



Grandpa Beck's Game of  
Scheming and Skulking®

2 - 6 players,  
30 minute play time.



**Grandpa Beck**  
will explain  
how to play!



Ahoy Maties! This is yer Captain Grandpa Beck and it's high time ye learned how to play the grandest pirate game, Skull King. Before we begin, ye must prepare yerselves to be lifted by the sweet wind of victory or torn apart on the jagged reef of defeat. Don't ye fear the cold hand of luck, because in Skull King ye can win whether ye be dealt high cards or low. Intrigued are ye? Well then, pull up a barrel to sit on, pour yerself a glass of milk, and let us begin.

## Overview

The main objective in Skull King is to correctly predict the number of tricks you will win each hand. Players who bid correctly are awarded points; those who miss their bid lose points.

**Note:** A trick consists of a single turn of play where each player lays down one card. The highest card wins. This is called taking a trick.

A game consists of ten hands, or rounds. In the first round only one card is dealt, in each subsequent round an additional card is dealt. So, for example, in round two, two cards are dealt, in round seven, seven cards are dealt and in round ten, ten cards are dealt. Easy, right?

At the end of each round, points are tallied. The player with the most points after the final round wins the game! The player with the fewest points does the dishes. Don't look at me, that's Grandma Beck's rule.

## The Cards

Ok, now that you've got the basic idea, let's talk about the cards. Knowing the value of the cards you are dealt will help you predict the number of tricks you hope to win, so pay close attention!

### Numbered Cards

There are four suits of cards numbered from 1-14 in the deck. Three of these suits, the green, yellow, and purple cards, are of equal value. If all the cards played in a single trick were of the same color, then the card with the highest value would win the trick.



**Example:** Loni plays a green 7, Sarah then lays down a green 12, and Heidi plays a green 8. Sarah, who played the highest green card, wins the trick.

The first suit laid down each trick establishes the suit the rest of the players must also play. If you don't have a card of the same color played by the first player, then you can play any suit that you like.

Colored cards that are a different suit than the first card played are worthless in that trick, and will always lose. (The exception to this rule is the trump suit, but we will get to that in a moment)

**Example:** Amy, Jenny, and Jared play the 12, 7, and 8 of yellow in the same trick. Harrison doesn't have a yellow card and plays a 14 of purple. Amy, who played the 12 of yellow, wins the trick. Even though Harrison played a card with a higher number, it has no value because it's from a different suit than the first card played.



### Jolly Roger Suit

The black cards with the Jolly Roger flag are trump cards. Trump cards always beat cards from the other three suits.

**Example:** Amy, Jenny, and Jared play the 12, 7, and 8 of yellow in the same trick. (Whoa! Talk about

déjà vu!) Harrison, once again, doesn't have a yellow card, but this time plays the 2 of black. Even though the 2 is the lowest number played, Harrison wins the trick because trump cards are worth more than the cards from the other three suits.

## Pirate Cards

There are five regular Pirate cards. These five Pirates are of equal value to each other but always beat any numbered card, including the black trump suit. If more than one Pirate card is played in the same trick, the first one played wins. Pirate cards can be played at any time, even when a player holds a card of the suit currently being played.



**The Skull King** is the highest valued card in the game and beats all other cards, including the other Pirate cards. If the Skull King is played after another Pirate card, in the same trick, a special bonus is awarded. We'll discuss that when we talk about scoring.

## Special Cards



**The Escape Cards** are the lowest value cards in the game and guarantee that you will lose the trick in which they are played. That may sound kind of lame, but they sure come in handy when you are trying to avoid winning more tricks than you bid. Like the Pirate cards, they can be played at any time.

***Note:** In the rare event that every player plays an Escape card on the same turn, the player to first lay down an Escape card wins the hand.*



**The Tigress** can be played as either a Pirate card or an Escape card. When a player lays down the Tigress card they must declare out loud if they will use her as a Pirate or an Escape card. That flexibility makes her one of the most useful cards in the game.

## Bidding

Now that you know what the cards are worth, let's talk about bidding.

There are many factors that will affect your bid. Chief consideration should be given to the value of your cards. Pirate cards almost always win. High trump cards are also a pretty good bet. The top few normal numbered cards also can win a trick fairly consistently if they are played right.

The Tigress gives you wiggle room, you can play her to capture a must win trick, or use her to avoid winning one trick too many. And the Skull King, well, he always wins, so you better bid at least one if you have him in your hand!

It may sound easy, but getting your bid correct can be quite a challenge. You might lose a trick when someone trumps your Pirate card with the Skull King, or you might win a trick with the three of purple when all the other players dump cards of other suits or use an Escape card. It's a cut-throat game, but what did you expect from a bunch of pirates?

After the cards are dealt, you indicate you are ready to bid by placing a closed fist on the table. The dealer leads the group in pounding (or tapping if you have neighbors sleeping on the floor below you) their fists on the table three times in unison. Feel free to accompany this with a hearty 'Yo, Ho, Ho!'

On the third hit, each player extends a finger for each trick they hope to win. If you want to bid more than five, simply declare your bid out loud on the third tap. The scorekeeper records the bids in the small boxes on the score pad.

## Gameplay

After the bids are recorded, gameplay begins with the player to the left of the dealer who lays down the first card. The first card played each trick will determine what cards other players can lay down.

