



Haviland Family GameRoom



TOWERS & BOWERS

A LIGHTWEIGHT EUCHRE-STYLE DUEL

Background

TOWERS & **BOWERS** is a trick-taking card game incorporating the familiar mechanics of a *trump suit* and *bidding*. It was originally devised to teach young children the fundamentals of cardplay, as a stepping stone on the path to 4-player partnership euchre. The game remained a household favorite long after the target audience became sophisticated card players, and ultimately proved to be a fast and fun strategy game for players of all ages and skill levels.

Objective

The game is won by the first player to claim 3 **towers**. A tower is a sequence of hands – as many as 7 or as few as 1 – ending when one player captures all the tricks. Dealing confers a significant advantage; rather than alternating, the privilege of the deal goes to the player that bids for – and takes – a majority of the tricks available.

The Deck

A pack of 24 cards is used consisting of A K Q J 10 9 in each of the four suits: spades, clubs, **diamonds** and **hearts**. Tip: A standard 48-card pinochle deck contains the exact composition of cards necessary, in duplicate.

Rank of Cards

In the trump suit, the Jack is the highest card, known as the Right Bower. The Jack of the **same color** as the Right Bower is the Left Bower, the 2nd highest ranking card.

Trump Suit	Rank of Trump Cards						
Spades	♠J	♣J	♠A	♠K	♠Q	♠10	♠9
Clubs	♣J	♠J	♣A	♣K	♣Q	♣10	♣9
Diamonds	♦J	♥J	♦A	♦K	♦Q	♦10	♦9
Hearts	♥J	♦J	♥A	♥K	♥Q	♥10	♥9

Important Note: The Left Bower counts for all purposes as belonging to the trump suit. In the following situations, if hearts are trump for example:

- The Left Bower [♦J] is led. You must follow suit by playing a heart if possible.
- The ♥9 is led. You hold only one trump, the Left Bower [♦J]. You must follow suit with the ♦J.
- The ♦K is led. You hold the ♦9 and the Left Bower [♦J]. You must follow suit with the ♦9; the ♦J counts as a heart.

The trump suit includes seven cards. The non-trump suits contain six cards, except the suit that is the same color as trump, which has only five on account of the Left Bower's promotion. The two non-trump Jacks rank normally, between the Queen and Ten.

The Starter

Anyone may shuffle and, starting with the opponent, turn one card per player face up until a black Jack appears, indicating the first dealer. Repeat the procedure at the start of each tower.

The Deal

Each hand in a tower sequence has an associated number of cards, starting with 7. After dealing the designated number of cards to both players, the dealer then turns the next card in the pack face up, placing it on top of the remaining cards. This **up-card** is used as a basis for selecting the trump suit. The remaining cards below are left face-down and are not used.

Etiquette

Shuffle thoroughly and with purpose. Offer a cut. Starting with the opponent, deal in packets of two or three cards (excepting the rare 7th round of a tower, wherein a single card is dealt to each player).

Be prepared to perform (or decline) a cut when offered; the dealer is not obligated to wait more than a moment for the cards to be cut before dealing. The cut, if taken, must leave at least four cards in each section of the pack.

Bidding

The suit of the up-card is on offer as the trump suit for the hand. The opponent may either **accept** or **pass**. If the opponent passes, the dealer may **accept** or **pass**. If accepted by either player, the *dealer* first discards any card and then takes the up-card in exchange.

If the dealer passes, the up-card is turned face down and the opponent may name one of the three remaining suits trump, or pass a second time. If the opponent passes, the dealer must name one of the three remaining suits trump.

The player that accepted the up-card or named the trump suit is known as the **bidder**, and is contracted to win a majority of the tricks. The other player is the **defender**.

Etiquette

Rather than explicitly announcing “accept” or “pass”, the dealer may simply discard and collect the up-card to declare the suit trump, or turn it over to indicate a pass. The opponent may knock on or tap the table to pass.

Play of the Hand

The non-dealer leads first. Any card may be led, and the opponent must follow suit by playing a card of the same suit as the card led if possible. A player who cannot follow suit may play any card.

The trick is won by whoever played the highest card of the suit led, unless a trump was played in which case the highest trump wins. The winner of each trick leads to the next one.

Seven cards apiece are dealt on the first hand of the tower, then 6, then 5, and so on down to a single card. If the bidder takes the majority of the tricks, the bidder deals the next hand. Otherwise, the contract is defeated and the defender deals next (ties go to the defender). If either player sweeps all the tricks in a hand, the sequence ends and the player that won all the tricks is awarded a **tower**. The next tower begins anew with a **starter** dealing 7 cards each.

