

RAT-SNAKE

A Lankhmar wagering game with dice

But the Mouser had made his throw, and the odd dice of Lankhmar had stopped with the matching symbols of the eel and the serpent uppermost, and he was raking in triangular golden coins. — "The Bleak Shore" by Fritz Leiber

Rat-Snake is a gambling game that requires two six-sided dice to play.

Serious Rat-Snake players use specialized dice inscribed with the image of a rat on the one-pip face and a snake on the six-pip face. This tube contains 8 such dice and a rules booklet for Rat-Snake.



\$15.00

GMG5207

3rd printing



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Rat-Snake originated in Lankhmar, but quickly spread to gambling dens, barracks, and alleys throughout Nehwon. It requires two six-sided dice to play. Serious Rat-Snake players and casinos use specialized dice inscribed with the image of a rat on the one-pip face and a snake on the six-pip face, but it can be played with standard gambling dice simply by treating a “1” as a rat and a “6” as a snake. In some gambling dens, dice from an even older form of this game are used. These scavenged dice feature the image of an eel in place of a snake, but are treated as serpents when used in Rat-Snake.

Rat-Snake is played with two or more players, called a “ring,” who take turns throwing two dice. In gambling dens, the players compete against a house who covers the wagering. In less formal games, such as street corners or in barracks, the other player(s) act as the house, paying the thrower’s winnings from their own pockets and collecting his losses, splitting the payments and collections equally among themselves.



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PLAYING RAT-SNAKE

Step One: The current player (known as the “thrower”) antes six coins. These coins are typically gold rilks that represent his store of grain and called the “silo,” but other denominations may be wagered if the house and/or other players agree.

Step Two: The thrower rolls two dice. There are six possible results: **two rats** (or two one-pip faces, also called “rat’s eyes”); **two snakes** (or two six-pip faces, also called a “twist”); a **rat on one die** and a **number of pips ranging from two to five** on the other; a **snake on one die** and a **number of pips ranging from two to five** on the other; a **rat on one die** and a **snake on the other**; or **both dice showing pip faces totaling between four and ten**.

Step Three: The roll determines the fate of the thrower.

- If the result was **two rats** or “rat’s eyes”, the thrower loses his entire silo of coins and play passes to his right. The former thrower can either leave the ring or remain, making side bets and awaiting the dice to come his way again.





- If the result was **two snakes** or a “twist”, the thrower wins a number of coins equal to the current stakes in his silo. He may then either pass the dice to his right or continue to play.
- If the result was **one rat with a number of pips on the second die**, the thrower loses a number of coins equal to the number of pips on the second die from his silo. If this reduces his silo of coins to zero, he is out and play passes to his right. If the thrower has coins remaining in his silo, he can increase his ante back up to six coins and continue to play, or bow out with his remaining stakes.
- If the result was a **snake with a number of pips on the second die**, the thrower gains a number of coins to his silo equal to the number of pips. He can then either take his winnings and pass the dice or continue to play. If the result was a **snake on one die and a rat on the other**, the thrower neither gains nor loses any coins and may continue to play or bow out. This roll symbolizes the snake eating the rat before it could devour the silo's grain.

- If the result was **two dice with pips on both faces**, the thrower must immediately roll again. This is called “checking the silo.” The result of this second throw or “check” determines the thrower’s fortune.
 - If the result of the check is equal to the number of pips on the first roll, the thrower’s silo remains the same and he can either bow out and pass the dice or throw again, starting a new round.
 - If the result of the check is greater than the number of pips on the first roll, he wins a number of coins equal to the result of the initial throw. For example, the Gray Mouser rolls a 3 and a 5 on his first throw, resulting in a total of 8. He must check the silo and rolls again, throwing a 4 and a 5 for a result of 9. He wins eight coins, an amount equal to his first throw, adding the coins to his silo. He can either take his winnings and leave the ring or throw again, starting a new round.
 - If the result is less than the thrower’s initial roll, the player loses a number of coins equal to the first throw (not to exceed his silo). If his silo is reduced to zero, he is out. Otherwise, the thrower can either continue to play (increasing his stakes back to six if the loss reduced his silo to less than that amount) or bow out, passing the dice to the right.
 - NOTE: When “checking the silo”, a roll of a rat is treated as a “1” while a roll of a snake is considered a “6”. Rats and snakes also do not cancel each other out as they do when otherwise rolled in the game.

Step Four: Play continues with the current thrower until he is unable to meet the ante of six coins or decides to bow out when play allows. The next player then becomes the current thrower and the process begins anew.

SIDE BETS



layers not currently throwing can place side bets against the house or one another, wagering on the result of the thrower's roll. These other players wager the thrower will either "rat out," "twist a win," "guard the grain," "fill the silo," "lose his grain," or "check the silo." If the thrower rolls two rats, he "rats out" and the house pays 3:1 odds.

If the thrower rolls two snakes, he "twists a win" and the house pays 3:1 odds.

If the thrower rolls a rat and a number of pips, he "loses his grain" and the house pays 2:1 odds. If the thrower rolls a snake and number of pips, he "fills the silo" and the house pays 2:1 odds. If the thrower rolls a snake and rat, he "guards the grain" and the house pays 3:1 odds.

If the thrower rolls pips on both dice, he "checks the silo." This result pays nothing, and requires the side-betting player to double down on his bet and wager whether the check result will be either a "match," "lose," or "gain." If he correctly predicts the result of the check as a "match" (meaning the second roll equals the first), the house pays 4:1 odds. If the player correctly predicts the check as a "lose" (the roll is less than the first throw) or a "gain" (higher than the initial roll), the house pays 2:1 odds.

If there is no house, non-throwing players can still make side bets, but the losers' wagers are won by whichever non-throwing player(s) correctly predicted the thrower's outcome.

Special thanks to: The Dungeon Games Sunday Crew (Bob Brinkman, Jen Brinkman, Jim DelVasto, William Ferry, Kirk Kirkpatrick, and Bill Porter) for their rigorous and enthusiastic play-testing of Rat-Snake. May you always roll a twist with a full silo!

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SIDE BETS

TWO RATS
Rats Out
3:1

TWO SNAKES
Twists a Win
3:1

SNAKE & RAT
Guards the Grain
3:1

SNAKE & PIPS
Fills the Silo
2:1

RAT & PIPS
Loses Grain
2:1

PIPS ON BOTH DICE:
Thrower Checks the Silo
MUST DOUBLE DOWN

LOSE
(less than first throw)
2:1

MATCH
4:1

GAIN
(higher than first throw)
2:1

SILO STARTING ANTE: 6

TWO RATS
Rat's Eyes
Silo emptied, play passes to right

TWO SNAKES
Twist
Pays 1:1. May continue or pass play

SNAKE & RAT
Check
May continue or pass play

SNAKE & PIPS
Silo gains pip coins, may continue or pass play

RAT & PIPS
Silo loses pip coins, must continue play if possible

PIPS ON BOTH DICE:
Check the Silo

LOSE
(less than first throw)
Lose total of first throw, may continue or pass play

MATCH
May continue or pass play

GAIN
(higher than first throw)
Gain total of first throw, may continue or pass play

THROWER

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