SKULL KING®

Ahoy There!

Look at you lot o' landlubbers! Soft hands betray that ye've never scaled rigging, swabbed decks, or swung a sword. Well, I hope ye learn quick, fer I need e'ry hand I can get on this treacherous voyage.

Treasure awaits, but only fer the bold, as mermaids and pirates be after it, too! Will ye be lifted by the winds of victory, or torn asunder on the jagged reef of defeat?

Are ye truly brave enough to join me crew? Then climb aboard, and cry out a hearty "Yo-ho-ho!"

- THE SKULL KING.

WATCH OUR HOW TO PLAY VIDEO:
www.gbecks.com/sk-vid

OVERVIEW

Skull King is a trick-taking game in which you will bid the exact number of tricks you predict you will win each round. You'll battle with your rivals as you strive to keep your own bid afloat... while seizing opportunities to also sink your opponents! The pirate with the highest score at the end of the game wins and earns the title of Captain of the Seven Seas!

Contents

Suit Cards

Parrot (14)
Pirate Map (14)
Treasure Chest (14)
Jolly Roger (14)

Special Cards

Pirate (5)
Tigress (1)
Skull King (1)
Mermaid (2)
Escape (5)

Expansion Cards

Loot (2)
Kraken (1)
White Whale (1)

Additional Items

Player aid card (16)
Bid Reminders card (16)
Blank Card (4)
Scorepad

SETTING SAIL

Remove the following from the deck before starting: the Blank cards, the Loot cards, the Kraken, and the White Whale. You'll use these when you learn the advanced rules. Separate the player aids and bid cards.

Distribute the player aid cards and a set of bid reminder cards to each player. Place any remaining player aids and bid cards in the box. Now shuffle the deck and prepare yerselves fer battle!

Key Terms

For those unfamiliar with these waters.

Trick: Consists of each player, in clockwise order, playing 1 card face-up to the table. The person who plays the highest valued card wins and takes the trick. The player gathers the cards in a stack before them.

Round: Consisting of 1 or more tricks. The number of tricks in a round is determined by the number of cards dealt. A round begins by dealing cards and ends when all cards dealt have been played.

Example: In the third round, 3 cards are dealt so 3 tricks will be played that round.

Suit: Suit cards are the numbered cards, 1-14, in four colors.

Trump: The black bordered cards (Jolly Roger) are the trump suit. This suit is ranked higher than the other three colors of numbered cards.

Example: Green (Parrots) 14 is of lower rank than 1 black (Jolly Roger) because black is Trump.

Leading: The first card played in a trick sets the pattern that must be followed. Players must play that suit if they have one. Cards without numbers need not 'follow suit.'

Dealing Cards

Skull King is played over 10 rounds. 1 card is dealt to each player in the first round, 2 are dealt in the second, and so on, ending with 10 cards dealt to each player in round 10. The entire deck, including **all cards** played in the previous round, is shuffled at the start of each round.

Round 2:

Round 3:

Round 4:

8 Players: When playing with more than six players, ensure that each player has the same number of cards in the final rounds. Simply repeat the number of cards dealt, which allows each player to have an equal number of cards, in each of the remaining final rounds.

Captain's Log: After you learn the basics, you can modify the number of rounds and cards dealt each round to your liking. See the advanced rules for instructions.

Bidding

After the cards are dealt and you've studied your hand, you'll decide the exact number of tricks you predict you will win in that round. Remember, the higher a card's value, the more likely you are to win a trick.

Once you're all ready, you'll pound your fists on the table in unison three times while calling out "Yo-ho-ho!" On the third pound, you'll each extend the number of fingers equal to your bid or a closed fist if bidding zero. (Your fist on table indicates readiness)

Using your 2 bid reminder cards, place one over the other to indictate your bid (see diagram below). If you're brave enough to bid 10, simply stack both face down. Have a player record each player's bid on the scorepad.

Captain's Log: In the event that you bid more than 5, simply say the number out loud instead of extending your fingers on the third pound.

THE CARRRDS

Understanding the interaction of the various cards and their value is essential to accurately predict the number of tricks you'll win, so pay close attention and then check your player aid if you need a reminder.

Suit Cards

There are 4 suits of cards numbered 1-14 in the deck.

