

Unofficial Homebrew
ZINBIDDLE
Kuari Style

(as imagined by John Jackson Miller in
the Star Wars novella “The Ride”)

Star Wars and Canto Bight ™ and ® Lucasfilm

On Zinbiddle

In 2017, I wrote the novella “**The Ride**” to appear in ***Star Wars: Canto Bight***, a prequel to **Star Wars: The Last Jedi**. The story featured a card-counter, Kaljach Sonmi, who specializes in a card game called Zinbiddle.

On Zinbiddle

I pulled the Zinbiddle name from an old West End ***Star Wars Roleplaying Game*** volume, and slapped the “Kuari Style” name on it to explain any deviations from any possible earlier descriptions of the game earlier.

It became clear that I needed to know something about how the game was played for my narrative to work.

On Zinbiddle

So I provided Lucasfilm and Del Rey with a slideshow document explaining the general beats of the game. As it was, it was not anything that would be playable — it was only a general outline. But for years, people have asked what a full version would be like.

On Zinbiddle

What follows is an **unofficial version** which describes in much greater detail gameplay that fits what is described in the book. It's just a fan homebrew, even though it's by me; should something official come along, it might be completely different.

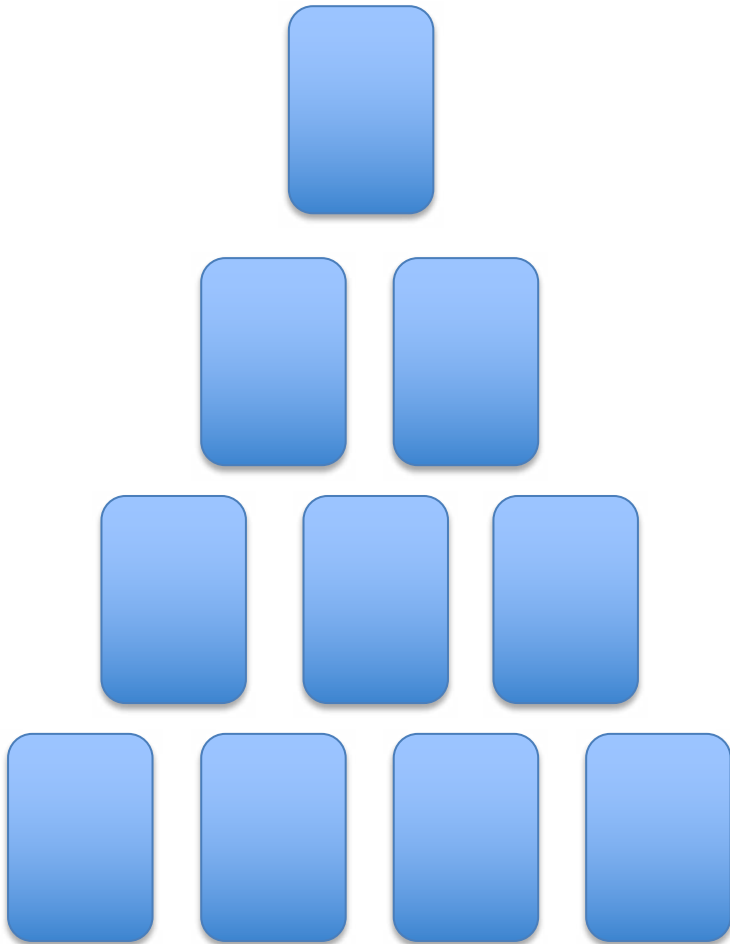
On Zinbiddle

To use a phrase we often used when I was editing the collectible card game magazine *Scrye* many years ago, “**Nobody playtested this at all!**”

What follows is mechanics only — and they might not be workable as a good game. It’s just something that’s consistent with what I imagined in the story.

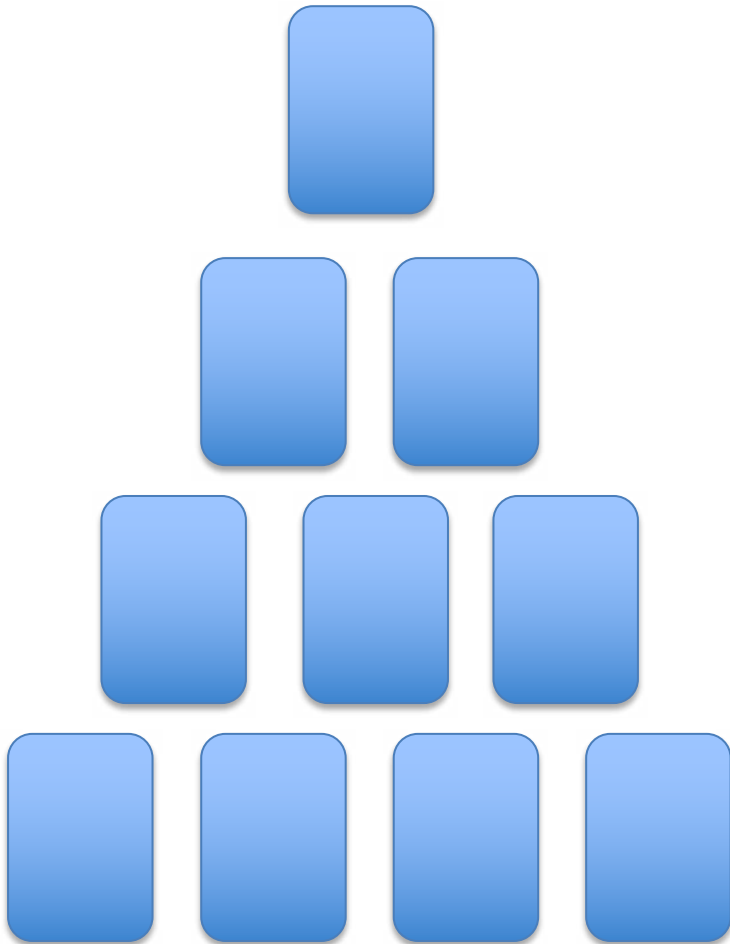
Here goes...

The Zinbiddle pyramid



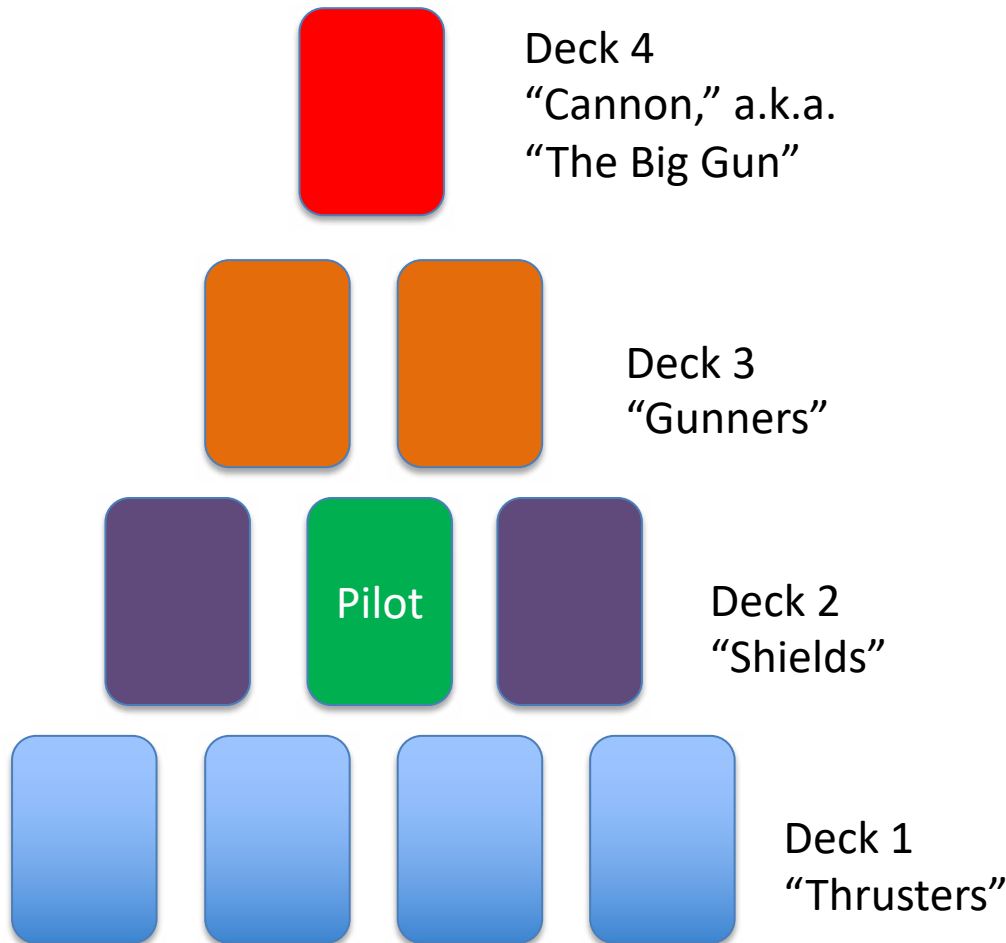
Zinbiddle is a **convoluted game** favored by members of the upper classes (for its obscurity) and by card counters, whom it offers several opportunities to.

The Zinbiddle pyramid



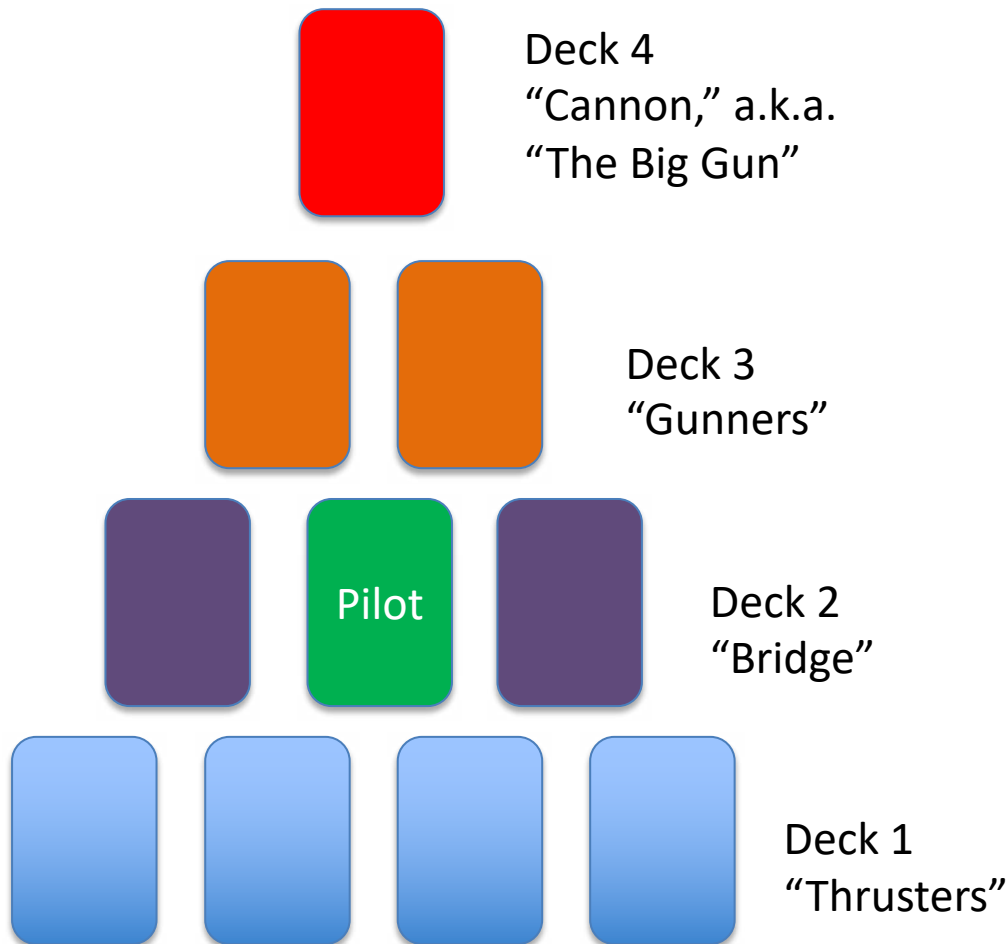
For story purposes, we needed a game in which players both vie against one another, and who also make side bets against the house that certain card combinations will appear. This does that.

The Zinbiddle pyramid



This shows a completed pyramid. The idea is that it represents a Star Destroyer, with thrusters behind, guns forward, and a pilot at center.

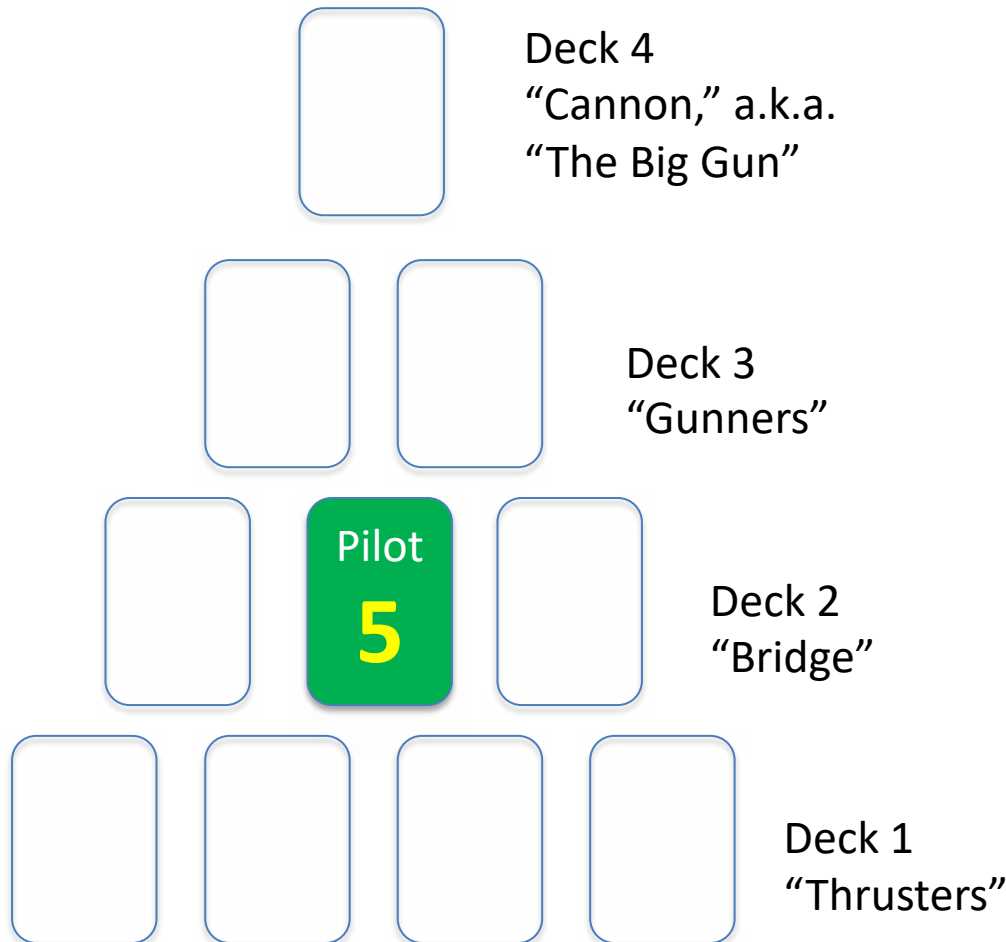
The Zinbiddle pyramid



In the casino, each deck is literally drawn from a different deck of cards — a different shoe dedicated to each level.

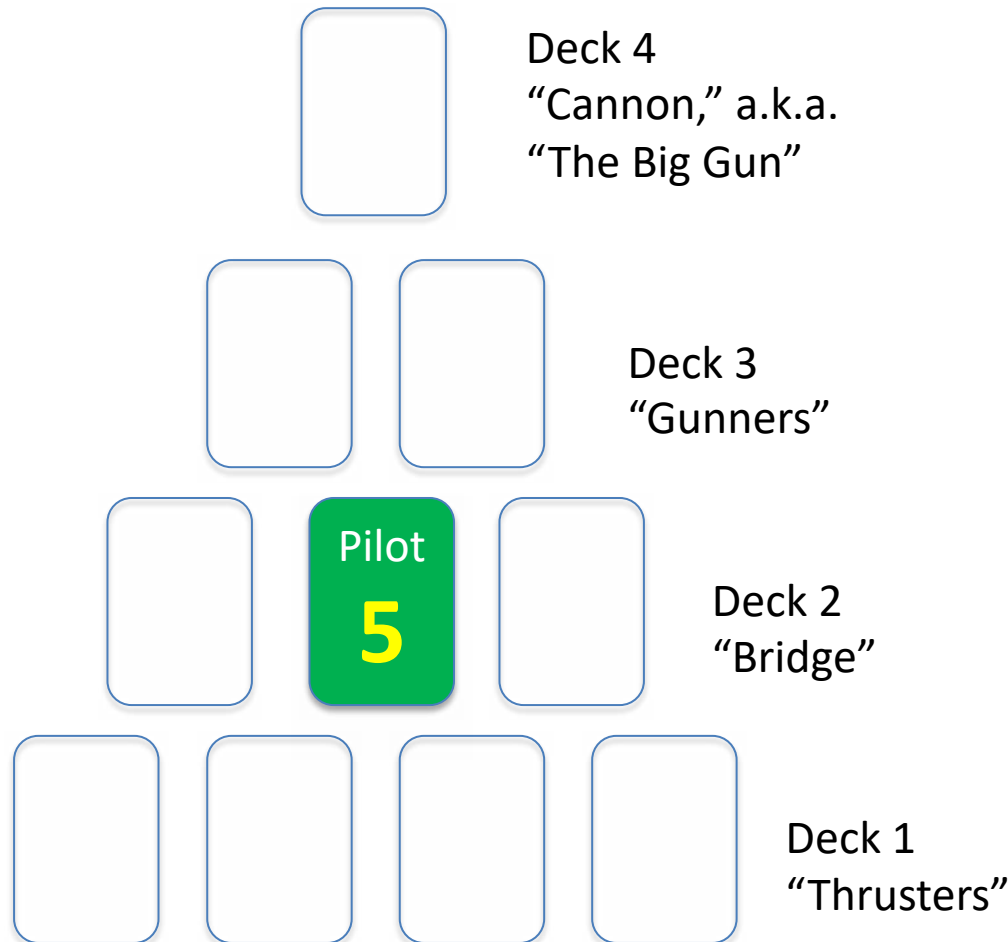
But in a casual game one deck suffices for all.

