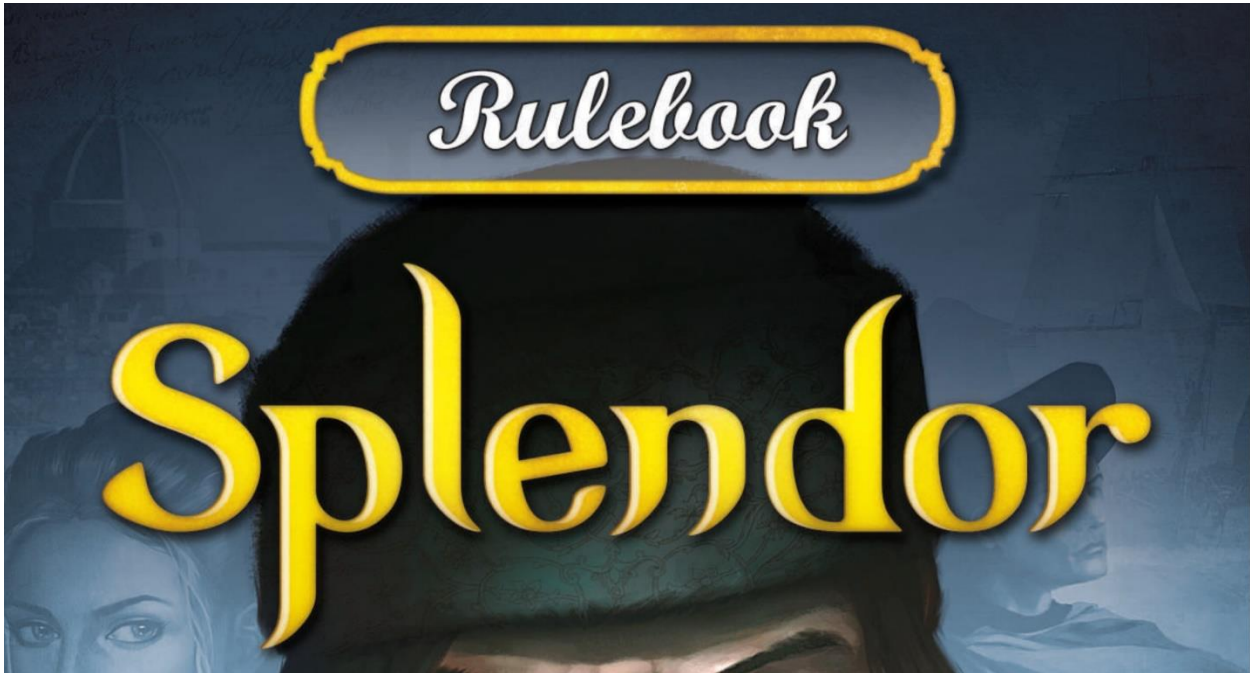


Splendor
Rulebook Review



Splendor is one of those games that I never get tired of playing, no matter how predictably and thoroughly I get beat. It's also a game that I hope to never have to consult the rulebook for except to remind myself how many tokens are used depending on the number of players in the game. That's on the first page of the rules, and if that's as far as I have to go, I'm happy.

But the second and third pages?

Well, I just hope this review is the last time I visit them.

The individual rules aren't themselves poorly written. The issue with Splendor's rulebook is the layout. So, to discuss it, I've reproduced page 2 below.

Notice that right off the bat, we've got a problem: the columns are reversed. Rulebooks tend to be best organized in a chronological fashion, walking the player through the game. First the setup (nicely done on the previous page), then the overall objectives (in the header of this page, not copied here), then how a round proceeds, player options on their turn, and eventually moving into the end game mechanics and how someone can win or lose. Since players will naturally start with the left column, these need to swap position.

The development cards

To win prestige points, the players must purchase development cards. These cards are visible in the middle of the table and may be purchased by all players during the game.

The developments in hand are the cards which the players reserve throughout the game. Developments in hand may only be purchased by the players holding them.

