

# Pirate's Bluff

A card game by James Ernest

Beta Rules July 29, 2020

**Introduction:** *Pirate's Bluff* is a bluffing card game for long sea voyages. It is similar to the traditional game *Liar's Dice*, in that players start with a random secret hand, and try to guess through bidding what every other player holds. The game uses a custom 72-card deck, with excellent art by Nate Taylor, plus coins or poker chips for keeping score.



**Development Status:** *Pirate's Bluff* has been in the works since October 2017, invented at RinCon in Tucson AZ. This is the "Beta" version of the rules, created for Crab Fragment Labs. We're still testing when we can, and we welcome your comments on this new game!

**Players:** 3 to 8

**Components:** The 72-card *Pirate's Bluff* deck, and chips for betting.

**Playing Time:** 30+ minutes, at 3 to 5 Minutes per hand.

**Notes:** This is a gambling game, which means each hand is an independent game. Players can enter and leave at any time, and there is no specific end point. The object is to finish with more money than you started with.

For a finite play session, you can choose a fixed period of time (for example, 30 minutes) and compare your stacks at the end. Should a player run out of coins, it is fine to let them take a loan. Just remember to account for that loan in the final score.

**The Deck:** The *Pirate's Bluff* deck contains eight copies each of the numbers 1 through 8, plus eight wild cards (rank 0), for a total of 72. You can build your own deck from a single UNO deck or two poker decks. Or you can order our custom decks from DriveThruCards.

Ideally, each card in your deck has a mark (such as a letter) indicating priority order, so there is never a question about who will make the first bid. You can do this by marking your own deck with a pen. Each card in the same rank should be distinguished with a letter from A to H.

*Note: You may want to play with two decks.* This game goes very fast, and the best way to keep the action going is to shuffle one deck while the other is in play. We have created both a Red and Blue-backed version of the deck, for players who want to take advantage of this option.

**Setting Up:** Give each player at least 50 gold coins. If you do not have gold coins, any other kind of coin or chip will do. (Remember to bury your coins on a tropical island between games, to keep them safe.)

**Each Round:** Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of seven\* cards to each player. At the beginning of each round, all players make an *ante* bet of one coin, which goes into a central pot.

\* This hand size drops to 6 cards if you have 7 players, and 5 cards for 8 players.

*Note: The position of dealer can change, or stay in one place. It has no bearing on the order of play.*

**First Play:** Each player chooses one card from their hand and places it face down on the table. Once everyone has chosen a card, they are turned up. The player who played the lowest card will make the first bid, with ties broken in favor of the earlier letter. Wild cards are rank 0, and are therefore lowest.

**First Bid:** The opening bidder must declare a *bid* as follows: A bid contains a *number* of cards of a single *rank*, such as “Four Threes” or “Seven Twos.” The bidder is claiming that at least that many cards of that rank exist in play, including all players’ hands, as well as the starting cards.

**Bids and Calls:** Following the opening bid, any player may at any time either *make a higher bid*, or *call the current bid*. This proceeds as fast as the players wish to go, with no turn order, usually very quickly. Any player may act at any time, except that a player can’t perform two actions in a row. (You can’t bid and then call yourself, duh.)

- **Increasing the Bid:** To be allowed, a new bid must do one of the following:
  - Keep the *quantity* of the previous bid, but increase the *rank* of the cards
    - For example from “Five Threes” to “Five Sixes”
  - Increase the *quantity* of the previous bid. In this case the *rank* can be anything.
    - For example, from “Five Sixes” to “Six Twos.”
- **Calling the Bid:** If you believe that the standing bid is too high, you may *call*. This ends the round, and all players show their hands to determine who is right and wrong.

**Showdown:** When a bid is called, all players show their hands. If the bidder is right, the bidder wins and the caller loses. If the bidder is wrong, then the caller wins and the bidder loses.

- The bidder is right if there are at least as many cards of the called rank in play. For example, if the bid is “Four Threes,” the bidder wins as long as there are at least four threes in play.
  - “Cards in play” includes all players’ hands, as well as the faceup starting cards.
  - If the bidder is right, the bidder wins and the caller loses.
- The bidder is wrong if there are fewer cards in play than the bid number. For example, if the bid was “Seven Twos” and there are fewer than seven twos in play, the bidder loses, and the caller wins.

**Wild Cards:** Wild cards become copies of the called rank, but only if they are in a hand with at least one natural card of that rank. (The starting card is part of the hand.) For example, if the bid is “Five Sevens,” then wild cards become sevens, but only if they are in a hand with an actual seven.

