



## A game for the Island Deck

**CRAB FRAGMENT LABS**

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**Background:** Showboat is a new family card game designed by James Ernest. It is based on the traditional Elatian game of Quattro Ponti.

**Players:** 3 to 6

**Playing Time:** 30 Minutes

**Components:** The *Island Deck* and a way to keep score.

**About the Deck:** The *Roja Deck*, or *Roya Deck*, was introduced to Port Ramón, Traza Ligera by the explorer Roya Ruiz García Alarcón. It has now been rebranded as the “*Island Deck*,” and is available at gift shops in Crab Fragment Cay and throughout Les Îles Rouges.

The deck has 54 cards in six suits. Each suit contains the ranks Ace through Seven, plus Queen and King. In Showboat, Aces are always low (with a value of one).

Different versions of the deck have different suits, but those in the *Island deck* are Anchors, Boats, Crabs, Dolphins, Flowers, and Trees. The suits are ranked in alphabetical order, with Anchors being the first.

**Summary of Play:** Players will play six *hands*, each consisting of several *rounds*. On each round, players will play one card and (usually) pick up one card from the center of the table. The played cards are collected into a *tableau*, which is a sequence of cards that is worth points at the end of the hand. The player with the highest total score in six hands wins the game.

**The Role of Dealer:** Because gameplay is simultaneous, it doesn't matter if one player always deals, or if the job is shared between several players.

**Each Hand:** To start each hand, shuffle the deck and deal a hand of four cards to each player. If there are fewer than six players, discard additional cards until the total number of cards dealt is 24. This ensures that exactly 30 cards are left in the deck.



**Each Round:** Start each round by dealing six cards from the deck, face up into the center of the table. If this is the last block of six cards in the deck, the dealer should announce this.

Next, all players will choose one card from their hand, and play it face down on the table. Reveal these cards simultaneously.

If you have cards in your tableau from previous rounds, be careful to stack them in the order they were played, so it is obvious which card is your most recent one.

Players will now *act* in order, starting with the lowest card, and going up. Aces are first, followed by the other numbers, then Queen and King.

Between cards of the same rank, the *lower* letters are the fastest. (Anchors, then Boats, etc.)

When it is your turn, you will usually pick up one card from the center. This card goes into your hand. If you do not pick up a card, you “retire,” which means you are done with this hand, as described below.

After all players have acted, discard any cards remaining in the center, and deal another six cards into the center. Note that it is possible to play one more round even after the deck is exhausted, if some players still remain in the hand.

**Retiring:** When you choose not to pick up a card, you *retire*. (This happens automatically, but still in turn sequence, if there are no cards in the center.)

Usually, players will try to accumulate as many points as possible before retiring, but sometimes the best move is to retire early. You'll learn the strategy after a few hands of play.

When you retire, turn your final card sideways, to show that you are no longer in the hand.

**Last Player:** Retirement is *not an option* for the last player. Instead, as soon as everyone else is out, the round is over, and this player gets no more actions (even if they have not acted yet on this round).

Being the last player can be costly, which is why it's important to plan when you will retire.



This tableau of 2-K-4-4-K scores 21 points. The second 4 is not scored, and the final King is doubled.

**Scoring:** The cards in your tableau are worth points, as described below. However, the cards remaining in your hand can count against you.

**Number Cards:** Aces through Sevens in your tableau are worth their face value, but only if they are *larger than all the number cards played before them*.

**Face Cards:** Queens and Kings in your tableau are worth five points each, and they do not follow the same ordering rules as number cards. They can be anywhere.

**Last Card:** If it follows the ordering rules, the last card in your sequence scores *double*, unless you were the last player, in which case it scores only its face value.

**Your Hand:** Cards in your hand are worth *negative points*, unless they are duplicated in your hand, in which case those are worth zero. For example, if your hand is K-K-3, you lose nothing for the Kings, but deduct three points for the 3.

**Final Tally:** You will play a total of six hands. The player with the highest total wins the game.

**The Showboat:** The best you can typically score is 35 points, with three 5-point cards, one 6, and a doubled 7, as well as a zero-point hand. This is called a **Showboat**.

**Notes and Strategy:** This game has an unusual format, so you may need a few hands to get the hang of it. After a while, you will learn how to watch other players and even anticipate their actions.

The *speed* of the card you play will determine how many choices you have from the cards in the center. Low cards are fast, meaning that you have more options of what to pick up, but they are also worth fewer points. Face cards are the slowest, but they are also the easiest to place in your sequence.

When you take cards from the center, you're choosing between cards that improve your tableau, and cards that cancel cards in your hand. Sometimes there are no good choices, and you have to pick up the card that will cost you the fewest points in the end. If retiring is ultimately a better option than picking up another card, you should retire!

When choosing between picking up or playing cards of the same rank, you should *always* choose the fastest suit. Prefer the six of Crabs to the six of Dolphins, etc.

If you are going for the highest score, you will have to retire with a 7 on round five. That can be tricky, unless you feel confident that at least one other player will play a slower card than yours.

Remember that the hand doesn't end after a fixed number of rounds, but after all players except one have retired. This can happen as early as round four (or earlier), or as late as round six, at which point there are no cards left and the only option is to retire. Even then, players can't retire until their turn comes, so faster cards will get out before slower ones. Try not to be the last player to retire, unless that is your best choice for scoring.

**Rules for Two:** This game is not fantastic for two players, but you can try it with one extra rule.

Because any player can torpedo the game by retiring early, you're not allowed to retire until *round four or later*. This isn't a great rule for the multiplayer game, but it's pretty essential for two.

**Credits:** Showboat was created by James Ernest and the fearless crew at Crab Fragment Labs. These able matelots included Vye Alexander, David Cornwell, Bob DeDea, Nate Heiss, Owen Jungemann, Colleen McGaughey, Nora Miller, Carol Monahan, Jamey Otsby, Paul Peterson, Toivo Rovainen, Cathy Saxton, Tom Saxton, Craig Stockwell, Lauren Tozer-Kilts, and Cassidy Werner. Art by James Ernest. © 2020 Crab Fragment LLC:

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