

The Bottle Imp

A diabolic trick-taking card game for two to four players aged 10 years or up.

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(translation by [Rick Heli](#))

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Game contents:

- 36 playing cards
 (12 each of blue, red and yellow)

They are consecutively numbered 1 to 37 with the exception of 19. The coins between the numerals indicate the point value of the card for scoring at the end of the hand.

- 1 start value card (= 19)
- 3 overview cards
- 1 bottle
 ("tempered in the flames of hell")
- these instructions
- 1 booklet including Robert Louis Stevenson's short story about the Bottle Imp



In addition paper and pencil are 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.

Before we continue, just a few words on the Ownership of the Bottle

"Of glass it is but the glass of it was tempered in the flames of hell. An imp lives in it, and that is the shadow we behold there moving: or so I suppose. If any man buy this bottle the imp is at his command; all that he desires - love, fame, money, houses like this house ... - all are his at the word uttered ...

There is one thing the imp cannot do - he cannot prolong life; and, it would not be fair to conceal from you, there is a drawback to the bottle; for if a man die before he sells it, he must burn in hell forever ...

it cannot be sold at all, unless sold at a loss. If you sell it for as much as you paid for it, back it comes to you again like a homing pigeon ...

Only remember it must be coined money that you sell it for ..."

(booklet pages 47- 48)

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About the game

As with many other trick-taking card games, the idea of The Bottle Imp is to acquire the most points. The Bottle Imp makes trumps out of the lowest cards.

The player with the highest card less than the price of the Bottle earns the trick and also the bottle with the imp. Then the price of the Bottle falls to that of the winning card.

In this way the owner of the Bottle Imp changes until its value can no longer be undercut. Whoever has the Bottle Imp at the end of the hand earns negative points instead of positive ones.

Preparation

The start value card (no. 19) is placed face up on the table and the Bottle Imp is placed on this card.

The three overview cards are placed so that each player can see one of them. They show the distribution of the colors and numbers on the cards.

The 36 playing cards are evenly distributed to the players. In receiving the cards it is recommended that the players sort them by number, rather than colour.

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Course of the game

Beginning the game

Each player discards a card. The discarded card is placed face down as the Imp's Trick under the start value card. No one may look at these cards.

Each player exchanges a card face down with both of his neighbors. First he passes a card from his hand to his left hand neighbor, then one to his right

hand neighbor. Finally he takes the two cards which are lying before him (from his neighbors) into his hand.

Trick-Taking

Play proceeds clockwise. The player to the left of the dealer begins by playing a card. Whatever colour has been played, the other players must follow suit.

If a player cannot follow suit he may play any card.

If all of the played cards are numbered higher than the current value of the Bottle Imp, the player who played the highest numbered card, regardless of whether he followed suit, wins the trick.

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The Bottle Imp

The Bottle Imp can always be re-sold as long as the price is lower than the last price:

If someone plays a card whose number is lower than the current price of the Bottle Imp, then the Bottle Imp automatically transfers to its new owner at the end of the trick.

If only one player plays a card lower than the Bottle Imp price, then this player gets the trick and the Bottle Imp.

If more than one player play cards with numbers lower than the current price of the Bottle Imp, then the player who played the highest such card (placed next to the card which has shown the price until now) receives the trick and the Bottle Imp.

The card which won the player both the trick and the Bottle Imp and is placed face up under the Bottle Imp. This card indicates the new price of the Bottle Imp.

The card which denoted the previous price of the Bottle Imp goes to the Bottle's former owner. He turns it over and adds it to any other cards he has won. It is possible that the new and former owners of the Bottle Imp are identical..

At the start of the game no one owns the Bottle Imp. Its starting price is 19.

An Example:

The value 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 gets the trick and also the Bottle.

The new price of the Bottle Imp is 17. The 17 card is placed before Christian with the Bottle on it. The next trick is always led by the player who took the last trick (in the example above, Christian).

"Is there anything wrong about the price?"

"It has dropped a great deal in value since your time, Mr. Keawe," said the young man stammering.

"Well, well, I shall have the less to pay for it," says Keawe. "How much did it cost you?"

