

# Card Game for 3 Players

## OH HELL!

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### Historical Notes

Called “Oh Pshaw” or “Blackout” in more prissy times and places, Oh Hell! was apparently developed in England. First records of its play are from New York card clubs in the 1930s. Today, many versions are played around the world.

### Concept

A very basic trick-taking game, Oh Hell! is distinguished by its dealing scheme and its guarantee that someone will always have reason to repeat its name. The bidding and play are individual, so it is a good game for three, but as many as seven can play (although a lot of players mean a lot of work for the scorekeeper).

### The Deck

The standard, 52-card deck. Rank is Ace (high), king, queen, jack, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 (low).

### The Deal

One at a time, face down, left to right, beginning with player on dealer’s left. With three, four, or five players, the first deal is ten cards to each player. With six players, deal eight each; with seven, deal seven each. The top card of the remaining deck is turned face-up to fix trump for that round.

After each round is completed, the deal passes clockwise and the next deal is for one fewer cards. That is, after a round of seven cards each, the next dealer deals six cards to each player, and the next deals five, and so on until only a single card is dealt. After this, the number of cards is increased by one each round until the original number (ten, eight, or seven) is reached, and the game is finished.

### Bidding

Beginning with the player to the left of the dealer, each player, in turn, makes a single bid indicating the number of tricks he thinks he will take. (No suit is named in the bid, as trumps have

already been determined.) These bids are recorded for each player by the score keeper. A player may bid zero, but no passing is allowed.

The final bid (by the dealer) must be such that the total number of bids does not equal the number of tricks available. Thus, if six cards have been dealt and the bids are 3 and 2, the dealer cannot bid 1.

Players must make exactly the number of tricks they bid — no fewer, no more — in order to score.

### The Play

The player to the dealer’s left leads the first trick. Each player in turn must follow suit, if able. If unable to follow suit, any card may be played. The player who places the highest trump in the trick, or the highest ranked card of the suit led (if there is no trump) wins the trick.

Each player collects the tricks she has won in front of her in such a way that they can be easily counted by all players. (Clearly, this doesn’t apply when only one or two cards are dealt.)

At any time during the bidding or the play, a player may ask the scorekeeper for the number of tricks any other player has bid or for whether the round is overbid or underbid.

### Scoring

At the end of the round, players who have bid one or more and have made exactly as many tricks as they bid, score the amount of their bid plus 10 points.

If a player has bid zero and takes no tricks, she scores 5 plus the number of tricks available in the round. (This is because zero bids are relatively easy to make with few cards dealt and more difficult to achieve with many cards.)

Players who have taken either fewer or more tricks than they bid score nothing.

### Winning

Once the final round has been played out, the player with the highest score wins the game.

## Variations in Oh Hell!

Some play that trump is named by the player who makes the highest bid. If two players make equally high bids, the one who bid first names trump.

Some play that those who miss their mark still score one point for each trick they take. This encourages players to continue trying to take tricks after they have overshot their bid, thus increasing the difficulty for other players.

Some reverse the dealing scheme, starting with one card each, working their way up to the highest possible number of cards and then back down again to one.

Some do not require that the bid be unequal to the number of tricks available. (The rationale for this is unclear.)

The game may be shortened by beginning and ending with smaller hands. ■

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