The

PAIRS ™

Companion

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Contents

Introducing Pairs

Pairs is a pub game for 2 to 8 players. We call it a "pub game" because it's fast, simple, portable, and easy to bet on. This booklet contains the basic rules, as well as many other games and ways to play.

Pairs was created in 2013 by veteran game designers James Ernest and Paul Peterson. It's the product of several years of combined experience creating casino- and pub-style games.

In the Spring of 2012, Ernest and Peterson created a 2-player game called "Quicksilver," played with a standard poker deck, in which the goal was to get the best poker hand, taking cards one at a time.

Quicksilver was modified into a custom deck card game, which used a Tarot-style deck, and the rules were modified to include "losing" as well as "winning," based on different combinations of cards.

In the summer of 2013, James Ernest decided to make a "pub game" based on the simple notion that a local pub needed more appropriate games on its shelf.

Ernest and Peterson worked up a basic concept where *losing* was the only relevant outcome. The losing condition was simplified to "getting a pair," and they chose a triangular deck (1x1, 2x2, etc.) so that the odds of pairing were different for every card.

What started as a 2-player game turned out to be great for more players. After several months of playtesting, including analysis by casino mathematicians and lots of traveling, Pairs was ready for prime time.

The design team joined forces with author Pat Rothfuss to give the new game a fictional background, and to bring thousands of visitors to their 2104 Kickstarter campaign. Pairs launched with style, raising more than $300k and unlocking a total of ten extra decks (pictured opposite), each with their own unique art style and variant rules.

Pairs in Fiction

Pairs has been woven into the world of the **Kingkiller Chronicles**, a series of fantasy novels by Patrick Rothfuss, which includes *The Name of the Wind* and *The Wise Man's Fear*.

This world, called Four Corners, already had a great collection of games, like **Tak**, a chess-like strategy game, and **Corners**, a four-player Euchre-like game. Here's Pat's explanation of how Pairs fits in:

Pairs *exists in one form or another throughout the civilized world, from Vintas and the Commonwealth to the farthest corners of the small kingdoms. In his seminal history,* The Chains of Empire, *Etregan speculated that the game originated in Atur, and was spread by conquest, just as Atur brought rule of law, common language, and a standardized system of timekeeping to the lands it subjugated.*

Many scholars disagree, citing as evidence Modegan decks that appear to predate Atur's expansion by more than 400 years. Others point out iconography in Aturan decks that predates the empire and seems to originate in pre-plague Caluptena. The game's origin seems lost to history, with countless regions having their own decks and variations of play.

Pairs also makes a cameo appearance in the **Girl Genius** universe, thanks to a collaboration with Studio Foglio on the **Muses** deck. The Girl Genius-flavored variant game is **Regent**, a sophisticated bluffing game played by the nobles in a historic high court.

1
The Basics

Pairs is a simple press-your-luck card game, using an unusual "triangular" deck. The deck contains the numbers 1 through 10, with 1x1, 2x2, 3x3, and so on.

In the basic game, Pairs has no winner, just one loser. Players score points by catching pairs (or by folding) and the first player with too many points loses.

If you like, you can choose a penalty for the loser. The loser could tell a joke, buy a round of drinks, make a funny noise, or whatever is appropriate for your group.

*All of the games in the book can be played with any Pairs deck.*

How to Play

To Begin: Shuffle the deck and *burn* (discard) five cards, facedown, into the middle of the table. This is the start of the discard pile. Each time you reshuffle, you will burn five cards again. This makes it harder for the players to count the cards.

To start a round, deal one card faceup to each player. The player with the lowest card will go first. (Break ties as described on the page 9.)

Using a Cut Card: A cut card is simply an extra blank card. Keep this card on the bottom of the deck, where it prevents players from seeing the bottom card. When you reach the end of the deck, you can use the cut card to mark where play was interrupted. Place it back on the bottom after you shuffle.

Example: Player A is dealing. She shuffles the deck, puts the cut card on the bottom, and burns five cards into the middle. She then deals one card to each player, faceup, so the table looks like this:
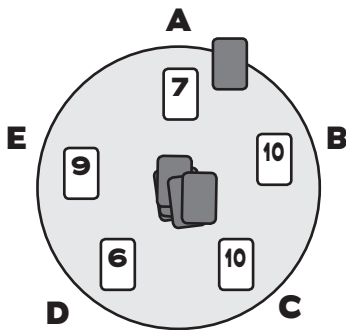
Who Should Deal? One player can deal for the whole game, or the role of dealer can pass around the table. The dealer's position doesn't really matter, since the starting player is always determined by the low card.

Target Scores				
The losing score depends on the number of players:				
Players: 2 3 4 5 6+				
Losing Score: 31 21 16 13 11				
(The formula: Take 60 points, divide by players, then add 1.)				

On Each Turn: On your turn, you have two choices: You may *hit* (take a card), or *fold*. If you catch a pair, or fold, the round is over and you score points. If not, play passes to the left.

Pairing Up: When you hit, you're hoping not to get a pair (any two cards of the same rank). If you pair up, you score that many points. For example, if you catch a pair of 8's, you score 8 points. Keep one of those cards, faceup, to track your score.

Folding: You can surrender (fold) instead of taking a card. When you do this, you take *the lowest card in play* and keep it for points. You may choose this card from all players' stacks, not just your own.

Folding can be better than hitting, depending on the odds of catching a pair, but it's up to you to decide when to do it.

Ending the Round: As soon as one person catches a pair or folds, the round is over. Discard all the cards in play, facedown into the middle, and deal another round.

Players keep their scoring cards aside, faceup. These cards will not return to the deck until the game is over.

