

The Bottle Imp

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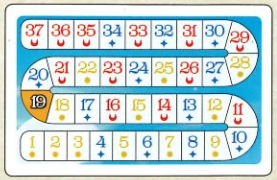
CONTENTS

- **36 Playing cards** (12 each of blue, red, and yellow)
  These are consecutively numbered 1 to 37 with the exception of 19. The coin symbols between the numbers indicate the point value of the card for scoring at the end of the round.
- **1 Start Price card** (19)
- **3 Overview cards**
  These show the distribution of the colors and numbers on the cards.
- **1 wooden Bottle**
- **This Rules Booklet**



Bottle Imp Start Price card



Overview card



Playing card


Bottle

Paper and pencil are also needed to record points.

Note: The rules for three and four players are described first; rules for two players can be found at the end.

ABOUT THE GAME

As with many other trick-taking card games, the idea of the game is to acquire the most points. However, because of the Bottle Imp, the highest card does not always win the trick.

The player with the highest card less than the price of the Bottle Imp earns the trick and also the Bottle Imp. The Bottle is then placed on the winning card, indicating its new price.

In this way the owner (and the price) of the Bottle Imp changes until its price can no longer be undercut. Whoever has the Bottle Imp at the end of the round earns negative points instead of positive ones. The game is played over a number of rounds, with players adding up their scores from each round until a winner is determined.

PREPARATION

At the start of the game, choose one player at random to become the dealer.

To begin each round, follow these steps:

1. The Start Price card (19) is placed face up on the table and the Bottle is placed on this card.
2. The Overview cards are placed so that each player can see one of them.
3. The Dealer takes the 36 Playing cards, shuffles them, and distributes them face down evenly between the players. Each player then picks up the cards they have been dealt into their hand.

It is recommended that players do not sort their cards in their hand so as not to give away information to other players when choosing which cards to play.

PLAYING THE GAME

BEGINNING THE ROUND

Each player chooses a card from their hand and places it face down underneath the Start Price card. These cards are the **Imp's Trick**, and these cards may not be looked at by any player.

Each player then exchanges a card face down with both of their neighbors:

- First they pass a card from their hand to their left-hand neighbor, then they pass one to their right-hand neighbor.
- Each player then takes into their hand the two cards which were passed to them by their neighbors.

TRICK-TAKING

The player to the left of the Dealer begins by playing a card from their hand face up onto the table in front of them. Then, all other players in clockwise order do the same. However, if possible, they must play a card of the same color as the first card played. If a player cannot play a card of the same color, they may play any card.

After all players have played one card, the winner of the trick is determined:

- If **all** of the played cards are numbered **higher** than the current price of the Bottle Imp, the player who played the highest numbered card, regardless of the color, wins the trick. They take all of the played cards and put them face down in front of them. The Bottle Imp stays at the current price.
- If however, at least **one** of the played cards is **below** the current price of the Bottle Imp, see the section below.

In both cases, the winner of the trick begins the next trick by playing a card from their hand.

THE BOTTLE IMP

The Bottle Imp can always be sold on as long as the price is lower than the last price.

- If only one player plays a card lower than the Bottle Imp price, that player wins the trick and the Bottle Imp.
- If more than one player played cards with numbers lower than the current price of the Bottle Imp, the player who played the highest of these cards (closest to the current price of the Bottle Imp) wins the trick and the Bottle Imp.

The card which won the the trick is placed face up in front of the player, and the Bottle is placed on top of the card. This card indicates the new price of the Bottle Imp. The card which denoted the previous price of the Bottle Imp stays with the Bottle's former owner. They flip it face down and add it to any other cards they have won. It is possible that the new owner of the Bottle Imp is the same as the former owner.

At the start of each round, no one owns the Bottle Imp, and its starting price is 19. Once someone wins a trick with a card lower than 19, the 19 card is set aside until the next round.



Bottle Imp | Adam | Betty | Christian | Doris

***Example:** The price of the Bottle Imp is 19. The following cards are played: Adam: 24, Betty: 15, Christian: 17, Doris: 32.*

Adam and Doris played cards above 19 while Betty and Christian played lower than 19. Of the latter two, Christian's 17 is higher than 15 and closer to 19, so Christian wins the trick and also the Bottle.

The 17 card is placed before Christian with the Bottle on it. The new price of the Bottle Imp is 17. The 19 card is set aside. Because Christian won the trick, he also begins the next trick.

END OF THE ROUND

When all the cards have been played, each player counts the number of coins on each of the cards they have won (their face down cards).

