

Swords & Dragons™

a fun-filled fantasy card game for 2-10 players

Swords & Dragons™ is a fast-paced card game very popular in the fantasy world of Arduin®. Gnomes, Kobbits and Phraints play Swords & Dragons in the taverns of Arduin, wagering gold coins on the turn of the cards. Now you too can enjoy this fantasy card game based on the works of Dave Hargrave.

Like poker with several unusual twists, Swords & Dragons offers card players a wide variety of play options and outcomes - expect the unexpected.

Played with a fantasy-inspired deck of 108 cards (eight suits of thirteen cards with four Dragon cards), Swords & Dragons will delight fantasy enthusiasts, card players and older children alike.

Emperors Choice does not endorse nor promote gambling, and so references to betting will always be in terms of "chips" (although characters in Arduin may feel free to wager their coppers, silver shillings or gold sovereigns).

For Ages - 8 & up

Number of Players - 2 to 10

The Rules - Only the first two sheets of the rules are needed to play Swords & Dragons. The other pages contain supplementary material.

The Cards - There are eight suits: Swords, Eagles, Skulls, Sceptres, Coins, Chalice, Shields and Talismans. Each suit includes nine "number" cards, three "court" cards (Knight, Queen and King), and one Ace. Cards are ranked in value from highest to lowest as follows; Ace, King, Queen, Knight, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, (Ace). Aces are considered the highest value card, although they may also be treated as a "1" card for purposes of building a Straight. In addition, there are four Dragon cards, which function as special purpose wild cards. All the cards revealed are her "Hand," while the cards revealed during the Showdown are called her "Book."

Special Cards & Suits - The suit of swords is "Trump," the best suit in the game. A Book containing more Swords will beat a similar Book with fewer Swords. The suit Eagles is special, it's cards are considered "Good," representing the forces of Light (i.e., Love, Peace, Compassion). Eagles and Skulls may never be matched together in the same Book since the suit of Skulls is "Evil," representing the forces Darkness (i.e., Hatred, War, Greed). Although Eagles and Skulls may never be matched together in the same Book, either may be combined freely with any other suit. All other suits are considered "Neutral" in outlook and may be matched with all other suits.

Certain cards (like the Ace of Swords Blake Blade or Knight of Eagles Eagle Lance) have a special "sobriquet" or nickname in Arduin. This is indicated on the cards themselves. In standard play these sobriquets have no impact, while some Cultural Variants may attribute great significance to these named cards.

Finally, dragons may be used as wild cards or may be played on a player to force her to discard one or more of her Trove cards (drawn at random).

The Initial Draw - Each player draws one card from anywhere in the deck and reveals it. High card determines the first dealer). Card ranking is Ace (high) and 2 (low).

The Shuffle & Cut - Dealer shuffles the cards and the player on her right cuts them (divides the deck into two or more groups and regroups them).

The Deal - Dealer deals cards, one at a time, beginning with the player on her left and proceeding to the left (clockwise). Each player receives seven cards. The rest of the deck is placed face down on the table. The remaining cards are called the "Draw Pile" or "Talon." The bottom-most is then revealed and placed on the table face up. This is the "Discard Pile" of "Commons." The card on top of the Discard Pile, also know as the "Common Card" is considered to be a part of every players' Hand. Note, the Common Card will change as players discard. After a Showdown ends play, a new Dealer deals the next Hand. The next Dealer is the player to the left of the current Dealer.

The Hand - All the cards a player holds, plus the Common card, comprise her "Hand." Hands are divided into two sections, a "Trove" and the rest of the Hand. Each player designates four cards as her Trove. These cards are protected and may not be taken by other players. All Trove cards are safe from Questing (although a Dragon Wrack still causes one or more cards to be discarded). Players decide which four cards comprise their Trove after they have finished drawing cards that Round (or after having been dealt their initial Hand). Each player's Trove must be set face down in front of them. When not held, the rest of their Hand is placed crossways on top of the Trove.

Within Hand, certain combinations or cards are called "Books." When a "Showdown" occurs and Hands are revealed, the player with the best Book wins.