Reshuffling: When the deck runs out, reshuffle the discards. Pause the game, shuffle, and resume where you left off. Remember to burn five cards each time you shuffle.

Losing the Game: There is no winner, just one loser. The game ends when one player reaches the target score (see the Target Scores chart above). For example, in a 4-player game, the loser is the first player to score 16 points.

Examples of Play

Take a look at the example game on page 6. The full names of the players are Angie, Bob, Carlos, Delia, and Echo (A, B, C, D, and E). Here's an example showing the first few turns of that game.

Delia is First: Because she has the lowest card, a 6, Delia will take the first turn. Her choices are to *fold for an automatic 6 points*, or to take a *hit*, and *risk* getting 6 points.

Obviously, she takes a hit. (This is usually an obvious choice on the first turn, unless you start with multiple cards, due to a tie breaker.) Delia's new card is an 8, so she avoided pairing up. Hooray!

Echo's Turn: The turn passes to the left. Echo can hit her 9, or fold for 6 points. Folding for 6 seems costly, and hitting the 9 isn't all that risky. (There are only eight 9's left in the deck.) So Echo takes a hit, and catches a 3.

Angie's Turn: Angie is next. She could now fold for 3 points, since Echo has a 3, but she decides to take a hit. She catches a 9.

Bob's Turn: Bob has a 10. He could fold for 3 points, but he decides to take a hit. He gets a 5.

Carlos' Turn: Carlos is a cautious player. Rather than risk pairing his 10, Carlos folds, and takes the 3. Everyone's cards are then discarded, facedown in the center, but Carlos keeps Echo's 3 for three points. (If Carlos had taken a hit, rather than folding, and if he had paired his 10, he'd get 10 points instead of 3.)

Dealing the Next Rounds: Angie keeps dealing until she reaches the bottom of the deck, or until someone loses the game.

When it's time to reshuffle, Angie shuffles only the discards (not the cards in play, and not the cards that have been kept for score). After shuffling, she burns five cards, then resumes dealing wherever she left off.

The game continues until one player scores 13 points.

Breaking a Tie for Low

Many Pairs games, including the basic game, use the same method to break ties for starting card. If two or more players are tied for low, deal additional cards to the tied players, and use those cards as tie breakers.

If the tiebreakers are tied, deal more cards until one player is clearly going first.

If someone gets a pair in this process, discard the paired card and deal a replacement. You can't be knocked out by a pair on the deal, but you can sometimes wind up with several extra cards!

Example: In the example below, there is a tie for low. A tie breaking card is dealt to players B and C. Player B will go first.

	A	B	C	D	E
First Cards:	10	4	4	10	7
Tie Breaker:		8	9		

Some Hints for Dealing

As dealer, your job is to keep the game moving smoothly. You can help by calling out the cards as they are dealt, and making sure that every player acts in the right order.

As mentioned before, it doesn't matter if one person deals all the time, or if the deal passes around the table. The first player is always determined by the low card, and that's fair no matter where the dealer sits.

To keep it fair, be sure to deal cards in a *consistent order*. Start with the player on your left each time, and deal clockwise around the table. Deal tiebreaking cards in the same order.

Simple Variants

In the vein of "dealer's choice" poker, here are a few simple variations on the basic game of Pairs. They include Continuous Pairs, Pieces of Eight, and the Calamities variant.

These are a great starting point, but we hope you will make up your own variations on basic Pairs, and share them with us!

Continuous Pairs

Continuous Pairs is a slightly more strategic version of the core game. The game is nearly the same as basic Pairs, except that when a player pairs up or folds, *only that player's cards are discarded*. Everyone else keeps their cards in play, and that player is still in, but with an empty stack.

This game is basically one long round, instead of several short ones.

There are a couple of rules clarifications for Continuous Pairs:

1: When you fold, you may take *any card in play*. (It doesn't have to be the lowest card.)

2: When you have no cards, you must *always hit*.

Continuous Pairs is included alongside the basic rules in all Pairs decks, because we feel it's a game that everyone should play. The decisions about when to fold, and whose cards to take, can get pretty interesting.

As a simple example, suppose your lowest card is a 3, and the lowest card among the other players is a 4. All other cards in play are 7 or higher.

If you fold by taking your own 3, that leaves the 4 in play.

If you fold by taking the 4, this discards your hand, removing both the 3 and 4 from play, and leaving your opponents in a trickier spot. Now their best choice for folding is 7 points, making them more likely to hit instead.

Pieces of Eight

*This simple variant was introduced in the **Pirate** Deck by Brett Bean. It can be played with basic Pairs or Continuous Pairs, and probably in other games as well. We're especially curious if it works in Port!*

8's are special. If you have an 8, instead of taking a hit, you can discard the 8 and take two cards.

Note: If the first card makes a pair, knocking you out, you don't deal the second. This is only relevant in Continuous Pairs.

Calamities

*The **Commonwealth** deck depicts seven Calamities on the 7's (Fire, Death, Strife, etc.). That makes that deck ideal for the Calamities variant, though you could play it with any deck.*

In this Pairs variant, the Calamities *attract attention*. They have two rules that keep the focus on whoever gets them:

1: 7's are lower than 1's when determining who goes first.

2: If you receive a 7, the turn *stays on you*. (In *Continuous*, this is true even when the 7 gives you a pair, so you will discard your cards and immediately receive another card.)

It's rumored that the Calamities cards are actually based on the seven Chandrian, a group of legendary evil beings. But you'd never catch anyone in the Four Corners talking about it!

