

Gleek

A card game for 3 players, using a standard (though reduced) deck

History

Gleek (sometimes spelled Gleeke, Gleke) is mentioned in several publications during the first half of the 16th century. The earliest is known reference is from a book titled *The chirche of the euyll men and women*, published in 1522.

This reconstruction is based on the rules which are found in Francis Willughby's *A Volume of Plaies* written around 1665 but unpublished until 2003. Willughby refers to it as "one of the best games at cards."

Background and Definitions

Gleek is a trick taking game, but with several stages of play before the trick taking portion. Like most period games Gleek is a gambling game with several ways to win and lose. The game uses a regular deck with the 2s and 3s removed, so that you are left with 44 cards. The cards are ranked with the ace high, followed by the king, queen, jack, 10 and so on down to the 4.

Eldest - The player to the left of the dealer. Between any two or more players, the eldest is the one closest to the left of the dealer.

Trump - A suit, selected at the beginning of the game, which beats all other suits when taking tricks.

Ruffe - The largest set of same suited cards. In Gleek, not all the cards are counted equally. Also found spelled "ruff".

Gleeke - Three of a kind. Same word as the name of the game, but I will spell this with the extra 'e' to distinguish it from the game.

Murnivall - Four of a kind. Also found spelled "murnival" and "mournival".

Tyde - The 4 of Trumps. Worth 2 from each player to the player who holds it, as a consolation for getting the worst trump card. Can be collected right away or when the card is played.

Tom - The Jack of Trumps.

Tib - The Ace of Trumps.

Honors - These cards are worth bonus points at the end of the game to the player who wins them in a trick. They are Tom, worth 9; the King and Queen of Trumps, each worth 3; and Tib, worth 15.

Setup

Choose a player to be the first dealer and have them deal 12 cards to each player. Cards are normally dealt four at a time.

The remaining 8 cards are called the *stock*. The top card for the stock is turned face up to determine the trump suit for this hand.

Play

Buying the Stock

The first stage, after dealing the cards and revealing the trump suit, is buying the stock. The eldest *must* begin the bidding with a bid of 12. After that, each player in turn may raise the bid or pass. When no one will raise the bid any more, the player who won the bid pays half of their bid to each of the other two players. If the bid was an odd amount the extra 1 goes to the player who made the second to last bid. The winner then discards, face down, 7 of their worst cards and takes into their hand the 7 face down cards from the stock - leaving the card showing trump. Your goal in buying the stock is to get rid of low, non-trump cards, and replace them with better ones.

Vie the Ruffe

The second stage is to vie the ruffe. To vie the ruffe is to claim to have the most cards of a single suit. When counting cards for the ruffe, face cards are worth 10, aces are worth 11 and all other cards are worth 1. A murnivall of aces will beat any ruffe. The eldest has the first option of vying for the ruffe or passing, then on around to the other players. If everyone passes, the ruffe is not claimed this hand its value is doubled for the next hand. If one player vies, then the other players have the option of passing, seeing or seeing & revying. Passing means you believe the vying player has a better ruffe than you, so you are dropping out of vying for the ruffe. Passing will cost you at least 2. If both other players pass, then the ruffe is not shown. Seeing means you believe you have a better ruffe. All players who see reveal their ruffe and the player with the best ruffe collects 4 from anyone who sees. Seeing and revying is similar to seeing and raising - the other players must now pass, see or see & revie (again). The amount owed to the winner increases by two each time it is seen or seen & revied.

A player who passes may not re-enter vying for the ruffe, but only owes the amount that was set when they passed.

Amount owed:

Not vied = 0, but all amounts for the ruffe are double on the next hand.

Vied and not seen = 2

Vied and seen = 4

Vied, seen & revied and not seen = 4

Vied, seen & revied and seen again = 6

Vied, seen & revied, seen & revied a second time, and not seen = 6

Vied, seen & revied, seen & revied a second time, and seen again = 8

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An easy way to keep track of the amount owed is to create a pot in the middle and pay into it as you go. As soon as one person vies, everyone puts in 2. If you see it, you and the vying player each put in another 2 (if they haven't already passed, the third player may at this time also see and put in 2 more as well). If all three players are still in, wait for the third player to see or pass before revying. At the end, the winner collects the pot.