The player who purchases this card wins 4 prestige points. Owning this card allows the player to benefit from a blue bonus. To purchase this card, the player must spend 3 blue tokens, 3 black tokens, and 6 white tokens.



The noble tiles

The noble tiles are visible in the middle of the table. At the end of their turn, a player automatically receives the visit from a noble if that player has the amount of bonuses (and only bonuses) required, and they get the corresponding tile.

A player cannot refuse a visit from a noble.

Receiving a noble isn't considered to be an action. Each noble tile is worth 3 prestige points, but players can only get a single one per turn.

The player who acquires this noble's tile gains 3 prestige points. If a player has enough development cards to amass 3 blue bonuses, 3 green bonuses, and 3 white bonuses, then that player automatically receives a visit from that noble.



GAME RULES

The youngest player begins. Play then proceeds clockwise.

On their turn, a player must choose to perform only one of the following four actions.

- Take 3 gem tokens of different colors.
- Take 2 gem tokens of the same color.
 - This action is only possible if there are at least 4 tokens of the chosen color left when the player takes them.
- Reserve 1 development card and take 1 gold token (joker).
- Purchase 1 face-up development card from the middle of the table or a previously reserved one.

Selecting tokens

A player can never have more than 10 tokens at the end of their turn (including jokers). If this happens, they must return tokens until they only have 10 left. A player can return all or some of those they've just drawn. The tokens owned by a player must be visible by all players at all times.

Reminder: players may not take 2 tokens of the same color if there are less than 4 tokens available of that color.

Reserve a development card

To reserve a card, a player simply needs to take a face-up development from the middle of the table or (if you're feeling lucky) draw the first card from one of the three decks (level ○; ○○; ○○○) without showing it to the other players.

The reserved cards are kept in hand and cannot be discarded. Players may not have more than three reserved cards in hand, and the only way to get rid of a card is to buy it (see below).

Reserving a card is also the only way to get a gold token (joker). If there is no gold left, you can still reserve a card, but you won't get any gold.

Buying a development card

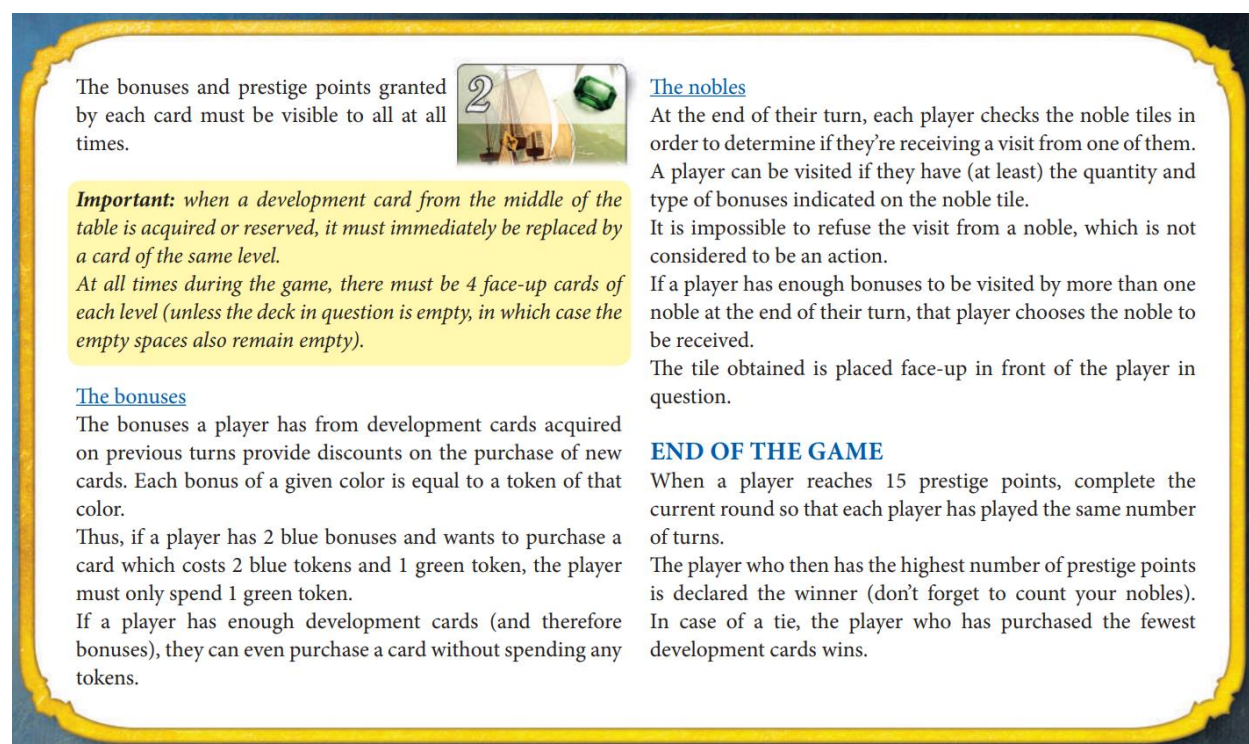
To purchase a card, a player must spend the number of tokens indicated on the card. A joker token can replace any color. The spent tokens (including any jokers) are returned to the middle of the table.