Etiquette

The dealer should discard **before** picking up the turned card, and the non-dealer is wise to wait until the discard is down before leading. In practice the dealer need not take the turned up card at all, but may instead leave it on the undealt pile until it is played. Either behavior is acceptable. Taking the up-card before discarding is discouraged, but allowable.

Penalties: Reneging

A renege (or revoke) is a failure to follow suit when able. A renege may be corrected before the next trick is led. If discovered later, a renege accusation ends the hand immediately. If the accusation is proven, the aggrieved player may claim the tower as a penalty.

Penalties may also be declined. Novices will often fail to follow suit either by inappropriately playing or withholding the Left Bower. When introducing the game, a charitable opponent may offer to “undo” the renege and resolve the hand as it likely would have ended if played out correctly.

On the other hand, there are experienced anglers who might consider reneging intentionally in hopes of not getting caught. Don't do this. Although the ploy might be narrowly defensible from a risk-reward perspective, intentional reneging is outside the bounds of fair play.

When a renege is suspected with less than full confidence, it is best to mentally note the trick and suit involved and let the hand play out before declaring the misplay, to avoid being penalized for the accusation. When a renege is alleged it may turn out the player accused in fact played properly. If the accusation was made and disproven before the final trick of the hand, the *falsely accused* player may claim the tower as a penalty.

If multiple renege violations occur during the same hand, only the first is penalized. If you notice that you have **accidentally** reneged earlier but have not been caught, it is not considered dishonorable to keep quiet (though you are supposed to feel bad).

Claiming

The outcome of a hand is often established before the final trick is collected. For example, if the bidder wins the first four tricks of seven, then loses the fifth, the last two tricks become irrelevant. In many cases one player will be able to determine the outcome of the hand before the other, due to the possession of **boss** cards that are guaranteed to take the necessary tricks. The Right Bower is always a boss card; as a hand progresses, any unbroken sequence of the highest trump cards not yet played are all countable as automatic tricks. Lesser-strength holdings may also rise to boss level, depending on the outcome of previous tricks and the player on lead.

For example, if **hearts** are trump:

- Player₁ holds ♥9 ♥10. Previously in the hand, Player₁ led the ♥A and Player₂ discarded a non-trump queen. The ♥9 and ♥10 are now guaranteed to win tricks.
- Player₁ holds ♠A ♠K ♠Q. Previously in the hand, Player₁ led the ♥A and Player₂ discarded a non-trump queen. Provided Player₁ is on lead, the ♠A ♠K ♠Q are now guaranteed to win tricks.
- Player₁ holds ♥J ♦J ♥A ♥9 ♠A and claims the remaining 5 tricks. Occasionally cards involved in a claim are not strictly guaranteed to win tricks unless played in a logical order – if the ♥9 or ♠A are carelessly led before running the high trump then five tricks are **not** automatic. Nevertheless, the claim implies an understanding of future possibilities and is considered valid.

- Player₁ holds ♦J ♥9 and needs one of the two remaining tricks. If Player₂ is on lead, this hand has a valid claim to one trick: if Player₂ leads anything weaker than ♥J, Player₁ will take the trick with the ♦J; if Player₂ leads the ♥J, Player₁ will follow suit with the ♥9, promoting the ♦J to a sure trick. Notice this claim is both *positional* (Player₁ must play last to the trick) and *non-automatic* (Player₁ must play correctly if Player₂ leads trump). Nevertheless, this tactical motif arises frequently and the claim is considered valid.

The same principles apply to *conceding* tricks. Some holdings have no chance of winning a trick, a condition that may be inferred from the outcome of previous tricks or simple lack of strength.

- Player₂ holds ♠10 ♠9 ♣9 with Player₁ on lead. Player₂ concedes the remaining tricks.
- Player₂ holds ♠A ♠K ♠Q ♠J ♣9 and leads a spade, which Player₁ trumps. Player₂ concedes the remaining tricks.

Claiming is not strictly proper, though it is consistent with the pace and casual nature of the game. However, understand that any irregular “throwing in” of a hand makes a renege considerably easier to conceal and therefore more difficult to detect and prove. It is also possible the result being claimed is not a mathematical certainty. Either player may insist that all tricks be played out in normal turn order.