The Zinbiddle pyramid



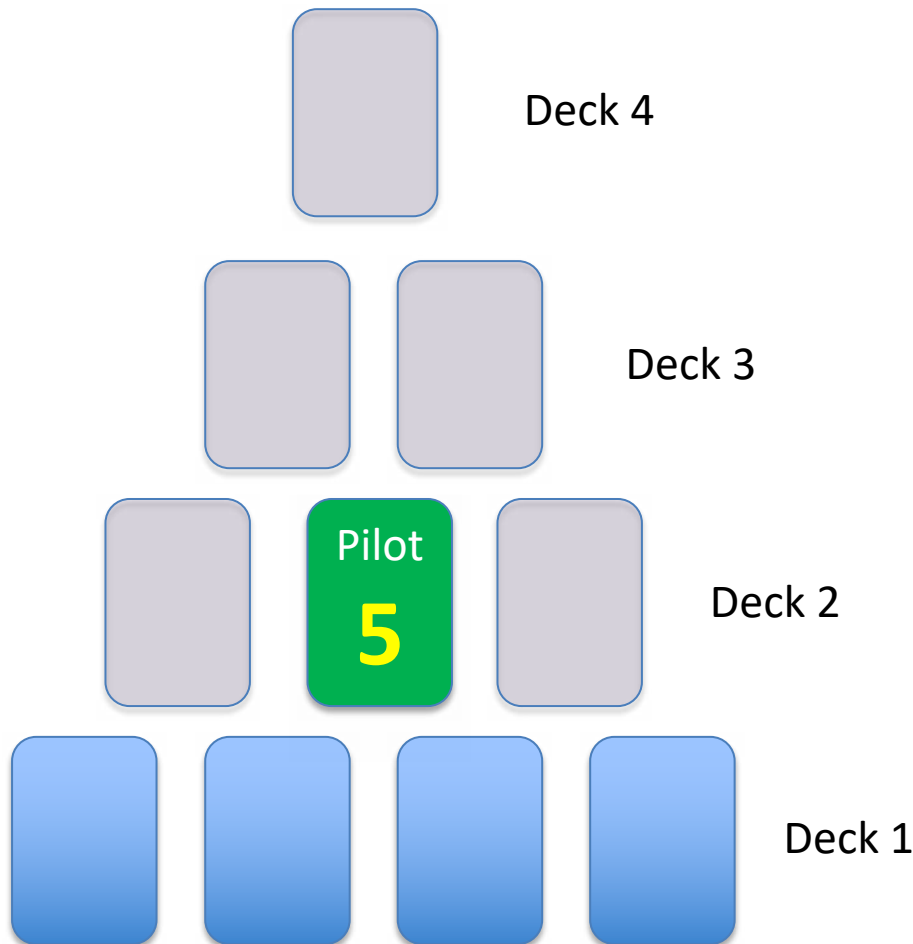
The playing surface begins empty but for a single card for the pilot. In casual games, it’s a card that reads “4” at the start, representing the number of pilot’s actions remaining.

The Zinbiddle pyramid



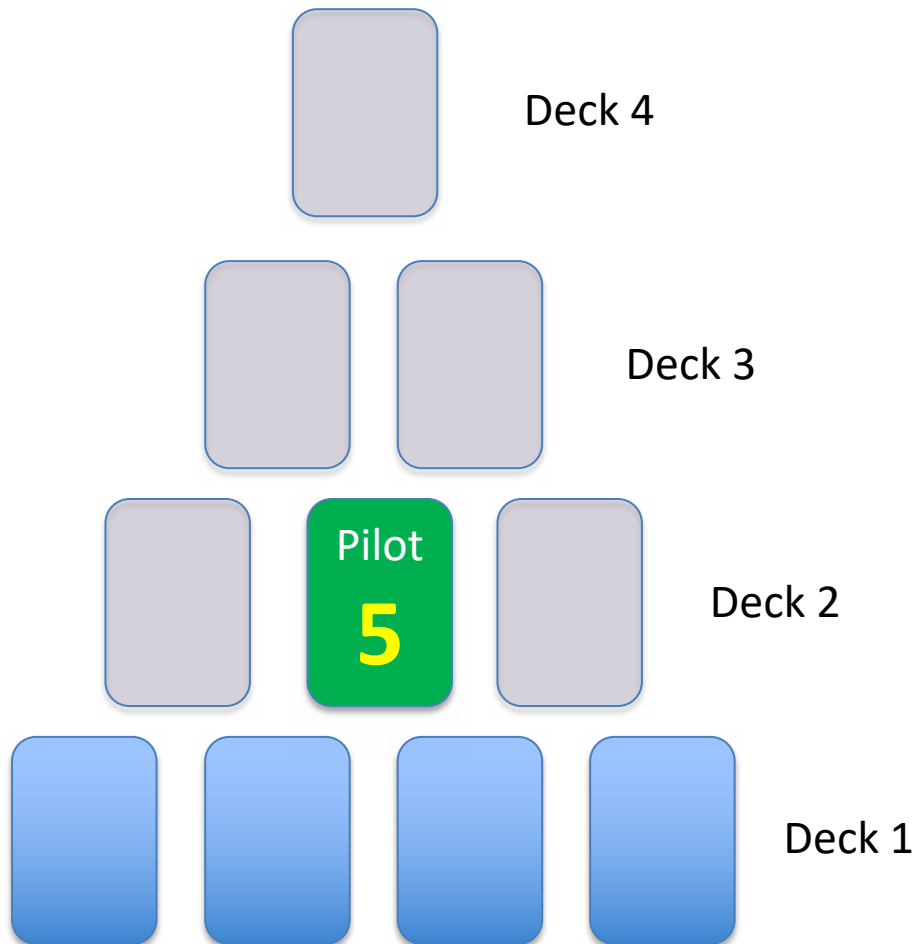
In a casino situation, there isn't a card there, but rather a spot marked on the table that connotes the pilot's space, and which has a digital counter.

The Zinbiddle pyramid



The cards are dealt to build the ship a deck at a time, with betting and draw rounds in between. Some games never get to the “big gun” fourth deck card.

The Zinbiddle pyramid



Importantly, the bottom row of cards is dealt **face down**, but available for the players to look at. They may not be shifted within the row except at certain times.

The Zinbiddle cards



For the casual game, the cards consist of the numbers 1-4 plus a null or zero card in four color suits. The nulls are considered “misfires,” as we’ll see.

The Zinbiddle cards



(Real-life players wanting to attempt the game can easily build a deck with one or more Uno™ decks, with the ∅ and zero cards serving as misfires.)

The Zinbiddle cards



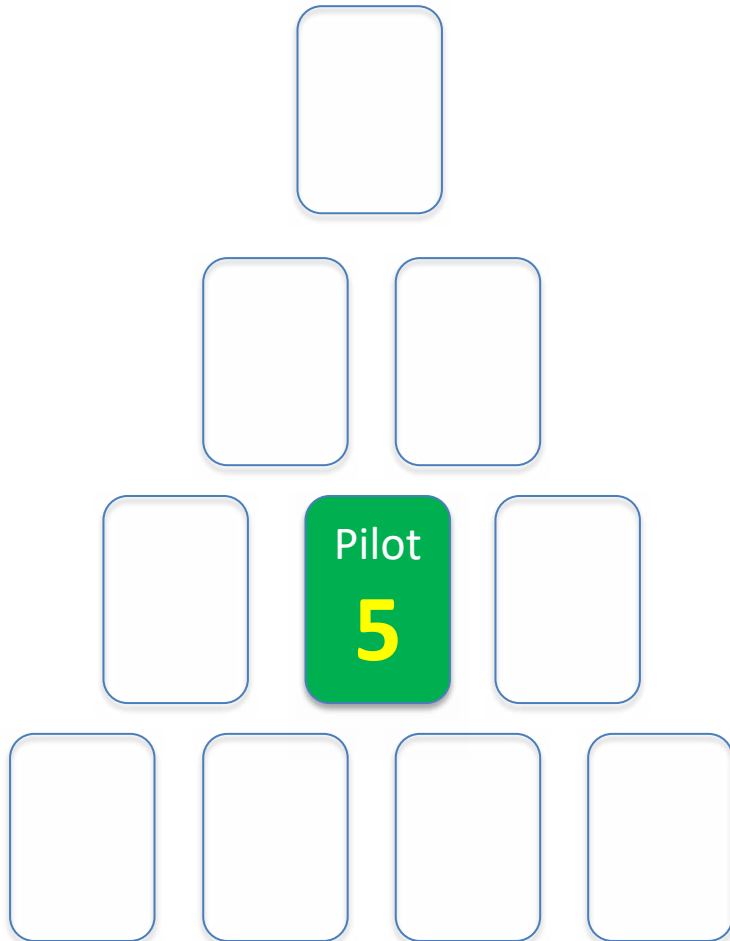
There's no cap to the number of sets of cards which can be in the deck; we'd presume that in the casino, the shoes would hold lots of sets of these 20 cards.

The Zinbiddle cards



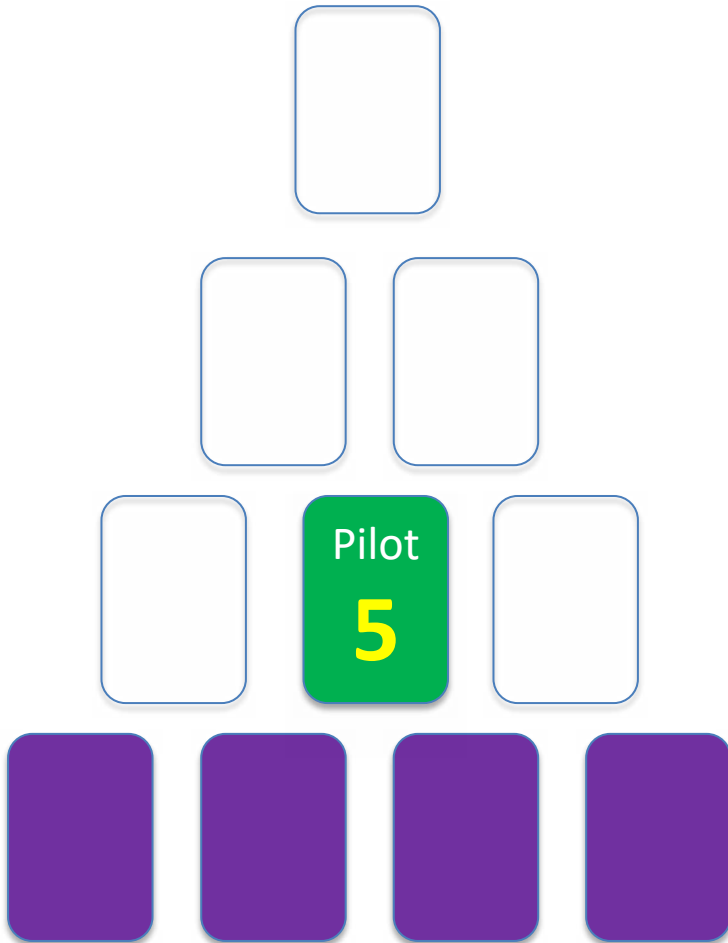
While the casino employs a lot of different kinds of wild cards, only one is relevant to the story; the “Vermilion Six.” It can be made to be any number and color — even more than one!

Three games at once



Zinbiddle is similar to High/Low poker games in that there's more than one winner of a hand. Actually, there's three!

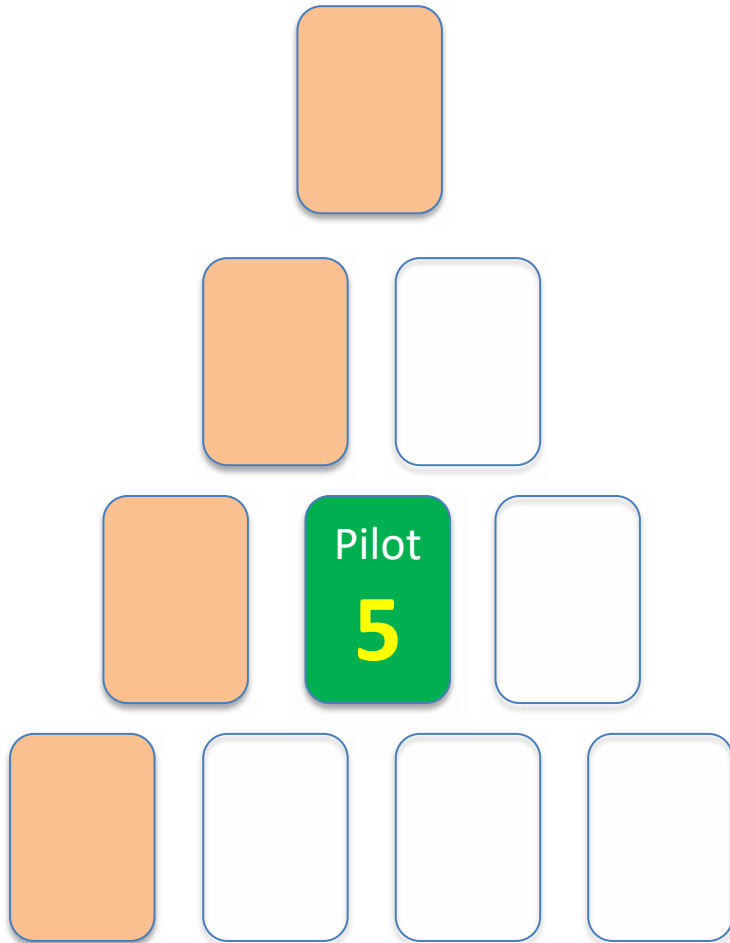
Three games at once



The four cards on the bottom deck, for example, compete with the four bottom-level cards of one's opponents.

Best hand at the showdown takes $1/4$ of the pot.

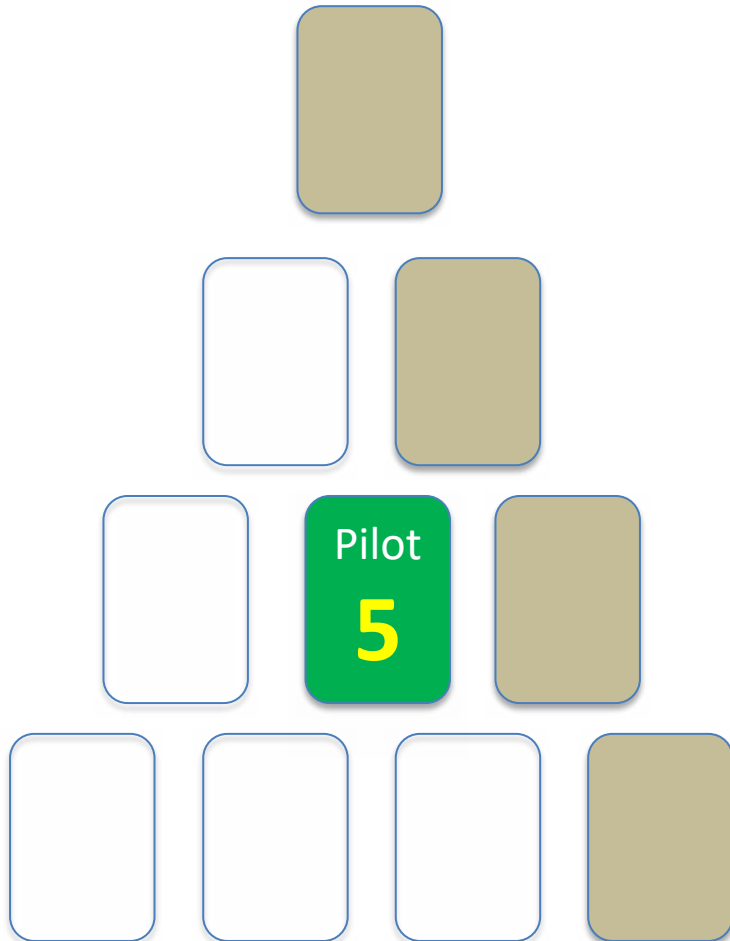
Three games at once



Then the four cards on the left side — the “port flank” — are compared with those of one’s opponent.