Port

*Port was introduced in the **Pirate** deck, illustrated by Brett Bean. Port is similar to Pairs, but with the added option to lock your hand.*

Players: 2 to 7
Equipment: A Pairs deck and a way to keep score.

Port is played in rounds, keeping score after each round. Points are *good*; the first player to score 21 points wins.

To Begin: Shuffle the deck and burn five cards. (You can deal several rounds from the same deck, as in Pairs.)

Each Round: Deal each player one card faceup. The low card will go first, with ties broken as in Pairs.

Each Turn: On your turn, you may either take a hit, or *lock* your stack. If you lock, you will receive no more cards in this round. If you hit, you are trying to get more points without getting a pair. A pair busts you, and you get no points at all.

The round continues until everyone has locked or busted.

Scoring: The player who has the *most total card points* in her stack (adding all the cards together) scores N game points, where N is the number of players. (For example, 4 points in a 4-player game.)

The next highest total scores N-1 game points, and so on, down to 1 game point for the lowest valued stack (if no one busted).

Players who busted get no points. If there is a tie for any level, both players receive the higher amount.

For example, in a 5-player game, the stacks are 23, 22, 22, 17, and bust. These players earn 5, 4, 4, 2, and 0 game points.

After the round is over, discard all the cards and deal again, and keep playing until a player scores 21 points or more. If there is a tie (people tied with more than 21 points), those players play one more round.

2
Faceup Games

Pairs is unusual among card games in that players have no secret information.

We call a collection of faceup cards a "stack," to distinguish it from a "hand" of facedown cards. Games with hidden cards are found in the following two sections.

This section contains several variants on the faceup Pairs game. It just so happens that all of them can be played for money.

You don't have to play for real money to make these games fun. Instead, just keep score with chips, and see who has collected the most at the end of the night.

Starboard

*Starboard is similar to **Port**, but players are wagering on a common hand. It was introduced in the **Pirate** deck, with art by Brett Bean.*

Players: 2 to 7
You Need: A Pairs deck, chips or coins for gambling, and a "button" or special coin to designate the first player.

To Begin: Each player antes 1 coin into the pot. The player with the button acts first. If this is the first game, give the button to a random player; otherwise, it passes one seat to the left after each game.

Deal two cards into the middle of the table. This is the start of one hand of cards that everyone will play. If the first two cards are a pair, discard one of them and replace it.

Each Turn: In turn, starting with the button, players may either *draw* or *lock*.

Draw: To draw, pay 1 coin into the pot. Deal a card to the hand, faceup. If this pairs the stack, you *bust* (lose), but the game continues. *Discard the paired card*, and drop out.

Lock: Declare that you are locked. When a player locks, any players who locked with *fewer cards* are knocked out. To win the pot, you must lock with the *highest number of cards*.

Ending the Game: The game ends when every player busts or locks. (If you are the only player left, you lock.) The pot is split among all players who locked with the highest number of cards. (Unlike in Port, the card points are irrelevant.)

Odd Coins: If the pot does not divide evenly, leave any odd coins for the next pot.

Gambling Rules:

*These basic gambling variants can be used with Basic or Continuous Pairs.*

Seattle Rules: This is the simplest. At the end of the game, the loser pays *one coin to every player*.

Tacoma Rules: In Tacoma, the loser pays a predetermined amount (for example, 6 coins) to the player with the *lowest score*. Tied players split the prize. If there are odd coins, leave them in the pot for the next game.

Note: We suggest 6 coins for this penalty because the award is often split between several players, and 6 is divisible by 2 and 3. You'd have an even easier time splitting pots if you played for 12. Or maybe 60!

Olympia Rules: In Olympia, the loser pays the player(s) with the lowest score, as in Tacoma, but the penalty is equal to *the difference in those players' scores*. This makes each point more interesting. *(Note: This sounds like more money than the last two variants, but you can just play for smaller stakes!)*

Portland Rules: Portland works like Olympia, but in Portland the loser pays *every player* the difference between their scores. This keeps all scores interesting until the very end!
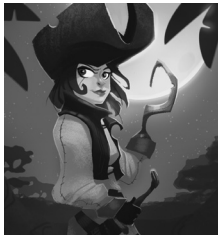
Rocket

Rocket is a casino version of Pairs, in which each player makes a separate bet in a head-to-head game against the dealer. In a home game, the role of dealer passes to the left after each round.

*Rocket was introduced in the **Barmaids** deck, with art by Echo Chernik.*

Players: 2 to 7 (including one dealer)
You Need: A Pairs deck, and chips or coins for gambling.

Flow of Play: Rocket is structured as a casino table game, like blackjack. All players are playing against the dealer (not each other), and the dealer plays by fixed rules.

In a home game, players should take turns being the dealer. There is a slight advantage for the dealer, so the game is only fair when the deal passes around the table.

The Deck: You can play Rocket with a single Pairs deck, or up to 8 Pairs decks shuffled together. The deck should be reshuffled when approximately 20% remains.

The Bet: To begin, each player must place a bet. Different players can bet different amounts. A bet *must be divisible by 10 units*, because all payouts will be based on 1/10 of the bet. The dealer agrees to cover bets of any size, up to a maximum bet agreed upon by all players.

The Starting Deal: Deal one card faceup to each player, and then to the dealer. Play begins on the dealer's left.

Using a Button: Casinos may wish to start each hand with the low card, rather than on the dealer's left. In this case, use a button to designate the starting position, and break ties by choosing the player closest to the left of the previous button (rather than by dealing an extra card).

Under these rules, the dealer still acts last.

Player's Turn: Each player is playing against the dealer only. In turn, players may either *fold* or *hit*. All players act before the dealer.

