

# *The Official Rules for*

## Grandpa Beck's

# SKULL KING™



*Grandpa Beck's Game of Scheming and Skulking®*

*2 - 6 players, ages 8+, 30 minute play time.*

## BASIC RULES *(scroll through for Legendary Expansion Rules)*

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

**Captain's Log:** *Haven't played Skull King before? Then I advise that you play a few games with these original rules to learn the basics before you add in the expansion cards. It's best to learn to sail a skiff before a frigate, eh?*

### Overview

The way to sail to victory in Skull King is to correctly predict the number of tricks you will win each round. Players who get their bid right are awarded points; those who win too many or too few tricks lose points. A game lasts ten rounds. The player with the highest score at the end of the game is declared the winner!

The player with the lowest score does the dishes. Don't look at me, that's Grandma Beck's rule.

### Key Terms

**Trick:** *Consists of a single turn of play where each player lays down one card. The player with the highest valued card wins and takes all the cards played. This is called taking, or winning, a trick.*

**Round:** *Comprised of one, 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 the cards dealt have been played. Also known as a hand.*

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

### The Cards

Now that you've got the basic idea, let's teach you about the cards. Understanding the value of the cards you are dealt is essential to accurately predict the number of tricks you'll 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 number would win the trick.

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

The first suit laid down in each trick establishes the suit the rest of the players must also use. If you have no cards of that color in your hand, then you can play a card of another suit. Otherwise, you **must always follow the first suit played**.

Numbered cards that are of a different suit than the first card played are worthless in that trick and will always lose. The exception to this rule is the black Jolly Roger suit (we'll discuss that in a moment).

**Example:** Scarlet, William, and Thomas play the yellow 12, 5, and 8 respectively. Jack doesn't have a yellow card, so he plays a purple 14. Scarlet, who played the yellow 12, wins the trick. Jack's 14 was the highest number but it has no value that trick because it's not the same color as the first card played.

## Jolly Roger Suit

The black cards with the Jolly Roger flag outrank the other three sets of numbered cards. Jolly Roger cards will always beat a card from the other three suits, no matter their value.

They are, however, subject to the same rules as the other numbered cards and can only be used when a player has no cards of the suit currently being played, or when a Jolly Roger card leads out (is the first card played).

**Example:** Scarlet, William, and Thomas play a yellow 12, 5, and 8 respectively. 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 Jolly Roger cards are worth more than the cards from the other three suits.

## Special Cards

Special cards don't follow the rules governing numbered cards. All of the following cards can be played in **any trick**, even when you have a card of the suit currently in play in your hand.

**Pirates (5):** The five Pirate cards are of equal value to each other, but always beat any numbered card, including the black Jolly Roger suit. If more than one Pirate card is played in the same trick, the first one played wins.

**Escape cards (5):** The five Escape cards are the lowest value cards in the game and (nearly always) guarantee that you will lose the trick in which they are played. They sound cowardly, but they sure come in handy when you're trying to avoid winning more tricks than you bid.

**Captain's Log:** In the rare event that every player plays an Escape card in the same trick, the first player to lay down an Escape card wins.

**Skull King (1):** The feared Pirate Captain is the highest-ranking card in the game and beats all other cards, including the other Pirate cards. The Skull King can also earn bonus points for capturing Pirates that are played prior to him in a trick.

**Tigress (1):** The cunning mercenary known as the Tigress knows when to fight and when to flee. You can choose to play her as **either** a Pirate card **or** an Escape card. Declare your decision out loud at the moment the Tigress is played.

## Support Cards

There are quite a few moving pieces in Skull King, so we've included a couple of different cards to help make gameplay easier.

**Bid cards (21):** A key component of Skull King is predicting the number of tricks that you'll win. It can be difficult to remember each player's bid. These cards serve as a reminder.

**Reference cards (6):** The Skull King, Escape, Jolly Roger, Pirates; it's a lot to keep track of! These reference cards will help you keep things straight. Give one to each player at the beginning of the game.

## EXPANSION CARDS

These cards are for Skull King: Legendary Expansion. Put them back in the box for now until you are an experienced player. Expansion cards have a compass rose symbol in the lower left corner.

## Dealing & Bidding

A full game consists of ten rounds. One card is dealt to each player in the first round. In each subsequent round, one additional card is added, ending with ten cards dealt to each player in the tenth round.

Bidding takes place after the cards are dealt at the beginning of each round. Your decision of how many tricks to bid is based upon the value of the cards in your hand. The higher a card's value, the more likely you are to win a trick with it.

When all players are ready, the dealer leads the group in bidding. Players pound their fists on the table in unison three times while chanting, "Yo, Ho, Ho!" On the third pound, each player extends the number of fingers equal to their bid. For bids over five, say the number out loud instead of extending your fingers.