Gleekes and Murnivalls

The third stage is gleekes and murnivalls. If you have a gleeke or murnivall of face cards or aces, you collect from each of the other players. Gleeke of jacks is worth 1, queens 2, kings 3 and aces 4. Murnivalls are worth twice those amounts. So a player with a murnivall of aces will collect 8 from

each of the other two players. You may use the card which is showing trump to make a gleeke if you have two of them in hand. Players need only announce what they have; they are not required to show them.

Trick Taking

The final stage is trick taking. The eldest begins by playing a single card face up. The next player *must* play a card of the same suit and with a rank of a ten or higher. If they do not have a ten or higher, they must play their largest card of the same suit. If they are out of cards of that suit, they may play a trump card (or any other card). The third player must follow suit if they can, and if not they can play any card. Highest trump wins the trick, or if no trumps were played, then the highest card of the suit led wins. The winner collects the cards and lays them aside. The winner then begins the next trick.

Once all twelve tricks have been played, each player counts the number of cards they collected. To this they add the value of any honor cards that they collected. If the card from the stock that is showing trump is an honor card, that bonus goes to the dealer. You owe for each point you are below 22, and you collect for each point you are over. If you have exactly 22, you have broken even on this stage.

After everyone has settled up, the eldest becomes the new dealer and starts a new hand. The game continues for as long as the players wish.

Additional Rules and Concepts

Being Taken - When the eldest is forced to take the stock against his will, and loses better cards than he gets back.

Hoisting the Stock - To raise the price of the stock without intending to win it. The idea is to convince the other two players that the honor cards are in the stock when they are really in your hand.

Challenging - Because gleekees and murnivalls are not shown, it is possible for the player who won the stock to overstate what they have when in fact some of the cards were discarded for the stock (any other player would be easily caught). A player who believes this to be true (because the claimed cards were not all played), may challenge the player. The challenger may look at the cards that were discarded for the stock and if they find what they are looking for the challenged player pays back double what they took for the gleeke or murnivall.

About the Reconstruction

Willughby does not give the full details on each stage of the game, specifically the ruffe and trick taking portion. In those cases I have drawn on his descriptions of the games Ruffe and Trump, to fill in the missing details.

Playing with 4 or More Players

Willughby states that by changing the deck size, hand size and the values for the honors you can adjust the game for different numbers of players. One catch is that the stock needs to be at least four fewer cards than the hand, because a player must be able to keep all four honors if they have been dealt them. All four honors need to be in play; otherwise the scoring at the end will not work out evenly. Alternately, Willughby suggests you could allow a player to discard a few cards, then

collect the stock and discard the rest. Below are some possible arrangements (with the 3 player version of reference). In those cases where you are using 48 or 52 cards, Tyde become the 3 of Trump or 2 of Trump respectively.

	2 Players	3 Players	4 Players	4 Players (alt)	5 Players	5 Players (alt)	6 Players
Deck Size	44 cards	44	44	48 (no 2s)	44	52	52
Hand Size	17 cards	12	10	10	8	9	8
Stock Size	10 cards	8	4	8	4	7	4
Tom	9 points	9	8	8	9	9	9
King & Queen	3 points	3	3	3	3	3	3
Tib	15 points	15	14	14	15	15	15
Break even	32 points	22	17	17	14	15	13
1st discard	9 cards	7	3	6	3	5	3
2nd discard	0 cards	0	0	1	0	1	0

Sources

Willughby, Francis, *A Volume of Plaies* (c. 1665). Published in 2003 by Ashgate Press under the title "*Francis Willughby's Book of Games*"

Ghory, Imran. *Dating Period Card Games* webpage. <http://bits.bris.ac.uk/imran/games/cards.html> via the Internet Archive (www.archive.org)

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