The Books - Books are combinations of cards which determine who wins the game. Generally the player whose Book contains the greatest number of cards wins. This is called "the Longest Book." If several players have the Longest Book, then the highest quality or "Best Book" among them wins.

Notice that a low quality but longer Book will beat a high quality shorter Book. Between Books of equal length and quality, the Book with the greatest number of Swords wins. If Books are still tied, high card in the player's Hand wins (or next highest if still tied, etc.).

Examples: If player A has a 5-card Flush and player B holds a "Pent" (Five-of-a-Kind), B will win since she has the better of two equally long Books.

Notice though, that if player C has a seven card Straight while player D holds a 5-card Royal Flush, C wins since her Book is longer.

Suppose that player E and player F both hold 5-card Straights, but E's Book contains more Sword cards than F's. In this case, E would win by having more Sword cards (Trump). If both E's and F's Straights have the same number of Sword cards, high card in the Hand (not just the Book) wins.

NOTE: There are a few exceptions to the "longest wins" rule. Since Pairs and Trips are so easy to get, Three-of-a-kind (3 cards) beats Two-Pair (4 cards) and Three-Pair (six cards). Similarly, Four-of-a-Kind (4 cards) beats Two-Trip (6 cards). On the other hand, "Four Wyrms" or holding all four Dragon cards is unbeatable (even by a 13 card Royal Flush of Swords) in standard play.

The following list shows, in ascending order (#1 is lowest quality), Books which are universally recognized throughout the world of Arduin (additional Books are possible in certain Cultural Variants).

#1 High Card. No combination. The highest Swords card wins; if no one has Swords, the highest card wins, or the second higher if tied, etc. Cards rank: A, K, Q, KN, !0, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 (high to low).

#2 Two-of-a-Kind (Pair). A pair of cards of the dame rank (e.g. Two Knights). Between two such Books, the one with the greatest number of Swords cards wins. Among "Pairs" having equal numbers of Swords, the higher ranking Pair wins. If tied, high card wins or second higher if still tied, etc.

#3 Two-Pair. Two pairs of cards having the same rank (e.g., two 8's and two 9's). Of two such Books, the one with the greatest number of Swords cards wins. Between Books containing equal numbers of Swords, the higher ranking Pair wins, if tied the higher ranking second Pair wins. If still tied, the high card wins or second higher if still tied, etc.

NOTE: This Book is an exception to the rule that longest Book wins, since Three-of-a-Kind (three cards) beats Two-Pair (four cards).

#4 Three-Pair. Three pairs of cards having the same rank (e.g. two 4's, two 7's and two Knights). Between two such Books, the one with the greatest number of Swords cards wins. Among Books containing equal numbers of Swords, the higher ranking Pair wins, if tied the higher ranking second Pair wins, and if still tied the higher ranking third Pair wins. If both Books are still equivalent, high card wins or second higher if still tied and so on.

NOTE: This Book is an exception to the rule that the longest Book wins, since Three-of-a-Kind (three cards) beats Three-Pair (six cards).

#5 Three-of-a-Kind (Trip). Three cards of the same rank (e.g. Queens). Of two such Books, the one with the greatest number of Swords cards wins. Between Books having equal numbers of Swords, the higher ranking "Trip" wins. In case of ties, high card wins or second higher if still tied, and so on.

#6 Two-Trip. Two groups of three cards having the same rank (e.g. three 2's and three Queens). Between two such Books, the one with the greatest number of Swords cards wins. Among Books containing equal numbers of Swords, the higher ranking Trip wins, if tied the higher ranking second Trip wins. If still tied, high card wins or second higher if still tied, etc.

NOTE: This Book is an exception to the rule that the longest Book wins, since Four-of-a-Kind (four cards) beats Two-Trip (six cards).

#7 Four-of-a-Kind (Quad). Four cards of the same rank (e.g., four 10's) of two such Books, the one with the greatest number of Swords cards wins. Between Books containing equal numbers of Swords, the higher ranking "Quad" wins. In case of ties, high card wins or second higher if still tied and so on.