The best hand here at showdown wins $1/4$ of the pot.

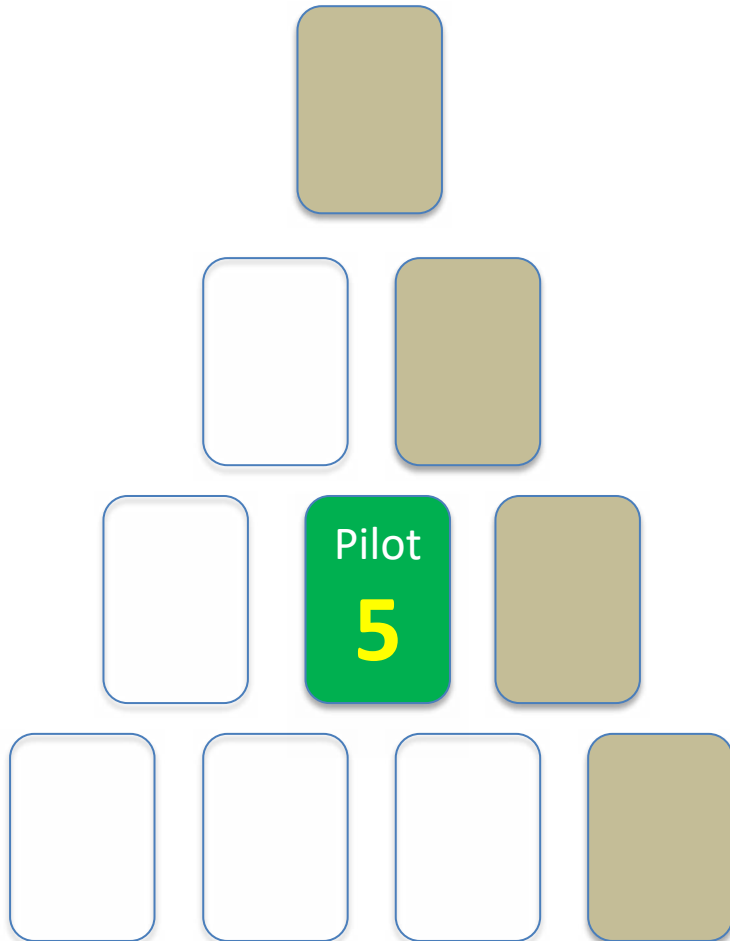
Three games at once



Then the four on the right are the “starboard flank.”

Again, the winner there gets a quarter of the pot. So it’s possible for three players to each win part of a hand.

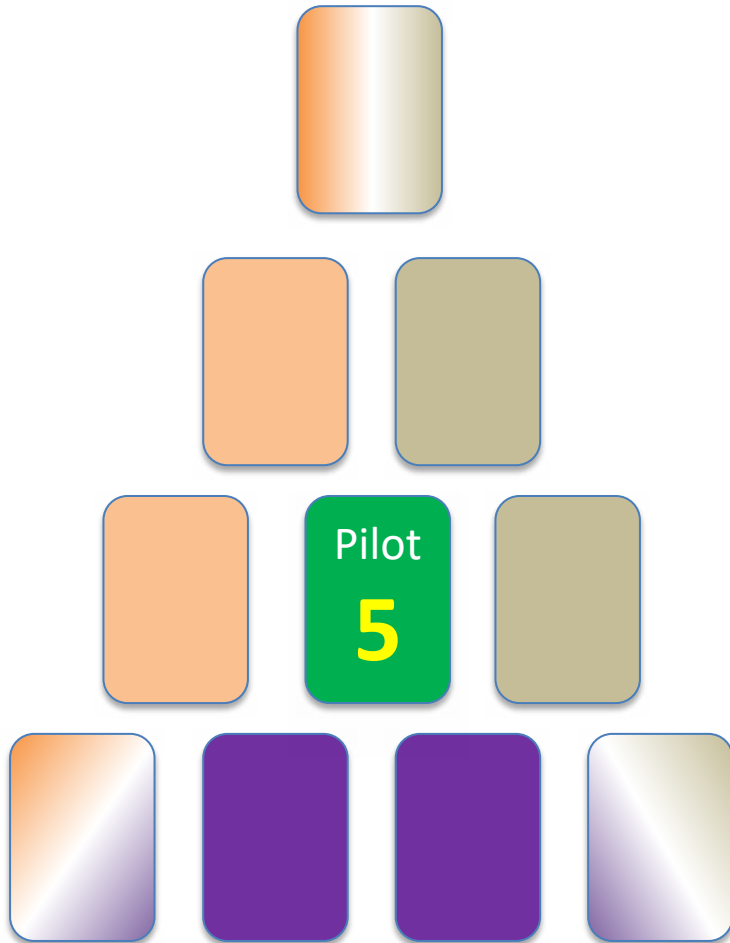
Three games at once



If any player wins two out of three of the battles, they win the fourth and final portion of the pot.

If nobody wins more than one of the combats, that portion of the pot rides until the next game.

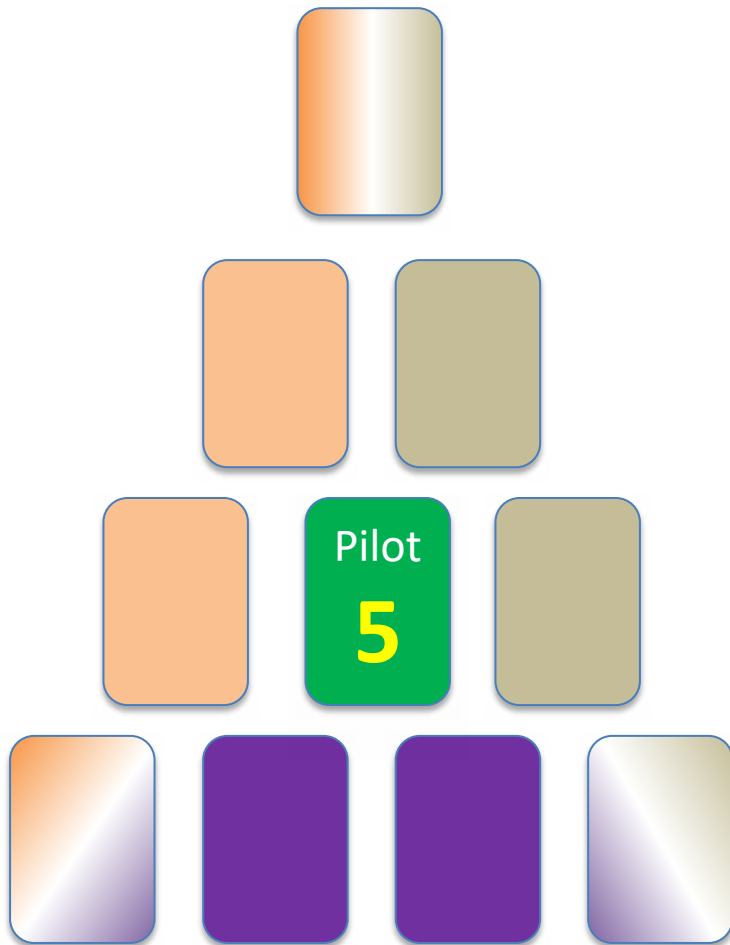
Three games at once



It should immediately be noted that the corner three cards are part of two hands at once.

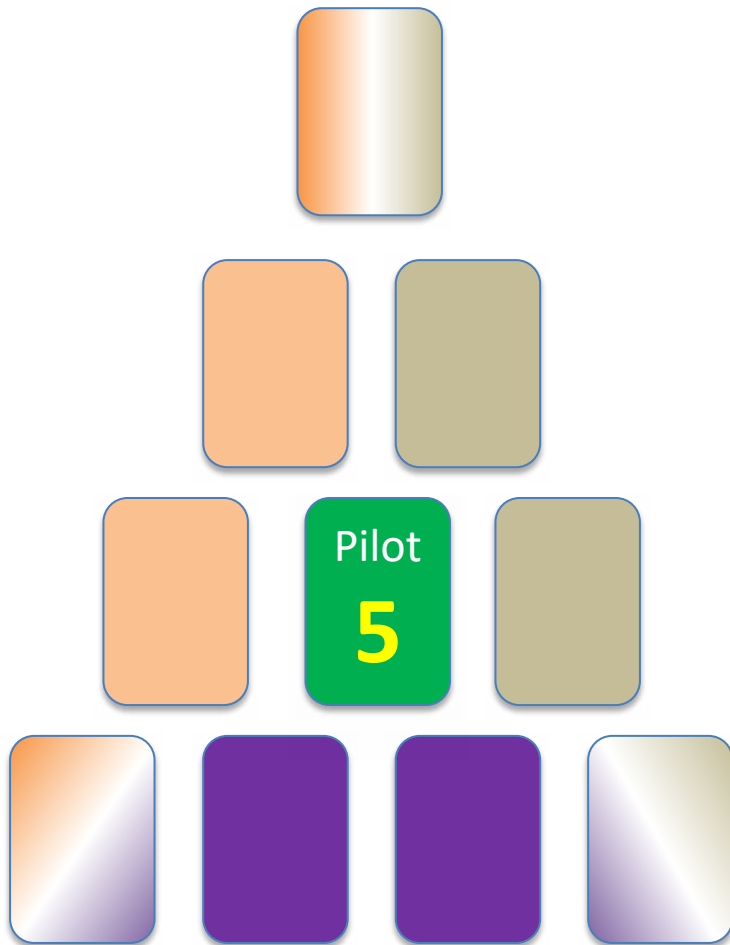
That's important!
They're vital to winning.

Three games at once



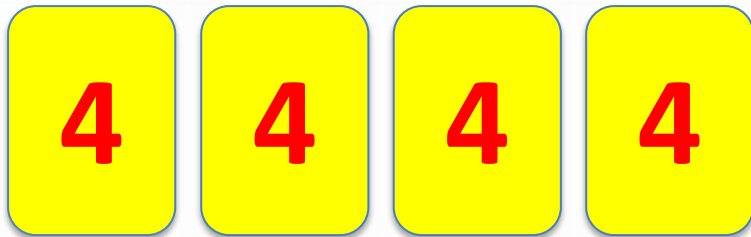
Another thing that's tricky about zinbiddle is that the hand rankings are different for the lower or thruster deck than for the sides of the pyramid.

Three games at once



The ship's thrusters are all about power — and an even distribution of it — so there you're looking for **four of a kind**, with the highest numbers being better.

Thruster level rankings



Because there can be multiple copies of cards, it's possible to have four of the same exact card on the thruster level.

That's a powerful hand — but **not** the highest ranked. Here's why...

Thruster level rankings



Because the goals are different on the port and starboard flanks, you actually don't want the same suits on the corners. So the top hand is the 4 in **all four different suits.**

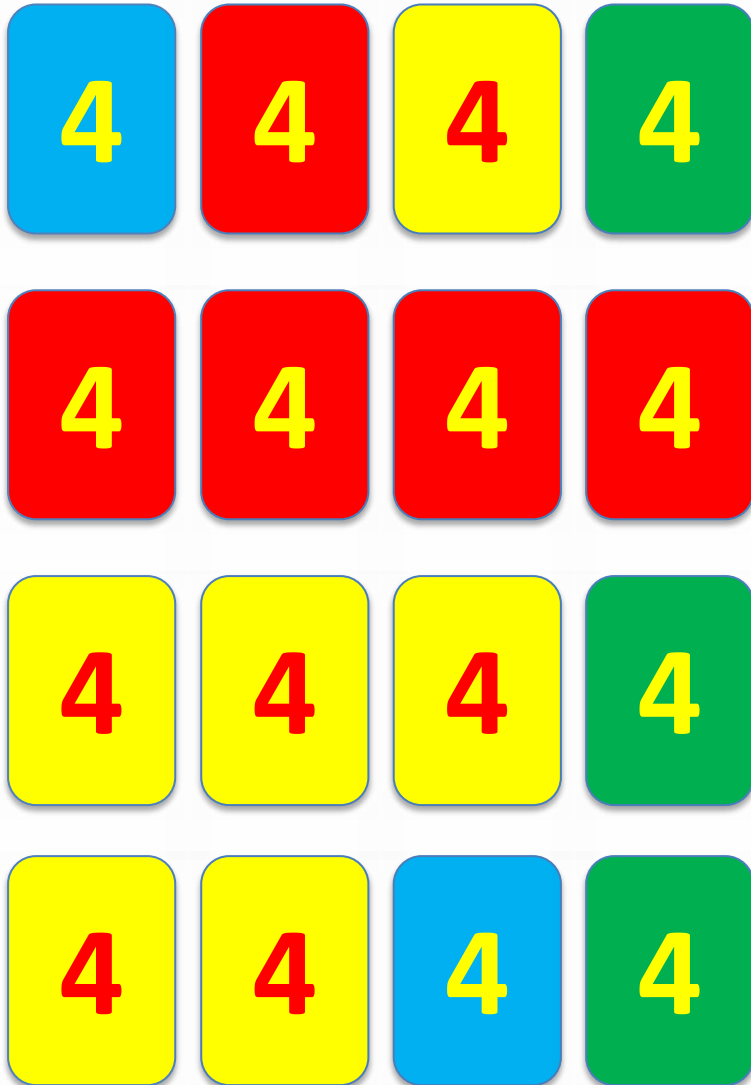
This is called a **"barrage."**

Thruster level rankings



Ranking immediately below the barrage is four of a kind in a single suit. This is called a “**blaze.**”
(Actually, a really archaic poker term!)

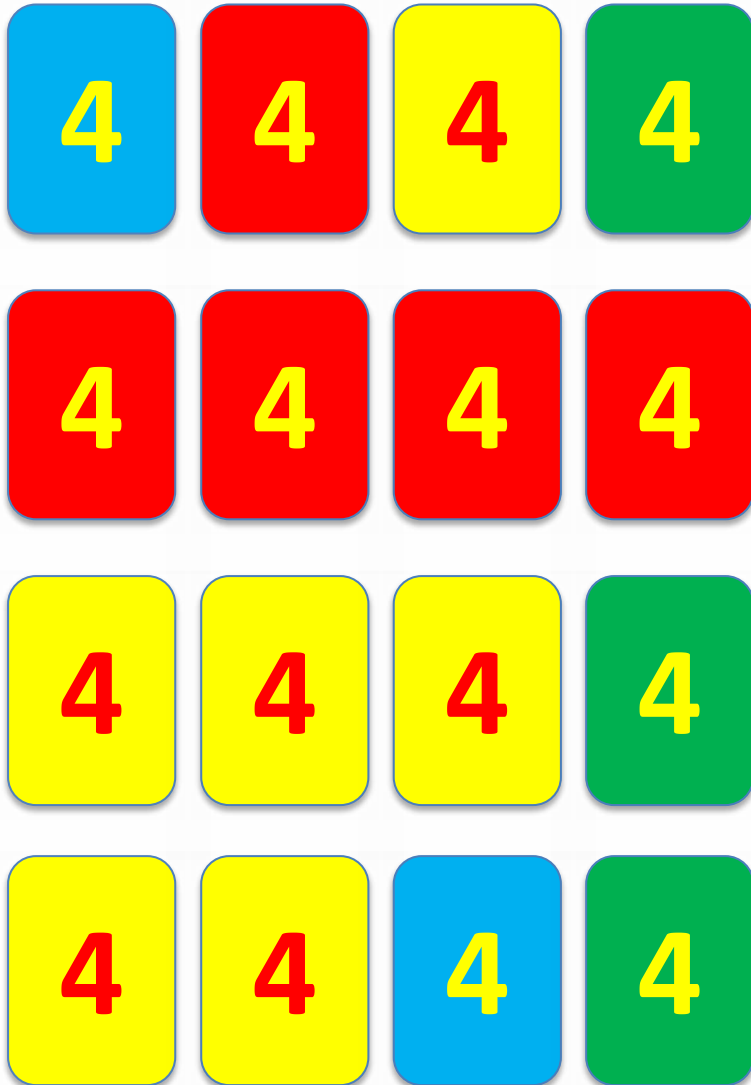
Thruster level rankings



Ranked immediately below the “blaze” for the number 4 is the “busted blaze” — with one of the fours being of a different suit.

Below that, any combination with just two of the same suit.

Thruster level rankings



It will immediately be noticed that trying for a barrage — and just missing it, by one card — leaves you worse off than if you'd tried to get three or four of the same suit. It's the price of going for all the marbles!

