

The Cheapass Games

Poker Suite



Fourteen original games that you can play with a standard deck of cards.

Playing cards are awesome. There is so much they can do.

The Cheapass Games Poker Suite is a collection of original games that you can play with a standard deck of cards. They are interesting, smart, and probably unlike anything you have ever played before.

In this book, you will evolve from primordial ooze, escape from a sinking ship, and battle gladiators to the death.

You'll play baseball with brains, perform magic tricks, and cheat a slow-witted bartender out of his loose change. You'll spend the last years of your artistic career struggling to die penniless and insane.

Oh, and you'll play a little poker, too.

You will do all this amazing stuff with no new pieces, no custom bits, and nothing extra to buy. Except a deck of cards.

These days, it's easy to believe that every new game requires new components. Big game publishers need you to believe this, because if a game has no bits, there's nothing for them to sell.

We'd rather give our games away for free, and let the players decide what they are worth. You can support this plan by paying what you like for Crab Fragment Games, either by buying our free PDFs, or by joining our illustrious Patreon backers, the Hermit Crabs.

It's only with your help that we can spread love and joy throughout the galaxy.

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Abandon Ship!



Players: 2-5

Playing Time: 60 minutes

Equipment: A standard deck of cards without Jokers, and a way to keep score.

Story: *The rats are gone, but you're still here. You and your greedy pals are hustling around the deck of a sinking pirate ship, trying to scoop up as much treasure as you can carry. You'll need to collect plenty of loot, so you can buy your way into a lifeboat, and the best lifeboats are the ones with the most treasure already in them. It's complicated. Or maybe you're just not very smart.*

In this game, Aces are worth 1 point, Jacks 11, Queens 12, and Kings 13. All other cards are worth their face value.

Overview: The game consists of several hands, or "rounds," each of which ends when the last card is drawn from the deck, and the ship sinks. At the end of each round, players will compete to get on the lifeboats in a *showdown*, and they score points based on which lifeboat they board. If you board no lifeboat, you get no points for the round. The first player to earn 200 points wins.

To Begin Each Round: Shuffle the deck and deal five cards to each player. If there are only two players, deal five more cards and set them aside, face down. These cards will not be used. Play starts with the dealer, and the deal moves to the left after each round.

On Your Turn: If you do not have five cards in your hand, draw back up to five. If you draw the last card off the deck, the ship sinks immediately, *and you do not take the rest of your turn*. After you draw, you have two options: you may *discard* one card, or *pick a fight*.

Discarding: There are four discard piles, one for each suit. These represent lifeboats. When you discard a card, place it into the lifeboat of the appropriate suit, and your turn is over.

Fighting: To pick a fight, play a card into the center of the table, and declare which player you are attacking. That player has two options: he can surrender and lose the fight, or he can play a card of higher rank than the card you played. (Suit doesn't matter.)

If your opponent plays a higher card, you may respond with an even higher card, or you may surrender. This continues until one player gives up, or can't play a higher card.

The winner of the fight draws a random card from the loser's hand. That card goes into the winner's "board," which is a faceup collection of cards on the table in front of him.

Board cards aren't part of your hand. You can't fight with them, discard them, or lose them in fights. They will help you in the showdown.

After the fight, all cards which were played in the fight get sorted into the appropriate lifeboats. (Think of it as other pirates picking up all the stuff you threw at each other.)

Important Restriction: You cannot play the last card in your hand, unless that card is a King. This rule ensures that the winner will always be able to draw a card from the loser's hand.

Pointless Restriction: You can't challenge a player who is holding no cards. You'd have nothing to draw from him, and you can achieve the same result by simply discarding a card.



The Showdown: When the last card in the deck is drawn, the ship sinks. At this point, it's time for each player to bribe his way into a lifeboat, in the phase called the "showdown."

Each player plays one card from his hand, face down. This card is called the *Key Card*, and it is a declaration of which lifeboat you're running to. This means that you must be lucky enough to hold a card matching the lifeboat you want. If your hand is empty, which is rare, you will go down with the ship and score no points for the round.

Once everyone has played a Key Card, reveal all the cards in everyone's hand.

If everyone ran for a different lifeboat, there's no contest. Each player gets the point value of the cards in that lifeboat. You do not score the cards in your hand, your Key Card, or your board.

If more than one person went for the same lifeboat, then only one player will get in. The points in the lifeboat will go to the player who is holding *more points in the matching suit*, including his *hand*, his *board*, and his *Key Card*. If there is a tie, it is broken in favor of the player who has the *single highest card in that suit*. As above, you score only the points in the lifeboat.

Scoring Example: It's the showdown in a four-player game. Player 1 plays a Spade, Players 2 and 3 play Hearts, and Player 4 plays nothing because his hand is empty. Player 1 gets the points in the Spade lifeboat, and Player 4 gets nothing.

Players 2 and 3 have both gone for the Hearts lifeboat, so they must compete to get in. Compare all the Hearts they hold: Player 2 has the 6h on his board, played the Qh as his Key, and holds no other Hearts. Player 3 played the 2h as his Key, and held only the 3h and the 7h in his hand. Player 2 takes the lifeboat, with 18 total points of Hearts vs. Player 3's 12 points. Player 3 scores nothing.

Winning: Play to 200 points. If two players break 200 on the same round, the player with the highest score wins. If two players are tied for the high score, they must engage in the embarrassing Caribbean Plank Walk tied together with a ten-foot rope and clenching knives in their teeth.

Strategy: The cards that you discard and play in fights are crucial choices. Every card that you play in this manner will wind up in a lifeboat. On the other hand, every card that you win or lose in a fight will go in someone's board. Early in the game, it helps to get a few cards into your board, to give yourself some leverage in the showdown. Later, you must do what you can to make sure you hold a Key Card for the right lifeboat. You will notice that the more valuable a lifeboat is, the fewer points it will require to board (the majority of that suit is in the lifeboat, and not in players' hands.) Discretion is the better part of valor: it's better to get into a small lifeboat than to try for a big one and lose. Learn to guess what the other players will probably go for, and play accordingly.