### Leading with a Numbered Card

As explained previously, when the first card played is a numbered card, all other players must follow suit, playing another numbered card of the same color. However, if a player doesn't have a card of the same suit, then a card of any other suit can be played, including the trump suit.

**Note:** *As a reminder, any card with a name, not a number, may be played without the need to follow the card that was led. These cards...*

## Leading with a Pirate Card

When play begins with a Pirate card, Skull King, or Tigress as a pirate, there is no suit to follow. The remaining players can lay down any card they like. This is a great opportunity to get rid of high numbered cards or trumps if you are worried about taking more tricks than you bid.

Any card, including other Pirate cards, will lose when played after a Pirate card. The exception to this rule is the Skull King card, which as you may recall, always wins.

## Leading with an Escape Card

If the first card played in a trick is an Escape card (or the Tigress played as an Escape card), then the first numbered card laid down by a subsequent player sets the suit, as explained above. If a Pirate card is played next, then it is considered to be the leading card, as explained in the previous section.

**Example:** Lisa lays down an Escape card. Tauni then plays a green 11. Green is now the suit that must be followed.

The player who wins the trick gets to play the first card of the next trick. At the end of each hand, the scorekeeper records the score for each player with a running total in the larger boxes on the rule sheet. The player to the left of the dealer becomes the new dealer. The player to the left of the new dealer plays the first card of the next round.

# Scoring

Scoring in Skull King is straightforward. If you win exactly the number of tricks you bid, you are awarded points. Bid incorrectly and you lose points. Points are dispensed differently if you bid one or more tricks, or bid zero.

## Bidding One or More

Players earn 20 points for each trick they win when they take *exactly* the number of tricks they bid.

**Example:** Calvin bids three and wins three tricks. Calvin is awarded 60 points. Calvin pumps his fist.

Unfortunately, if you win more or less tricks than you bid, you will lose points. For every trick you were off, whether over or under, 10 points are subtracted from your score.

**Example 1:** Jack bids three, but only wins two tricks. Jack loses 10 points. Jack is sad. (-10 points, not 60-10)

**Example 2:** Angela bids two tricks, but instead wins five. Since she was off by three, Angela drops 30 points. Angela is even sadder. (-30 points, not 40-30)

**Note:** *If you lose more points than you currently have, your score will drop below zero. This isn't golf; a negative score is not a good thing!*

## Bidding Zero

A bid of zero is scored differently. Let's start with the positive. If you bid zero and manage to avoid winning a single trick, your score is ten times the number of cards each player was dealt that round.

**Example:** In the sixth round, six cards are dealt. Katy bids zero and wins zero tricks. Katy scores 60 points. Katy is the boss.

As you can see, zero bids are awesome when they go well. That being said, they can also be *incredibly* risky. If a player bids zero and then wins just one trick, they lose 10 points for every card dealt to them. You don't have to be a mathematician to see that this could quickly destroy your score.

**Example:** Jeff is dealt a hand with a lot of low cards in the ninth round. Jeff takes a risk and bids zero, but ends up winning one trick. Jeff loses 90 points. Jeff regrets his decision. He also regrets wearing a mullet in all of his wedding photos.

## Bonus Points

Players may earn bonus points by winning a trick in which three particular cards have been played.

- The 14 of yellow is worth an additional 10 points.
- The 14 of black is worth an additional 20 points.
- The Skull King scores a bonus of 30 points for every Pirate card that was played in the same trick prior to the Skull King being played.

**Note:** *Pirate cards played after the Skull King don't award any bonus points to the player taking the trick.*

**Example:** Jencen plays the 14 of yellow, hoping to win a trick. Maren, who doesn't have any yellow cards, plays the 14 of black, trumping Jencen's card. Jessica, feeling confident, plays a Pirate card which beats the 14 of black. Grandpa Beck then triumphantly plays the Skull King which beats Jeff's Pirate. He is awarded 10 points for capturing the 14 of yellow, 20 for capturing the 14 of black, and 30 for capturing another Pirate card with the Skull King. Sometimes it pays to write the rules!

**Note:** *Bonus points are only awarded if a player wins the number of tricks that they bid. If you miss your bid, tough cookies! You don't get to keep the points.*

## Conclusion

Thar be the rules. I wish ye luck as ye embark on the grand adventure of a rowdy game of Skull King with yer maties. Should ye have a question or a wee concern, then don't hesitate to drop me a line at [Grandpa@GrandpaBecksGames.com](mailto:Grandpa@GrandpaBecksGames.com) I'll answer yer questions quickly and do me best to make ye content. *Happy sailing!*

### *Recap of them rules...*

20 points for each trick bid, and take. Or...

-10 points for each bid more or less than you bid, instead of the above score potential.

Zero bids are worth 10 times the number of cards in that hand if you win zero tricks and minus that same amount if you win any tricks. (eg. round 5 = either +50 or -50 points)

+10 or +20 for the #14 cards with those bonus values, if you capture that card, and get your bid.

+30 points for each Pirate card that the Skull King card takes, if the Pirates were played before the Skull King in the same trick, and one who played the Skull King gets his/her bid exactly.

Extra score sheets in a larger format are printable from the website, [Grandpabecksgames.com](http://Grandpabecksgames.com).

Questions? Visit [grandpabecksgames.com](http://grandpabecksgames.com), email us at [grandpa@grandpabecksgames.com](mailto:grandpa@grandpabecksgames.com) or call 206-498-1959.

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