

# FALLING™

## Real-Time Card Game



**Everyone is falling. And fighting.**

**The object is to hit the ground last.**

**It's not much of a goal.**

**But it's all you could think of on the way down.**

### About the Game:

**FALLING** was invented by James Ernest in 1998. It is a “real time” card game, which means that all players are doing the same thing at the same time, with no turns.

The game was nominated for the Origins Award for Best Traditional Card Game (despite its nontraditionalness), and was included in the 1998 GAMES 100. It was succeeded by real time card games including *BRAWL*, *Fightball*, and *Light Speed*.

**FALLING** went out of print sometime in the mid-oughts. It was reprinted in Polish (featuring adorable art of falling cows) and by Paizo Publishing in a “Goblin” edition. Now the original set is available in this free format.

This game takes some getting used to. If this is your first time falling, you will need to play a few games before you understand what is going on. That's okay, because each game takes about a minute and a half.

You must deal, even if you're new to the game, because it will make you a better player. A good **FALLING** player has sympathy for the dealer, and helps her by placing his cards cleanly and discarding his own cards when he's supposed to. As competitive and frenzied as this game is, it really helps if everybody... helps.

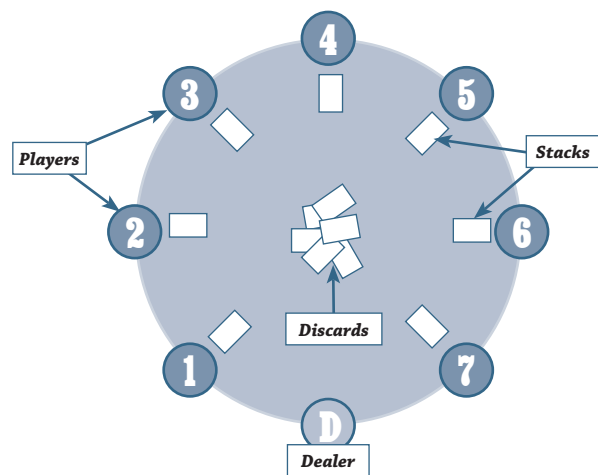
### How to Play:

**FALLING** is a fast-paced card game with one dealer and several players. The dealer, who is not falling, distributes the cards and moderates the action. Everyone else is playing all the time. Five **Ground** cards are waiting at the bottom of the deck, and these cards knock you out of the game. The object is to hit the ground last.

**FALLING** works best with 4-8 people, and you can even add more players if you don't mind the chaos that will ensue. We don't recommend playing with fewer than 4.

A good playing surface is important: a small, round card table is ideal. Players should have enough room for their own cards, but should also be able to reach across the table to play cards on each other.

This rulebook is split into two principal sections, **Dealing** and **Falling**. Everyone needs to understand both parts, but we felt this was the best way to sort the rules.



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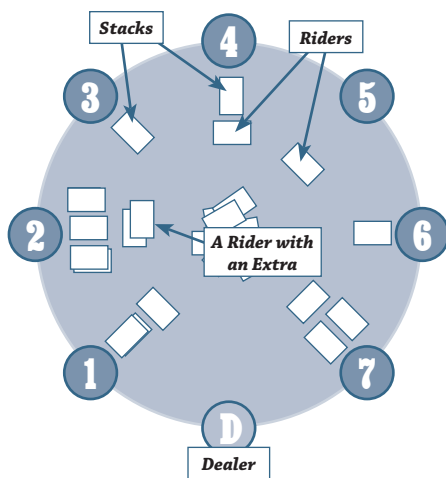
## Section 1: DEALING

When you deal, you aren't falling. Your job is to control the pace of the game, follow the instructions of the Riders, and referee the game. The winner of one game will become the dealer for the next.

Occasionally, timing disputes will arise, and it is the dealer's job to settle them. If two players have tried to do something at the same time, and can't agree on who was faster, the dealer can pause the game and settle the problem. The dealer's solution is final, so use your best judgement and move on.

**The Basics:** Before you deal, separate the **Ground** cards from the deck. Shuffle the rest of the cards, and put the Grounds at the bottom. Hold the deck face down, and deal from the top. The Grounds will be the last cards you deal.

Starting with the player to your left, deal cards one at a time clockwise around the table. Deal the cards face up into **stacks** in front of each player, as shown in the diagram below. Each player starts with one stack. Later in the game some players might have more stacks, or none at all.



If a player has *more than one stack*, you deal one card into each. If a player has *no stacks at all*, you start a new one. (Player 5 above has no stack, but will get another card on the dealer's next pass.) Additional stacks disappear once they are empty, so you don't have to remember anything beyond the first.

**Altering the Deal:** Your dealing pattern will be changed by cards called **Riders**. These are instruction cards that must be played sideways between a player and the dealer. The three Rider cards are **Hit**, **Split**, and **Skip**.

Riders can be modified by an **Extra** card, which doubles the Rider's effect. There are five Riders in the diagram above, one of which (player 2's) is being modified by an Extra.

When you encounter a Rider, you must follow the card's instructions, and then sweep the Rider into the discard pile. The meanings of the Riders are as follows:

**HIT:** After dealing normally, deal a *second card* into each of this player's stacks.

**EXTRA HIT:** After dealing normally, deal *two extra cards* to each Stack. (Sweep away the **Extra** and the **Hit**.)

**SPLIT:** After dealing normally, deal this player one more card as the *foundation of a new stack*.

**EXTRA SPLIT:** After dealing normally, start *two new Stacks*. (Sweep away the **Extra** and the **Split**.)

**SKIP:** Deal no cards to this player. (This is not a per-stack effect. You skip the entire player regardless of how many stacks she has.)