Variation for 6-8 Players: You can play *Abandon Ship!* with as many as eight players, by shuffling together two decks. Deal eight hands regardless of how many players are in the game, and remove the unused hands from the game. To resolve ties during the showdown, if both players have a card of the same rank as their highest card in their Key suit, compare the second highest cards in each hand, and so on. If tied hands are exactly identical, it's time to set up the plank.

BARCELONA

Players: 2-5

Playing Time: 1 minute per hand

Equipment: A deck of cards without Jokers, and coins or poker chips for betting.

Divide your poker deck into two decks, one red and one black. If you like, you can use cards with different backs.

To Begin Each Hand: Shuffle the red and black decks separately. Everyone pays an ante of one coin. Then, everyone draws one card from each deck. Everyone should now have one red and one black card.

The Play: Simultaneously, every player reveals one card. This can be either the red or the black card, based on your strategy.

Next, the player who is showing the *single lowest card* may either *force a showdown*, or *drop out*. For determining which is the lowest card, Aces are low, and suits (from lowest to highest) are clubs, diamonds, hearts, and spades.

If a player drops out, the player with next lowest card has the same option, and so on. Each player in turn may either drop out, or force a showdown. You cannot do anything until you are the lowest card.

The Showdown: In a showdown, all cards are revealed. The player who holds the *highest black card* wins, and all the losers (that is, all those who have not dropped out) pay the winner a number of coins equal to the value of their *red cards*. Aces are worth 1 coin, and all face cards are worth 10. The winner also collects the antes. If there is no showdown, the surviving player wins, and takes only the antes.

Play several rounds, using chips to keep score.





BONEYARD

Players: 4-8

Playing Time: 20 minutes

Equipment: The Ace, 3, 5, 7, and 10 from two decks. For 8 players, you will need these cards from *three* decks.

Each player starts with the same hand: A, 3, 5, 7, and 10. The Boneyard starts with the same set. Aces are worth 1.

Basics: Boneyard is a silent-bid auction game in which players are bidding on buckets of money. The object is to be the first player to accumulate 40 dollars. It's not too hard; you start with 26!

Setup: Each player starts with exactly the same hand: one of each of the following cards: A, 3, 5, 7, and 10. There is also a "Boneyard" in the middle of the table.

The Boneyard is made of five "buckets" which start out holding the same list of cards: A, 3, 5, 7, and 10.

Each round, players will bid to buy the money in these buckets. However, there is a catch: If two players make the same bid, their bids cancel out, and they get nothing.

Bidding: On each round, choose *one or more cards* from your hand, and hold them face down. You may want to cover your cards so that it's harder for others to see how many cards you are playing. Once everyone is ready, all the bids are revealed.

If two or more bids are the same total value, put them aside. They will take nothing.

The player with the highest *unmatched* bid takes the card(s) from any single bucket, and puts them in his hand. You won't necessarily take the bucket with the most money, but that's usually the best choice.

Other unmatched bids take cards from the remaining buckets from highest to lowest, until all the bids have been resolved, or until there are no buckets left to claim.

If you make an unmatched bid but don't claim anything (this can only happen with 6 or more players) you get to take back your bid.

Players who made matching bids get nothing. If you run out of cards, you are out of the game.

Rebuilding the Boneyard: After the bidding is resolved, the Boneyard regenerates. First, each unmatched bid falls into the bucket it took. Then, the matched bids are gathered into sets of the same size, and are added into the lowest valued buckets. There is an example below.

If there are multiple sets of matched bids, pile the largest set together into the smallest bucket, then pile the next largest set into the now-smallest bucket, and so on. Again, see the example below.

Winning: After each round, everyone checks his score, which is the total value of all the cards in his hand. The first player to collect at least 40 dollars wins.

If several people go over 40 at the same time, then the highest total wins. *If there is a tie for high score at this point, play another round. If no one is over 40 after that round, the high score still wins.*

An Example of Play: Suppose the five buckets contain the following values: 17, 13, 7, 4, and 3, as shown below.

Cards:	10+7	5+5+3	7	1+3	3
Bucket:	A	B	C	D	E

There are eight players, who make bids of 10, 7, 7, 5, 4, 3, 1, and 1.

The 10 is the highest bid, and it is unmatched. That player decides to take the largest bucket, (10 + 7).

The value-7 bids match, cancel, and take nothing.

The 5 is the next bid, and decides to take the (5+5+3).

The 4 bid (which is made of 1+3) takes the 7.

The 3 takes the (1+3)

The 1 bids cancel, and take nothing.

Next, the buckets refill. Dropping the successful bids into the buckets they took, the Boneyard becomes:

Cards:	10	5	1+3	3	3
Bucket:	A	B	C	D	E

Next, the matched bids fall into the smallest buckets, as follows. First, drop the pair of 7's into the smallest bucket (one of the 3's), then drop the pair of 1's into the smallest remaining bucket (the other 3). This results in the following Boneyard for the next turn:

Cards:	10	5	1+3	3+1+1	3+7+7
Bucket:	A	B	C	D	E

At this point, if any player holds more than 40 points, she wins. Otherwise, play another turn.

Strategy: There is a good deal of strategy in trying to psych out other players, and in trying to remember what cards they have played and taken. Remember, everyone starts with the same hand, so the only randomness in this game comes from which cards people decide to play from round to round.

Also, you will note that it's not generally profitable to bid more than the value of the largest bucket. But you probably already figured that out.

BRAIN Baseball!



Players: 3-7

Playing Time: 20 minutes

Equipment: A deck of playing cards without Jokers, and a way to keep score.

Brain Baseball is a trick-based card game that is unlike Baseball in nearly every regard. It was originally crafted as an adjunct to **Give Me the Brain**, for which a surfeit of bid cards was printed. It lives on in this form.

To Begin: Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of seven cards to each player.

Play will consist of several rounds, or “tricks,” each of which involves a *pitch*, a *swing*, and a *catch*. Each set of tricks is called an “inning.”

After the inning is over, the deal passes to the left. The game ends when each player has dealt one inning.

