

Deep Six

A card game for four players, by Dave Howell

EQUIPMENT

One “anti-Pinochle” deck, which is 2 through 8 doubled in four suits, for a total of 56 cards in the deck.

PLAYERS

4 players; two teams of two players each, with teammates seated across from each other.

GOAL

First team to 500 points loses. (More accurately, when at least one team has more than 500 points, the team with the lowest score wins.)

OVERVIEW

After a round of bidding, the winning partnership exchanges a few cards. All players meld, and then play their hands to avoid taking tricks with points in them. The hands are scored by adding meld (which has a negative value) to points taken, and the result added to the running scores.

BIDDING

Bidding starts with the player to the left of the dealer. A player may bid, or pass. If they pass, they’re out of the bidding for that hand. Because there are a total of 250 points in a hand (see “Playing,” below), bidding starts at 120, and goes *down*. Bids must be multiples of 10. Jump bidding (bidding 20, 30, or more below the previous bid) is perfectly acceptable. If the first three players all pass, the dealer *must* bid 120. Note that it is legal to bid less than zero.

PASSING

After bidding, the winning player names the *sunk suit* (see “Playing,” and “Sunk Suit”). She then lays down meld, or potential meld (see “Invitational Melding”). Her partner selects three cards from his hand, and passes them over. The bidder picks up the cards, and may use them to complete melds on the table, picking up any cards that aren’t used for melding. The bidder then passes three cards back to her partner, and all other players can lay down meld. Cards are passed face down.

MELDING

There are three basic kinds of meld: runs, echos, and wides. A *deep run* is a run of 6, 7, 8 of the same suit, and is worth –30 points; a *shallow run* is a run of 5, 6, 7 of the same suit, and is worth –15 points; and a *grand run* is 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 all one suit, and is worth –50 points. However, **you may not score a run in the sunk suit.**

An *echo* is a pair of two identical sixes, sevens, or eights: a *deep echo* is identical eights, worth –20 points; a *shallow echo* is identical sevens, worth –15 points, and a *Mark Twain* is identical sixes, worth –10 points.

Wide is four cards of the same rank and different suits. *Eights Wide* is –30 points, *Sevens Wide* is –20, and *Sixes Wide* is –10. You cannot score a Wide in 5s, 4s, 3s, or 2s.

See “Example of Melding” below for examples.

INVITATIONAL MELDING

When the bidder first lays down meld, they may lay down *incomplete* melds, such as sevens of Diamonds, Hearts, and Spades for Sevens Wide, or 8, 7, 5, 4 of Clubs for Grand Clubs. This is *invitational melding*. Their partner can thus select cards to pass to complete these melds. Once cards are passed, the bidder can play other meld out of their hand in addition to the invitational meld, and does not have to use the passed cards to complete meld on the table.

PLAYING

Once all players have placed meld on the table and recorded their meld, all the cards are returned to the players’ hands, and the winning bidder leads a card. The other players, in clockwise order, play a card. Whoever plays the high card takes the trick and leads for the next one.

The object when playing is to *avoid* taking tricks with *point cards* in them. Point cards are the 2 and 3 of each suit: 2s are worth 20 points each, 3s are worth 10. Ten points are also awarded for taking the last trick.

The rules for playing a card are as follows:

1. A player *must follow suit* if possible. If they cannot, they may play *any* card in their hand. (“Follow suit” means to play a card in the same suit as the one that was *led*, which is *not* affected by rule 4 below.)

2. If (and *only* if) a player follows suit, they *must play over* the cards currently in the trick, if possible. (If they cannot, they may play any card in suit.)

The rules for who takes a trick are:

3. A trick is won by the *high* card of the *last* suit *introduced* to the trick.
4. Cards in the *sunk* suit are always treated *as if the sunk suit was the first suit introduced*.
5. If two *identical* cards are played, the *second* one played is *higher* than the first.

EXAMPLES OF PLAY

The sunk suit is hearts.

