

Oktoberfest

A game for 3-7 players by Jeff Warrender

It is time for the annual Oktoberfest celebration! Tents have been erected, each promising food, music, games, and of course, pints of delicious beverages! You're ready to enjoy yourself, and perhaps challenge some of your fellow attendees to contests of skill and strength, but be careful not to become too tipsy!

GAME EQUIPMENT

72 activity cards

Each activity card has a suit (color) and scoring value (top corners). Cards come in five suits. There are three scoring suits: food (green), music (brown) and games (blue), one "wild" suit (yellow), and one non-scoring suit, rest (grey).



The back of each card has a number, indicating how *tipsy* the player becomes participating in that activity. The more valuable the card, the higher the tipsiness number is likely to be.

GAME OVERVIEW

The activity cards are split into three piles, representing three tents at the Oktoberfest celebration. Each turn you will participate in an event by taking a card from one of those piles. It is understood that these activities entail imbibing "liquid refreshment", which puts you at risk; for, if another player challenges you to a competition, you must hope you are still sober enough to prevail!

GAME SETUP

Shuffle the activity cards together. If 7 are playing, remove the top 6 cards, without looking at them, and return them to the game box. For any other player count, remove the top 9 cards and return them to the game box. Separate the remaining cards into three approximately equal piles in the center of the table, *face-up*.

Choose a start player.

GAME PLAY

Players take turns in clockwise order beginning with the start player. On the player's turn, the player does two things: *take a card* and then (optionally) *challenge an opponent*.

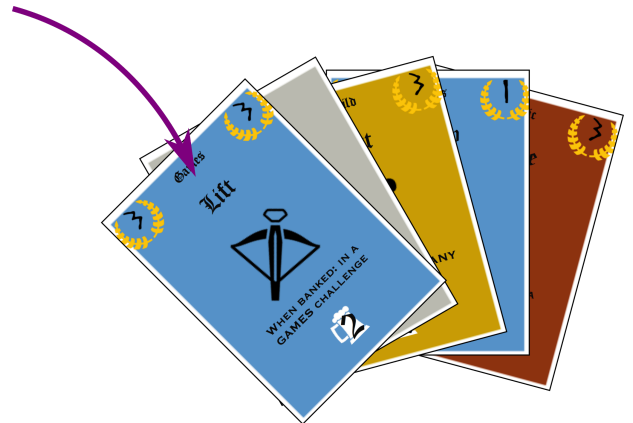
Take a card

The active player *must* take the top activity card from one of the three piles, and add it to his or her hand ***without examining the back***. Players should hold their cards splayed so that their opponents can see the backs.

Important: A player must NEVER look at the back of the cards he or she holds.



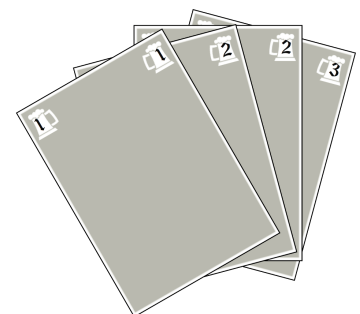
Example: Katja considers the three draw piles and selects the "Lift" card in the Games category. She adds it to her hand.



When you hold your cards in a splayed configuration, your opponents will be able to see the tipsiness numbers on the back of the cards, but you will not.



What you see



What your opponents see

If you took the last card in one of the piles, rearrange the piles so that each has about the same number of cards.

Challenge an opponent to a contest (optional)

After taking a card, the active player may challenge one opponent to a *contest*. (*Exception*: No player may initiate a contest until the fourth round of play.) The contest will be won by whichever player is less *tipsy*.

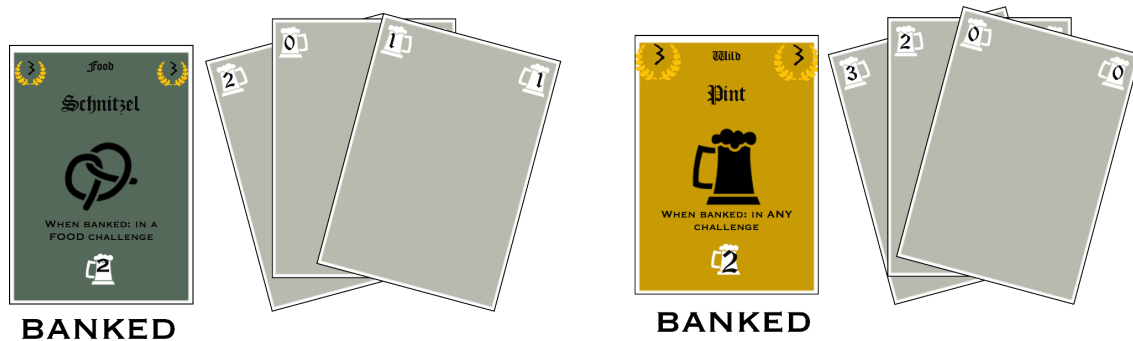
The active player first *banks a card*. This means: the player selects a card from his or her hand (not the one he or she just drew) and puts it face-up on the table in front of himself or herself.

The suit of the banked card is the *challenge suit*.