The Cards: The cards in the deck are worth their face value, with Jacks being 11 points, Queens 12, and Kings 13. Aces are low (1 point), except when used as fielding cards, in which case they are high and worth 15. Deuces are also high in fielding, and are then worth 14 points.

On Each Round: The round begins with a pitch. The dealer pitches the first trick of each inning. Subsequent pitches are thrown by whoever ended up with the ball.

Pitching: The pitcher plays one card from his hand face up on the table. This card is the “ball.”

Hitting: Starting on the pitcher’s *left* and proceeding to the left around the table, everyone (except the pitcher) gets one chance to *swing* at the ball. They may do this by playing a card that is *equal to or lower than* the value of the ball, but *higher than the swings that have been played so far*.

For Example: If the ball is a 7, and a 4 has been played, the only legal remaining swings are 5, 6, and 7.

Taking a swing is always optional, so you can pass on any ball.

The swing that is closest to the value of the ball hits it. Put the ball in front of the hitter, and discard all the swing cards.

If the ball is not hit, it is a “strike.” In this case, the pitcher keeps the ball for points, and the same player pitches again.

Three Strike Rule: If a pitcher ever throws three strikes in a row, he wins the game!

Fielding: Once a ball has been hit, every player (except the hitter) gets one chance to catch the ball, starting with the player on the hitter’s left, and going once around the table. Like swinging, fielding is always optional.

To catch the ball, you must play the highest card, in much the same way as you did while hitting. The only difference is that, in fielding, you can play any card *equal to or greater than the ball*, and *higher is always better*.

The first fielding card must be equal to or higher than the value of the ball, and subsequent cards must be higher than the last fielding card played.

Note: In fielding, as mentioned above, the Aces and Deuces are worth 15 and 14 points respectively.

The ball is caught by the highest fielder, who keeps the ball for points and throws the next pitch. Discard all the fielding cards.

If no one catches the ball, the hitter keeps the ball for points and throws the next pitch.

If the role of pitcher ever goes to a player who has no card, it passes to the left.

Ending the Inning: The inning continues until only one player has any cards left. So, when the next-to-last player plays his last card, this will be the last round of the inning. Every ball is now scored, and is worth its base value in points. (Aces are worth 1 point, and Deuces are worth 2.) Record your scores and reshuffle the deck.

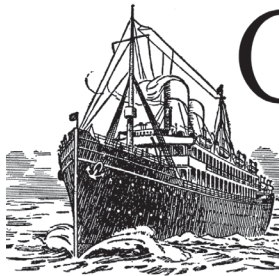
The game ends after every player has dealt once.

Gambling Variation: To play this as a gambling game, do the following: each time a player makes a pitch, he must add one dollar to the pot for each point in the value of the pitch. Whoever wins the inning takes the pot.

Strategy Note: You will notice right away that there’s not much incentive to swing at a ball. You will only do so to prevent the pitcher from getting another strike, or if you’re taking a chance that no one will bother to catch it.



Art by Brian Snoddy



Caribbean Star

Players: 2

Playing Time: 15 minutes

Equipment: A deck of playing cards without Jokers, and a way to keep score.

Story: Welcome aboard the **Caribbean Star**, Caribe Cruise Lines' most luxurious cruise ship. It's chock to the gills with newlyweds and nearly-deads who have ventured to the Caribbean to float into the Panama Canal, buy knickknacks in Jamaican straw markets, and drink Piña Coladas from absurdly carved coconut shells.

Unfortunately, you and your opponent are magicians, and, like most magicians, you have more or less the same act. The Miami booking office accidentally placed both of you on the same cruise ship, and now you've got one week to prove who's better, and get the other one fired.

How to Begin: Each player owns one color of cards, either red or black. Determine who is who before the game begins.

Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of five cards to each player. Turns are simultaneous.

On Each Turn: Both players play one card face down. Your card will determine your action for the turn. After both cards are played, reveal them.

Each card has a unique function, described in the list below. Although they are played at the same time, cards always take effect from lowest to highest. Deuces are low, and Kings are high. Aces work differently, and are explained later. If both cards are the same rank, suit determines the order. Clubs are lowest, followed by Diamonds, Hearts, and Spades (alphabetical order).

Card Functions:

Magic Tricks, 10, J, Q, and K: Tens and face cards are *magic tricks*. When you play a magic trick, it means you are practicing that trick for your next performance. If you play your opponent's color, he practices that trick.

When you play a magic trick in your color, put it in your "practice pile," a set of cards that remain face up on the table in front of you. If you play a magic trick in your opponent's color, you put that card into *your opponent's* practice pile.

Each magic trick takes time, and a perfect show is 15 minutes long. All face cards add 5 minutes to your show. Jacks are worth 2 points, Queens are worth 4 points, and Kings are worth 6 points. Tens add 10 minutes to your show, and are worth 10 points.

Showtimes, 7 and 9: Sevens and Nines are *showtimes*. When you play a showtime of your color, you will perform your act. This means you will discard your practice pile and convert it into points. If you play a showtime in your opponent's color, your opponent performs his act. Obviously, you want to convert your own practice pile when it is worth maximum points, and convert your opponent's pile when it is worthless.

The scoring of the performance is described later. After you perform your act, the showtime card and all the cards in your practice pile go into the discard pile.

Dinner Buffet, 8: Eights are "dinner buffet" cards. When you play an Eight in your color, you may perform (i.e., discard) one of the magic tricks in your practice pile and score *half its point value*. For example, if you use an Eight to remove a King from your practice pile, you score 3 points.

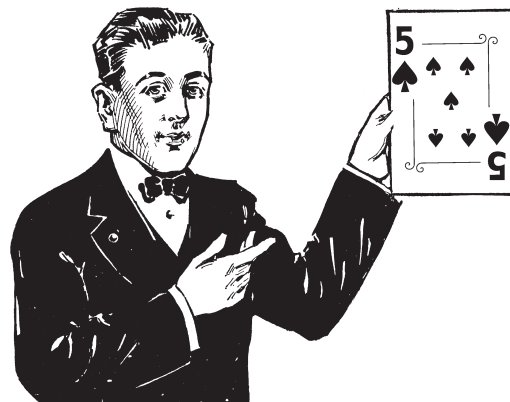
You don't have to use your dinner buffet, even after you play it. You might play an Eight and then, seeing what your opponent has played, decide to ignore the buffet. Whether you use it or not, the Eight is discarded.