The scorekeeper (pick someone honest who's good at math) records each competitor's bid on the score sheet and each player places a correct bid card in front of them on the table.

## Gameplay

With bidding complete, the player left of the dealer leads out the first trick by playing a card face up in the middle of the table. The first card played each trick will determine which cards other players can play.

### Leading with a Numbered Card

When the first card played is a numbered card (including the Jolly Roger suit), all other players **must follow suit**, playing a card of the same color. You may also play a special card. If a player doesn't have a card of the same suit, any other suit can be played.

### Leading with a Pirate Card

When a trick is lead with a Pirate card (including the Skull King, or the Tigress played as a Pirate), there is no suit to follow. The remaining players can play any card they'd like. Reminder: The first Pirate played in a trick will beat other Pirates played after it, except the Skull King.

### Leading with an Escape Card

When the first card played in a trick is an Escape card (or the Tigress played as an Escape card), the setting of suit is passed to the next player. If that player also lays down an Escape it passes again. If every card played is an Escape card, then the person who played the first one wins the trick.

### Taking Tricks and Continuing Play

The person who plays the highest ranked card wins the trick and gathers the cards into a stack, laying them face-down in front of them. The winning player then plays the first card of the next trick.

Play continues until all the tricks in that round have been played. Complete the round by tallying each player's score. The player to the dealer's left becomes the new dealer. Each round the number of cards dealt increases by one.

## Scoring

You only score points in rounds that you get your bid right. Otherwise, you lose points. There are also opportunities to score bonus points.

### 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 three and wins three tricks earning him 60 points.*

If you capture more or less tricks than you bid, you receive a negative score for the round. You tally -10 points for every trick you were off.

***Example:** Barty bids three, but only wins two tricks, he gets -10 points for the round.*

***Example:** Angela bids two, but instead takes five tricks. She's off by three so she scores -30 points.*

### Bidding Zero

If you bid zero and manage to avoid winning a single trick, you score **+10 multiplied by the number of cards dealt that round**. The more cards dealt, the greater the reward.

***Example:** In the seventh round, seven cards are dealt. Kate bids zero and wins zero tricks. She scores 70 points for the round.*

Zero bids are awesome when they go well, but they are also quite risky. If a player bids zero and then wins one or more tricks, they tally **-10 points per card dealt that round**.

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

### Bonus Points

Players may earn bonus points by performing one of these feats:

- \* Capturing the yellow, green, or purple 14: **+10 points**.
- \* Capturing the black Jolly Roger 14: **+20 points**.
- \* Capturing (a) Pirate(s) with the Skull King: **+30 points per Pirate**.

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

***Example:** Lawrence leads with the yellow 14, Charlotte plays a black 14, and Anne lays down a Pirate card. Morgan then plays the Skull King, winning the trick. He earns +10 for capturing the yellow 14, +20 for capturing the black 14, and +30 for capturing a Pirate.*

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

## Using the Score Sheet

**Name:** Pretty sure you know what goes here

**Round:** Current round number/number of cards to be dealt

**Bid:** Number of tricks bid at the start of the round

**Bid Points:** Points earned for a correct bid, or lost for an incorrect bid

**Bonus Points:** Earned by capturing 14s, or Pirates with the Skull King

*Reminder: You may only earn bonus points with a correct bid*

**Round Points:** Your total score for the round (Bid Points + Bonus Points)

**Running Total:** Previous Running Total + current Round Points

**Captain's Log:** Each score sheet is double-sided. Use the front side for rounds 1-5 then flip it over for rounds 6-10. Print more score sheets at [GrandpaBecksGames.com](http://GrandpaBecksGames.com)

## Conclusion

Thar be the rules. I wish ye luck as ye embark on the grand adventure of many rowdy games of Skull King with yer maties. With a wee bit of practice you'll soon master the strategies ye will need to conquer yer foes and claim victory for yerself.

If'n ye have questions during yer voyage, please don't hesitate to drop me a line by e-mail at Grandpa (at) GrandpaBecksGames (dot) com.

# Skull King: Legendary Expansion

*Welcome mates, this is yer Captain, Grandpa Beck. Afore ye approach these uncharted waters, turn back and learn the rules of the original game. Once ye have a grasp of the basic play, return here to learn the additional rules of the most cunning pirate game that thar be, Skull King: Legendary Expansion.*

## Overview

Skull King: Legendary Expansion introduces several new and rousing elements to an already strategic game. Think of these added rules as a menu of options for you to choose from. You can adopt all of the new rules, or just one or two. You're the captain of this adventure!

## Expansion Cards

All of the new cards in the expansion are special cards. As such, they don't follow the rules governing numbered cards and can be played on any turn, even when you have a card from the suit in play in your hand.

**Mermaids (2):** The two Mermaids, Sirena and Alyra, are the only beings crafty enough to capture the Skull King.

A Mermaid beats all numbered cards, including the Jolly Roger suit, but loses to all Pirates, except the Skull King. A Mermaid played in the same trick as the Skull King **always wins** the trick, even if another Pirate is played.

