

Knives

A Five-Player Trick-Taking Game

Overview

Knives is a five-player trick-taking game where players compete to collect stars (points on cards). One player becomes the banker and secretly partners with a shadow banker. The other three players are defenders trying to stop them.

The Deck (32 cards)

Knives Suit (7 cards)

2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, Ace

- Ace is highest, 2 is lowest
- Knives are always **greater trump**

Four Traditional Suits (24 cards)

Spades, Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts - each containing:

- Ghost (lowest)
- Thief
- Maid
- Jack
- Queen
- King (highest)

Special Card

- 1 Joker (no suit)
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Card Values (Stars)

- **Kings:** 3 stars each
 - **Queens:** 2 stars each
 - **Jacks:** 1 star each
 - **Ace of Knives:** 1 star
 - **All other cards:** 0 stars
 - **Total in deck:** 25 stars
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Setup

1. **Dealer shuffles** and cards are cut
 2. **Deal 6 cards** to each player (clockwise)
 3. **Deal 2 cards** face-down to the bank
 4. **Dealer declares** an initial strong suit
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Choosing the Banker

Starting with the player left of the dealer, each player in turn either:

- **Picks:** Becomes the banker with the current strong suit
- **Passes:** Names a new strong suit (overriding the previous one) and passes

Once someone picks:

- They become the **banker**
- They take the 2 bank cards (now have 8 cards)
- They **bank** 2 cards face-down from their hand (back to 6 cards)
- The banked cards count toward the banker's stars at the end

If Everyone Passes

1. The last player names a final strong suit
 2. The dealer chooses **leaster** (fewest stars wins) or **moster** (most stars wins)
 3. The dealer discards the 2 bank cards face-down
 4. (Optional) The dealer may reveal the discarded cards (both, one, or neither)
 5. All players play for themselves
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The Strong Suit & Trump

- **Greater trump:** Knives (always)
- **Lesser trump:** The declared strong suit
- **Fail suits:** The other three traditional suits

Trump Hierarchy

- Knives beat the strong suit
 - The strong suit beats fail suits
 - Among fail suits, only the leading suit can win the trick (unless trump is played)
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Finding the Shadow Banker

- If a player other than the banker holds the **Ghost of the strong suit**, they are the **shadow banker** (secret partner)

- The shadow banker's identity is discovered during play when the Ghost is revealed
 - The banker may announce they are playing solo if they wish, but this helps the defenders
 - The banker and shadow banker **combine their won tricks** to count stars together at the end of the round
 - If the banker has the Ghost, they play solo (no partner)
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Special Card Abilities

Joker

- Can be played at any time (no need to follow suit)
- Always wins the trick
- When led: The trick has no leading suit, all players may play any card

Ghost

- If a Ghost and King of the **same suit** are played in the same trick, the Ghost outranks the King
- The Ghost of the strong suit identifies the shadow banker

Thief

- If you play a Thief and **no other player** plays a Thief that trick, you lead the next trick (regardless of who won)
 - If multiple Thieves are played, they cancel each other out
 - Has no effect on the final (6th) trick
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Playing Tricks

First Lead

- **With a banker:** Player to the left of the banker leads
- **Leaster/Moster:** Player to the left of the dealer leads

Following Suit

- Players must follow the leading suit if able
- If unable, they may play any card

Winning Tricks

- Highest trump card wins (Knives beat strong suit)
 - If no trump, highest card of the leading suit wins
 - Exception: Joker always wins
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Scoring

Banker + Shadow Banker (combined stars)

Both players receive the same points:

- **13-16 stars:** +1 point each
- **17-20 stars:** +2 points each
- **21+ stars:** +3 points each

Defenders Win (combined stars 13+)

- Each defender: +1 point

Solo Banker (no shadow banker)

Double the normal payout:

- **13-16 stars:** +2 points
- **17-20 stars:** +4 points

- **21+ stars:** +6 points

Leaster (fewest stars wins)

- Player(s) with fewest stars: +2 points each

Moster (most stars wins)

- Player(s) with most stars: +2 points each
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Winning the Game

Players decide before the game starts how many points to play to:

- **Quick game:** First to 10 points
 - **Standard game:** First to 15 points
 - **Long game:** First to 20+ points
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Variations

Simplified Scoring

For faster, more casual play:

Banker + Shadow Banker:

- Win (13+ stars): +2 points each
- Win with all 25 stars: +3 points each

Defenders Win:

- +1 point each

Solo Banker:

- Win (13+ stars): +4 points

- Win with all 25 stars: +6 points

Leaster/Moster: (unchanged)

- +2 points each to winner(s)

Simplified Rules

For younger or beginning players:

Changes:

- **Spades is always the strong suit** (no suit selection)
- The player with the **Ghost of Spades** is the shadow banker
- **No Ghost/King power:** Ghost does not beat King
- **No Thief power:** Thief is just a regular card
- **If all other players pass, the dealer must be the banker** (no leaster/moster)

Solo Banker: +4 points for any win

Recommended for ages 10+

Quick Reference

Must Remember:

- Follow suit if you can
- Knives always trump
- Strong suit trumps fail suits
- Banker's banked cards count toward their stars
- Shadow banker is secret until Ghost is played

Star Values: K=3, Q=2, J=1, Ace of Knives=1

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