Similarly, if you play an opponent's Eight, he may convert one of his magic tricks or he may ignore it. You can't force your opponent to perform at the dinner buffet.

Rehearsal, 6: Sixes are *rehearsal* cards. You can rehearse your act before performing it, which will double its final value. When you play a Six in your color, add it to your practice pile. If you play a Six in your opponent's color, it goes into his practice pile.

If you have two Sixes in your practice pile, your show will be worth quadruple points!

Afternoon Nap, 5: Fives are "afternoon nap" cards. When you play a Five of any color, you will swap hands with your opponent. Discard the Five after you swap hands.



Mistakes, 2, 3, and 4: Twos, Threes, and Fours are *mistakes*. These are a little like magic tricks, but they are worth *negative points*.

If you play a mistake of your own color, it will go into your practice pile. If you play a mistake of your opponent's color, it will go into his practice pile. Mistakes don't always hurt you: if you perform a show composed entirely of mistakes, it's called a "comedy show" and is worth nothing. Which is better than negative points!

Scoring your Shows: A practice pile may contain magic tricks, rehearsals, and/or mistakes. When you perform it, here is how to score the show.

First, evaluate the magic tricks by the length of the show. The perfect show is 15 minutes. Face cards are 5 minutes each, and Tens are 10 minutes.

If your show is exactly 15 minutes, you will score full value for all your magic tricks. If you run long or short by 5 minutes, you must cut the value of your biggest trick by half (or one of your biggest tricks, if you have two big tricks of the same size). If you run short or long by 10 minutes, you must cut all your tricks by half. If you run 15 or more minutes too long, you get no points for your magic tricks. If you run 0 minutes (because you have no magic tricks at all) you are doing a comedy show, which is always worth exactly zero points.

Second, subtract the values of your mistakes. Twos are worth -2, Threes -3, and Fours -4. Mistakes do not add time to your act, and you always lose full value for these cards unless you are doing a comedy show. Mistakes can easily result in a negative value for your show.

Last, apply the rehearsal cards. If you have a Six in your practice pile, double the final value. If you have two Sixes, you double it twice.

Comedy Show: If your act has no magic tricks, it is always worth exactly zero points. This is true regardless of the number of mistakes and rehearsals in the pile; ignore the mistakes and rehearsals and score 0 points for the show.

An Example of Scoring a Show:

A practice pile has the following cards in it: King, King, Ten, Six, Four, Three, and Two.

The show is 5 minutes too long ($5 + 5 + 10 = 20$ minutes), so the highest magic trick, the Ten, will be worth only half value. The base value of the show is therefore $6 + 6 + 5$, or 17 points.

The mistakes are worth $4 + 3 + 2$, or 9. These are deducted from 17, leaving 8 points.

Finally, the show value is doubled because of the rehearsal card (the Six), which results in a final value of 16 points.

Stop Cards, the Aces: Aces are not played like other cards. Instead, they are "stop" cards that can be played while other cards are resolving. Aces are not color-specific so they always work for whoever plays them.

You can play an Ace from your hand to cancel the effect of any other card, immediately before it is resolved. In other words, once the cards are revealed, and just before executing a particular card, either player may use an Ace to stop that card from happening.

When you play the Ace, you *pick up the card you canceled and put it in your hand*. Discard the Ace.

You *cannot* use an Ace to cancel another Ace.

An Example of Playing an Ace:

The red player has played a red Five, and the black player has played a red Ten. Black holds an Ace.

Before the Five swaps both players' hands, black has the opportunity to play his Ace, but he chooses not to. The Five is discarded, and the players swap hands.

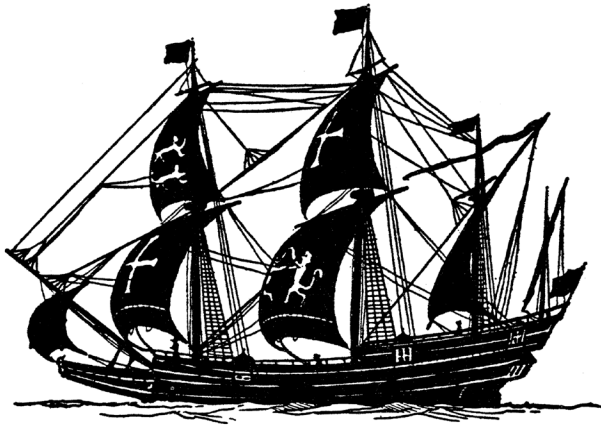
Now red holds the Ace, and he can play it to cancel the red Ten. He discards the Ace, and puts the red Ten into his hand. (Red canceled the Ten because it would have made his act too long. He plans to use the Ten in his next act.)

Ending the Turn: At the end of the turn, each player draws one card. Once there are no more cards to draw, players continue to play cards until their hands are empty, or until one player can no longer play cards because he holds nothing but Aces. At this point, the game ends.

Scoring the Game: At the end of the game, each player gets one "farewell show," in which he scores the cards remaining in his practice pile. The farewell show is *not optional*; you can lose a lot of points in this show if you're not careful.

After the farewell show, the player with the most points wins. The other player must disembark in San Juan, dismayed and alone, and will inevitably fall into a lifestyle of binge drinking and compulsive gambling.





Following Suit

Players: 3-6

Playing Time: 20 minutes

Equipment: A deck of playing cards without Jokers, and a way to keep score.

Following Suit is a trick-taking game about oh, let's say, maritime trade. The object is to collect as many points as possible in a single suit. The game is played in several rounds, and the first player to reach 200 points wins.

This game is somewhat like Lamarckian Poker (page 10) and was created around the same time. You can decide which one you like better. We like them both.