Thruster level rankings



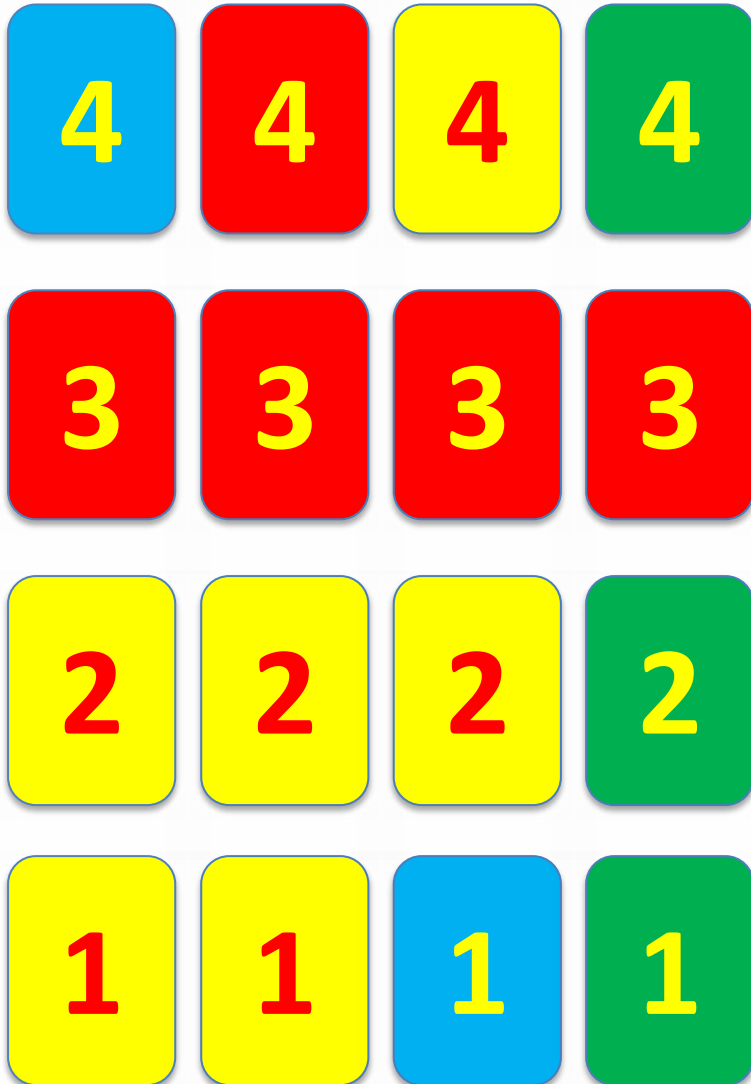
Unless playing in a casino — or with a LOT of decks — two players will likely not both have barrages or blazes made up of the same card. So four threes rank below four fours, and so on.

Zinbiddle!



Remember, the bottom deck consists of hole cards, dealt face down to the player. If **four of a kind** — regardless of suits — is dealt to a player, they may in their first betting round turn call “Zinbiddle!”

Zinbiddle!



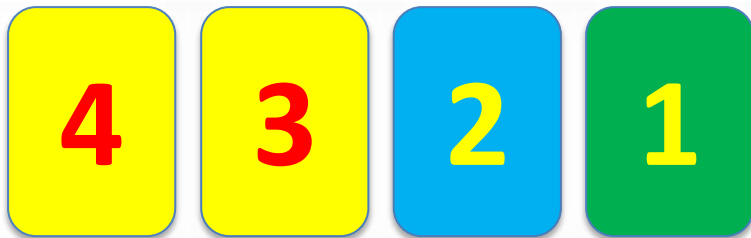
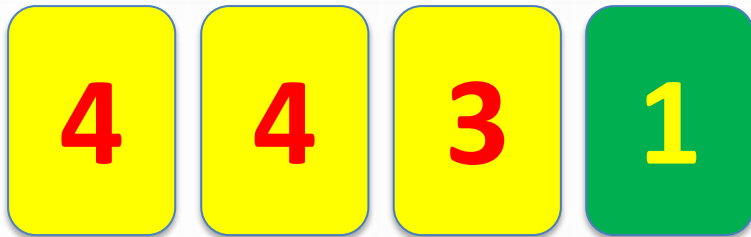
This immediately ends the game; the player wins anything bet earlier. Since it's so early in the game, the player might only win everyone's antes. Position is thus important; last to play collects more bets.

Thruster level rankings

4	4	4	1
2	2	1	1
4	4	3	1
4	3	2	1

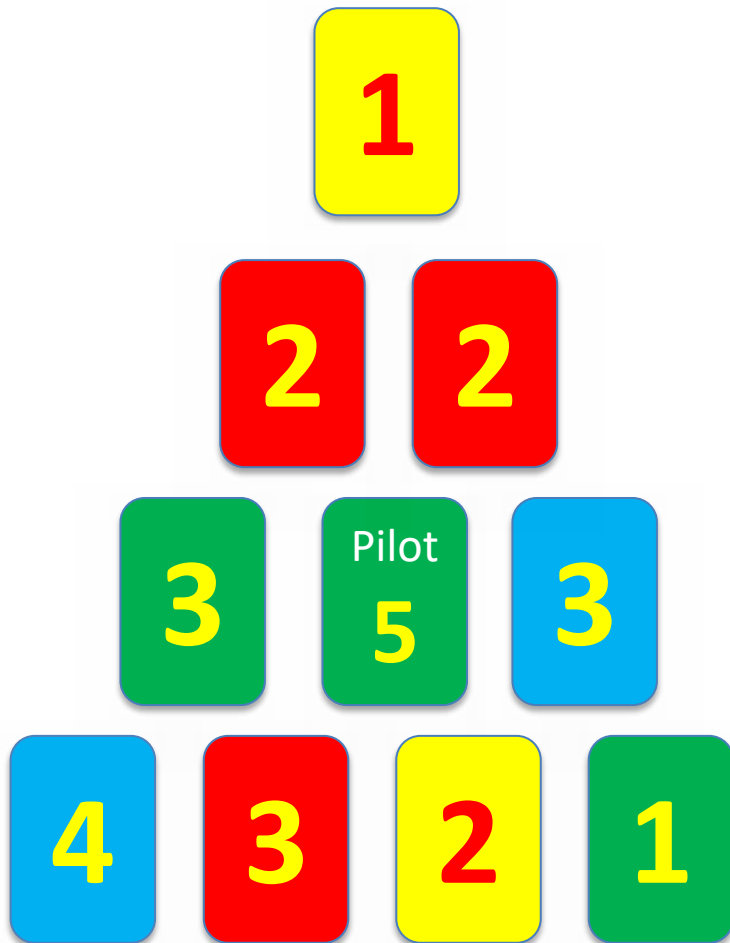
But most players won't draw a natural zinbiddle — four of a kind — and zinbiddle cannot be called in later rounds. So the rankings continue, with **three-of-a-kinds** outranking **two pairs**, and then **single pairs**.

Thruster level rankings



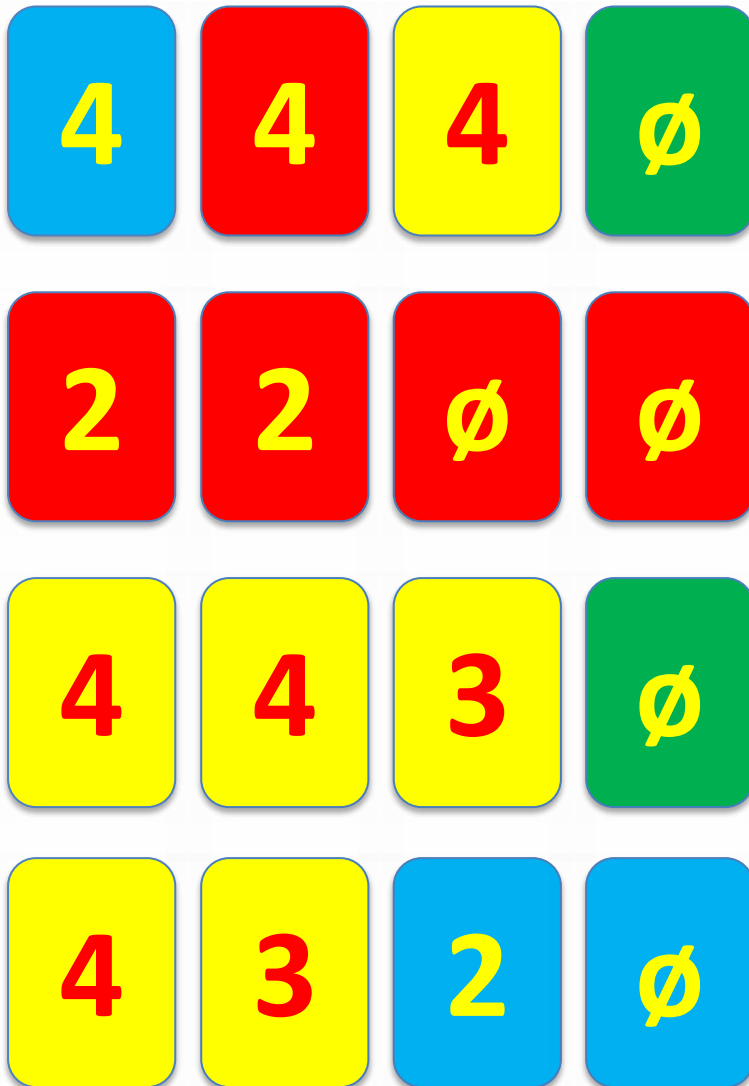
At levels below four-of-a-kind — barrages and blazes — suits don't matter at the thruster level. It's just poker, now, **without flushes or straights**. Suits don't matter now.

Thruster level rankings



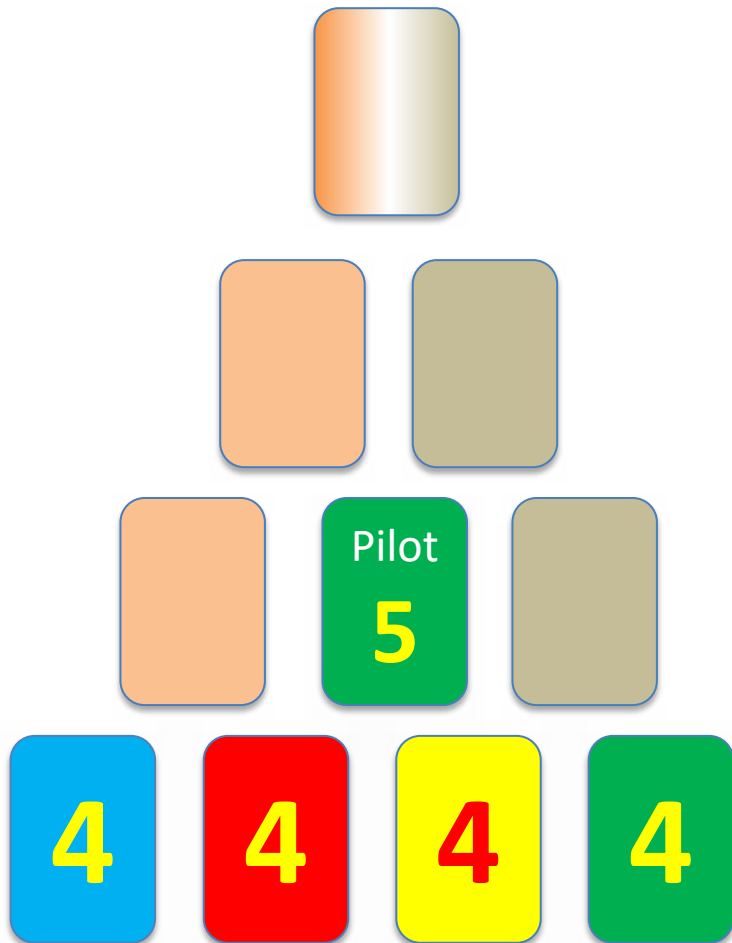
Indeed, getting a straight across the bottom means you won't be able to finish straights on the other flanks of the pyramid. So if you want to win it all, four fours is what you need.

Thruster level rankings



Finally, there are **unplayable hands**. By showdown if any misfires remain, a player loses the whole game immediately. The ship never got off the ground! Fortunately, you can buy replacement cards.

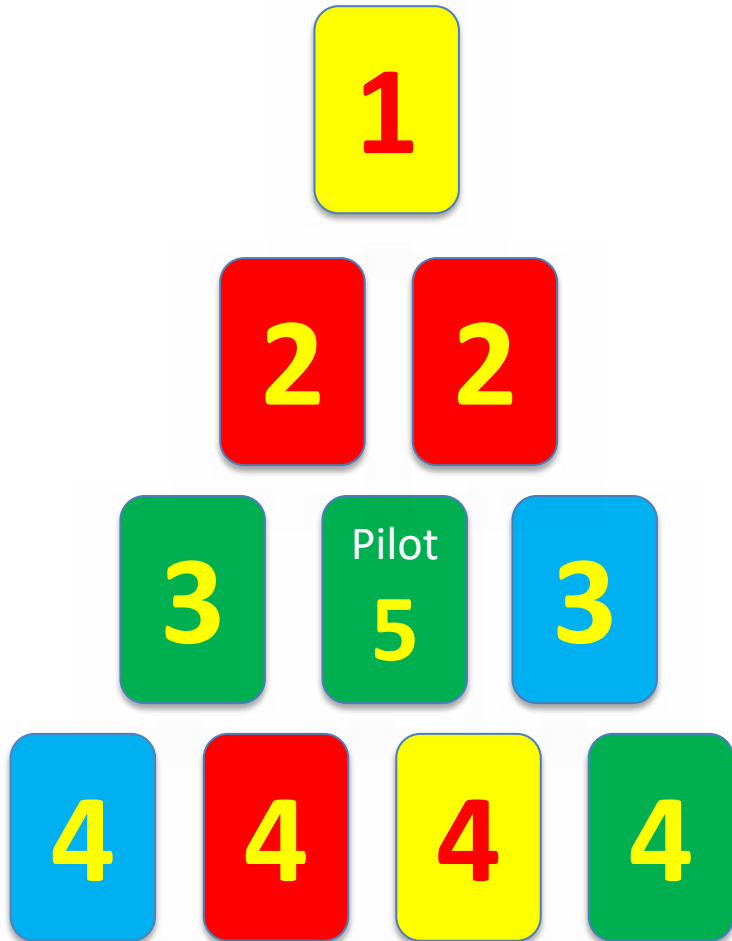
Three games at once



So now we know that on the bottom or thruster row, we're looking for four of a kind, with suits only mattering to break ties.

Straights are of no use...

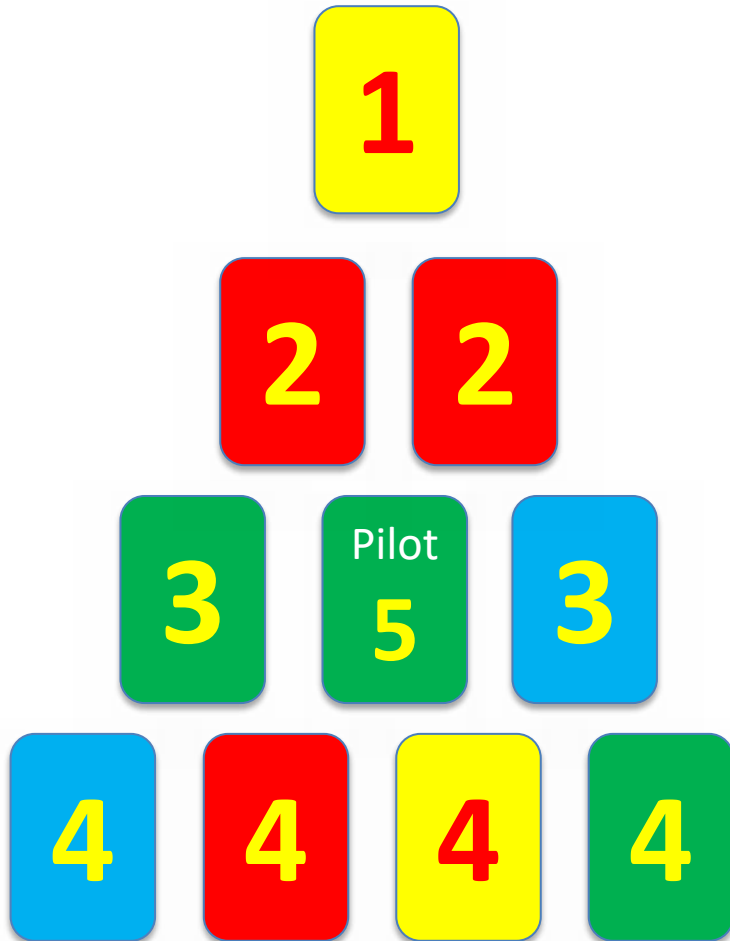
Three games at once



...but remember, the rankings are different for the sides.