A player may purchase one of the face-up development cards in the middle of the table or a card in his hand that was reserved on a previous turn.


Each player makes distinct rows with the acquired development cards by sorting them by color, and staggering them vertically so that their bonuses and prestige point values are visible.

In the first section of the Game Rules, things start out fine, describing taking tokens. That's great, because before having the coins to buy their first development cards, that's all players can do. But, for some reason reserving development cards and taking a gold token comes before the ordinary purchasing a development card option. This ordering is repeated below in the "Reserve a development card" and "Buying a development card" sections. (And never mind the lack of parallel grammar; most players won't notice and it doesn't affect anything other than linguistic worrywarts.)

If you're familiar with Splendor, you'll also notice something missing from this page, a little something known as *The Core Mechanic of the Game*. It doesn't arrive until the next page:



The bonuses and prestige points granted by each card must be visible to all at all times.



Important: when a development card from the middle of the table is acquired or reserved, it must immediately be replaced by a card of the same level.
At all times during the game, there must be 4 face-up cards of each level (unless the deck in question is empty, in which case the empty spaces also remain empty).

The bonuses
The bonuses a player has from development cards acquired on previous turns provide discounts on the purchase of new cards. Each bonus of a given color is equal to a token of that color.
Thus, if a player has 2 blue bonuses and wants to purchase a card which costs 2 blue tokens and 1 green token, the player must only spend 1 green token.
If a player has enough development cards (and therefore bonuses), they can even purchase a card without spending any tokens.

The nobles
At the end of their turn, each player checks the noble tiles in order to determine if they're receiving a visit from one of them. A player can be visited if they have (at least) the quantity and type of bonuses indicated on the noble tile.
It is impossible to refuse the visit from a noble, which is not considered to be an action.
If a player has enough bonuses to be visited by more than one noble at the end of their turn, that player chooses the noble to be received.
The tile obtained is placed face-up in front of the player in question.

END OF THE GAME
When a player reaches 15 prestige points, complete the current round so that each player has played the same number of turns.
The player who then has the highest number of prestige points is declared the winner (don't forget to count your nobles).
In case of a tie, the player who has purchased the fewest development cards wins.

The bonuses! That's what drives the entire game, but it's not mentioned until near the very end. This discussion should have come well before discussing prestige points and the nobles (which are the end game/winning mechanic).

The main thing you're doing in Splendor is collecting coins to buy cards, and buying cards to get permanent discounts on future card purchases, enabling you to more easily buy the expensive cards worth prestige points.

I said I enjoy this game no matter how predictably I lose, and the rulebook layout might be related to that. Putting the prestige points and nobles front and ~~center~~ left reflects how stronger players develop their strategy and plot a path towards victory (the part I'm weakish at). Same goes for giving reserving cards and gold coins more emphasis than ordinary card buying.

The rulebook seems to be written from the point of view of the type of player I habitually lose to. But, this isn't a strategy guide for experienced players; it needs to see the game from the perspective of someone entirely new to its rules and mechanics.