Player 1 leads a 6♠. This is a pretty good lead early in the game, although a 7 or even an 8 would have been better in this case. You'll see why in a second.

Player 2 has 2♠ 3♠ 6♠ 8♠ 4♦. They must play a spade♠ (Rule 1), and must play the 6 or 8, since those cards will beat the card already played (Rules 2 and 5). They play 8♠.

This is a mistake on Player 2's part. There's only one other spade in the deck that can take this trick: the other eight, and it might be in their partner's hand. Let's follow play a little further.

Player 3 has 2♠ 7♠ 7♥ 3♦ 4♦. They must play a spade (Rule 1), but can play either the 7 or the 2, since neither will take the trick (Rule 2). Now, you can see if Player 2 had played their 6♠ then Player 3 would have been forced to play the 7 (Rule 2), and probably take the trick, although so far there aren't actually any points in this trick, so taking this trick might not be too bad. This is why a fairly high lead by Player 1 is good; it probably forces Player 2 to play such a high card that Player 1's partner will be free to shovel some low card worth points onto the pile for their opponents to get stuck with. Player 3 will play their 2♠.

Player 4 has no spades; they're holding 5♥ 5♥ 3♣ 2♦ 5♦. If they play a club or diamond, they will take the trick, since that suit would become the last suit introduced (Rule 3). However, if they play 5♥, then Player 2 will take the trick, since Player 2 played the highest spade; the 5♥ is applied as if hearts (the sunk suit) were introduced *before* spades (Rule 4). Since either Player 4 or his partner is going to take this trick, Player 4 uses the 5♦ to take the trick, saving his sunk suit cards for later.

Let's rewind slightly. Player 1 leads a 6♠. Player 2 plays the second 6♠. This time, however, Player 3 is holding 3♥ 7♥ 3♦ 4♦ 8♦. They can't follow suit.

Option one, play the 8♦. Player 3's now probably going to take the trick, but at least it doesn't have any point in it (yet).

Option two, play the 3♦. If Player 3 had reason to believe that the last player has no more spades (the suit led) or hearts (the sunk suit), then Player 3 is hoping that Player 4 will have to play a higher diamond (which will beat the 3) or play a club. That would make clubs the last suit introduced, and no matter which club it is, Player 4 will have to take the trick.

Player 3's best option, however, is to play 3♥. Hearts are sunk; they all rank below spades. They could also play 7♥, but the 3 is a point card and the 7 is not.

SCORING

Once all cards are played, each partnership counts the number of points they took in the hand. 2s are worth 20 points, and 3s are worth 10 points, as is taking the last trick, for a total of 250 possible points. The partnership then adds their (negative) meld to the points taken, to get their net points. Net points are added to each team's score. If one team has a total of 500 points or more, then the other team wins. If both teams break 500 points, the team with fewer wins. If it's a tie, play another hand.

The team that won the bid must have net points less than or equal to their bid. If they do not, then they score 200 points minus their bid, and do not subtract their meld from that result.

If a team bids less than zero, they must still meet the net points requirement. However, if either team has less than zero net points, they record 0 points for that hand. *A team never scores less than zero points.*

EXAMPLE OF MELDING

[this section is incomplete]

SCORING TABLE

Runs (<i>all same suit, cannot be scored in sunk suit!</i>)	
Grand Run (8, 7, 6, 5, 4)	-50 pts.
Deep Run(8, 7, 6)	-30 pts.
Shallow Run (7, 6, 5)	-15 pts.
Echos (<i>pair of identical cards</i>)	
Deep Echo (8s)	-20 pts.
Shallow Echo (7s)	-15 pts.
Mark Twain (6s)	-10 pts.
Wides (<i>four cards, one of each suit</i>)	
8s Wide	-30 pts.
7s Wide	-20 pts.
6s Wide	-10 pts.
Cards In Tricks	
2s	20 pts. each
3s	10 pts. each
Last Trick	10 pts.