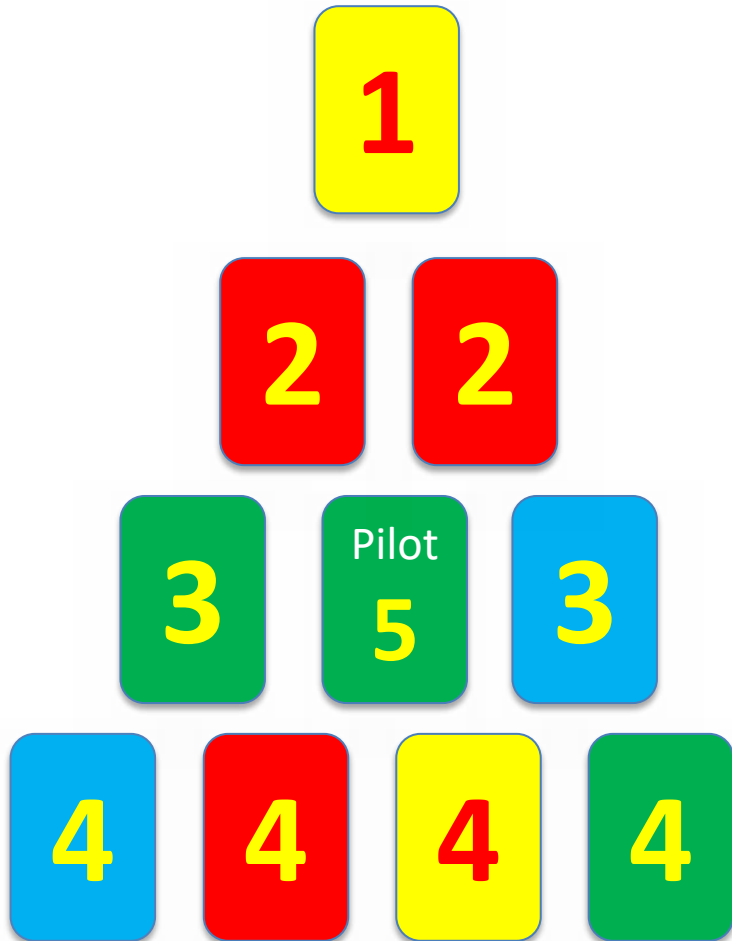
Here, the player is looking for **straights**, not multiple copies of the same number.

Three games at once



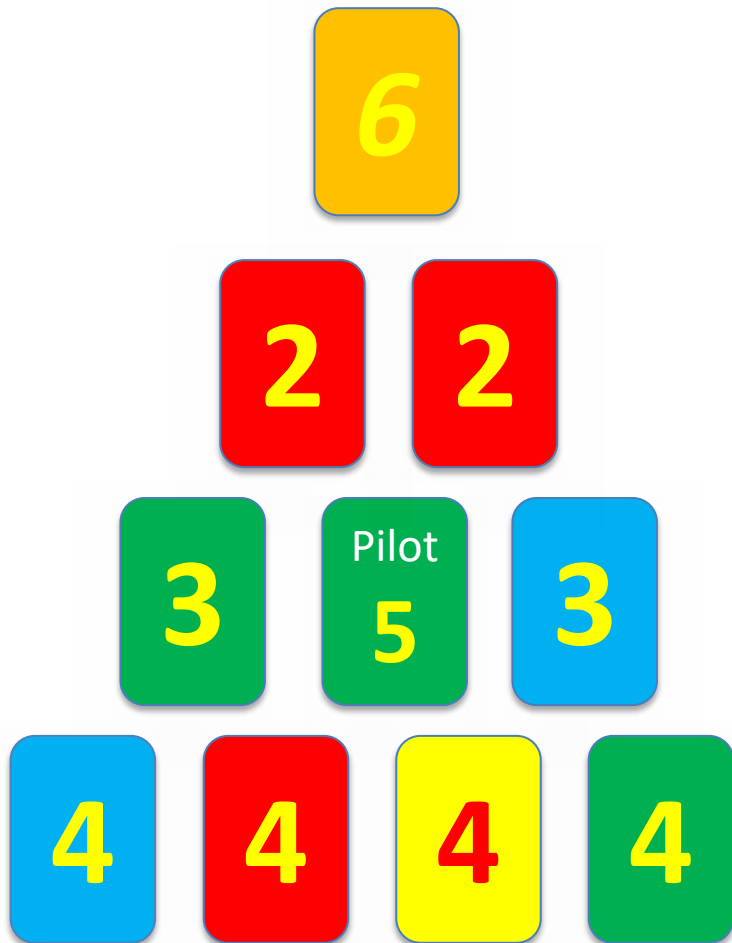
Further, where higher numbers are better on the thruster level, on the port and starboard sides, lower numbers are better. This has an interesting result...

THE “ION BARRAGE”



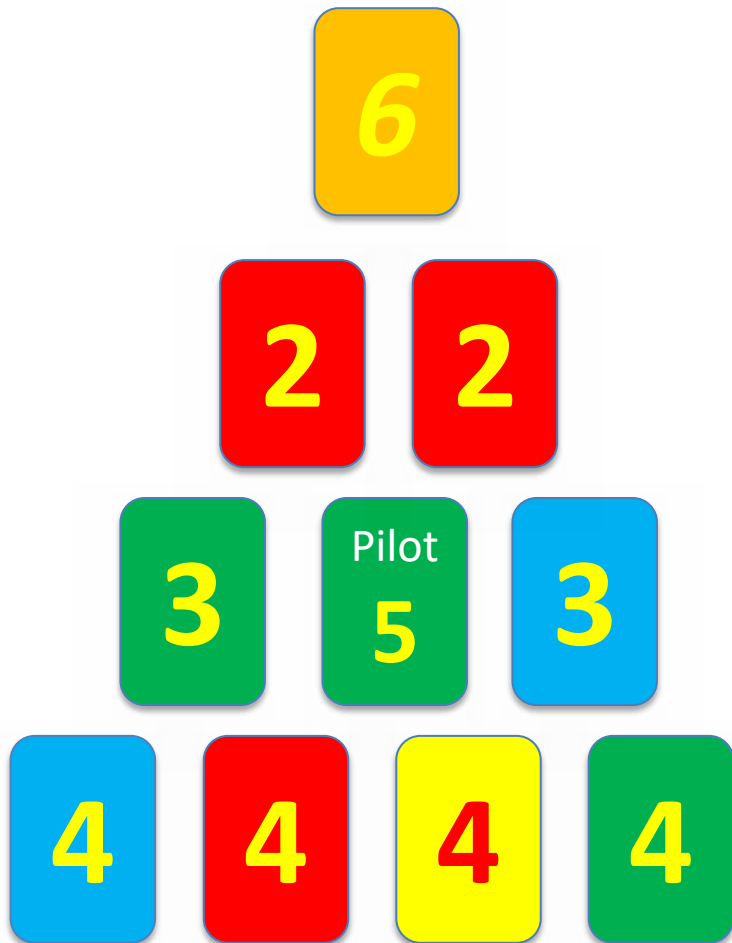
...which is that the highest possible hand without a wild card, the “Ion Barrage,” has the highest possible hands on the left, right, and bottom. It’s invincible!

THE “ION BARRAGE”



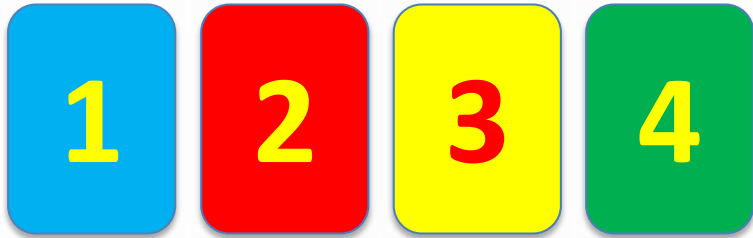
At Canto Bight, the only way to beat an Ion Barrage is with another Ion Barrage — with the Vermillion Six as a capstone. That’s the one that wins the giant progressive jackpot.

THE “ION BARRAGE”



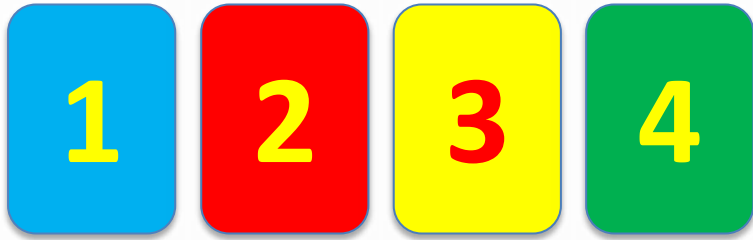
Wherever it appears in the pyramid, the Vermilion Six is whatever card it needs to be to fill out each hand. So it could be a Green 1 and a Red 4 at the same time, for example.

Port and starboard rankings



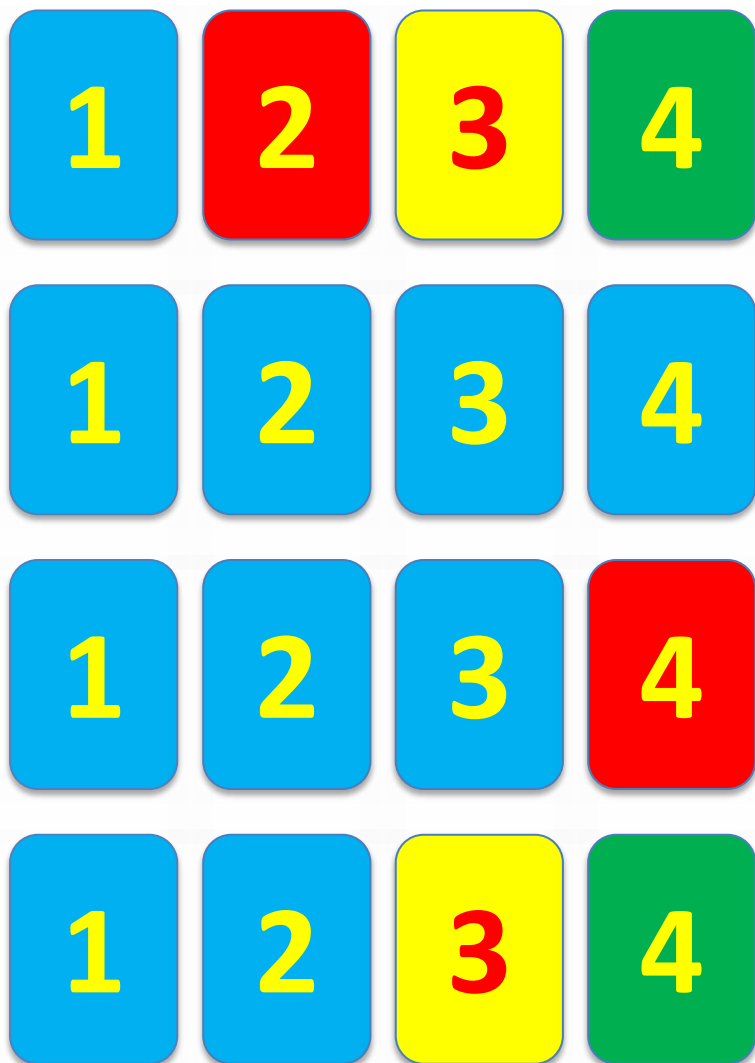
But now let's go back to the rankings. As noted, the top ranking is a straight — also known here as a “port barrage” or “starboard barrage” depending on which side it's on.

Port and starboard rankings



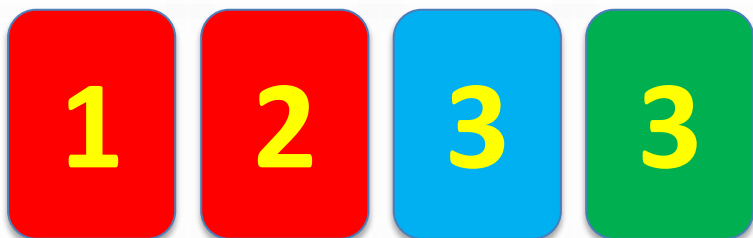
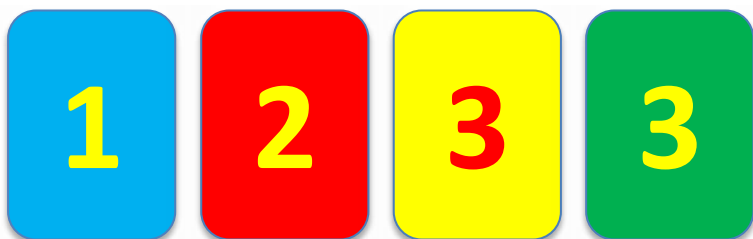
The direction of the barrage is determined by what card is atop the pyramid — so a run from 1-4 is great, while a 4-1 run is terrible. That makes sense: ones are not great numbers to have on the thruster level.

Port and starboard rankings



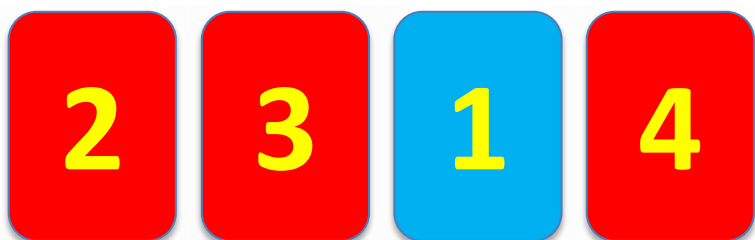
We then follow the same logic as on the thruster level. Identical straights which are also all of the same suit are the next level down. Then those with one wrong color, and then two.

Port and starboard rankings



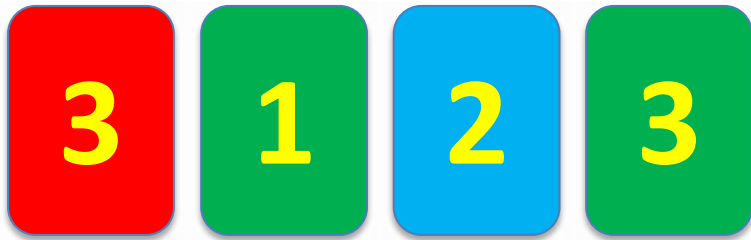
What happens if you don't have a 1 through 4 straight? At this point, three-card straights are counted, with straights starting with 1 outranking the others, and the color sub-rankings breaking those ties.

Port and starboard rankings



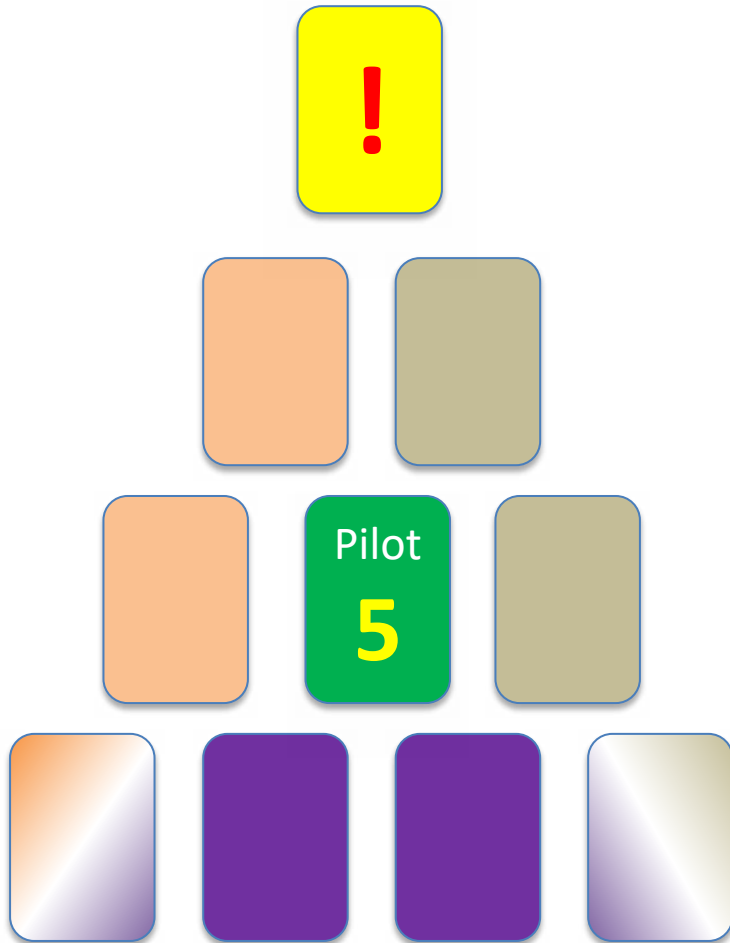
A couple of things are important to note: the order of how cards appear in the pyramid is vital. These cards are **not** a 1-4 straight, because they aren't in order. It's just a 2-3 straight.

Port and starboard rankings



The straight also *must* start with the capstone or cannon card. So, similarly, a three-card straight like that seen here wouldn't count as one. This hand counts as a straight of 1 — likely a loser.

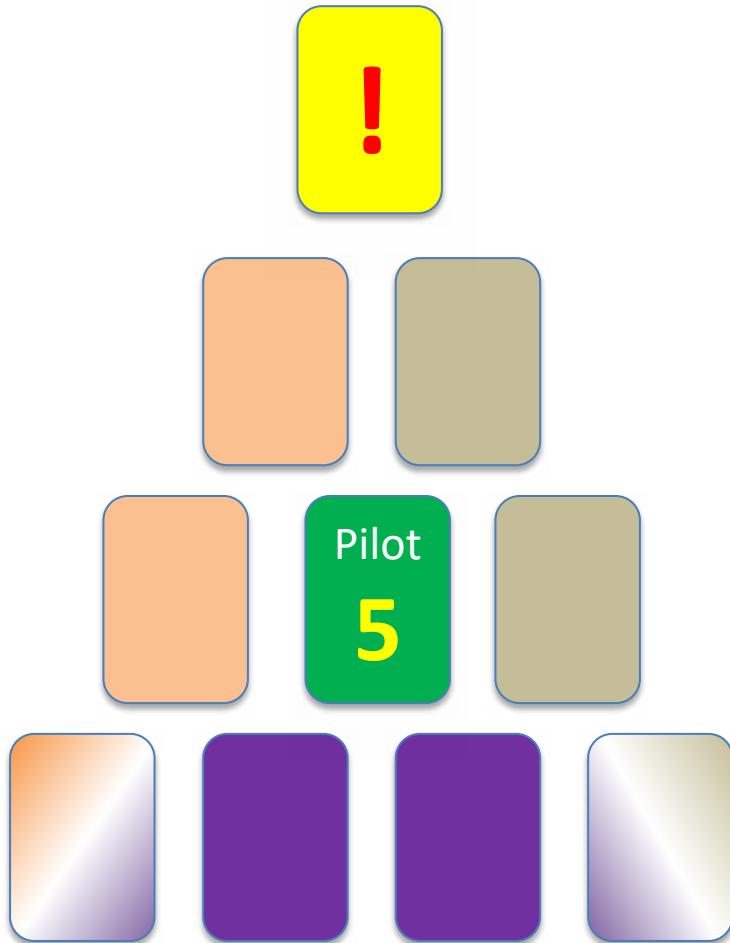
Three games at once



This makes that capstone card the most important card in the game, since it controls victory in two flanks at once.