#8 Straight. A Book of five cards (or more), all in numerical sequence, but not all of one suit. Aces may count as high (A K Q KN 10) or low (5 4 3 2 A). Of two equal length Straights, the one with the most Swords cards wins. Between equal length Straights containing equal numbers of Swords the higher ranking card wins. In case of ties, high card wins or second higher if still tied, and so on. (In a Book of equal size, Straights always beat Blazes).

#9 Flush. A Book of five cards (or more), all from the same suit but not in numerical sequence. . . Between two equal length Flushes the one with the higher ranking card wins. However a Swords Flush will beat other equally long Flushes regardless of card rank. In case of ties, high card wins or second higher if still tied, and so on. (In a Book of equal size, Flushes always beat Straights (& Blazes).

#10 Five (or more)-of-a-Kind (Quad). Five or more cards of the same rank (e.g., six A's). Between two such Books of equal length the one with the greatest number of Swords cards wins. Among Books having equal numbers of Swords, the higher ranking "Pent" (or "Hext," "Sept," etc.) Wins. In case of ties, high card wins or second higher if still tied and so on. In Books of equal size, #-of-a-Kind always beat Flushes and Straights (& Blazes).

#11 Straight-Flush. A Book of five or more cards, all in numerical order and all in the same suit. Aces may count as high (A K Q KN 10) or low (5 4 3 2 A). Of two equal length Straight-Flushes, the one with the higher ranking cards wins. However, a Swords Straight-Flush will beat other Straight-Flushes regardless of card rank. In case of ties, high card wins or second higher if still tied, etc. In Books of equal size, Straight-Flushes always beat #-of-a-Kind, Flushes, and Straights (& Blazes).

#12 Royal Flush. An Ace high Straight-Flush. Only lower Book (or "Four Wyrms") will beat a Royal-Flush, while an Ace high Swords Straight-Flush is nearly unbeatable. In case of ties, high card wins or second higher if still tied, and so on. In Books of equal size, Royal-Flushes always beat Straight-Flushes, #-of-a-Kind, Flushes and Straights (& Blazes).

#13 Four Wyrms. The is the best Book is standard Swords & dragons: all four Dragon cards. In the standard game nothing beats Four Wyrms.

NOTE: This Book is an exception to the rule that the longest and best Book wins, since Four Wyrms (four cards) beats every other Book.

NOTE: The various denizens of Arduin have their own house rules (or Cultural Variants) for Swords & Dragons, including special combinations of sobriquet cards. The Books are exceptions to the rule that the longest Book wins, since they often beat every other Book. For example, certain human cultures play that "Double Lancers beat all!"

The Bet - Usually, all players ante one chip into the "Pot" before the Deal, that is, each player moves one (or more) chips from her stack to the center of the table, forming the pool for which everyone's playing. Chips once stacked (or bet) cannot be retrieved except by winning the whole Pot (by having the best Book). Individual player's stakes must be kept separate and not combined into a single pile since it is important to know how much each player has bet.

After the Dealer has dealt seven cards to everyone, the player on the Dealer's left has the option to Open (make the first bet) or to Pass. If she Passes, then the player on her left may either Open or pass, and so on until someone Opens or the Dealer Passes. If no one Opens all hands are discarded, everyone antes again into the same Pot, and a new Dealer deals new Hands. When a player opens her first betting Round she places one or more chips in the Pot as her initial bet or "Raise." Players must at least match this bet or else "Fold" (drop out of play and thus forfeit their stakes). After placing her bet the Opening player draws and discards whatever cards are entitled to her depending on her choice of play (see next section).

After the Opening player finishes her Round, the player on her left now gets the opportunity to either "Call" (place a bet exactly equaling the previous bet), "Raise" (place more chips than needed to cover the previous bet), or "Fold" (drop out of the game, discard Hand to the Commons, and forfeit all stakes). By consensus, players may set a limit to Raising or they may put a cap on the total bet. If the player places a bet (Call or Raise), she draws as many cards as her choice allows (see next section.) Then the player on her left plays a Round and so on. Even players who might have Passed initially instead of Opening get to play a Round, but once a player folds she's out of the game.