Folding: When you fold (similar to *surrender* in blackjack), you are paying to get out of the game. Pay the dealer a fraction of your bet, which is 1/10 of the total bet multiplied by the lowest card in either *your stack* or *the dealer's*.

For example, if your bet is 20 coins, and the lowest card between you and the dealer is a 4, you can fold by paying 2 x 4 = 8 coins.

You retrieve the remainder of your bet.

Hitting: When you hit, you are staying in, and trying not to get a pair. Take one card, faceup. If you don't pair up, you are safe. If you get a pair, you lose, and must pay that number, multiplied by 1/10 of your bet. For example, if you have bet 20 coins and get a pair of 8's, you pay 2 x 8 = 16 coins.

Dealer's Turn: The dealer always acts last, and plays by a different set of rules:

Dealer Must Hit: The dealer *always hits* (she cannot fold).

Dealer Pair: When the dealer catches a pair, she pays all surviving players that amount, multiplied by 1/10 of *their bet*.

For example, if the dealer catches 7-7, and your bet was 50, the dealer pays you 5 x 7 = 35 coins. (You also keep your bet.)

Death Card: A 3 is *sudden death* for the dealer. The dealer loses immediately if she gets a 3, even on her first card. This pays all bets at 3/10 (as if the dealer caught a pair of 3's). *Note: A 3 is not lethal to players, only the dealer.*

Continuing: If the dealer doesn't pair up or catch a 3, play resumes with the first player. The game continues until all players either catch a pair or fold, or until the dealer pairs up or catches a 3.

Blackstone

Blackstone is a tough-as-nails gambling game, which was introduced in the **Modegan** deck, with art by Shane Tyree. It's rumored to predate basic Pairs in the world of the Kingkiller Chronicles. In fact, it's just a super-strange way to play Pairs.

Blackstone is an aggressive contest, like a game of "chicken" played with money.

Players: 2 to 8

You Need: A Pairs deck, and chips or coins for gambling.

Summary: 10's are the "black stones," and everything else is "white stones." Players are trying not to draw a *pair of black stones*. Each round is a self-contained, separate game. Your goal is to finish with more money than you started with.

Setup: Each player *antes* 5 coins. Leave each player's ante in front of them, not in the pot, so the dealer can easily see who is still in the game. When a player is knocked out, her ante goes into the pot.

To Begin: Shuffle the deck and deal one card to each player. The lowest card will go first. As in basic Pairs, if there is a tie for low card, deal more cards to those players until the tie is broken.

If anyone catches *more than one 10* in this process (which is rare), you must return the extra 10's to the deck and reshuffle after you determine who is going first. Since other pairs don't matter, all other pairs you deal are simply ignored.

After determining who goes first, bring all white stones (all cards that are not 10's) into the center of the table, arranging them so that they can be easily counted. It helps to stack them in two rows, using bunches of five, as shown in the diagram on the next page.

Players keep only their black stones. Collecting two black stones will knock a player out, and ends the game.

Turns: On your turn, you may either *take cards* or *fold*.

Taking Cards: If you take cards, you must take *at least as many* cards as the previous player. (The first player must take at least one card, but may take more if he wishes.)

If a player collects two 10's, that player loses, and the game is over. That player pays 1 coin to the pot for every white stone that has been dealt, and the surviving players split the pot.

Folding: If you fold, you drop out of the game. Pay an amount equal to *half the white stones in play, rounding up*, into the pot. Your ante also goes into the pot. For example, if you fold when there are 15 white stones in the center, your penalty is your ante, plus another 8 coins (which is half of 15, rounding up).

Sorting the white stones: Since the fold cost is half the white stones (rounding up), keep them in two rows so that half is easy to figure. Here they are being grouped into piles of 5 cards. The fold cost here is 8 coins.

Folding *does not end the game*, unless there is only one player left, in which case the remaining player takes the pot.

Ending the Game: The game ends when someone gets a pair of 10's. After she pays her penalty, the pot is split evenly among all the surviving players, and any odd coins remain in the pot for the next game.

About the Muses

*In the world of **Girl Genius**, the Muses are famous and powerful clanks (a bit like robots). They were created as advisors and companions to royalty, many centuries ago.*

*The Muses deck, according to **Phil** and **Kaja Foglio**, features modern interpretations of what these historic clanks might have looked like.*

*The Muses deck includes the rules for **Regent**, in both a traditional 2-player form, and a modern version that can accommodate up to 6 players. Both are sophisticated bluffing games that are played for money, though it is considered improper to refer to them as "gambling." Aficionados prefer to use the term "tracking score."*

3
Secret Hands

This section contains several Pairs variants that use facedown cards.

Secret information makes these games highly strategic, and leads to great opportunities for deception and bluffing.

As in the previous section, all of these games can be played for money. Of course, you don't have to play for real money, but it still helps if you use chips to keep score.

Hawthorn

Hawthorn *is a game like Pairs, but using a hand of cards. Players alternate taking cards from their own hands, and the deck. It feels a bit like poker, even though there is no betting.*

Hawthorn was introduced in the **Faen** *Deck, with art by Nate Taylor.*

Players: 2 to 6
You Need: A Pairs deck, chips or coins for gambling, and a "button" or special coin to designate the first player.

To Begin: Everyone *antes* one coin into the pot. Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of five cards to each player, facedown.

The First Card: Each player chooses a starting card, and these cards are revealed simultaneously. After that, play starts with the low card, and proceeds clockwise around the table.

If there is a tie for low card, break the tie by dealing more cards from the deck, discarding and replacing any paired cards, as in Pairs.