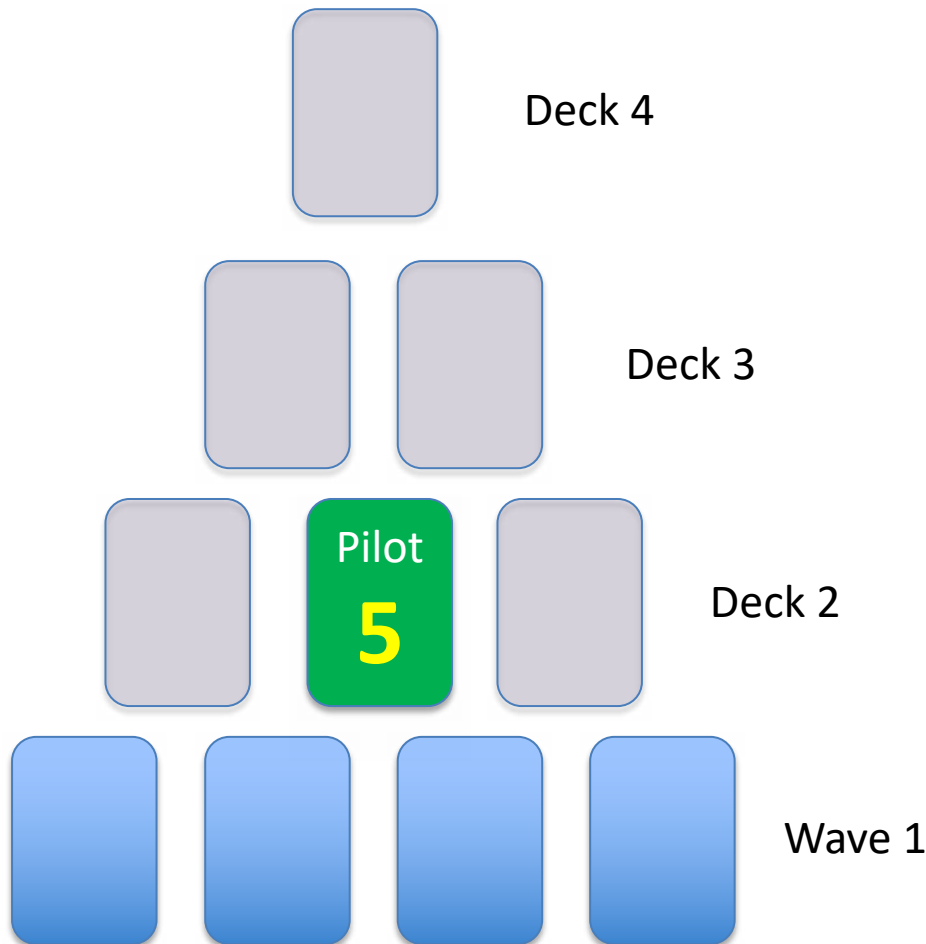
Most bettors might not go to a showdown without a 1 or a 2 there.

Three games at once



And so here is, as in the story, one reason why card counting works in zimbiddle. A talented counter sees the decks light on high cards and adjusts accordingly.

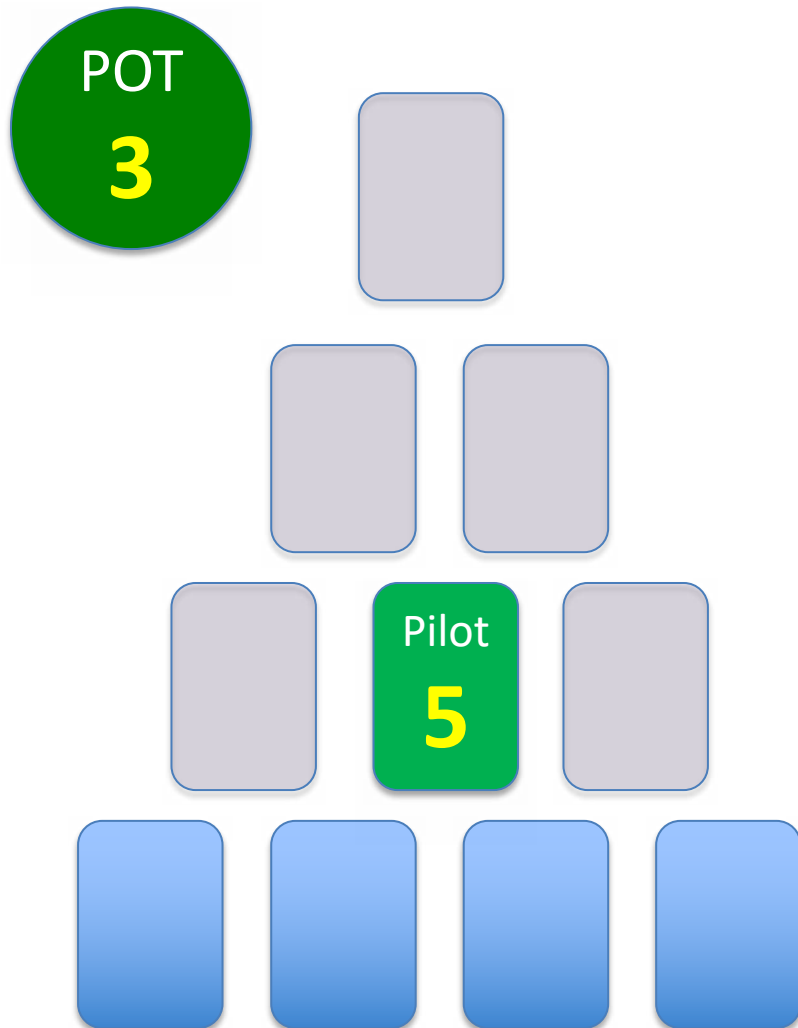
Starting a hand



Players pay a set amount as the ante to be dealt the first four cards.

The house rakes an ante at fixed intervals to fund itself.

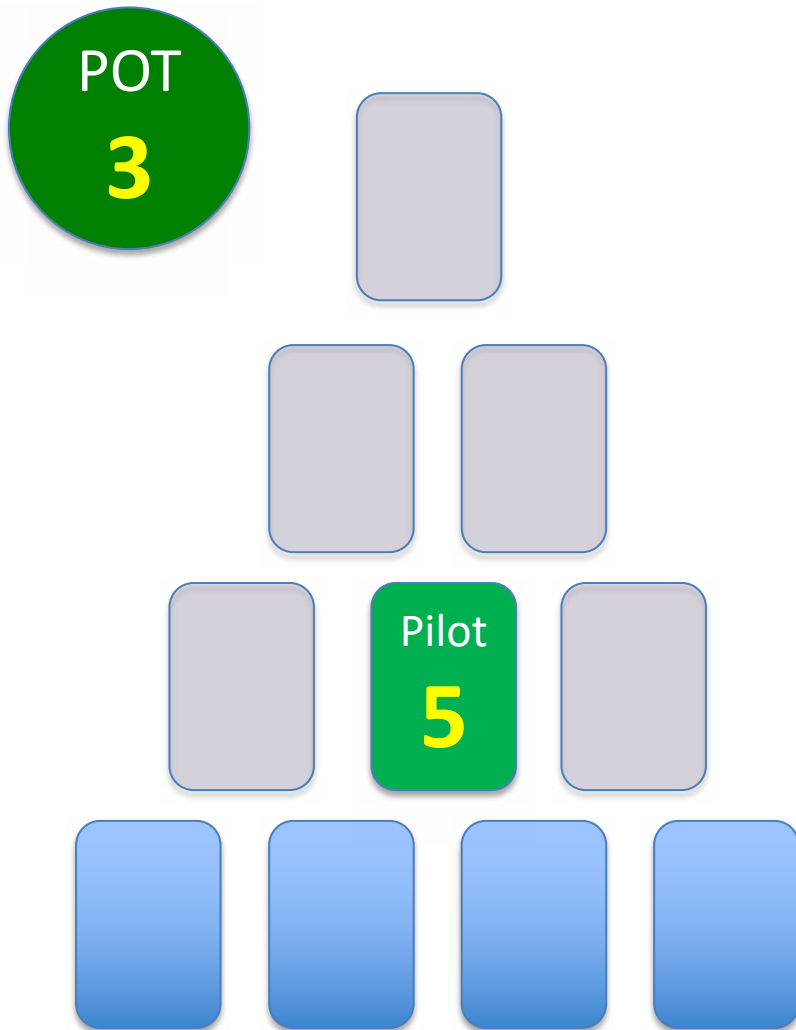
Starting a hand



In the first round of betting, players bet their hands blind. This money goes into the communal pot.

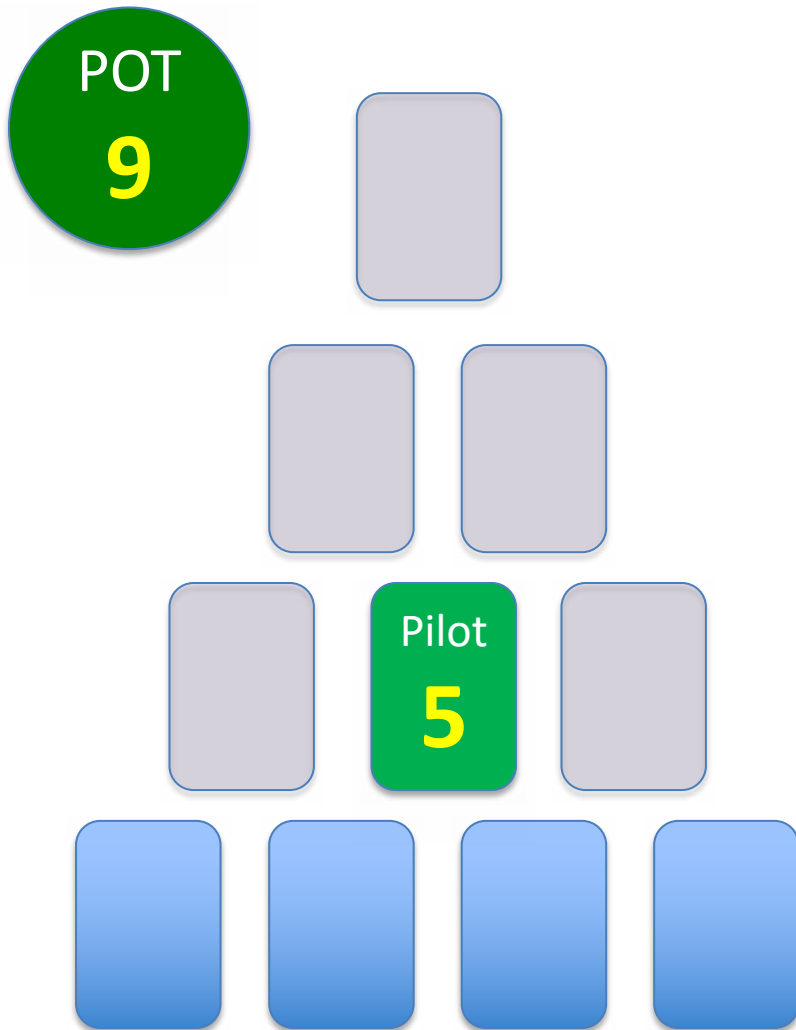
The ante amount fixes the betting limits. Let's call the ante 1 coin. In a three handed game, the pot would then have 3 coins.

Starting a hand



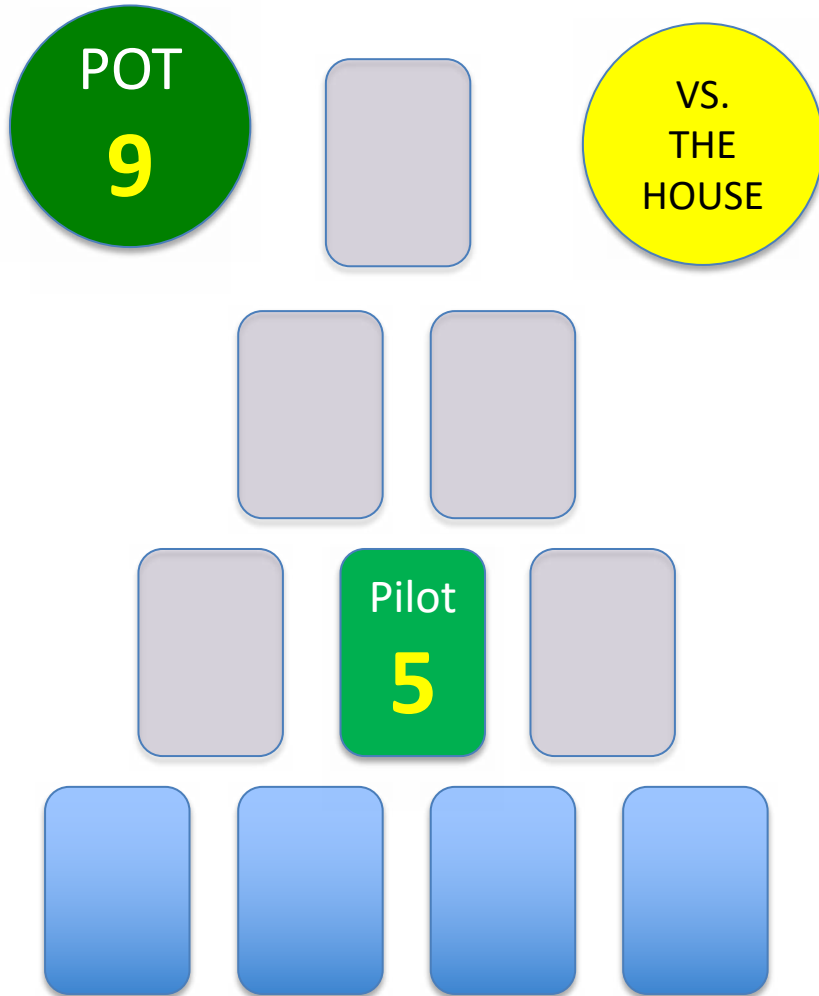
The first round of betting is then done blindly. House rules determine pot size, so let's say for the moment it's 2 to bet and to raise, with a three-raise limit.

Starting a hand



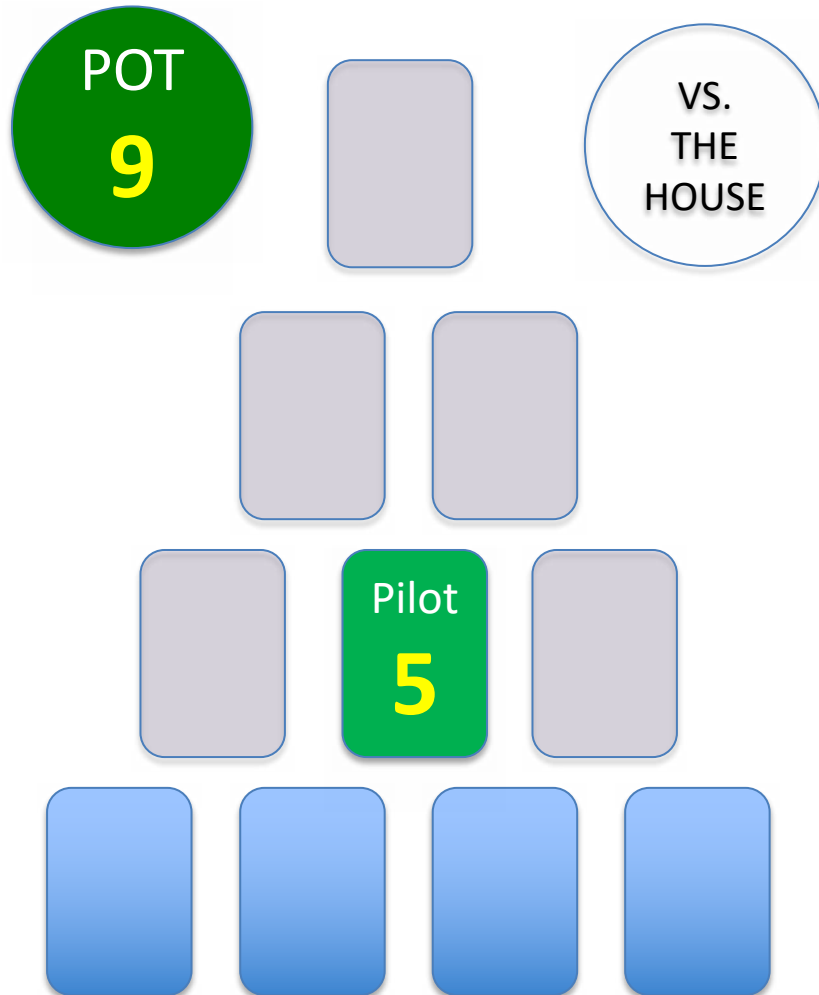
Let's assume for our game that someone raised once and the other two players called. Nobody's seen their hands, after all!