To Begin: Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of four cards to each player. Turns are simultaneous.

On Each Turn: Deal eight cards face up into the middle of the table. These cards are called the *pool*. Each player plays one card from his hand face down. This card is called the *mark*.

When every player has played a mark, all the marks are revealed. The highest mark of each suit captures all the cards on the table in the *following suit*, including the cards in the pool *and the other marks*.

For capturing, Aces are high.

The suits capture each other in descending order (as shown in the diagram at right): Spades capture hearts, hearts capture diamonds, diamonds capture clubs, and clubs capture spades. In suit order, each suit captures that suit that is immediately below it, except for clubs, which wrap back to the top and capture spades.

The captures are simultaneous, so a mark can both capture and be captured at the same time.

Cards that you capture go into your hand.

Cleaning Up: If there are any cards left on the table at the end of the turn, those cards go into the discard pile.

The Next Round: Deal another eight cards into the center of the table, and take the next turn. This process continues until the deck runs out of cards. *Note: With an even number of players, the last pool will contain four cards, instead of eight.*

Scoring: When you reach the bottom of the deck, the round is over. Players score points for their hands, counting *only the cards in the best suit*.

Each card is worth its face value in points. Aces are worth one point, Jacks are worth 11, Queens 12, and Kings are worth 13 points.

Remember, you only score your best suit. For example, if you end a round with 14 points of spades, 25 points of hearts, and 3 points of clubs, you score 25 points.

Winning: The winner is the first player to score at least 200 points. If more than one player breaks 200 in the same round, the player with the highest score wins. If two players are tied for high score, play another round.

An Example of Play: Suppose there are five players, and the eight cards in the pool include two cards of each suit.

On this turn, the five marks played include the Js, the 2s, the Ac, the 10c, and the 3h.

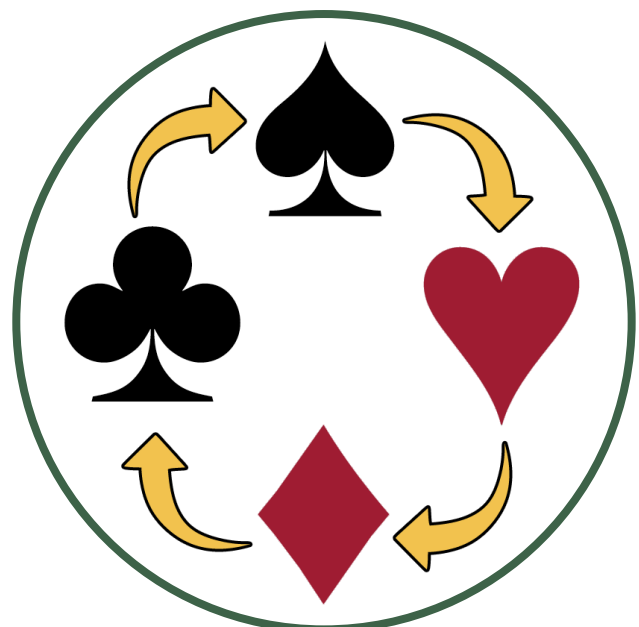
The 2s and the 10c will capture nothing, because those cards are outranked by other marks (the Js and Ac).

The Js captures all the hearts on the table, including the 3h.

The 3h captures the diamonds.

The Ac captures all the spades on the table, including the 2s and the Js.

No diamonds were played, so nothing captures the clubs. Those cards remaining on the table are discarded, and the turn is over.





Players: 2-6

Playing Time: 15 minutes

Equipment: A deck of playing cards without Jokers, and a way to keep score.

Basics: Everyone is trying to take change from a friendly but slow-witted bartender. He's so friendly that if he doesn't have exact change, he'll give you more money than you gave him.

To Begin: Deal each player a hand of 7 cards. If there are 5 or 6 players, deal hands of 6 instead. Deal 7 more cards to the "Bartender," which is a faceup hand in the center of the table. Play begins on the dealer's left and proceeds to the left.

On Each Turn: Give one card from your hand to the bartender. The bartender will then try to make the best change he can, as follows:

1: All cards are worth their face value. Aces are worth one dollar, Jacks are worth 11, Queens 12, and Kings 13.

2: If the bartender can give you an exact match for your card, he will. For example, if you play an Eight, he would prefer to give you an Eight. If he cannot, he will try to assemble the same dollar value from the fewest possible cards. In other words, he would rather give you two cards than three.

3: When choosing between several combinations of the same number of cards, the bartender will choose the set with the highest card in it. For example, when deciding between 4 + 3 and 6 + A, he will choose the 6 + A.

4: If he can't assemble the right value, the bartender will try his best to build the next higher value by the same rules, and so on until change is made.

5: If the bartender's hand does not add up to the value of the card being exchanged, he will draw cards from the deck until it does. He will then make change according to his basic rules.

After you have taken your change, discard the cards you received, and score one point for every extra dollar the bartender gave you. If he gives you exact change, you earn no points at all. The card you played goes into the bartender's hand.

Winning: The game ends when every player has played his hand out. Then the highest score wins.

SPOTS

Players: 2-6

Playing Time: 20 minutes

Equipment: A deck of playing cards without face cards or Jokers (Aces through 10's only), and a way to keep score.

*Spots is a card game in which two or more players will make change from a pool of cards. Scoring is handicapped as described below. We put it here because it's a little like **Hey Bartender!** But not exactly.*

The Deck: As mentioned above, the deck contains only A through 10 of each suit. All cards are worth their face value, with Aces being worth 1.

To Begin: Shuffle the deck and deal five cards to each player, *face up*. Put one card face up into the middle of the table.

Your face-up cards are your hand. The player with the fewest points in his hand will go first. Break ties by taking turns.

Before you play, establish a handicap for each player by subtracting the total value of the *smallest hand* from the total value of *that player's hand*, and dividing by two. The smallest hand has no handicap.