Give the first player the button. Every round will begin with this player, or to this player's left, if she drops out. This is important because the rules of play change on alternate rounds, and it's easier to remember that the round type changes each time the play reaches the button.

There are two kinds of rounds, called *deck* and *hand* rounds. The first round will be a *deck round*.

Deck Rounds: In a deck round, play proceeds roughly as it does in Pairs. Players may opt to *hit* (take one card from the deck), or *fold*.

If you fold, rather than scoring points, you must *pay coins* into the pot. The price of folding is the value of the lowest card in play. (Turn your cards facedown to show that you are out.)

If you hit, you are hoping not to get a pair. If you do, you are out, and you pay a penalty equal to the value of the pair. For example, if you are knocked out by a pair of 8's, you pay 8 coins into the pot, and you are out.

Hand Rounds: Once the action returns to the first player, the rules change. In a hand round, you will play a card from your hand, rather than taking one from the deck. The rules are the same for folding and pairing, so of course you will play an unpaired card if you can, and you will fold if you can't.

Play continues, alternating between Deck and Hand rounds, until only one player remains. That player wins the pot.

Strategy: The rank of your starting card will determine whether you go first, and it will also affect your odds of pairing up on the first round. If you'd rather not catch a pair, play low. If you'd rather not go first, play high.

Each time you play a card from your hand, you can reduce the price of folding (for yourself and everyone else) by playing a lower card than is currently in play.

And note that the price of folding can go up, since cards leave play when their owners go out.

You'll need to play Hawthorn a few times to see how it works. There is some strategy and tension, and even some good opportunities for bluffing.

Goblin Poker

Goblin Poker is similar to Hawthorn, but the rules for distributing cards are considerably more chaotic. Goblin Poker was introduced in the **Goblin** Deck, illustrated by Pete Venters.

Goblin Poker is a crazy screw-your-neighbor gambling game. In terms of rules, it actually has very little in common with poker.

Players: 3 to 8
You Need: A Pairs deck and coins or chips for gambling.

Setup: To start the game, each player *antes* one coin. This is the beginning of the *pot*. Shuffle and deal a hand of six cards to each player.

The First Card: Each player chooses one card from his hand in secret. These cards are revealed together. This card becomes the start of your faceup stack. The lowest card will go first.

If there is a tie for low card, the tie is broken with cards from the deck, exactly as in basic Pairs.

Each Round: Players now take turns *pitching* or *folding*, starting with the lowest stack (defined below) and going clockwise.

Defining "Lowest Stack": The identity of "lowest stack" can change frequently, each time cards enter and leave play. It's always the stack with the single lowest card, with ties broken by the second lowest card, and so on.

An extra card is lower than no card at all, so 2-3-6 is lower than 2-3. If there is a perfect tie, even mid-game, you must break it with more cards from the deck. As in Pairs, discard and replace tie-breaker cards that form a pair.

Each Turn: On your turn, you may either *fold*, by paying coins into the pot, or you may *pitch* one card. After everyone has done this, the pitched cards are shuffled and distributed to the players, described below.

> *Folding:* Pay a number of coins into the pot equal to the value of the smallest card in play. Turn all your cards facedown, and you are out of the game.
>
> *Pitching:* Choose one card from your hand and discard it into the middle of the table, facedown.

After each player has acted, there will always be a number of pitched cards equal to the number of players who are still in.

Shuffle the pitched cards and deal them to the remaining players, starting with the lowest stack and proceeding to the left.

As you deal these cards, if any player catches a pair, she is out of the game. She also pays pay a penalty into the pot. The cost is equal to the value of the paired card. For example, if you catch a pair of 8's, you pay 8 coins to the pot.

Note that players are eliminated *in sequence*, so if only one player remains alive, that player wins, even if he was about to catch a pair.

Moving Forward: If only one player remains in the game, that player wins, and takes the pot.

If more than two players are still alive, play another round. There can be as many as five rounds, since you start with six cards.

If multiple players survive the final round, those players split the pot, leaving any odd coins for the next game.

Monster

*Monster is a Pairs game based on the best dealer's choice poker game of all time, **Frankenstein**. Monster doesn't work exactly the same, since this isn't poker. But it's got a bit of the same flavor.*

*Monster was introduced in the **Shallow Ones** deck, illustrated by John Kovalic.*

Players: 4 to 8
You Need: A Pairs deck and coins or chips for gambling.

Summary: Monster is a self-contained gambling game, like poker, although a single game can take several rounds. The deal passes to the left after each game (when the pot clears). This means that the same player can act first for many rounds. This is balanced out over multiple games.

To Begin: Start by paying an *ante* into the pot. If you have 4 or 5 players, the ante is 2 coins. With 6 or more, the ante is 1 coin. (The ante is paid only on the first round of every game).

Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of six cards to each player. The player on the dealer's left will act first.

On Each Turn: Each player acts once, in turn. On your turn, you may *discard* zero to three cards, or *fold*. You are *not allowed* to keep a hand that includes a pair. You may want to fold some other hands as well, depending on circumstances.

Your discards go facedown into a pile in the middle, which becomes the Monster's hand. Folded cards *do not* go to the Monster; they are completely out of play.

The Showdown: After each player has acted, there is a showdown for best hand. Then, the *high hand* must compete against the Monster.

> *Definition of High Hand:* Any player hand that contains a Pair is a losing hand, and can't be kept for the showdown.
>
> All hands in the showdown will be compared by highest card, then second highest card, and so on. The best player hand is 10-9-8-7-6-5. A card is better than nothing, so a hand with 10-8-7-4 is better than just 10-8-7.
>
> This is similar to comparing poker hands for high card, except that there is no limit on the number of cards that can play, and it doesn't matter if your cards are in sequence.
>
> The Monster uses the same rules, but it *ignores pairs*. Treat the Monster as if it had only one card of each rank.