Starting a hand



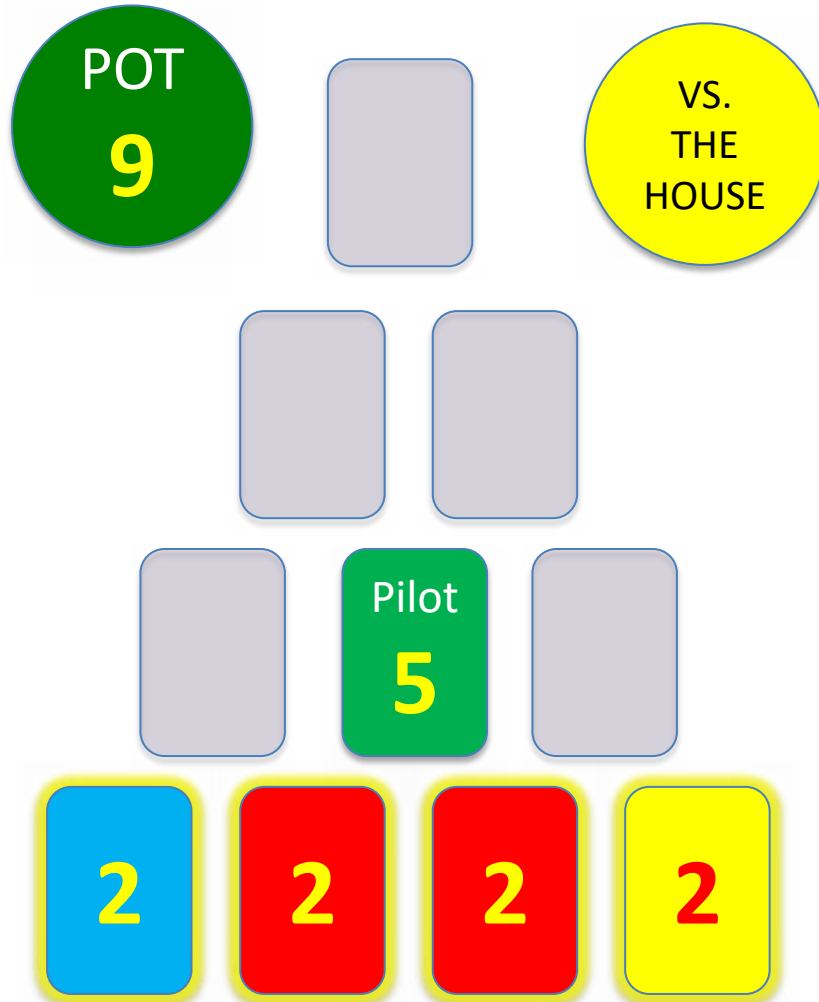
In a casino, players may also now make a side bet against the house that their hand is already a “zinbiddle,” basically a meld or flush of some kind. A marker is on the table to place that bet on.

Playing Deck 1



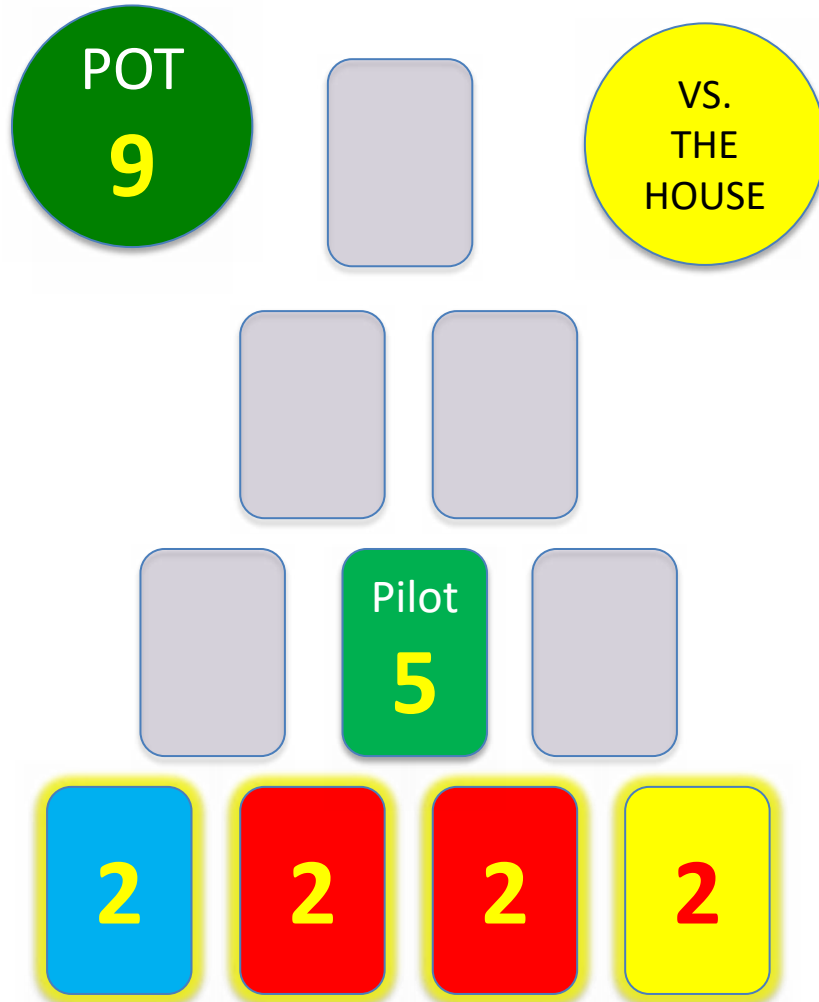
Players look at their hole cards in the first wave. Each player, in order, either checks (meaning no bet), bets into the pot...

Playing Deck 1



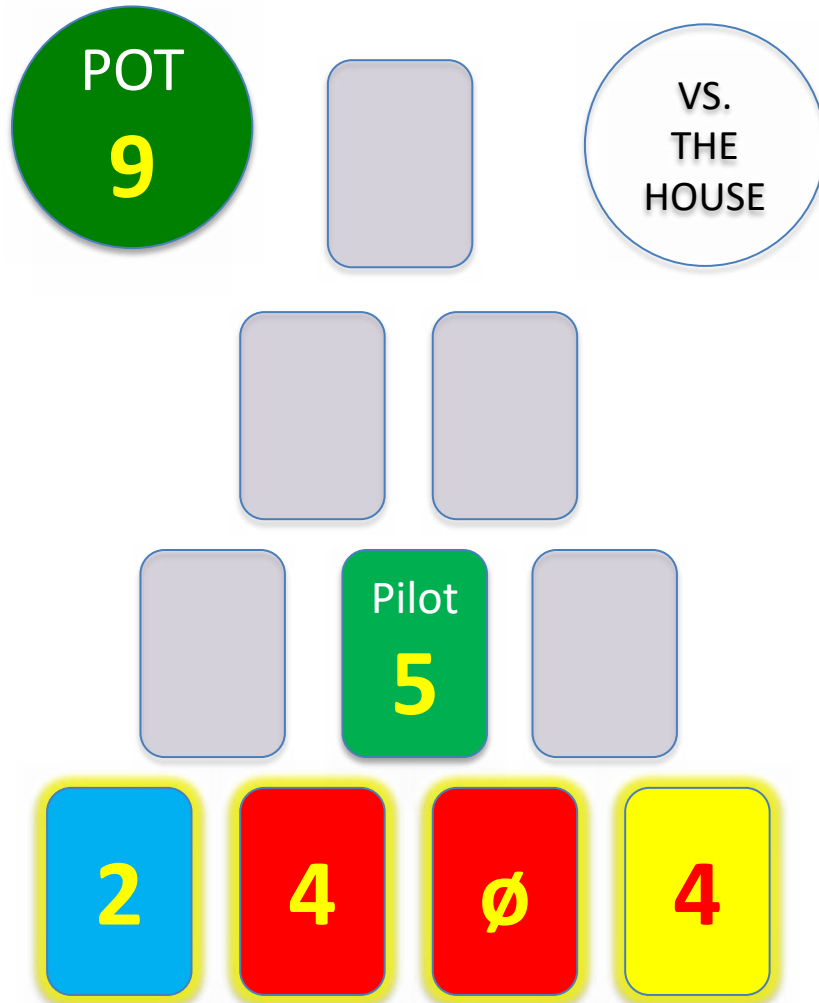
...or, if a natural “zinbiddle” is present, calls “zinbiddle!” (like “blackjack!”) and wins both the pot and any side bet placed against the house.

Playing Deck 1



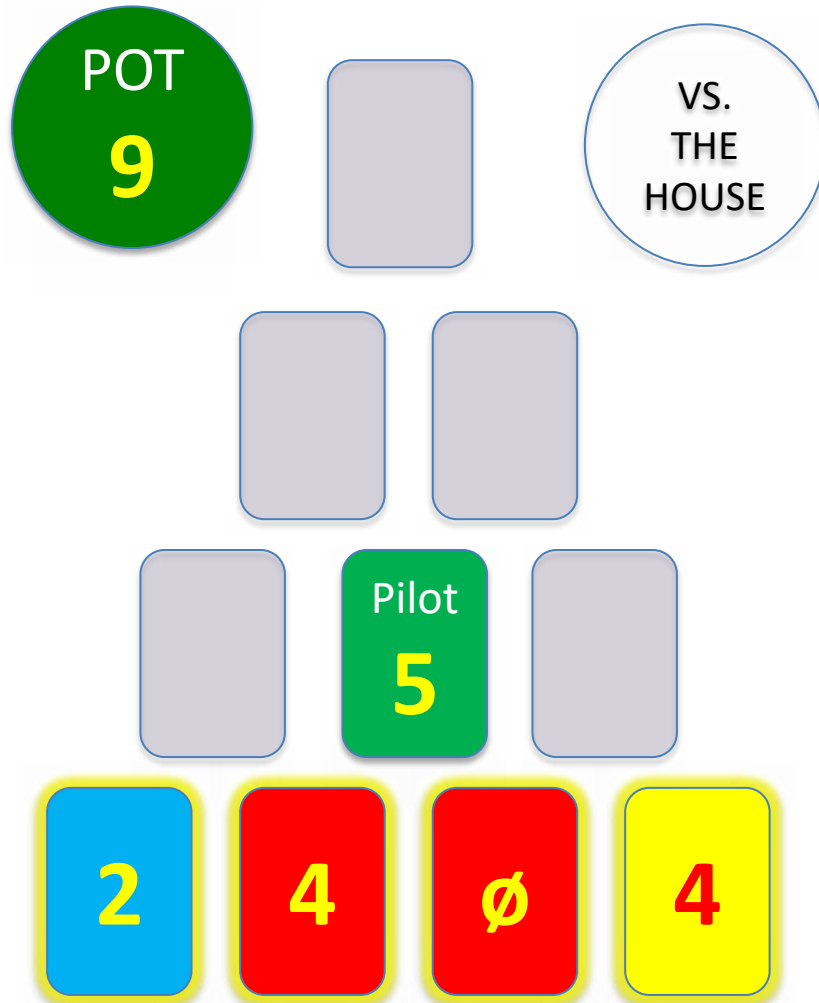
Early table position thus has its pluses and minuses: if you get a “zinbiddle” first you win automatically, preempting the others’ hands. Those players’ house bets are lost, too.

Playing Deck 1



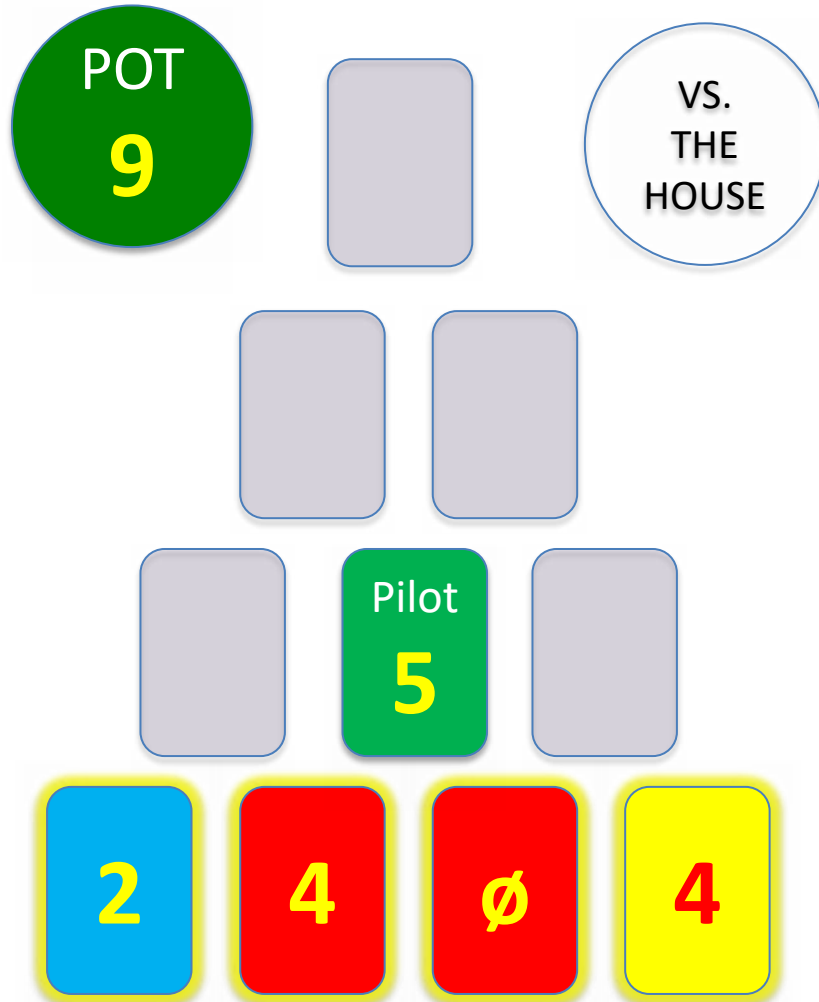
But if you don't have zinbiddle and place a bet on your hand instead, that bet is at risk of being lost to a later-position player who calls "zinbiddle."

Playing Deck 1



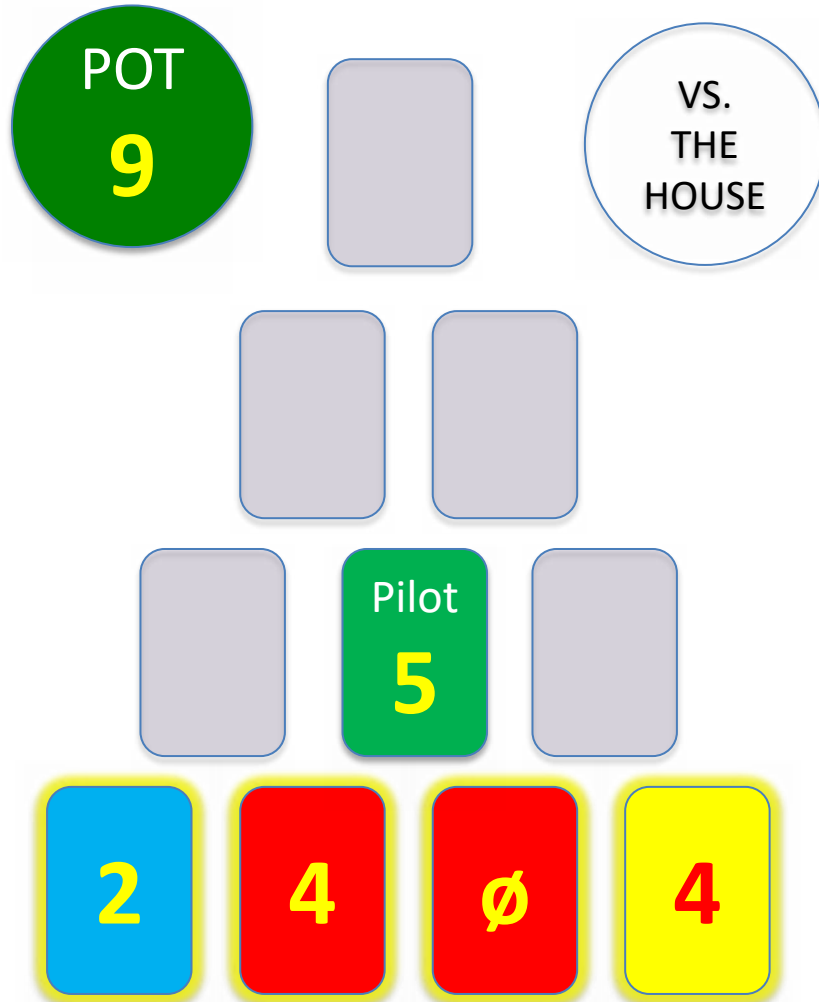
Also, whatever you bet against the house would be lost, as well. That pool is part of how the house funds its progressive jackpots.