Exception: The player who owns the Bottle Imp at the end of the round, instead of scoring positive points, receives the total amount of coins showing on the cards of the Imp's Trick as penalty (negative) points. That player does not score any points for any tricks they won that round.

After a pre-arranged number of rounds (e.g. each player deals twice) or reaching an agreed point total (e.g. 300 points), the player with the highest point total wins.

If the game did not end yet, the player to the left of the current Dealer deals the next round.

STRATEGY HINTS

PASSING CARDS

In general it is a good idea to pass the lowest cards to one's neighbors. Try to remember what cards you passed on, as this can be very useful information.

***Example:** You give your neighbor the 2 and receive in return the 1. If your neighbor succeeds in taking the Bottle Imp with the 2, then unless you manage to play the 1 in the same trick or earlier, you will end up with the Bottle Imp this round.*

It is also a good idea to remove from your hand all cards of one or more colors in order to give more options when playing cards. But while doing so, you should also keep in mind that your neighbors will often pass you low yellow cards. In any case, you should try to remember which cards were passed to/from which opponents and which cards you placed into the Imp's Trick.

CARD PLAY

You should try to play cards early whose values are slightly under the starting price, in order to beat cards of higher value. Once the price of the Bottle Imp has been lowered, this is no longer possible.

In order to avoid having the Bottle Imp at the end of the round, try to play the very lowest numbers as early as possible. That can be done most safely when cards of higher number that are below the Bottle Imp price have already been played in the trick.

Playing a high card into a trick that also has lots of coins on it is enticing, but risky. For example if you take the 31 with the 37, the next player could take the trick (together with the Bottle Imp) by playing a very low card.

It is important to try and remember which cards have already been played.

LOPAKA AND THE BRIGHT HOUSE - Two-player Variants

There are two different variants for two players:

- In "Lopaka" you play against a dummy opponent. (Robert Louis Stevenson's short story 'The Bottle Imp' tells the tale of Keawe, his helpful friend Lopaka and their dealings with a cursed bottle and the wicked imp it contains. Read more here:
- "The Bright House" is a more tactical variant.
  Each player plays with two hands, one open and one hidden.

LOPAKA

Lopaka always sits to the right of the dealer (thus changing seat every round).

PREPARATION FOR PLAY AND BEGINNING

The cards are shuffled and dealt: Each player (including Lopaka) receives 11 cards. The remaining 3 cards are placed as the Imp's Trick under the start price card.

Both active players pass a card to each other simultaneously. No cards are placed into the Imp's Trick or passed to Lopaka. Then, Lopaka's cards are revealed and sorted by number.

Trick-Taking

The player to the left of the dealer begins. When it is Lopaka's turn, the cards already in the trick are examined and one of his is played according to the following rules:

- If he cannot win the trick, he plays his lowest-numbered card.
- If he can possibly win the trick, he plays his highest-numbered card that still permits him to win the trick.
- If he wins a trick, he proceeds by playing his highest numbered card in the following trick.

Note: Lopaka's decision never takes into account cards played on earlier tricks; he only considers his hand and the current trick. Naturally Lopaka must follow color and may be forced to take the Bottle Imp as well.

Example: *The price of the Bottle Imp is 19. The following cards are played: Adam: 24, Betty: 20*



Bottle Imp Adam Betty Lopaka

Lopaka still has the cards 12, 17, 18, 32, and 36. He may not play the 12, 18, or 36 because he has to follow the color of the first card played: 24, blue. He can win the trick with the 17 or 32 and plays the higher one, 32.

Everything else is just as in the game for three or four players.

The Bright House

Preparation for Play and Beginning

Both players receive face down two hands (stacks of cards), each containing 9 cards.

First, each player picks up one of the hands, looks at the cards and then places one of them into the Imp's Trick. Then, they pass another card of their choice to their opponent. Now the players put their first hands down (including the card received from their opponent) and pick up the second hand. Here too, one card is placed into the Imp's Trick and another is passed to the opponent. Each player then compares their two hands and chooses one of them to be placed face up in front of them; the other they keep hidden in their hand.

Trick-Taking

In each trick, four cards will be played in the following order:

- Player 1 plays a card from their open hand.
- Player 2 plays a card from their open hand.
- Player 1 plays a card from their hidden hand.
- Player 2 plays a card from their hidden hand.

After the first trick, the winner of the previous trick becomes Player 1 for the next trick.

Everything else is just as in the game for three or four players.

STRONGHOLD GAMES

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