

Fortress and Chessboard

Fortress is one of a fascinating group of games in which no cards are ever hidden. The entire deck is laid out, face up and visible, at the start of the game. Chessboard is a close variation of Fortress, designed to be a little easier to win.

Layout Size: Fits nicely on a medium-size screen, with horizontal scrolling rarely required. The smallest screens will require tiresome vertical scrolling.

Difficulty: Fortress is winnable, but it's difficult. Frustratingly often, a new game will offer only a few possible moves before you become completely stuck. Chessboard offers more possibilities at the start of a game, and so is less frustrating and easier to win.

Because of the frequency of unwinnable games, we like to cheat a little at Fortress. Solitaire Till Dawn will not count a game as a loss unless you make at least one move. So we study each new game carefully at first, without touching it, trying to decide whether it's worth trying to win. If not, we just select "New Game" and try again. Playing in this fashion, we can win as many as one game in three; playing every game, we would do much worse.

Fortress Rules: Shuffle the deck and lay out all the cards in ten tableau piles. Each tableau pile fans sideways, with all cards face up and visible. Arrange the tableaus in two columns or "wings" of five piles each, one wing on the left and one on the right, with a vertical column of four foundations in between them. The top tableau of each wing starts with six cards; the others with five each. The foundations start out empty.

Top cards of tableaus are available for building on each other, either up or down in suit. Aces may be played to the foundations, which are to be built up in suit. The goal is to move all cards to the foundations.

(See picture: Fortress. The Ace of Hearts may be moved to a foundation, exposing the 8 of Clubs, which may then be moved onto the 7 of Clubs. Alternatively, the 7 of Clubs could be moved onto the 8 of Clubs, since tableaus can be built either up or down.)

Empty tableau piles may be filled with any available card.

Advice: You should try to create and maintain an empty tableau pile, as soon as you can. You can use an empty pile to move a build (that is, a string of cards in suit and in sequence) from its original pile to a third, destination pile, like this: start by moving the top card from the original pile to the empty pile, then move the next card onto the first, then the next, so that the formerly empty pile now contains the build in reversed order. Now you can take the cards from the formerly empty pile and move them, one at a time, to the destination pile (provided that the top card of the formerly empty pile can legally be placed there). The build will reverse order again as you move the cards for the second time, and will arrive on the destination pile in the original order. See the Sample Games for examples.

Chessboard Rules: The same as Fortress, with these exceptions: Building is circular; Aces may be played onto Kings and vice-versa. The empty foundations do not have to be started with Aces: so long as all foundations are still empty, you may play any available card from the tableaux onto an empty foundation. After that first foundation card is placed, the remaining three foundations will require that their first cards match the original card's rank. The foundations are then built up in suit, with Ace following King. The game is won when each foundation contains thirteen cards.

(See picture: Fortress, which serves equally well to illustrate Chessboard. In addition to the plays mentioned above under the Fortress Rules, in Chessboard you might play the 10D as the first foundation card, exposing the JH. A number of plays are then possible, among them: The JD can follow the 10D to the foundations; the QH can move onto the JH, exposing the 2H; the AH can then be moved onto the 2H, and so on.)

On the Screen: Solitaire Till Dawn will lay out the cards for you. The rules state that you can move only one card at a time. But as a shortcut, Solitaire Till Dawn will allow you to move an entire build if there is an empty pile, because you would have been able to accomplish the same effect by moving the cards one at a time.

Don't be alarmed when you see an entire fan slide sideways during play: Solitaire Till Dawn will adjust the pile's positions automatically to keep the layout tidy.