When a player faces the Monster, he *must beat it* to take the pot. Otherwise, the player loses, pays 5 coins, and is out of the game. (The Monster beats the player in a perfect tie.)

Moving Forward: If no one beats the Monster, shuffle and play another round with the surviving players. Players who fold, or who lose to the Monster, are out. The game ends when someone beats the Monster, or when only one player is left.

Ties: Two players who beat the Monster with exactly the same hand will split the pot. Two players who are exactly tied, but lose to the Monster, must each drop out and pay the 5 coin penalty, unless they are the only two players remaining, in which case they pay 5 coins but *play another round*.

Strategy: In the first few rounds, you may want to "duck," playing low hands and trying *not* to fight the Monster. As players leave the game, it becomes easier to fight for the pot. You'll have to experiment with different strategies as your group learns the flow of the game.

Regent

__Regent__ is a classic bluffing game from the Girl Genius universe, designed for two players. There is a "modern" version for 3 to 6 players, described below.

Regent was introduced in the __Muses__ deck, with art by Phil Foglio and Cheyenne Wright.
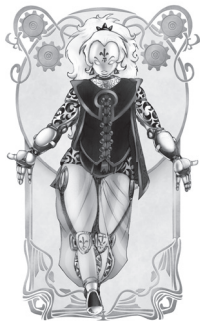
Players: 2
You Need: A Pairs deck, and coins or chips for tracking score.

Setting Up: Shuffle the deck and burn five cards, as in Pairs. You can deal to the bottom of the deck, to minimize shuffling, and then recycle the discards, exactly as in Pairs.

Each Round: To begin each round, deal each player a hand of three cards: two facedown, and one faceup.

The player with the lowest upcard will go first. Break ties by dealing more cards from the deck, exactly as in Pairs.

Each Turn: On your turn, you have the following five choices: You may *draw*, *attack*, *gift*, *fold*, or *see*.

Draw: Take a card from the deck into your hand, facedown.

Attack: Deal a card from the deck into your opponent's stack, faceup. You *don't* want to create a pair with this move.

If you deal your opponent a faceup pair, you lose the round, and pay them a number of coins equal to the value of the pair. For example, you lose 8 coins for dealing a pair of 8's.

Gift: Play a card from your facedown hand into your opponent's stack, faceup. You can't give your opponent a faceup pair, so you may only play cards that *do not match* your opponent's upcards.

Fold: Withdraw, and pay your opponent the value of the lowest face-up card. This ends the round.

See: Reveal your opponent's facedown cards. If they have a pair, including both up and down cards, you win, and collect the value of the pair. (If they have multiple pairs, they pay for just the highest pair.) If they do not have a pair, you lose, and pay them the value of their *highest card*.

Note: You can't see a player who has no facedown cards, since this would be an automatic loss.

Ending the Round: The round ends when someone catches a pair, or folds, or when one player sees the other. Whatever the reason, pay the penalty as described above, and then play another round.

Strategy: You need to clear your hand of pairs, and to catch your opponent with a pair before they catch you. Once players understand the basic flow of the game, bluffing becomes a big factor. This will become apparent after you play a few rounds.

Regent for 3-6 Players

Basics: The basic options are the same as two-player Regent. However, the turn does not always pass to the left.

If you draw or fold, the turn passes to the left. If you attack, gift, or see someone, the turn passes to that player. (If they are knocked out, it moves to the left from there.)

Losers are knocked out, their cards are removed from play, and the game continues until only one player remains.

If you attack someone and they catch a pair, that paired card is discarded, *and you are out*. Pay that player the value of the pair. If you see your target and catch them with a pair, they pay you, and they drop out. If they do not have a pair, their cards remain faceup. You pay them, and drop out.

If you fold, put your penalty into the center. This will go to the last surviving player.

Troll Guts

*With a similar name, it should be no surprise that **Troll Guts** is in the same family as **Goblin Poker**. One big difference: you can't fold, so you'll have to die by catching a pair. **Troll Guts** was introduced in the **Troll** Deck, with graphics by James Ernest.*

Players: 3 to 6
You Need: A Pairs deck, and coins or chips for gambling.

Setup: Each player *antes* one coin. Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of 5 cards to each player. Deal one more card faceup in front of each player. The low card will go first. Break ties as you would in Pairs.

Players must now *stack their downcards* in the order they want them to be revealed. Once you arrange your cards, you can't rearrange them (though you can still look).

Each Turn: Starting with the low card and proceeding to the left, players may either *Draw*, *Steal*, or *Buy*. Each action gets you a single faceup card.

Draw: Take a card from the deck (faceup).
Steal: Take the top card of anyone's facedown stack (faceup).
Buy: Pay a coin into the pot, and take the top card of your own facedown stack (faceup).

If your new card gives you a pair, you lose. Pay the value of the pair into the pot. For example, if you catch a pair of 4's, you pay 4 coins. When you are knocked out, turn all your cards facedown.

Winning: The pot goes to the survivor. There is no folding, so you're always going to win the pot, or die with a pair.

4
Bidding Games

In a departure from most other Pairs variants, the Bidding Games collection doesn't have anything to do with avoiding pairs.

Instead, players bid with cards in their hands, to pick up or score other cards.

Many of these games share a common ancestor, a card game written by James Ernest and Dave Howell called **Lamarckian Poker***, which is itself descended from a traditional card game called* **Casino***.*

Sweep

Sweep is a bidding game for 3 to 6 players. Each round, players will play cards from their hand to capture other cards from the center of the table. At the end of the game, the player who collects the most cards in each rank will score points for that rank.

