

Royal Wife-Swap

A card game for 3-5 players devised by Roger Kingdon, June 2008

1. Use a well-shuffled standard pack of 52 cards without jokers.
2. Deal 7 cards to each player. Place the remainder face-down as a 'stock pile'.
3. The player on the left of the dealer plays from his hand the first card of the first trick. The other players then follow in turn, each playing a card from hand. They must follow suit if possible. There are no trumps. The trick-winner is determined by the following rules:
 - Cards are ranked *firstly* by their position in the sequence A (high), K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 (low), and *secondly* by their suit in the sequence ♠ (high), ♥, ♣, ♦ (low). Thus 2♦ is beaten by 2♣ but 3♦ beats them both, for example.
 - Within each suit the top four 'court' cards (K, Q, J, 10) are outranked by the bottom four 'nemesis' cards (2, 3, 4, 5 respectively). Thus K♠ is beaten by 2♠, Q♠ is beaten by 3♠, J♠ is beaten by 4♠ and 10♠ is beaten by 5♠, and similarly for the other suits. Note that this is a pairing of particular cards within each suit, so 2♠ does not beat Q♠ or K♥, for example. Whenever in a trick a court card meets its nemesis, this determines who wins the trick: the rank of other cards is irrelevant. (For 4 or 5 players it is possible that two such pairings occur in the same trick. In these cases the trick is given to the person who played the nemesis to the highest-ranking court card.)
4. On completing the trick the trick-winner has the opportunity to arrange on the table particular combinations of cards, drawn both from the cards won in the trick and from the cards in his hand. These combinations, known as 'families', are the basis of the point-scoring system that determines the winner of the game. They are constituted as follows:
 - Families are started with a 'marriage' of K and Q or J and 10 (which, for the purpose of the game, represents a 'perfect 10' princess). If K and Q belong to the same suit it is known as a 'Royal marriage' (and worth more points at the end). J and 10 may *not* belong to the same suit, however: that would be incest.
 - Once a family has been started it may be augmented (in any order) by further cards belonging to the same suit(s) as the marriage partners. Again, these 'family members' add to the point-value of the family in the final reckoning. The exceptions to this rule are: (i) A family may contain only one K and Q; (ii) When J and 10 are married they establish their own 'junior' family independent of parent K and Q families. Junior families may contain only one J and 10 and no K or Q.
 - At the same time the trick-winner may make other changes to family groups, *e.g.* swapping marriage partners in order to upgrade to a Royal marriage, or marrying-off a bachelor J or spinster 10. If as a result of these changes a family contains members belonging to an alien suit (*e.g.* the suit of a dumped spouse) then these must be removed. If they cannot be found a legitimate home in another family these cards must be discarded as 'orphans'.
 - Once laid down in this manner, cards are not available for playing in tricks. (Neither can they be made available by discarding as orphans, unless they are genuinely so.)
5. When the trick-winner has finished building his family groups, all orphans and any unused trick-cards are added to the bottom of the stock pile (in any order). Then, starting with the trick-winner, players take the number of cards they need from the top of the stock pile to restore their hands to 7 cards. If the stock pile is running low then players just take what is available.
6. Play restarts with the trick-winner leading the next trick from hand.
7. Play continues in this way until one or more players has no cards left in his hand at the beginning of a trick. At this point play stops and the scores are counted as follows. For each card in a legitimate family combination, add up its face value (with K = Q = J = 10 and A = 1). All cards in a Royal family have their face value doubled. The winner is the person with the most points.
8. The game may be repeated over a fixed number of rounds or until one person has reached a pre-defined cumulative score. 500 is a good number to aim for.