There are three standard suits; Parrot (green), Treasure Chest (yellow), Treasure Map (purple), and the trump suit: Jolly Roger (Black). Jolly Roger cards outrank (trump) the other three suits.

If a suit card is played first in a trick (lead), all players must 'follow suit' and play that same suit (if they are going to play a numbered card). If you don't have the suit that was lead, you may play any other suit. If all cards played are the same suit, the highest numbered card would win the trick.

Cards without numbers are not suit cards and may be played regardless of what was led.

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

When you play a different suit (non-trump) than the suit that's in play, your 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.

If you are able to play black (trump), it will beat any standard suit card, even those of a greater numbered value.

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

Special Cards

Special cards allow you to break the rules governing numbered cards. You can choose to play one in any trick, even if you would normally be required to follow suit.

Captains Log: We've included some extra cards that you can use to make your own custom cards, replace missing or damaged cards, or use as drink coasters.

Escape Cards

Escape (5): The 5 escape cards have value in being able to be played to 'not win.' They lose to all other cards. They are very handy to help assure you get your bid by not winning more tricks than were bid.

Captain's Log: In the rare event that each player plays an escape card, Tigress as an escape, or a loot card, in the same trick; the first card played wins the trick.

Character Cards

Pirate (5): Pirate cards beat all numbered cards. They are of equal rank with each other, so if more than one Pirate card is played in a trick, the person who played the first pirate wins the trick.

Tigress (1): The cunning Tigress chooses her battles wisely. When you play the Tigress, you must declare whether she will count as a Pirate or an Escape; the choice is yours! She takes on all characteristics of either a pirate or an escape.

Skull King (1): The scourge of the seas is the trump of Pirates and beats all numbered cards and Pirates (including the Tigress, when played as a Pirate). The only ones who can defeat him are the Mermaids, luring him into the sea with their precious treasure.

Mermaid (2): Mermaids beat all numbered suits but lose to all of the Pirates, with the exception of the Skull King, who is lured by their treasure. If both Mermaids end up in the same trick, the first one played wins the trick.

Captain's Log: 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. Only the Mermaid capturing the Skull King bonus is earned.

Leading with Special Cards

When you lead a trick, you may choose to play either a suit card or a special card. When a special card is led, the rules for the suit in play are altered as follows:

Leading with an Escape

When an Escape, Tigress as an escape, or Loot is lead, the next player sets the suit that must be followed, unless they play one of these as well, which would defer setting the suit to the next player.

Leading with a Character

When a Mermaid, Pirate, Skull King, Tigress as a Pirate, Kraken, or White Whale leads a trick, there is no suit to follow for that trick. Each other player may play any card they choose.

ON YOUR TURN

Once bidding is complete, the player to the left of the dealer leads out the first trick by playing a card face up in the center of the table. In clockwise order, each other player plays a card following the rules outlined in the previous sections.

The person who played the highest-ranking card wins the trick, gathers the cards into a stack, and places the stack in front of them. Then, they play a card to lead the next trick.

Play continues until all the tricks in that round have been played. Tally each player's score, including any bonus points earned, on the scorepad.

The player to the dealer's left becomes the new dealer. This player shuffles **all** cards, including the ones played in the previous round, and then deals them, increasing the number of cards dealt by 1 from the previous round.

After the tenth round is completed, final scores are tallied, the player with the highest score is declared the victor and is appointed as the pirate captain of the seven seas!

Captain's Log: As the new captain, ye can command yer crew to walk the plank or the dog! However, seein' as ye don't have a sword, ye might face a mutiny if'n you do...

SCORING

There are two different scoring systems you can choose from when playing *Skull King*. Both are fun and unique. Need help scoring? Try the *Grandpa Beck's Scoring App*!

The Skull King's Scoring

The classic scoring system for *Skull King*, excellent for bold and casual play rife with risk and reward where scores swing like sail lines in a gale.

With the Skull King's scoring, you only earn points for the round when you bid correctly. If you're off, even by 1, you'll lose points instead.

Bidding One or More

When you win the exact number of tricks that you bid, you are awarded **20 points** for each trick taken.

Example: Calvin bids 3 and then takes 3 tricks. This earns him 60 points (20 × 3).