A third player acts as judge. The judge determines which player is *more tipsy*. A player's tipsiness is determined by adding up:

- The numbers on the backs of cards in the player's hand
- The automatic contribution from banked cards the player has in the challenge suit

The judge declares which player is less tipsy (tie goes to the defender), but **does not** disclose what the players' totals are. The less-tipsy player is the winner of the contest.



Example: Lucy (left) banks a Schnitzel card and challenges Rita (right) to a contest in the “food” category. Judy acts as the judge; she observes that Lucy has 5 tipsiness points (2+1 from her hand plus 2 from her banked card), and Rita has 7 tipsiness points (3+2 from her hand plus 2 from the banked Pint card, which counts toward ANY challenge). Judy announces “Rita has lost the contest”.

The loser of the contest must discard one card from his or her hand, from the challenge suit or a wild. (Exception: if the challenge suit was wild, the loser may discard any card). If this is not possible, the losing player must discard a card from any other suit (including a “bench” card). The losing player *may* discard a banked card but is not required to do so.

The discarded card goes into the game box, *face-up*.

Reminder: Never look at the back of your own cards, even when you bank or discard a card.

Example: Katja has lost a contest in the FOOD (green) category. She has a banked food card and a banked wild card, but is not required to lose these because they are banked. She elects to discard the Rest card from her hand.



A useful heuristic: Cards in the three main scoring suits are worth 1, 3, or 5 points, and have on average 1, 2, or 3 tipsiness points, respectively. Thus, if you have cards worth 5, 3, 3, and 1 in your hand, you can estimate that you might have about 8 tipsiness points.

GAME END

The game ends in one of two ways.

If at the **start of a player's turn**, the total value of the cards *in his or her hand* is 22 or more, that player wins immediately! Do **not** include banked cards in this calculation.

Example: It is the start of Katja's turn. The cards in her hand have a total value of 23 (7+5+5+3+3). She wins the game immediately!



If no player has met the instant-win condition by the time there is only one card left in each draw deck, the game ends at this time. (All players will have had the same number of turns).

First, the player with the highest sum of tipsiness on all of his or her cards still in hand must randomly lose one card from their hand.

Then, each player lays out all cards from his or her hand, along with his or her banked cards, grouping them by suit. You may assign wild cards to any suit. Benches count for nothing. Each player adds the value of his or her cards in each suit. The sum for the suit in which the player had the *lowest* total is the player's score.

The player with the highest score wins! In case of a tie, consider the second-highest suit, then the third-highest to break the tie. If players tie in all three suits they share victory.



Example: Rita's final cards are shown above. She has placed her two wild cards as shown, resulting in scores of 7, 12, and 10 in the games, food, and music suits, respectively. The bench card does not score. Her score for the game is 7.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Playtesters and helpful suggestions: Millie Beeswax, Dean Howard, Kevin Root, Echoes Zimet, Kristen Root, Pete McPherson, Richard McQueen, Chris Spahn, Ethan Adams, Andy Van Zandt

The card-holding mechanic is inspired by *Hanabi* by Antoine Bauza. The scoring is inspired by *Tigris and Euphrates* by Reiner Knizia.

Notes on the Theme

Oktoberfest is intended to be a playful and light-hearted game. The game's original theme was the mythical story of Icarus, and other themes – building sand castles, catering fancy parties, going on rides at amusement parks, jousting in medieval tournaments, engaging in criminal enterprises serious (e.g. gangsters, ruthless corporations) or mundane (e.g. stealing cookies from the cookie jar), or many other possibilities – could easily be considered.

HOW I TEACH THIS GAME

Here is the script I use to teach the game.

First, set up the game. Then say:

“I am going to tell you one thing to start. Most cards have a number in the upper right; this is the card's victory point value. Now, let's go around and each take one card. But when you take a card, **DO NOT LOOK AT THE BACK**. Hold the card so that everyone else can easily see the back, but not you.”

Now, go around and everyone takes one card. Then say:

“Now, notice that the cards come in several suits. Blue, green, and brown are the scoring suits, and yellow is wild. At game's end your score will be the number of points from the suit in which you have the *lowest* total. Now, draw again!”

We go around again and everyone takes a second card. Then say:

“Now we each have two cards. Notice on other player's cards there is a number from 0-4. That is how *tipsy* that card has made you. Tipsiness is undesirable; it puts you at risk. I will tell you one more thing: the more VP a card is worth, the higher its tipsiness number is likely to be. Ok, let's go around again. Again, don't look at the back of the card you draw. And, splay the cards so the icons are visible to you. That way everyone will be able to see the inebriation number on the back of all of your cards.”

Now, go around and everyone draws a third card. Then say:

“Now I will tell you what those tipsiness numbers mean. After you draw a card, you may challenge another player. Pick one of your cards to *bank*; this also sets which category is at stake. A third player – not you or the player you challenged – adds up the tipsiness points from your respective cards. And, that person adds to the total the number shown on any banked cards you have in the challenge category. Whichever of you has a lower total – tie goes to the defender – has won the challenge. The third player only announces who has lost, NOT how much damage you each had. The losing player must discard a card from the challenge suit, face up. They do NOT look at the back. Again, you NEVER look at the back of your own cards, even when they leave your hand.

At this point I announce the instant win condition, then we play for a bunch of rounds. I'll mention the instant win condition a few more times, then toward the end I'll remind players how the end game most-of-least scoring will work. This approach gets players playing immediately and learning the details as they go.