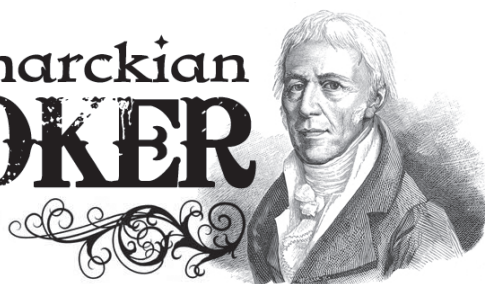
An Example: If the smallest starting hand has a value of 16, and your hand has a value of 24, then your handicap is $(24 - 16) / 2$, or 4 points.

On Each Turn: Play one card into the middle of the table, and take change. The table gives you exact change if it can, using the fewest possible cards. If the table cannot make exact change, it will give you more points than you played. If there are not enough cards to make change, add cards from the top of the deck until there are.

The card you play stays in the middle. The cards you receive go into a score pile, not back into your hand. Each player will play five cards.

Scoring: After the last card is played, count each player's score pile, and then subtract the players' handicaps. The player with the highest adjusted score wins the round. A full game ends when one player has won five rounds.

Lamarckian POKER



Players: 2-6

Playing Time: 10 minutes

Equipment: A deck of playing cards without Jokers.

Story: Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, Chevalier de la Marck, known to his friends as “Lamarck,” was a precursor of Charles Darwin, and a proponent of “soft inheritance.” This is the evolutionary theory that a parent animal could produce evolved offspring by changing its own behavior, as exemplified by the case of a giraffe who stretches her own neck, and later gives birth to a longer-necked calf.

As absurd as this sounds, given the overwhelming body of evidence supporting the creation of all life on Earth by a bearded, vengeful, all-knowing patriarch, Lamarck’s theories did nonetheless enjoy a brief period of credibility before being thoroughly rejected by critical thinkers of the modern age.

In Lamarckian Poker, you will start with a hand of random cards resembling primordial ooze, and then attempt through successive generations to evolve it into something more useful, such as mud or slime. Or perhaps the rats and giraffes of Lamarck’s colorful imagination.

To Begin: Shuffle the deck, and deal each player a starting hand of four cards.

On Each Turn: Deal four cards face up in the center of the table. These cards are called the “pool.” Each player plays one card from his hand face down on the table. This card is called the “mark.” When all the marks are down, reveal them. They will then be played one at a time, in descending order. Suit determines the order between cards of the same rank, with clubs at the bottom, then diamonds, hearts, and spades.

When played, each mark can capture cards from the pool. When you play a mark, you pick up all the cards which match it, either by suit or by rank. The mark itself falls into the pool. For example, if a Queen of spades is your play, you will pick up all the spades, and all the Queens, and then put the Queen of spades into the pool.

Another Example: On the first round of a three-player game, the following cards are dealt into the pool: Ah, Qc, 9s, 5h. Each player plays a mark face down, and then the cards are revealed to be the As, 10c, and 9h. The marks

are now played from highest to lowest, so the As goes first, capturing the Ah and the 9s, and then falling in. The new pool contains the As, Qc, and 5h. Then, the 10c takes the Qc, and falls into the pool. Last, the 9h takes the 5h, and falls in.

After the last mark is played, discard whatever is left in the pool, and deal four new cards into the pool, starting a new round.

Play continues until the deck is empty. After the last round, there is a showdown, and the player with the best poker hand wins.

It’s possible, especially with a large number of players, for people’s hands to empty. This is just a result of natural selection. If your hand is ever empty at the end of a turn, you go extinct and are out of the game.

Strategy: You don’t want to run out of cards, so in the early stages of the game you must try to pick up more cards than you play, regardless of how well they build your poker hand. At some point you will have to start tuning your hand with more precise plays, but only when you no longer run the risk of running out of cards. Just to be clear, straights and flushes require five cards.

The Poker Hands:

You probably don’t need a reminder, but in case you do, here is the list of poker hands from best to worst.

Five of a Kind: Five cards of the same rank, such as AAAAA. This hand is impossible without wild cards.

Royal Flush: This is merely an Ace-high straight flush. It has its own name because it is so awesome.

Straight Flush: Five cards in sequence that are also all the same suit, such as 3d-4d-5d-6d-7d.

Four of a Kind: Four cards of the same rank, such as four Jacks.

Full House: Three of one kind and two of another, such as QQQ-33 (Queens full of threes). The rank of the set of three determines the rank of the hand in comparison other full houses.

Flush: Five cards of the same suit. The highest card in the set determines the value of the hand, when comparing with other flushes.

Straight: Five cards in sequence, such as 8-9-T-J-Q. Straights are compared by their highest card. Aces can be used as high or low in a straight. A-2-3-4-5 is a 5-high straight.

Three of a Kind: Three cards of the same rank, such as three Kings.

Two Pair: Two pairs, such as KK-66.

One Pair: Two cards of the same rank, such as QQ.

High Card: If you have nothing else on this list, you have “high card.” Ranked by its highest card.



Players: 4-8

Playing Time: 15 minutes

Equipment: A deck of playing cards without Jokers, and some poker chips.

In all the history of humankind, nothing is as constant as the noble practice of men besting one another in mortal combat. From Roman gladiators to Jacobean duellists, Medieval French dung-runs to today's secret Tijuana Deathmatches, our world would not be the same without the endless struggle between men who really, really want to kill each other.

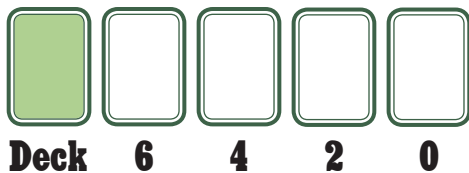
Last Man Standing is a simultaneous-play gambling game about boys being boys. Players take the role of managers, fielding teams of bloodthirsty gladiators in the hope of profiting from their dramatic and unnecessary deaths.

Note: This is a bold revision of the original game called "Last Man Standing." We should probably call it "Next Man Standing" or "Last Man Standing II" or "Penultimate Man Standing" or something. But we won't.

