

Scum is a card game based on the ideals of cutthroat American Capitalism: to wit, the rich get richer, and the poor...well, don't be poor.

Scum works best for four players, but it is possible to play with more. For reasons that will become clear later, you will need at least four to play.

Scum can be played with pretty much any deck of cards that has a definite hierarchy (i.e., Ace is highest, then King, then Queen, and so on down to Two) and two wild cards. For example, I learned to play with a Rook® deck. For the purposes of this presentation, I will assume you're using a standard deck (the kind used to play poker) with two jokers. You can adjust for other decks as necessary. If for some reason you find that you're not playing with a full deck, well, I can't help you.

There are four positions that the players will fill while playing Scum. They are, in descending order of importance and desirability: President, Manager, Worker, and Scum. The object of the game is to rise above your fellow players to become President. Once you have reached that position, your object is to stay there.

A word is in order now about the poor schmuck...er, the player who is Scum. This player is responsible for all the dirty work in the game. Scum has to shuffle and deal the cards between games, and also has to pick up the cards between tricks. In addition, Scum is most likely going to be the target of a lot of abuse during the course of play. So why play? Because, to rephrase the Law of Conservation of Angular Momentum, what goes around comes around. The player who is Scum this game may be President next time around, and vice versa.

The object of each round is to be the first player to get rid of all their cards. This player then becomes President for the next round. The next player to get rid of all their cards is Manager, and the next is Worker. The last one still holding cards--you guessed it--is Scum.

Before the game starts, it will be necessary to determine who will fill what positions for the first trick. How you do this is entirely your prerogative. We usually draw cards at random from the deck, with the highest being President and the lowest being Scum. You can also determine the opening positions alphabetically, by height, by arm wrestling, by Rock-Paper-Scissors, or by any other method you choose. Once the opening roles are determined, the players should sit in a circle--preferably around a table of some sort--in descending order. This will place Scum and President next to each other, by the way. (If possible, try to enhance the mood by having chairs appropriate to each position, such as a La-Z-Boy recliner for the Prez, one of those intolerable metal folding chairs for Scum, and that sort of thing.)

The round begins when all players are seated and all the cards are dealt. In dealing the cards, Scum first deals to Worker, then to himself, then to President, then to Manager, and so on, until all the cards are dealt. The observant reader will note that this means Worker and Scum already have one more card to get rid of than President and Manager. But wait, there's more.

The hierarchy of cards is as follows: Joker is highest, followed by Ace, King, Queen, Jack, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, and 2 as the lowest. I thought I'd mention this now, because after the cards are dealt, Worker has to give the highest card in his hand to Manager. That's right, the highest card, no questions asked. Manager then gives one card she doesn't want (not necessarily the lowest, mind you) to Worker. Now, Scum, before you laugh, you should know have to do the same with President, except you have to give him your two highest cards, and you'll get back two cards the President didn't want.

Now game play begins. The President leads on the first trick; after that, the last player to play on the previous trick leads. The leader will play one or more cards. The next player in line must then beat that play. This is done by playing a higher card or combination of cards. Matching is not enough; a player must play something higher. That is to say, you can't play a 5 if the player before you played a 5. You must play a 6 or higher. The same applies with pairs, triples, and four-of-a-kinds. If that player cannot beat the play, they pass to the next player. They may also pass if they feel it is to their strategic advantage to do so. When all four players have had a chance to play, the trick is over, and Scum clears the table. The last player to lay down a card (or cards) leads the next trick.

It is important to note that a player must always play the same number of cards as the player before him. For example, if one player lays down a 6, the next player must lay down a 7 or higher. If the player lays down three 4's, the next player must lay down three 5's or higher. A single must be beaten with a higher single, a pair with a higher pair, and so on. The only exception is that a single Joker will beat any other play. A Joker will, for instance, beat four Aces. Consequently, when a Joker is played, the trick is over. Players must stick to 'sets'; that is to say, a player can never lay down more than one card with different values. For instance, a player cannot lay down a 5 and a 7 to try to beat a pair of 4's. Any player who attempts to do this should be treated like Scum.

Here is a description of a couple of tricks, just to help you get the concepts down:

President opens the game by playing a 6. Manager follows by playing an 8. Worker plays a 9, and Scum plays a Jack. Scum then cleans up the cards before the others start taunting him.

Scum leads off the next trick with three 6's. President passes, having no triples. Manager has three Jacks but wants to save them for later in the game; she also passes. Worker plays three 9's. Scum is a little slow getting the trick cleared, and Manager says, "Pick it up, Scum!"

Worker plays a pair or 8's. Scum follows with a pair of Queens. President, who has a hand full of singles and is sick of all the multiples being played, throws down a Joker. Manager silently laments the pair of Kings she can't play this trick. Scum cleans up the cards, and President will lead the next trick.

Well, that's that. Now go get a few friends who won't mind a little abuse, and have fun.