**Note:** With eight wild cards and eight natural cards of each rank, the highest number of any rank that could theoretically be in play is *sixteen*. Bidding higher than that would be, shall we say, suspicious.

**Winning and Losing:** The winner of the showdown collects the *antes*. In addition, she collects coins from the other player who was in the showdown, equal to the *size of the final bid*. For example, if the final bid was “Nine Twos,” then the penalty is nine coins, paid directly from the loser to the winner.

**Irregularities and Special Cases:** Because the bidding is a free-for-all, there are sometimes questions of timing. Here are the rules and resolutions we have worked out so far:

- **Countdown: Going, Going, Dead.** If no player will increase the bid or call the standing bid, the bidder wins. To lock in this result, after a sufficient pause, the current bidder may begin slowly reciting the words “going, going, going, dead, dead dead.” If there has been no reply before the final “dead,” then the bidder wins the pot with no showdown, as well as an added penalty of one coin from every player.
- **Simultaneous Calls:** Should two or more players call at the same time, these players participate equally in the showdown. If they win, they divide the pot and the penalty as equally as possible, with any odd coins remaining in the pot for the next round. If they lose, they contribute to the penalty equally, rounding up the value if it is not evenly divisible.
- **Simultaneous Bids:** Should two or more players make the same bid at the same time, another bid (from anyone) is required to break the tie. Usually this will happen naturally. If no one is willing to make another bid, these two players can be called, or can initiate a countdown. If this ends in a showdown, the two players divide their wins and penalties as described above.
- **Sloppy Calling:** To call, you must say exactly and only the word “CALL.” Speak clearly and with intent. Any weaker version of calling, such as “I might just call that bid” should be ignored.

#### **Example of Play:**

The game has five players: Arville, Bethany, Carter, Douglas, and Eris. All players *ante* one coin to start. Eris shuffles the deck and deals six cards to each player. After looking at their hands, all players select one card from their hand, and place it face down onto the table.

The starting cards are revealed together, and they are **2, 2, 3, 4, and 7**. Between Arville and Bethany’s 2’s, Bethany’s has the lower letter (C vs. D) so she will make the first bid.

After careful consideration, Bethany declares “Three Twos,” which is a safe bid because she’s looking at two of them on the table. Her hand doesn’t contain any more, but she figures there must be another one out there. (Some players choose more aggressive opening bids, and might be called right away.)

Arville bids “Four Twos” because he assumes Bethany’s reasoning is good, and he has a Two in his hand. Carter bids “Five Twos” for the same reason. Bethany raises the bid to “Five Sevens” because she has two sevens. Douglas says “Six Sevens” as a bluff, because he has none, but wants to make others think he has some. Carter says “Seven Twos,” then Eris says “Seven Sevens,” and Douglas says “Call.”

The hands are revealed to be as follows (the first card in each list is the starting card):

**Arville:** 2-1-1-2-3-8-0

**Bethany:** 2-3-4-5-7-7-8

**Carter:** 3-1-1-2-4-5-8

**Douglas:** 4-1-2-3-4-8-0

**Eris:** 7-2-2-7-7-8-0

The final bid was seven sevens, by Eris, and Douglas called her. There are only six sevens in play, including the wild card in Eris’ hand. (The other wilds can’t be sevens because there are no natural sevens in those hands.) Therefore, Eris was wrong, and pays 7 coins to Douglas, who also gets the *antes*.

## Variations:

**Cyclone:** Immediately after the deal, each player passes two cards to the player on their left. You could also vary this so that players pass to different people each time.

**Super Wilds:** Under this variant, each wild card that a player holds counts for as many of the called rank as *all of the natural matches in the same hand*. This means if the bid was in Sevens, a hand containing W-W-7-7-7 would count for a total of *nine sevens*.

Note that the Super Wilds variation does increase the theoretical maximum quantity of a given rank, which is interesting, but it also arbitrarily grants a lot of knowledge and bidding power to a player who happens to get a lot of wild cards, which is probably bad. This one needs testing!

## Questions? Comments?

Crab Fragment Labs is all about making great games. We hope you'll have fun playing *Pirate's Bluff*, and if you have comments, questions, or ways you think the game could be improved, please let us know!

Reach out to us on Twitter at [@crabfragment](https://twitter.com/crabfragment), follow [CrabFragmentGames](https://www.facebook.com/CrabFragmentGames) on Facebook, or use the email form on the [About Us](#) page at [crabfragmentlabs.com](https://crabfragmentlabs.com).

**First Night Players:** James Ernest, Dori Lovers, Karen Arnold Ewing, Tony Ewing, and Robert Stickney