If everyone but one player Folds, the last player in the game wins the Pot without revealing her cards. Otherwise, betting continues until a player finds herself forced to Raise her own last bet. Instead of betting, the game ends in a "Showdown." At this point all players still actively in the game reveal their best Book. Generally, the longest Book wins, but there are several exceptions.

NOTE: If the Talon ever runs out, the game immediately ends in a Showdown.

The Play - A player who "Raises" or "Calls" has earned the right to draw one or more cards, depending on the option she chooses. Players in their Round may either "Delve," "Retrieve," "Quest" or "Wrack."

Delve - Player discards one card from her Hand face up on the Commons and then draws the top two cards from the Talon. Player's Round ends, play passes to her left.

Retrieve - Player takes the Common card, then discards one card from her Hand face up on the Commons. Player's Round ends and play passes to her left.

Quest - The Questing player asks another player for a certain card or type of card. If the addressed player has that card or type of card, she must hand it over to the Questing player who then gives the addressed player an unwanted card in return. A successful player may continue Questing as long as she gets what she wants. However, if the addressed player doesn't have the requested card or type of card, the Questing player must draw the top card from the Talon, discard a card, and end her Round.

The Questing player may ask for a specific rank provided she has a card of the same rank in her Hand (she may use the Common card), e.g. "Give me a King." She may ask for a specific suit provided she has a card of the same suit in her Hand (she may use the Common card), e.g., "Do you have any Swords?" She may even ask for a specific card, if she already possesses one of the same rank or suit (she may use the Common card), e.g., "Ace of Eagles, please." She may even ask for a Dragon or sobriquet card, provided she personally holds a card of the same rank. Although no one doubts her honor, the Questing player must reveal to everyone a card from her Hand which allows her to request that particular suit, rank or individual card.

If addressed player has that card or type of card, she must surrender it (one card) in exchange for any card the Questing player does not want. Then the Questing player asks the same or any other active player for another card or type of card. As long as she successfully gets cards, her Round continues.

If the addressed player doesn't have the card or type of card requested, she tell the Questing player to "Quest the Talon!" or simply "Quest!" The Questing player then draws the top card from the Talon. If the card drawn does not match what she was asking for, she discards a card face up onto the Commons, her turn ends and play passes to her left. However, if she does not draw the requested card from the Talon, she reveals this card, and continues her turn as if she'd had a successful Quest.

In some circumstances, when the Questing player has been very successful, she may find herself in the position of not wanting to give any of her cards away in exchange, since her entire Hand is already good. In this case, the Questing player may draw one card from the Talon instead of asking another player for cards, but she must then discard a card to the Commons (probably the card just drawn). This ends her turn and play passes to her left.

NOTE: There are two important exceptions limiting what may be requested:

1. If player A takes a card from player B, then B may not ask for the same card back from A in her immediately following Round. The Round after that she may be requested, if still desired. A player may ask for a suit or a rank however (if they already have a card of that suit or rank, or course).
2. A player's Trove is safe from Questing and may not be acquired. Only a Dragon Wrack can cause the loss of Trove cards.

Wrack - Player discards a Dragon card (placing it at the very bottom of the Commons), then she takes one or more randomly drawn Trove card(s) from a player of her choice, discarding them face up on the Commons. Each Dragon card shows how many Trove cards are lost by Wrack. After discarding the chosen player's Trove card(s), the wracking player's turn ends and play passes to her left.

NOTE: A Dragon Wrack is a very powerful weapon and should not be use lightly. For example, it would not be wise to Wrack someone's Trove when you're relying on that Dragon as a wild card in your own Book.

Players go through their Rounds in clockwise sequence, making bets and taking cards, until one of these three events occur:

1. Everyone Folds except one player. That player wins the Pot without revealing her cards.
2. All players Call the last Raise. A Showdown immediately results.
3. The Talon runs out of cards. The player attempting to draw cards merely ends her turn without drawing. A Showdown immediately takes place.