Capture **more** or **fewer** tricks than you bid, and you'll **lose 10 points for every trick you were off**. You don't earn points for any tricks captured that round.

Example: Angela bids 2 but takes 4 tricks. She's off by 2 so she loses 20 points (-10 × 2).

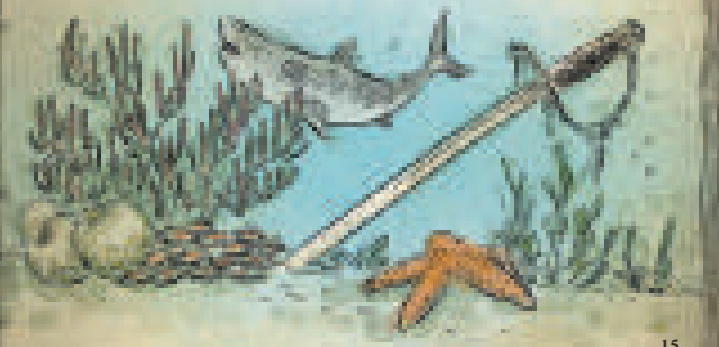
Bidding Zero

Bid zero and get your bid **correct** and your potential score is **10 points times the number of cards dealt that round**. The higher the card count, the greater your reward!

Example: Kate bids zero on round 7 and takes zero tricks. She scores 70 points (10 x 7).

However, if you bid zero and then take **1** or **more** tricks, you'll **lose 10 points per card dealt that round instead**. Zero bids are risky, but fortune favors the bold!

Example: Johnny bids zero in the ninth round but he captures 2 tricks. He scores -90 points for the round.



BONUS POINTS

In each round you'll have the chance to earn bonus points, but get your bid wrong and you won't score any of them.

The Number Fourteen Cards

- **10 points** *for each standard suit (yellow, purple, or green) 14 card you have at the end of the round.*
- **20 points** *for possessing the black (Jolly Roger) 14 card at the end of the round.*

Captain's Log: Every 14 you have at the end of the round earns you a bonus, whether played by you or an opponent.

Character Cards

Capturing (taking) character cards will 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.*

Captain's Log: Captain's Log: Order of play is not a determining factor in order to win these bonus points.

Example: Example: Lawrence leads with a yellow 14, 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: Pretty sure you know what goes here.
(B) Round: Round number (you typically play 10).
(C) Cards Dealt: Usually same as the round number.
(D) Bid and Result: Number of tricks you predict to win that round followed by the amount you actually won.
(E) Bid Points: Points earned or lost based on bidding.
(F) Bonus: Any bonus points earned for the round.
(G) Round Points: Total for the round (Bid + Bonus).
(H) Running Total: Previous + current Round Points.
(I) Bid Type: Canonball or Grapeshot (Rascal Scoring).

Captain's Log:Each scoresheet works for up to 4 players. Use two score sheets to play with more than four players. Additional score sheets may be purchased or printed from our website. www.grandpabecksgames.com/scorepads

The Rascal's Scoring

This scoring method is ideal for cunning and calculated players who seek a more even-keeled adventure.

Each round, **all** players have the same potential points, regardless of the number you bid. You can earn 10 points for each card dealt that round.

Example: 5 cards are dealt, so your potential score is 50 points, whether you bid 0, 3, 1, or 5.

What determines whether you earn all, part, or none of those potential points is your accuracy.

Direct Hit: When you get your bid exactly right.

- *Earn **all** of the potential round points.*

Glancing Blow: When you are off by 1 on your bid.

- *Earn **half** of the potential round points.*

Complete Miss: When you are off by 2 or more.

- *Earn **none** of the potential round points.*

Bonus Points

The same rules apply to bonuses. You'll tally **all** your potential bonus points if you land a direct hit, **half** if you land a glancing blow, and **none** if you completely miss.

Example A: Harry, Shirley and Poe bid 0, 1, and 2 in a round where 3 cards (30 point potential) are dealt. They each land a direct hit (get their bid) and score 30 points each for the round.

Example B: In the next round where 4 cards are dealt (40 point potential) Harry, Shirley, and Poe bid 1, 0, and 4, Harry gets his bid, Shirley is off by one, and Poe is off by 2.