To Begin: Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of two cards to each player. Each player puts an ante into the pot. The size of the ante varies with the number of players:

Players:	4	5	6	7	8
Ante:	15	16	18	20	22

The Auction: One by one, players will buy four more cards for their hands from an *auction line*. Deal four cards face up next to the deck. They are priced as shown below:



Starting with a random player and proceeding to the left, players take turns buying one card at a time from the auction line, and putting that card in their hand.

When a card is bought, the cards above it slide down, and a new card is dealt into the "6" spot. Repeat this until every player has a hand of six cards.

The Battle: Play will proceed in five rounds, with simultaneous card play. After the fifth round, the last man (or men) standing will divide what's left in the pot.

On Each Round: Each player chooses one card from his hand and plays it face down onto the table. This card is your *fighter*. Small fighters are fast and delicate; large fighters are tough and slow.

Once everyone has played a card, turn them face up.

Combat: Starting with the fighter with the lowest rank, fighters will kill other fighters as follows:

1: The lowest rank on the table goes first, and kills *all cards of the highest rank*. (Killed fighters are discarded.)

2: The remaining fighters will act in turn from lowest to highest. When it is their turn to attack, except for those covered by Rule 1, fighters kill all the fighters on the table that are *beneath them in rank*.

3: Exception: No fighter can make his attack if there is another fighter *of the same rank* on the table. Rule 3 takes precedence over Rules 1 and 2, so if any two fighters on the table are the same rank, they do nothing, and if the *lowest* fighters on the table have the same rank, then the highest fighters are safe.

Earning Money: When your fighter kills another fighter, you earn money from the pot as follows: if this is the first fighter killed on this round, you get 1 coin. For the second kill of the round, take 2 coins, and so on. If one fighter takes out several enemies at once, you figure the money as though they were killed one at a time. For example, for killing the 3rd, 4th, and 5th fighter of the round, you earn $3 + 4 + 5 = 12$ coins.

Continuing: If the pot empties, the game ends immediately. Otherwise, you will play a total of five rounds.

Fighters who survive one round will remain in play on the next round, and will attack in the same sequence as the newly played fighters. Yes, it is possible for one player's fighters to attack each other.

Finishing: The game can ends if the pot is empty. After the fifth round, if there is money in the pot, divide it equally among the fighters who survived the final round.

Since this is a gambling game, your goal is to win money. You don't necessarily have to win the most.

Example of Combat: Six fighters are on the table: they are a 2, two 3's, a 5, a 9, and a Jack. The 2 goes first, killing the Jack, and earning 1 coin. The 3's are tied and can't attack. The 5 goes next, killing the 2 and both 3's, and earning $2 + 3 + 4 = 9$ coins. The 9 kills the 5, earning 5 coins, and the Jack kills nothing because it was dead before it could attack. This means that the 9 is the last man standing, and it will remain in play.



THE LOST PUEBLO



Players: 4-10

Playing Time: 5 minutes per hand

Equipment: A deck of playing cards without Jokers.

Story: *Someone has stolen the pueblo! Can you guess who it is? **The Lost Pueblo of Doctor Green** is an absurd little bluffing game from a simpler age.*

Table talk is allowed. In fact, it's almost mandatory.

To Begin: Make a small pack of playing cards that includes three cards per player, one of which is the Ace of spades. It helps if the other cards aren't Aces or spades.

Shuffle the deck and deal three cards to each player. Whoever receives the Ace of spades is *the thief*, who knows the secret location of Doctor Green's stolen pueblo. The thief must keep his identity a secret, and try to escape. If he is discovered, he loses!

On Each Turn: Play starts with a random player and moves left. On your turn, you must do one of the following three things:

1: Hand a card to another player. You can't hand away the Ace of spades unless it is your last card.

2: Ask another player to hand you a card. Again, they cannot hand you the Ace of spades unless it is their last card.

3: Accuse a player of being the thief. If you find the thief, you win. However, if you are wrong, you must hand that player *two cards*. Again you can't hand away the Ace of spades unless it is your last card.

Dropping Out: If any player other than the thief runs out of cards, they lose and must drop out of the game.

Winning: If you are not the thief, you can win in one of two ways. You can win by identifying the thief, or you can win by collecting six cards.

If you are the thief, you can only win by running out of cards. When you give away the Ace of spades, you win, even if that also gives another player six cards.

Seven-Handed Poker

Players: 2

Playing Time: 10 minutes per hand

Equipment: A deck of playing cards (Jokers are optional), and seven coins or poker chips.

***Seven-Handed Poker** is a clever little way to play poker, designed by Joshua Howard and Evelina Shin.*



To Begin: Make a line of seven coins across the middle of the table, as shown above. Each player will place a poker hand at each of the seven spots.

Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of seven cards to each player. Determine randomly who will go first, then take turns.

On Your Turn: Place a hand of one to five cards, from your hand, face down on the table. Announce the number of cards you are playing. Your opponent then chooses where you must put those cards. They go on your side of the table, in any empty spot.

After you play, you always draw three cards from the deck. Your hand will grow and shrink depending on how many cards you play.

Showdowns: As soon as any coin has cards on both sides, turn those cards face up. The better Poker hand wins the coin. To indicate the winner, move the coin onto the winning hand, as shown above. If the two hands are tied, the coin stays in the middle and the hand counts as a win for both players.

Note: *When comparing hands of different sizes, a kicker is better than nothing.*

Winning: To win the game, win *three adjacent hands* or *four hands all together*. Because there can be tied hands, it's also possible to have a tie game.

Variation: The game can be played with or without Jokers. For a list of poker hands, see page 10.



Penniless and Insane

Players: 3-7

Playing Time: 20 minutes

Equipment: A deck of playing cards without Jokers, a score pad, and 20 coins or chips for each player.

***Penniless and Insane** is a simple auction game with a twist: the lowest bid takes the best stuff, but the object is to run out of money.*

You are a frustrated artist nearing the end of a wasted life. With no inspiration and a lackluster body of work, your new ambition is to die penniless and insane. You believe that this final desperate act will make your work more valuable, which only proves you're already insane.

You will spend your last few dollars buying art from students, apprentices, friends, and total strangers. You then hope to pass this work off as your own, after your inevitable and fast-approaching death.