**EXTRA SKIP:** Deal no cards to this player, and *sweep away only the Extra card*. (The **Skip** remains in play.)

**Timing Notes:** Players are not allowed to play cards that would affect a Rider if you are in the middle of executing it. Once the Dealer is addressing a player, no one can affect the deal by meddling with the Rider, either with a **Push**, **Grab**, **Stop**, or **Extra**. Similarly, when you are dealing to a player who has no Rider, if a Rider is played on him, you should ignore that Rider until your next pass.

**GROUND:** Once a player gets a **Ground** card, she is out of the game. You don't deal to her, and she can't play any more cards or have any more cards played on her.

**Running out of Grounds:** If there are so many players that the five **Ground** cards won't cover them all, you could add more **Grounds** from a second **FALLING** deck. But it's just as easy to imagine the last ones, and tell the last players who hit the Ground to gather their cards and turn them face down. Even though there are only five cards, there is always an unlimited supply of ground.

## Section 2: FALLING

As a player, you will be receiving cards from the dealer, and playing those cards at your own pace. There are no "turns" in this game, because everyone is playing all the time. You're trying to avoid the **Grounds** when they come out, by saving up plenty of **Skips**, **Extras**, and **Stops**, and using other cards to prevent other players from doing the same.

Play of cards is very restrictive: You may pick up only one card at a time, and you may only play the card that is in your hand. Strictly speaking, you should use only one hand to play, and keep the other hand out of the way.

You may pick up cards only from the top of your stack. This means that once a card has been buried, you can't retrieve it

unless you play all the cards on top of it. Note: If the dealer is giving you two cards in a row (because of a **Hit**), you can legally grab the first one. But only if you are fast!

When you have multiple stacks (because of a **Split**), you will have more choices of what to pick up. But you still can't pick up more than one card at a time.

Be careful what you pick up! Once you are holding a card, you may play it right away, or you may keep holding it. But you can't set it back down, and you can't discard it. And as long as you hold that card, you can't pick up another one.

### Riders:

Riders are instructions to the dealer. They include **Hit**, **Split**, and **Skip**, and their meanings are described under "Dealing," above.

Players can never have more than one Rider at a time. You may place a Rider in front of any player, including yourself, as long as that person doesn't already have one.

### Action Cards:

The Action cards are **Push**, **Grab**, and **Stop**, and they all affect Riders. **Stop** can also repel a **Ground**.

To play an Action card, you must touch the card to the Rider you are trying to affect, carry out the result, and then discard the Action card yourself. (The dealer won't do this for you!) Note: You can only affect Riders once they are in place; you can never mess with the cards in someone's stack.

**PUSH:** This card moves a Rider *away from you* to another player. Since no one can legally have two Riders at once, you can't Push a Rider to a player who already has one.

**GRAB:** This is the opposite of Push. A Grab steals a Rider *from in front of another player* and moves it to you. You can't Grab someone's Rider if you already have one.

**STOP:** This card has two functions: You can use it to destroy any Rider, or you can use it to pop a Ground card back onto the deck.

When you "destroy" a Rider, you sweep both the Stop and the Rider straight to the discard pile. If you Stop a Rider that has an Extra on it, they are both discarded together.

To Stop a Ground, play the Stop card as the Ground is being dealt to you. The Dealer retrieves the Ground card, and you discard the Stop.

Note: A Stop will only send one Ground back onto the deck. It doesn't necessarily turn the Dealer away. If you are due to

get two Ground cards, as a result of a Hit or because you have multiple stacks, just one Stop card won't save you.

### EXTRA and GROUND:

**EXTRA:** An **Extra** card modifies a Rider. Once played, it is attached to that Rider. To play an Extra, lay it on top of the Rider you wish to modify, but off-center so the dealer can still read both cards.

If the Rider moves around, the Extra moves with it. If the Rider is destroyed by a Stop, the Extra goes away too. A Rider can only have one Extra at a time, so if a Rider already has one Extra on it, you can't give it another one.

The specific effects of an Extra on all three Riders are described above, under "Dealing." In general, "Extra" means "more of the same." **Extra Hit** means getting more cards. **Extra Split** means getting more Stacks. And **Extra Skip** means you'll be skipped twice in a row: the Extra is swept away on the first pass, and the Skip is taken on the second pass (if it's still there).

**GROUND:** If you receive one of these, you are immediately out. To reflect this, gather your cards together under the Ground, or turn your cards face down. Once you have hit the Ground, you can no longer play cards, receive cards, or have any cards played on you.

### Some General Notes:

Hits and Splits can be good for you at the beginning of the game, but Skips are most useful at the end. You will discover that all three Riders have offensive and defensive uses, at different times in the game.

If you want to teach FALLING to a new group of players, it helps to play very slowly, and introduce the card types one at a time. Try playing a game with just the Grounds and Riders, then add the Action Cards, and finally add the Extras. Learning the card types one at a time is less overwhelming than learning the whole game at once.

And remember that people will play better after they deal!

FALLING was designed by James Ernest with help from the Cheapass Games Guinea Pigs, and Illustrated by Brian Snöddy. ©1998, 2011 James Ernest and Cheapass Games. Published by Cheapass Games, Seattle WA: [www.cheapass.com](http://www.cheapass.com).

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