Here's what their scores would be:

- *Harry: Direct Hit = Full points (+40)*
- *Shirley: Glancing Blow = Half points (+20)*
- *Poe: Complete Miss = No points (+0)*

Optional Rascal Rules

Crave more risk and reward? Then add this enhancement to the Rascal's Scoring. With this rule, you'll choose between two cannon loads immediately after bidding. This will impact your potential score. You'll each reveal your choice simultaneously, with a "Yo-ho-ho!"

Grapeshot (open hand): Follow standard Rascal scoring.

Cannonball (closed fist): Earn 15 points for each card dealt, if you bid correctly. Earn 0 if you're off, even by 1. You must get your bid correct to earn any bonus points.

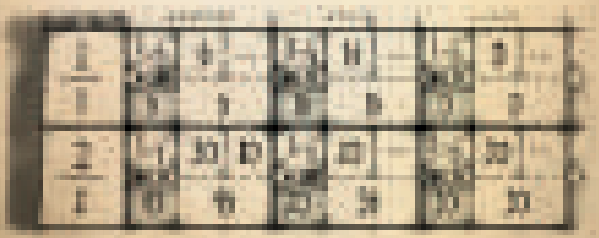
Example: Assume 6 cards were dealt and that you bid 3.

If you chose Grapeshot (open hand):

- *Correct bid: Score 60 pts for the round (6x10).*
- *Off by 1: Score 30 points for the round (6x5).*

If you chose Cannonball (closed fist):

- *Correct bid: Score 90 pts for the round (6x15).*
- *Off by 1: Score 0 points for the round.*



Two-Player Rules

Shuffle and deal 3 hands (yes, you read that correctly). You'll bid and play following the same rules as normal, but with one spooky twist. You'll be joined by Graybeard's ghost! However, he'll need a little help from you to play his cards (not having a body is a real bummer).

Each round, you and your opponent will alternate who leads out. Regardless of which one of you does, Graybeard will always play his card second.

On his turn, flip over the top card of his hand and add it to the trick (don't peek unless yer wantin' a hauntin'). Graybeard isn't much of a strategist (a small part of why he's dead) so he doesn't have to follow suit.

When Graybeard wins a trick, he leads out the next one, otherwise, he always goes second. He doesn't bid and doesn't have a score. He plays solely to aggravate others (the big part of why he's dead). When he plays a Tigress it is played as an escape.

An ancient foe has awoken.

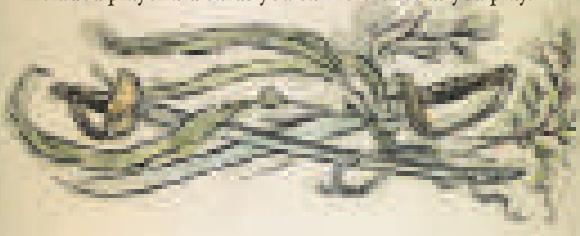
From the deepest part of the ocean, something terrible has risen. The kraken is too much for any with two legs. But another has arisen with a hunger for revenge. The great white whale seems up for the challenge that even I cannot win. Only our wreckage survives in her wake.

I feel it be best we just stay out of their way!

- THE SKULL KING.

YE BE WARNED!

Played the game and want to add more fight to your battles? Think of these added rules as a menu of options for you to choose from. You may include as many or as few as you like. To help you learn the advanced rules, we've included player aid cards you can reference as you play.



Leviathans From The Depths

Be warned that addin' both the Kraken and White Whale can make fer some nefarious battles, the likes of which ye never afore have laid eyes on. Try addin' just one of the two to yer game at first to see how yer crew handles things before addin' 'em both.

Kraken (1): Pirates fear nothin' at all, 'cept fer maybe the Kraken (and their in-laws). When played, the trick is destroyed entirely as the Kraken consumes all. No one wins the trick and the cards are set aside.

The next trick is led by the player who would have won the trick.

White Whale (1): Once hunted by whalers, the White Whale now hunts any vessel that dares cross its path. The White Whale affects both the special suits and numbered suits, in unique ways.

Special cards are destroyed and can't win!

Numbered cards (including trump) turn white with fear!