However, since all the best artists are still young and idealistic, they care little for your money. In fact, the less money you offer them, the better the art you will get.

Structure: This game is scored over multiple rounds. Each round consists of three tricks.

Starting Each Round: Every player starts each round with exactly \$20 in chips. Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of three cards to each player.

On Each Trick: To begin the trick, deal cards face up into the middle of the table. These cards represent pieces of art being offered for sale. Deal one less card than there are players. For example, if there are four players, you will put out three cards.

To bid on this art, each player now chooses one card from his hand, and plays it face down. This card is your *bid*, and it determines when you will act in the auction, as well as how much money you will pay for your art.

To act first, you want to play a low card. To spend more money, you want to play a high card. But be careful: the highest card in each trick often gets nothing!

After all the bids are down, reveal them. The lowest card on the table acts first. Aces are worth 1 point, and Jacks, Queens and Kings are worth 11, 12, and 13 points respectively.

Suit distinguishes between cards of the same rank, with clubs being the lowest, followed by diamonds, hearts, and spades. This means that the Ten of clubs is lower than, and will act before, the Ten of hearts.

When the action comes to you, you do three things. First, you discard the card you played. Second, you take any single card from the selection on the table, and put it into your hand. Third, you pay an amount of money equal to the face value of your bid card. This money leaves the game.

If you do not have enough money to pay for your bid, you *don't get the art*. Instead, you must take back your bid card and pay nothing.

If you are the last player to act, it is possible that there will be no cards for you to take (because the pool always starts with one less card than there are players). In this case, you will take back your bid card and pay nothing.

If there are any cards left in the pool after every player has acted, discard them. You will deal a total of three tricks and then take score for the round.

Scoring: After three tricks, score your hands. Each card in your hand is worth its face value.

Penniless Bonus: The player with the *least* money scores triple points for his cards. This is your bonus for getting as close as possible to penniless and insane. If multiple players are tied for the least money, they each earn triple points.

Remember to start the next round with \$20 each.

Winning: Record your scores after each round. The winner is the first player to score 150 points or more.

For a gambling variant, put all spent money into a pot instead of removing it from the game, and award the pot to the winner(s) of each round.





Willow

Players: 2-10

Playing Time: 2 minutes per hand

Equipment: A deck of playing cards without Jokers, and poker chips.

Willow is a poker-like gambling game with a simpler hand structure. Each player has two cards. The best hand is a pair, and the other hands are ranked by the difference between the cards. The greater the difference, the better the hand.

The Deck: Willow uses a deck of 36 cards. Remove the Jokers, Kings, and all cards of one suit from a standard deck. What remains are three suits, Ace through Queen. In this game, Aces are the highest pair, but are worth one point. Jacks are 11 points, and Queens are 12.

Bet Limits: Willow can have any structure, similar to poker. This version is a spread-limit game with bets of 1-10 on the first round, and 2-20 on the second. Note that in this structure there is *no minimum raise* (if one player raises 10, the next player can still raise 1). It is also *not legal to check*; you must bet (or call) at least 1, or fold.

Game Play: Each player antes one coin to start the hand. Shuffle the deck and deal one card to each player, face down. Starting on the dealer's left, each player has the choice to open the betting, or fold. Bets and raises on the first round can be any amount from 1 to 10. There is a limit of one bet and three raises.

After the first betting round, each player receives a second card, face up. There is a second betting round, also starting on the dealer's left, in which the limits are 2 to 20. Again, checking is not an option; you must either bet, call, raise, or fold.

The Showdown: The best hand is a pair, with Aces being the highest pair. Note that there is no way to have tied pairs, since there are only three of each card.

If no one has a pair, then the best hand is the one with the biggest difference between the two cards. For example, a 2-10 beats a 5-Q because 2-10 has a gap of 8, and 5-Q has a gap of 7. Aces count as ones for this type of hand.

If two hands have the same spread, then the hand with the highest card is better. If there are identical hands, the pot is divided among them. (The odd coin in this split goes to the earlier betting position.)

The role of dealer passes to the left after each hand.

About the Cheapass Games Poker Suite:

Unless noted, all game designs are by James Ernest.

Abandon Ship was published in *Dragon Magazine* in 2000, and also appeared as "**Shipwreck**" in *Chief Herman's Next Big Thing*, 2003.

Barcelona and **Willow** are previously unpublished.

Boneyard: A version of this game appeared in "*Change*," a collection of three card games with a Zombie Fast Food theme, in 1999.

Brain Baseball was originally designed as a way to consume overprinted bid cards from *Give Me the Brain*. The game was retooled and published in *Chief Herman's Holiday Fun Pack* in 2000.

Caribbean Star was designed by James Ernest and Carol Monahan while cruising in Alaska, for the game design textbook *Rules of Play* (2003). It also appeared in *Chief Herman's Next Big Thing*.

Following Suit and **Hey, Bartender!** were published in *Game Trade Monthly* in 1999 and later in *Chief Herman's Holiday Fun Pack*.

Lamarckian Poker was designed by James Ernest and Dave Howell in 1996, and was published in *GAMES Magazine* in 1999. It also appeared in *Chief Herman's Next Big Thing* as "**Darwinian Poker**."

Last Man Standing and **Lost Pueblo of Doctor Green** appeared in *Chief Herman's Holiday Fun Pack*.

Penniless and Insane appeared in 2002 in *WireHed Magazine*, and in *Chief Herman's Next Big Thing*.

Seven-Handed Poker was designed by Joshua Howard and Evelina Shin. It appeared in *Chief Herman's Next Big Thing*, and is also playable within MSN Messenger. Nice work, Joshua!

Spots was designed by James Ernest and Carol Monahan. It appeared in the 2000 Origins program book and in *Chief Herman's Holiday Fun Pack*.

Crab Fragment Labs is an unintended consequence of James Ernest, who designs tabletop games in his sleep and releases them upon an unsuspecting world whenever he is awake. If you'd like to learn more about what is up to right now, visit Crab Fragment Labs, at crabfragment.com.