The young man was as white as a sheet. "Two cents", said he.

"What?", cried Keawe, "two cents? Why, then, you can only sell it for one. And he who buys it -" The words died upon Keawe's tongue; he who bought it could never sell it again, the bottle and the bottle imp must abide with him until he died, and when he died must carry him to the red end of hell.

The young man of Beritania Street fell upon his knees. "For God's sake buy it!"

(booklet pages 63-64)

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End of the hand

When all the cards have been played each player receives the point value of his tricks.

Exception: the player who owns the Bottle Imp at the end of the hand, instead of scoring positive points, receives the total of the Imp's Trick as penalty (negative) points.

After a pre-arranged number of hands or reaching an agreed point total (e.g. 500 points), the player with the highest point total wins.

"All you have to do is to use the power of the imp in moderation, and then sell it to someone else, as I do to you, and finish your life in comfort."

(booklet page 47)

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Strategy Hints

Discarding and Passing

In general it is a good idea to pass the lowest cards to one's neighbors.

Vital game information is also passed with every exchanged card. For example, if one gives his neighbor and receives in return the 1, the game is lost if the neighbor succeeds in taking the Bottle Imp with the 2 unless the one manages to play the 1 in the same trick or earlier.

It is also a good idea to void oneself of one suit because one has more options in play. Therefore one should plan one's neighbors frequently passing low yellow cards.

In any case one should carefully note which cards were passed and discarded, and to/from which opponents.

Card Play

One should promptly play the cards whose values are slightly under the starting price, in order to win cards with high value. Once the price of the Bottle has been lowered, this is no longer possible.

In order not to receive and keep the Bottle Imp at the end of the game, try to play the very lowest numbers as favorably 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.

It is enticing, but also risky, to play a high point card into an (apparently) "normal" trick. For example if one takes 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 note which cards have already been played.

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Lopaka and the Bright House

- Two-player Variants -

There are two different variants for two players:

- In "Lopaka" you play against a virtual opponent (Dummy). (In the short story Lopaka is Keawe's helpful friend.)
- "Bright House" is the more tactical variant. Each player plays with two hands, one open and one hidden.

Lopaka

Lopaka plays passively. He 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 are placed as an Imp's Trick under the start value card.

Both active players pass a card to each other simultaneously. No card is discarded 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.

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 suit and may be forced to take the Bottle Imp as well.

An Example:

The value of the Bottle Imp is 19.

The following cards are played:

Adam: 24, Betty: 20

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 suit of the led 24 - blue. He can win the trick with 17 or 32 and plays the higher one, 32.



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

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The Bright House

Preparation for play and beginning

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

First each player picks up one of the hands and discards a card to the Imp's Trick. Then he passes another card to his opponent.

Now the players put their first hands down (including the card received from the opponent) and pick up the seconds. Here too, one card is discarded and one passed to the opponent.

Each player compares his two hands and decides which one he places face up in front of him and which hand he keeps hidden.

Trick-Taking

In each trick four cards are played in the following order:

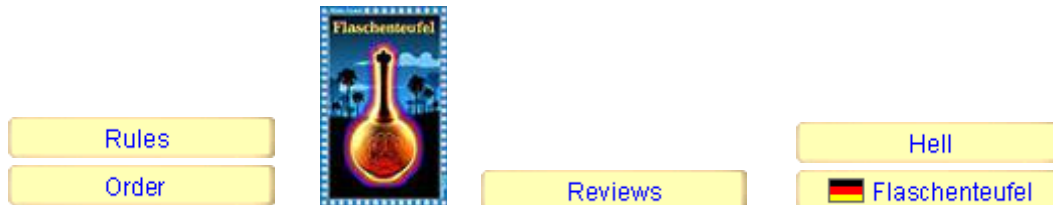
Player 1 plays a card from his open hand.
 Player 2 plays a card from his open hand.
 Player 1 plays a card from his hidden hand.

Player 2 plays a card from his hidden hand.

After the first trick, the winner of the previous trick becomes Player 1 and leads.

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

English translation by [Rick Heli](#) (19-Mar-2000, 25-Sep-2003)



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