This means that the **highest numbered card wins** the trick, regardless of the suit. If there is a tie, the first one played is the winner. If only special cards were played, then the trick is discarded (like the Kraken) and the person who played the White Whale is the next to lead.

Example: Cathy leads with the black 2. Ezra plays a pirate. David plays a yellow 14. Lori plays the Skull King. Charlie plays the White Whale. The special cards become escapes. The suit cards lose their color, leaving just their number, meaning that David's 14 wins the trick!

Roiling waters

The Kraken and the White Whale are ancient rivals. When played in the same trick the second one played wins the battle. That card then sets the action to be applied.

Captain's Log: When either of these beasts leads a trick, there is no suit for others to follow.

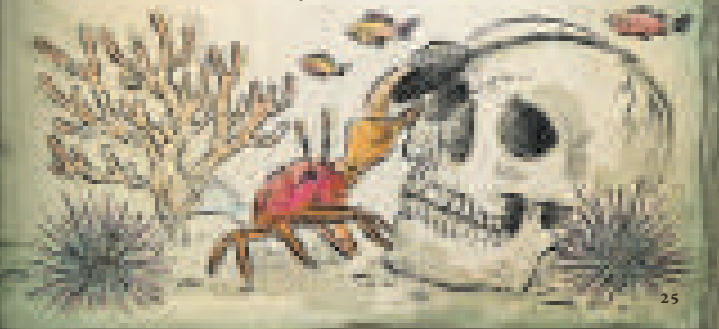
Additional Cards

Loot cards (2): Time to get yerself some treasure me hearties! When you play a loot card, you enter into an alliance with the player who captures it. If both of you bid correctly, you are **each** awarded **20 bonus points**.

Captain's Log: If you lead a trick with a loot card and the cards that follow are all escapes then you would win the trick. No alliance was formed, so no bonus is awarded.

Blank cards (4): You can use these to replace lost or damaged cards, or feel free to make your own custom cards. If you do, be sure to share them with us on Facebook (GrandpaBecksGames) or Instagram. (@grandpa.becks.games)

Please share your game night traditions: Pirate trophy, dressing up as pirates, favorite snacks? Join the Skull King family fun!



Advanced Pirate Abilities

Unlock each pirate's unique skill! To do this, you must first win a trick with that pirate rather than just capturing them. Also, it must be used immediately and does not carry over to the next round. Harry the Giant is the only pirate who's ability may be used after the final trick of a round.

Rosie D' Laney: A galley chef with a temper hot as her pies and cold eyes as blue as the sea.
Ability: Choose any player, including yourself, to lead the next trick.

Bendt the Bandit: An orphan raised by smugglers, Bendt is a trader (and traitor).
Ability: Add 2 cards to your hand from the deck and then discard 2 cards.

Rascal of Roatan: A notorious mercenary and gambler with suspiciously good luck.
Ability: Bet 0, 10, or 20 points. Earn the points if you bid correct, lose them if you fail!

Juanita Jade: Rumored to have mermaid ancestry granting her the gift of divination.**Ability:** Privately look through any cards not dealt that round to see which are not in play.

Harry the Giant: Known to wrestle panthers and crocs for fun, no one dares oppose this man.
Ability: You may choose to change your bid by plus or minus 1, or to leave it the same.

Variable Card Counts

Ready for your voyage? Change how many rounds and how many cards per hand. These are some suggested ideas:

- **Even Keeled:**
  Two rounds each of 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 cards per hand.
- **Skip to the Brawl:**
  One round each 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 each of 9, 7, 5, 3, 1 cards per hand.
- **Past Your Bedtime:**
  One round of 1 card per hand, plus a goodnight hug.

Captain's Log: Be sure to make note of how many cards you'll deal each round, by recording them in the ovals on the left side of the scoresheet under the round numbers.

Have a question?

Grandpa Beck is eager to hear from you.
Grandpa@grandpabecksgames.com
Call or text him directly: 206.498.1959
He loves photos of happy game groups!

Frequently Asked Questions

Visit our website to see our helpful resources:
gbecks.com/sk-FAQ

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Credits

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Copywriting: Jeff Beck, Brent Beck, Cathy Bock, David Bock

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