

Set a trap. Don't fall in.

# Deadfall

A Bluffing Game for 2-6 Players

## Welcome!

*Deadfall* is a bluffing game similar to **Liar's Dice**, played with a Pairs deck. The deck contains numbers 1 through 10, with 1x1, 2x2, 3x3, and so on. You can play all the Pairs games with a Deadfall deck, and vice versa.

*This game is set in a fantasy world filled with amazing stories and unique details that are too complex for this rule sheet. But it has dragons and zombies, so that's cool.*

## Summary of Play

*Deadfall* is played as a series of independent hands, each lasting about five minutes. Players keep score using coins, like any gambling game.

Throughout the game, players take turns playing single cards from their hand. When you play a card, you are claiming that someone still holds a card of that rank. To win, you must catch someone in a lie, or trick them into calling you.

## Rules

**Players:** 2 to 6.

**You Need:** A Deadfall / Pairs deck, and coins for keeping score.

**Starting the Hand:** Each player antes 1 coin into the pot. Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of six cards to each player.

*Exception:* With two players, each player starts with seven cards.

**Door Cards:** First, each player chooses one card in secret from their hand, which is called the *door* card. These cards will be revealed at the same time, and the player with the lowest door card will take the first turn. Play will proceed clockwise from that point.

If there is a tie for lowest door card, everyone plays another. Determine the starting player by the *second card*, using the first door card only as a tie breaker. If both of these cards are tied, continue to a third door and so on.

**Each Turn:** On your turn you have two options: you may *play* a card, or you may *call* another player. (There is no option to fold.)

**Play:** When you play a card, stack it atop the cards you have played before, arranging them so that one is visible, with the last card clearly on top. Playing a card in this manner is a declaration that the rank is *not dead*, meaning that you believe some player still holds a copy of it.

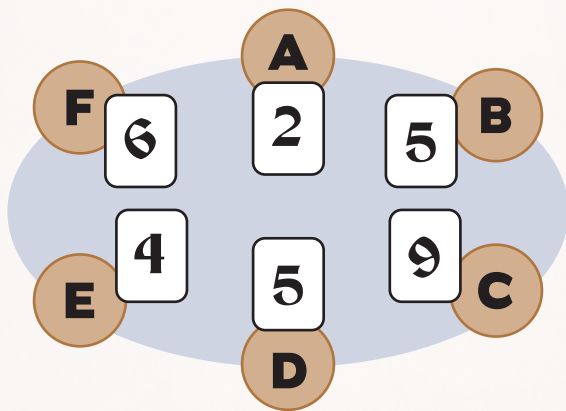
**Call:** When you call, you are choosing another player's last card, and declaring that they were wrong to play it, because that rank is *dead*. This means you believe that no one, including you, holds a copy of that card.

After a call, if you are right, you win, and if you are wrong, you lose. Either way, the hand is over.

**Restrictions on Calling:** You can only call a player's top card (the most recent card they played). In addition, if there are multiple such cards of the same rank, you may call only the card that was *played last* (that is, the one closest on your right).

For consistency, this positional rule also applies for door cards, even though they were all played at the same time.

For example, in the game below, Player A will go first, because she played the lowest door card. She could call any player except Player B. This is because both D and B played a 5, and D's was played "last" relative to the starting player.



**The Showdown:** When one player calls another, the hand is over. All players reveal their remaining cards, to determine whether the caller was right.

By calling, you are declaring that no more cards of the chosen rank are left in anyone's hand, including your own. If you are right, you win, and if you are wrong, you lose, and the player you called is the winner.

**Penalties:** The loser of the hand pays the winner a number of coins equal to the rank of the called card. The winner also collects the antes.

For example, if the called rank is a 5, the following two results are possible:

- 1: If 5s are dead, then the caller is correct, and she collects five coins from the player she called, as well as the antes.
- 2: If someone still holds a 5, then the caller is wrong, and she pays 5 coins to the player she called. That player also collects the antes.

## Strategy

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You obviously need to pay attention to which cards have been played, but this is fairly easy because the cards remain exposed.