*Sweep was introduced in the **Commonwealth** Deck, illustrated by Shane Tyree.*

Players: 3 to 6

You Need: A Pairs deck, and a way to keep score.

Setup: Shuffle and deal a hand of five cards to each player.

Each Round: Deal five cards into the center of the table, face-up. The round proceeds in two halves, *play* and *capture*.

On the first round, start with a random player. On subsequent rounds, start with the player who took the last card on the previous round.

Play: In turn, each player plays one card from their hand, faceup onto the table. All cards are played before the next step.

Capture: In ascending order, these cards will *capture* cards from the middle. Cards that you capture go *into your hand*.

First, the *lowest card* takes all cards of the *highest rank*. For example, if the lowest card is a 4, and the highest cards in the center are two 9's, then that player picks up the 9's.

Next, in ascending order, the remaining cards will capture all cards *lower than themselves*.

After each card captures, it falls into the center, where it can be captured by higher cards.

Ties: If two or more cards of the same rank are played, those players *take turns* capturing single cards, starting with the player who played first.

These players will divide their targets roughly evenly, but players who go last will often get fewer cards, or even nothing at all. So be cautious when playing a card that matches someone else's card!

After all captures are resolved, discard the cards that are left in the middle. Deal five new cards from the deck into the middle, and play another round. Repeat this until the deck is exhausted, and then score.

Scoring: For each rank of cards, the player who has collected the most cards of that rank scores that many points. (Points are good.) For example, you score 5 points if you have collected the most 5's. If players are tied for most cards, they each score the full value for that rank. *Hint: Set aside one card of each rank as you score it, to help track your total.*

Option: You can keep score over a longer game. If you do, the winner is the first player to reach 150 points.

Kitty

Kitty is a bidding game originally designed for four players. The basic goal of Kitty is to score points by winning bids and collecting sets of cards. There are several ways to play Kitty, but we'll start with the four-player version.

Kitty was introduced in the Princess and Mr. Whiffle Deck, illustrated by Nate Taylor.

Players: 4
You Need: A Pairs deck.

To Begin: Shuffle the deck and deal a "kitty" of 7 cards, facedown in the middle of the table. Deal out the remainder of the deck to all players.

On Each Round: The game will play in seven rounds, one for each

card in the kitty. To start each round, turn over the top card of the kitty. This card is the "target."

Pass: First, each player chooses one card from his hand and passes it to the left.

Play: Next, each player plays a *bid* card, facedown. When all four bid cards are played, reveal them.

Capture: The player who played the *lowest* bid will take the target, adding it to his hand. Exception: If the lowest bids are *tied*, they are ignored, and the *next lowest card* wins the target.

If there are no unpaired cards, *no one takes the target*.

Exception: *The 1 works differently. Although it is guaranteed to win the target, when you take a card with the 1, you must **give the target to another player**.*

After the capture, all four bid cards are discarded (removed from play). If all bids are tied, the target is also discarded.

You will play seven rounds, and then score the game.

Scoring: The player with the most cards in each rank scores the value of that rank. For example, whoever has the most 8's scores 8 points. If there is a tie for most cards, both players score the full amount. The highest score wins.

Long-Form Scoring: Kitty can be played as single hands, or you can keep score over several games. If the latter, play to 100 points.

Variations on Kitty

Depending on which variant rules you choose, you can play Kitty with any number of players from 3 to 6. For example, changing to "soft" lets you play with more people without running too low on cards.

Soft: The 7-round game described in the basic rules is the "hard" version. To play "soft," each target after the first consists of *two cards*, rather than one, so there are only four rounds total (1-2-2-2).

In the soft game, the lowest card in each round chooses *one* target card, and the second lowest card takes the *remaining* target card. Ties are still ignored, and unclaimed cards are still discarded.

Number of Players: Kitty (hard or soft) can be played by as few as 3 players, or as many as 6. The kitty is always 7 cards. In the 5-player game, another 3 cards must be removed from play *unseen* (this makes the starting hands come out even).

In the 5- and 6-player game, it's better to play by the "soft" rules, playing only 4 rounds instead of 7.

Partners: Four or six players can play Kitty in teams of two. You're not allowed to communicate with your partner about the cards in your hand, but you can infer what your partner has (or needs) by how she plays.

In Partners, if you take a card with the 1, you must give it to another team (you can still decide which player). At the end, teammates' hands are combined for scoring.

Gambling: To play Kitty for wagers, choose a coin value (such as a penny) for each point. When scoring, the winner collects from each player the *difference* between their scores.

For example, if the winner has 19 points, he would get 4 coins from a player with 15 points, and 6 from a player with 13.

Venture

*Venture is a bidding game for 3-8 players. Taking cards is usually bad, so the object is to take as few cards as you can, sometimes by conspiring with other players. But trust no one! Players don't have to tell the truth about what cards they play. **Venture** was introduced in the **Professor Elemental** Deck, illustrated by Cheyenne Wright.*

Players: 3 to 8
You Need: A Pairs deck, and a way to keep score.

Summary: Players will play several rounds, playing cards to capture other cards. Each card you capture is one *negative* point (regardless of its rank), unless you capture a *full set* (all the cards in one rank). Full sets are worth positive points.

To Begin: Shuffle the deck and deal a stack of cards facedown in the center of the table. This stack is the "slug." The number of cards in the slug depends on the number of players.