Terms -

ante - the bet made before anyone Opens, usually one chip.

best Book - the highest quality Book, when comparing Books of equal length.

betting - placing chips in the Pot, which allows a Round of cards to play.

betting player - a player who is currently playing a Round.

Blaze - A Book composed entirely of court cards.

Books - combinations of cards determining who wins the Pot. Generally, the player holding the Book containing the largest number of cards wins, while best combination of cards wins between Books of equal size.

Call - making a bet exactly equaling the previous bet.

Common card - upper most card in the Commons or Discard Pile, left face-up and considered part of everyone's Hand.

Commons - a.k.a. the Discard Pile. Discarded cards are placed face-up on top of the Commons. The uppermost card is the Common card.

court cards - Kings, Queens and Knights

Delve - one of the options available to the betting player, discarding one card and drawing two from the Talon.

discarding - placing a card face-up on the Commons or Discard Pile.

Discard Pile - a.k.a. the Commons. Discarded cards are placed face-up on top of the Discard Pile. The uppermost card is the Common card.

Dix - Ten-of-a-Kind Book

Dragon cards - wild cards which may wrack.

Draw Pile - a.k.a. the Talon. Unused portion of the deck from which players draw cards.

Evil cards - suit of Skulls, may not be matched in the same Book with Eagles.

Flush - Book containing cards all from the same suit.

Fold - making no bet. Player withdraws from the current deal, forfeiting all stakes wagered. She then discards her entire Hand onto the Common.

Four Wyrms - Book composed of all four Dragon cards. This Book is unbeatable in the standard game.

Good cards - suit of Eagles, may not be matched in the same Book with Skulls.

Hand - all the cards a player holds, including her Trove. The Common card is also considered a part of every player's Hand.

Hext - Six-of-a-Kind Book.

High card - player's highest ranking card in her Hand.

Longest Book - the Book containing the greatest number of cards.

Non - Nine-of-a-Kind Book.

Number cards - not court cards or Aces (i.e., 2-9)

Oct - Eight-of-a-Kind Book.

Open - make the first bet. Player on the Dealer's left has the first opportunity to Open betting.

Pair - Two-of-a-Kind Book.

Pass - decline to Open the betting.

Pent - Five-of-a-Kind Book.

Pot - all the chips at stake in a deal, consisting of wagers from each player.

Quad - Four-of-a-Kind Book.

Quest - One of the options available to the betting player, asking another player for a card.

"Quest the Talon!" - what a player says when asked for a card she does not possess (or which is safe in her Trove).

Often just "Quest!"

Raise - place more chips in the Pot than are needed to meet the previous bet. A player can never Raise her own last bet, a Showdown results instead.

Rank - the relative value of a card within a suit, A K Q KN 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 (high to low)

Retrieve - one of the options available to the betting player, taking the Common card and then discarding an unwanted one.

Round - a player's turn to bet and draw cards.

Royal Flush - an Ace high Straight-Flush.

Sept - Seven-of-a-Kind Book

Showdown - all players still in the game reveal their Book to determine who wins the Pot.

Sobriquet cards - cards having nicknames among certain cultures. Sobriquets are noted on cards. These cards can have great effect in some cultural variants.

Straight - a Book of five or more cards in sequence, but not all in the same suit.

Straight-Flush - a Book of five or more cards in sequence, and all in the same suit.

Suit - a series of cards having the same common graphic symbol, e.g., the suit of Chalice.

Talon - a.k.a. Draw Pile. Unused portion of the deck from which players draw cards.

Trip - Three-of-a-Kind Book.

Trove - four cards chosen by each player from their Hand. These cards are safe from Questing, but may be Wracked.

Trump - suit of Swords, the best suit. When comparing Books of equal length and quality, the Book containing the most Swords cards win.

Wild cards - cards which may be used to represent any card of the player's choice. Usually just the four Dragon cards, but Cultural Variants may change this. Ordinarily, wild cards may not be used to represent Dragon cards (no Wrack).

Wrack - one of the options available to the betting player, discarding a Dragon card and forcing another player to discard one or more Trove cards.

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