However, you must also consider *how* and *why* those cards were played. This will get easier with experience.

There are times when you want to be called, and times when you don't. To win, you must do more than just avoid conflict. You must learn how to trick others into calling you, *and* how to read other players well enough to call them.

Experienced players can be fooled, sometimes more easily than novices. Once your opponents understand the basic strategy, you can begin to play deceptively. One example is taking time to choose between two cards in your hand, even though they are the same rank. Beginners don't hesitate. Decent players pretend that it's a hard decision. Experts never do it the same way twice.

**Choosing a Door Card:** Usually, you want to get rid of a low card when you choose your door card. So if your starting hand is 3-4-6-8-8-10, you might want to play the 3 or the 4.

The reason to ditch low cards early is that they are hard to play later. The hand doesn't always last to the final card, but if you are stuck holding several low cards, you will have to play one and will almost certainly get called.

However, there is also a risk. Unless you are leading the Dragon (the 1), playing a low door card can get you called. If someone plays a lower door card, you might get called right away.

**Saving Pairs:** Often, you will want your last two cards to match, so that if you get called with one card left, you are safe. This isn't always an option, but players do typically save pairs until their last two cards.

**"Running":** "Running" a card simply means playing a card that you know isn't safe, hoping not to be called. This is easier with high cards, and harder with low cards. Once you get a sense for when people try this, you can learn to catch them at it.

## Variations

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Here are some of the more popular variations on *Deadfall*.

**Blind Start:** Players do not play a door card. Instead, the leader is the winner of the last hand. (Choose a random starting player on the first hand.)

**Breaking Nines:** The first player to play a 9 must pay 1 coin into the pot, and the first player to play a 10 must pay 2 coins. (If multiples of these cards are played as door cards, they all incur the penalty.)

You can slide this penalty as low as you like. For example, if you play “Breaking Eights,” then players pay 1 coin for playing the first 8, 2 coins for the first 9, and 3 for the first 10.

**Cherry:** If a player is called and doesn’t hold a matching card, but another player has one (and therefore saves that player from losing), then the called player pays a single coin to the player who saved them. If there are multiple saviors, they each get a coin. This coin is called a cherry.

Nearly everyone plays with the “cherry” rule, though it’s not technically part of the basic rules. The cherry is named after the 3 in the original Pairs deck.

**Cold Call:** Players can “cold call” their opponents. Rather than declaring that the last played card is a lie, you can state the *exact contents* of your opponent’s hand. This is easiest when it’s just one card, but allowed anytime.

The penalty for correctly (or incorrectly) cold-calling is the total of *all cards in the called player’s hand*. For example, if you correctly cold-called a player with a pair of 10s, that player would owe you 20 coins.

*Cold calling certainly makes people think twice about holding on to a pair.*

**Red Devil / Double Devil:** In Red Devil, each player passes one card to the left after the deal, before the door cards are played. In Double Devil, there are two passes: one card before the door card, and one card after. Mixed with cold calling, the Devil rules make for some interesting hands indeed.

### Credits

*Deadfall* was designed by **James Ernest** and **Nora Miller**. Artwork by **Bill McGuire**.

*Pairs* was originally designed by **James Ernest** and **Paul Peterson**, with help from **Joshua Howard** and **Joe Kisenwether**. Playtesters include Adam Sheridan, Ahna Blake, Bob De Dea, Boyan Radakovich, Carol Monahan, Cathy Saxton, Daniel Solis, Debbie Mischo, Don Flinspach, Hal Mangold, Jeremy Holcomb, John Mischo, Jonathan Fingold, Kenneth Hite, Mike Selinker, Nathan Clarenburg, Nora Miller, Owen Jungemann, Rick Fish, Shawn Carnes, Tom Saxton, Patrick Nickell, and many others. Edited by Carol Monahan, Cathy Saxton, and Mike Selinker. **Deadfall** is © and ™ 2016, 2023 by **James Ernest** and **Crab Fragment LLC**, Seattle WA.