A bonus of **50 points** is awarded to the player who captures the Skull King with a Mermaid, but only if you get your bid correct for the round.

**Captain's Log:** *If two Mermaids are played in the same trick, the first one wins. If a Mermaid is the first card played in a trick, there is no suit to follow (just like when a Pirate card leads out).*

**Loot cards (2):** Loot cards are a unique type of Escape card. The person who plays a loot card enters into an alliance with the player who captures it. If **both** get their bid correct, they are each awarded 20 bonus points. If a loot card is the first card played, the next card sets suit.

**Kraken (1):** When the mighty and ferocious Kraken is played, the current trick is destroyed entirely. 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 had the Kraken not been played.

***Captain's Log:** If the Kraken leads out, suit is set by the next card played. If it is played after the suit is set, subsequent players must still play a card that follows suit.*

**Replacement Cards (3):** The replacement cards can be employed in a variety of ways. You can use them to replace lost or damaged cards, to create additional copies of your favorite cards, or to make your own custom cards for house rules. You can even make your own Pirate card!

## Advanced Abilities for Pirate Cards

In Skull King: Legendary Expansion all the Pirates, not just the Tigress and the Skull King, have their own unique ability. To unlock a Pirate's ability, you must play, and win a trick with it. The ability is then used immediately following the conclusion of the trick.

***Captain's Log:** Abilities do not carry over from one round to the next. Capturing another player's Pirate does not earn you their ability. Only Harry and the Rascal's abilities may be used in the final trick of a round.*

**Rosie D' Laney:** A galley chef whose temper is as hot as her stew, Rosie is feared by all. Her power allows you to choose any player to lead out the next trick, including yourself.

**Bahij the Bandit:** A smuggler from the far east, Bahij is always looking for a good trade. Bahij's ability lets you draw 2 cards and then discard any 2 cards (which may include those just drawn) face down beside the deck.

**Rascal of Roatan:** The Rascal is a notorious gambler (with suspiciously good luck). His power permits you to wager 10 or 20 points, if you'd like. Get your bid right and you'll win that amount as bonus points. However, if you're wrong you'll lose that many points instead.

**Juanita Jade:** A renowned fortune teller, Juanita can see the future. After capturing a trick with Juanita you may look through all the cards that were not dealt that round. No sharing what you see and don't take too long!

**Harry the Giant:** A giant feared by all for his size and strength, no one complains when Harry cheats (which really annoys the Rascal). Harry's ability allows you to change your bid by +1 or -1, if you so choose.

## Adjustable Rounds

In Skull King: Legendary Expansion you are free to modify how many cards are dealt per round and the number of rounds played in a game.

You can also choose to just play with the standard 10 rounds. Like all the new rules in the Legendary Expansion, it's your call.

Here are a few suggestions, but you can make up your own too!

**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, 5 cards per hand.

**Broadside Barrage:** Ten rounds, 10 cards per hand.

**Whirlpool:** Two rounds each of 9, 7, 5, 3, and 1.

**Past Yer Bedtime:** One round, 1 card per hand, plus a goodnight hug.

After you decide how many cards you'll deal each round, record them in the ovals on the left side of the score sheet under the round numbers (on the score sheet).

### **Odd Encounters in the Deep**

Sometimes when you set out on a journey at sea you come across situations you don't know how to handle. If you were to read the rules carefully, you'd find the way to handle each of these situations, but we'll save you some time and address each one here.

**Winning a trick with the Loot Card:** If you were to lead out a trick with a Loot card and all subsequent competitors played an Escape, you would win the trick. No alliance is formed, but if you get your bid right you'll still earn a 20-point bonus.

**Leading with Kraken followed by all Escape Cards:** Just like the situation above, if you lead out with a Kraken, and the rest of the players lay down Escape cards, you would be the person who would have won the trick had it not been destroyed. As such, you will lead out the next trick.

**Winning the last trick of a round with Juanita, Rosie, or Bahij:** Pirate abilities don't carry from one round to the next. If you win the last trick of a round with Juanita, Rosie, or Bahij, tough biscuits, your power is worthless. Pro tip: avoid waiting until the last trick to play these three Pirates if you want to take advantage of their ability.

*As ye can see, that be loads of new schemes to explore and conquer in the broadened world of Skull King: Legendary Expansion.*

*Mind that ye don't fall in love with a Mermaid, always be on the lookout for the fearsome Kraken, and remember, never agree to play a game o' chance with Harryor that cheatin' Rascal!*

*What are ye waitin' fer? It's time to get Kraken!*

*-Grandpa Beck (A.K.A. Skull King)*

*Still have questions? Please let us know! Email Grandpa (at) GrandpaBecksGames (dot) com.*

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