3p: 4 Cards	**4p:** 3 Cards	**5p:** 5 Cards
6p: 7 Cards	**7p:** 6 Cards	**8p:** 7 Cards

Next, deal the remainder of the deck out to all players. After removing the slug, the cards should divide evenly.

Turn the slug faceup in the center. This will be the *pool* of cards for the first round.

On Each Round: Each player chooses one card from his hand, and plays it facedown as a *bid*. Players are welcome to talk about what bids they are playing, in an effort to confuse or conspire with each other. *(Don't overlook this rule; table talk can make or break this game.)* When all players are ready, reveal these cards, and execute them in order *from low to high*.

Capturing: Bid cards will "fire," starting with the lowest card and going up. When cards fire, they capture other cards on the table, *including other bid cards*. If multiple bids of the same rank are played, those cards "misfire" and can't capture anything. (This is generally good, since capturing cards is bad.)

In general, cards "capture down," meaning that they pick up smaller cards. So, for example, a 7 will take all cards lower than 7. However, the lowest card is different. It fires first, and captures all cards of the *highest rank on the table*. (Remember that this includes the pool and the bid cards.)

Set aside the cards you capture, faceup. Uncaptured cards will remain on the table as the pool for the next round.

Play until your hands are empty. Then it's time to score.

Scoring: Each card you capture is worth *one negative* point. However, if you collect a full set (that is, all the cards of the same rank) those cards are worth 1 point each. Also, the cards that remain in the center *can be scored by anyone*, so if you collect eight 9's and the last 9 is left in the middle, you score 9 points. The player with the highest score wins.

An Example Venture Game

In this 5-player game, the slug is 4, 5, 6, 8, 10.

On the first round, the bids are 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. The 2 fires first, and captures the 10. Moving up the ranks, the 3 is next and captures the 2. The 4 captures the 3, and the 5 captures both 4's. The 6 catches both 5's. This leaves a pool of 6, 6, 8.

On the second round, the bids are 5, 5, 7, 9, and 9. The 5's would normally target the 9, but they misfire because they are matched. Next, the 7 fires, and captures all the 5's and 6's. Finally, the 9's are matched, and capture nothing. This leaves a pool of 7, 8, 9, 9.

Example Scoring: A player has captured a total of 11 cards, including all of the 5's. The six non-matched cards total 6 negative points, and the five 5's are worth a total of +5, for a final score of -1 point. (Scores are often negative.)

Keeping Score: It's best to keep score for a fixed number of rounds. Since scores can go negative, you don't want to play to a fixed point total, or you might never get there.

Optional Rule: Drafting

After the deal, but before the slug is revealed, players can tailor their hands using a simple drafting system.

From your starting hand, keep three cards, and pass the rest to the left. Set aside the cards you keep, and repeat this until there are no cards left to pass.

Drafting works only if you have a feel for the strategy. It lets you tailor your hand and get a glimpse of what others have.
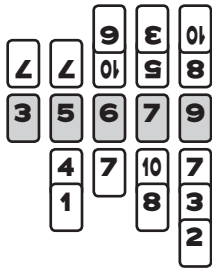
Five Cards

Five Cards *is a simple 2-player game that was introduced in the super-secret* ***Troll*** *deck.*

Players: 2
You Need: A Pairs deck and a way to keep score.

Setup: Shuffle the deck and deal five *unmatched* cards into the middle. (Discard any matching cards.) Sort the five cards from lowest to highest, as shown in the center line above. These are the "target" cards. If you had to discard any cards on the deal, reshuffle the deck.

Choose a random player to go first. On subsequent rounds, the player who scored the fewest points in the previous round will go first.

Each Turn: Draw a card from the deck, and play it faceup on your side of one of the line.

You can't play a card if it matches *any card* in the column, including the target card and the opposing player's cards.

Play proceeds in this fashion until someone draws an unplayable card. This ends the round, and it's time to take score.

Above is an example of a game in progress. In this example, the player on top is currently winning the 3, 5, 6, and 9, and the player on the bottom is winning the 7. This game would end if another 7 were drawn; that card is unplayable because each column already contains a 7.

Scoring: Whoever played the most points on their side of each target card scores the point value of that card. If the players are tied in a column, they divide the point value of the target, rounding down.

Record your score and play again. The winner is the first player to score 100 points.

Credits

Art by Brett Bean, Cheyenne Wright, Echo Chernik, James Ernest, John Kovalic, Nate Taylor, Pete Venters, Phil Foglio, and Shane Tyree.

Pairs was designed by James Ernest and Paul Peterson, with help from Joshua Howard and Joe Kisenwether. Venture was designed by James Ernest and Daniel Solis. Regent was designed by James Ernest and Rick Fish.

Playtesters include Adam Sheridan, Ahna Blake, Alec Nelson, Ashley Humphries, Ben Reinhardt, Bob De Dea, Boyan Radakovich, Carol Monahan, Cathy Saxton, Daniel Solis, Debbie Mischo, Don Flinspach, Hal Mangold, Jed Humphries, Jeremy Holcomb, John Mischo, Jonathan Fingold, Kenneth Hite, Mike Selinker, Nathan Clarenburg, Nora Miller, Owen Jungemann, Rick Fish, Ruth Boyack, Shawn Carnes, Terry Murray, Tom Gurganus, Tom Saxton, and many others.

Rules edited by Carol Monahan, Cathy Saxton, Christopher Dare, and Mike Selinker.

Made possible through Kickstarter!

For rules, variants, alternate decks, and more,
please visit: **www.playpairs.com**

What is Pairs?

Pairs is a "new classic pub game," invented by James Ernest and Paul Peterson.

This guide contains the basic rules and history of the game.

It also contains many other games and variations on the basic rules.

1 Pears