays the Skull King in hopes of the bonus for taking a Pirate. Morgan plays a Mermaid, winning the trick! She earns +10 points for taking the yellow 14, plus 40 points for taking a Skull King with the Mermaid. The Skull King did not win, so that bonus is not awarded.*

THE SCORESHEET

(A) Name:

(B) Round:

(C) Cards Dealt:

(D) Bid and Result:

(E) Bid Points:

(F) Bonus:

(G) Round Points:

(H) Running Total:

(I) Bid Type: (if following alternative scoring methods)

Each score sheet allows for up to four players. Use two score sheets to play with more than four players. Additional score sheets may be purchased from our website, or downloaded from www.grandpabecksgames.com/scorepads.



THE RASCAL SCORING:

See our website for a secondary scoring method where players get points for *almost* getting their bid correct.

	Rascal				Alyra			Greybeard		
(B)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(I)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(D)	(E)	(F)
1	0/0	10			0/0	10	—	1/1	20	10
(C) 1	(G) 10	10	(H)	10	10	10		30	30	
2	1/1	20	30	2/0	-20	—	0/1	-20	—	
2	50	60	-20	-10	-20	10				

TWO-PLAYER RULES

Shuffle and deal 3 hands. The third hand will remain face-down and will be played by "Graybeard's ghost." Bid and play following the same rules as normal. The two players alternate who leads each round. Regardless of who leads, Graybeard will always play his card second.

On Graybeard's turn, flip over the top card of his hand and add it to the trick. Note: He doesn't have to follow the lead suit.

As per usual, the player who wins the trick leads out the next trick. If Graybeard wins a trick, he leads the next one. The player who led that round plays second. When he plays the Tigress, it plays as an escape. Loot cards are not used in a 2-player game.

VARIABLE CARD COUNTS

Short on time or want to mix up the game play? Try one of these options for variety to the length of the game:

- **Even Keeled:**
One round of 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 cards per hand.
- **Skip to the Brawl:**
One round of 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 cards per hand.
- **Swift-n-Salty Skirmish:**
Five rounds of 5 cards per hand.
- **Broadside Barrage:**
Ten rounds of 10 cards per hand.
- **Whirlpool:**
Two rounds of 9, 7, 5, 3, 1 cards per hand.
- **Past Your Bedtime:**
One round of 1 card per hand, plus a goodnight hug.

ADVANCED PLAY OPTIONS

The advanced cards act as a menu to choose from. These can add more strategy to the game. Include as many or as few as wanted. For help using the advanced cards during play, refer to the player aid cards.

The Kraken

When played, the trick is destroyed. No one wins, and the cards played in the trick are set aside. The next trick is led by the player who would have won the trick.



The White Whale

When played, all special cards are destroyed and numbered cards lose their suits. The highest numbered card wins the trick, regardless of suit.

If the highest number is a tie, the first one played wins. If only special cards were played, the trick is discarded and the person who would have won leads the next trick.

When the Kraken and the White Whale are played in the same trick, the second one played determines the action to be applied.

Example: *Thomas leads with the black 2. Bill then plays a Pirate. Susan plays a yellow 14. Lori plays the Skull King. Charlie plays the White Whale. The special cards are destroyed. The suited cards lose their color, leaving just their number. Susan's 14 wins the trick.*

Loot Cards

When a Loot card is played, it is played as an escape. An alliance is formed between the player who played it and the player who won the trick. If both get their bid correct, they are each awarded 20 bonus points.



Advanced Pirate Abilities

Unlock a pirate's unique ability when you win a trick using that pirate (not simply capturing a pirate card). The ability must be used immediately following the trick won using that pirate. Harry the Giant is the only pirate whose ability may be used after the final trick of a round.



Rosie D' Laney: A galley chef with a hot temper and cold blue eyes.

Ability: Choose any player, including yourself, to lead the next trick.



Bendt the Bandit: An orphan raised by smugglers and a cunning trader.

Ability: Add 2 cards to your hand from the deck. Then discard 2 cards.



Rascal of Roatan: A notorious mercenary and gambler with suspicious good luck.

Ability: If desired, bet 10 or 20 points on your chance of getting your bid that round. Earn the points if you get your bid. Lose them if you don't. If you choose not to bet, your score is not affected.



Juanita Jade: Rumored to have mermaid ancestry and the gift of divination.

Ability: Privately look through the cards not dealt that round.



Harry the Giant: Known to wrestle crocs for fun. No one dares oppose him.

Ability: Choose to change your bid by plus or minus one, or leave it the same.

Leading with Advanced Cards

If a player leads with a Kraken or a White Whale, there is no lead suit to follow. Players may play any card they choose in the trick. When played mid-trick, the following cards played don't need to follow the lead suit.

If a player leads with a Loot card, the next suited card played sets the suit. If all other cards played are Escape cards, or the Tigress played as an escape, the player who played the Loot card wins the trick. No alliance was formed, so no bonus is awarded.

Blank Cards

Replace lost or damaged cards, or make your own custom cards. If you do, be sure to share them with us on Facebook (GrandpaBecksGames) or Instagram (@grandpabecksgames).



Have a question?

Grandpa is eager to hear from you.

He loves pictures and feedback!

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Frequently Asked Questions

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