Playing Deck 1



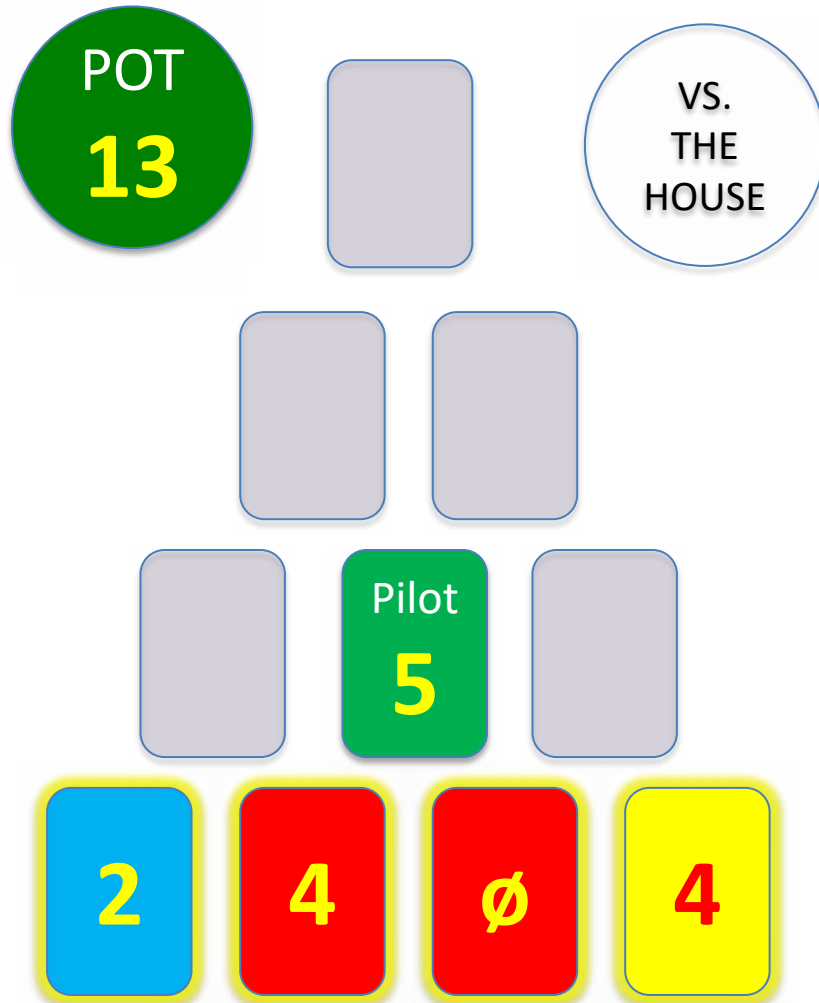
So you didn't
zinbiddle right off. In
this first betting
round after cards
have seen, let us say
the opening bet is
4x the ante, with a
three-raise limit.

Playing Deck 1



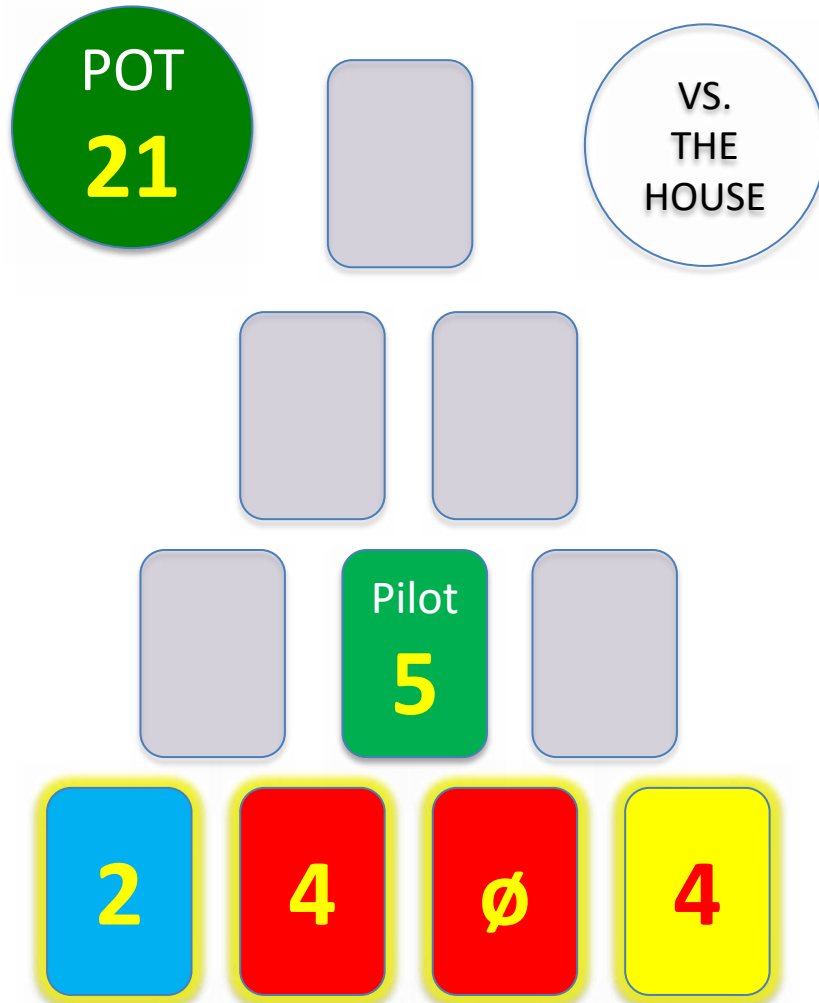
It happens that one of your later pilot actions is replacing cards — so looking at this hand, that pair of fours is actually not bad. So you might bet your hand...

Playing Deck 1



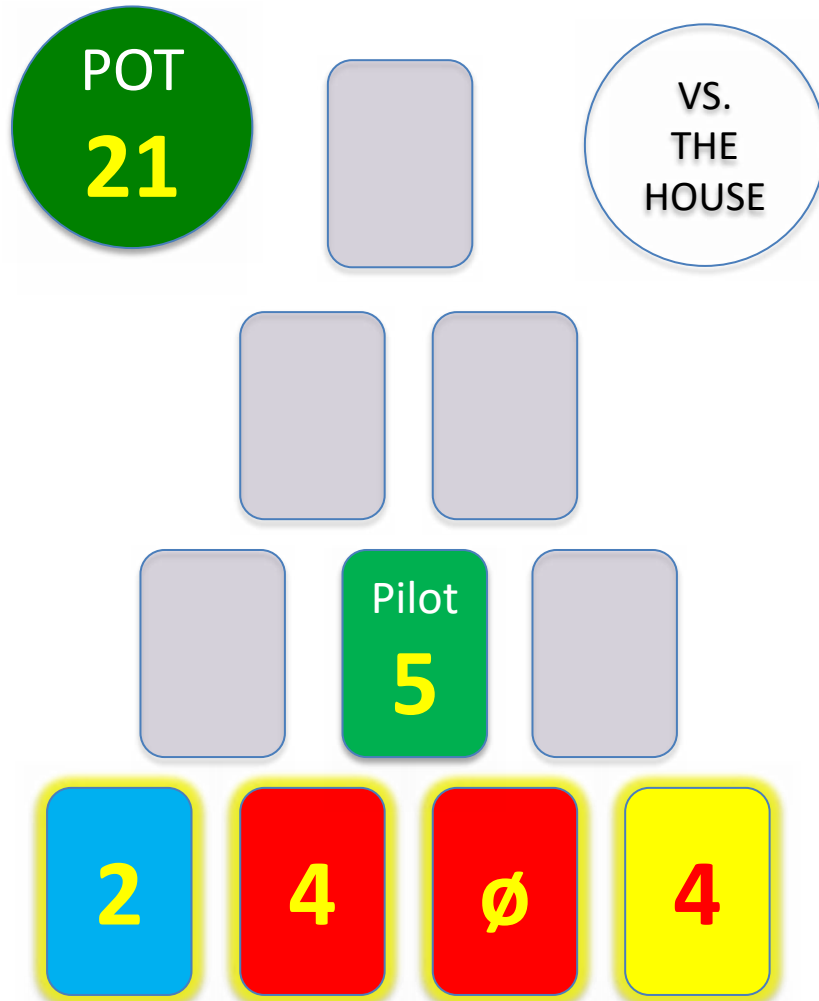
So your opening bet would be four coins — and you would hope that nobody after you zinbiddles.

Playing Deck 1



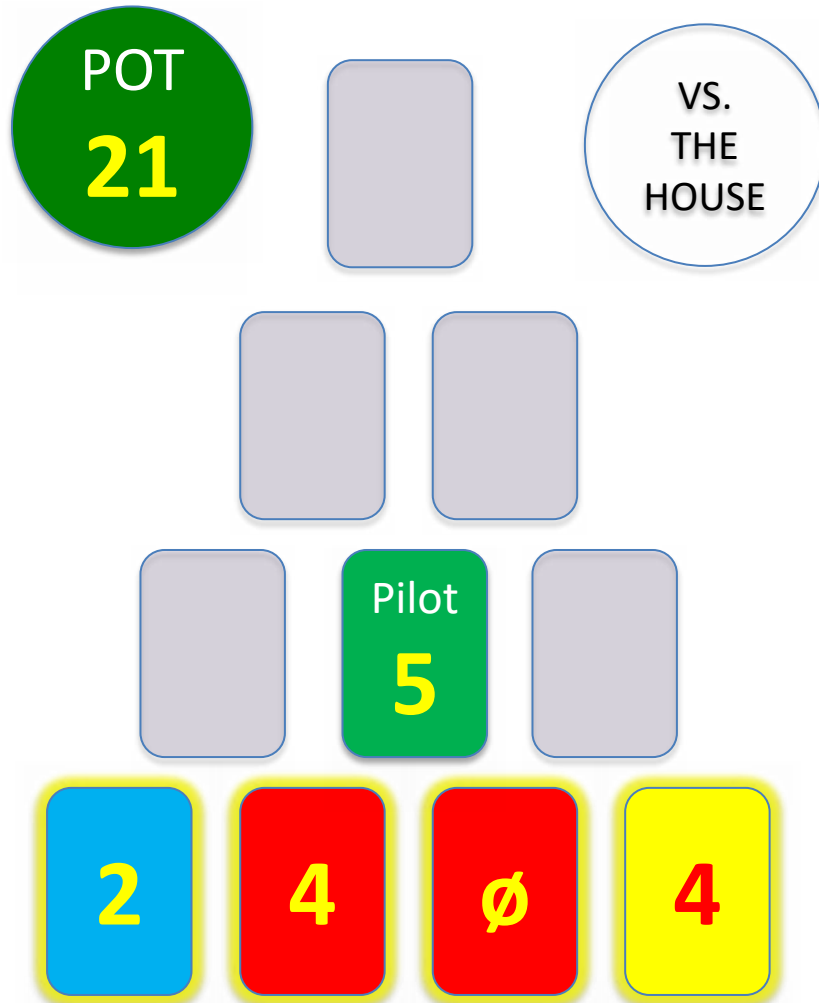
As it turns out, nobody did, but you got calls from everyone. So now we are already up to a decent-sized pot, before any other action.

Deck 1 Pilot Actions



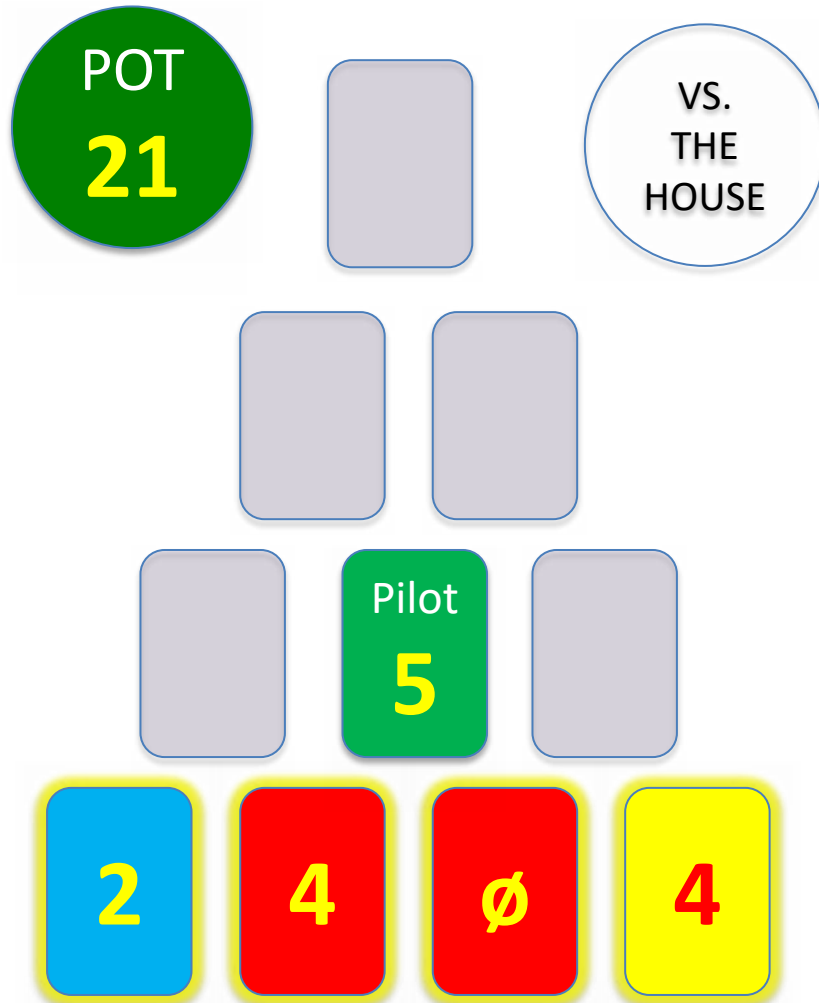
With this betting round done, players may expend up to 1 Pilot Action. This can be to buy a redraw for a single card, or to change the order of a whole row of cards.

Deck 1 Pilot Actions



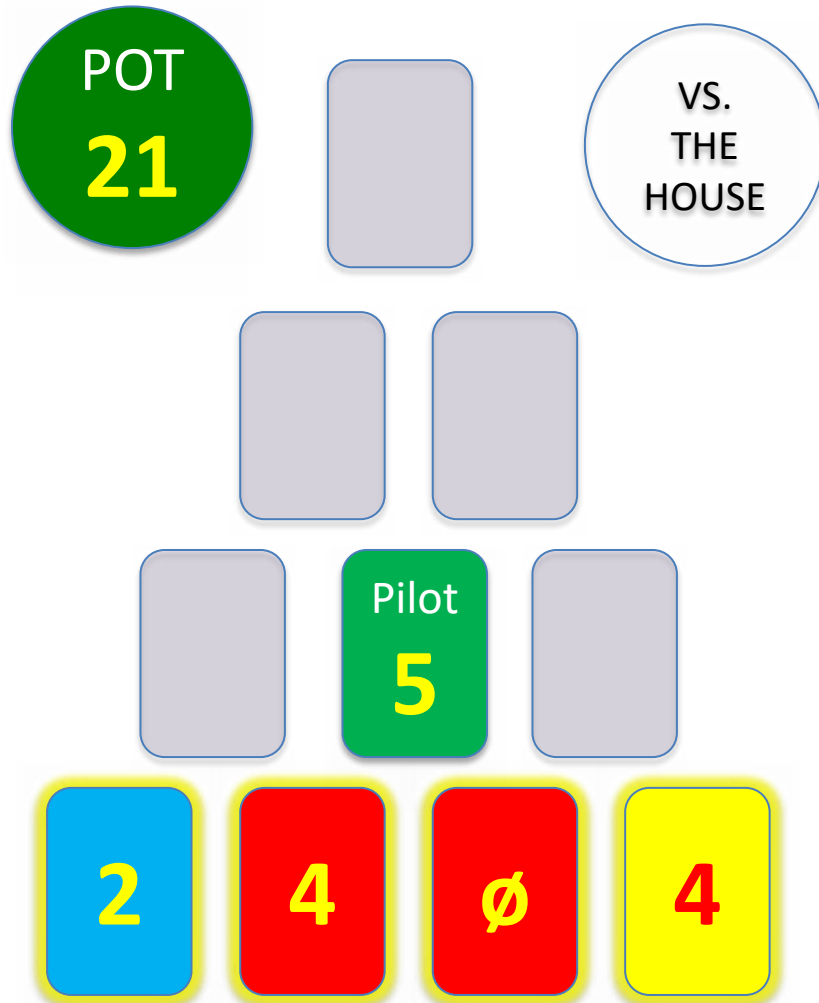
This action costs the player — everything does! The cost of using an action is ante times the number of players times the round players are in.

Deck 1 Pilot Actions



So here it would be 1 (the ante size) times 3 (for three players) times 1 (for the first round). The cost for an action would be 3, to be paid into the pot. In a casino game, the bank would take a portion.

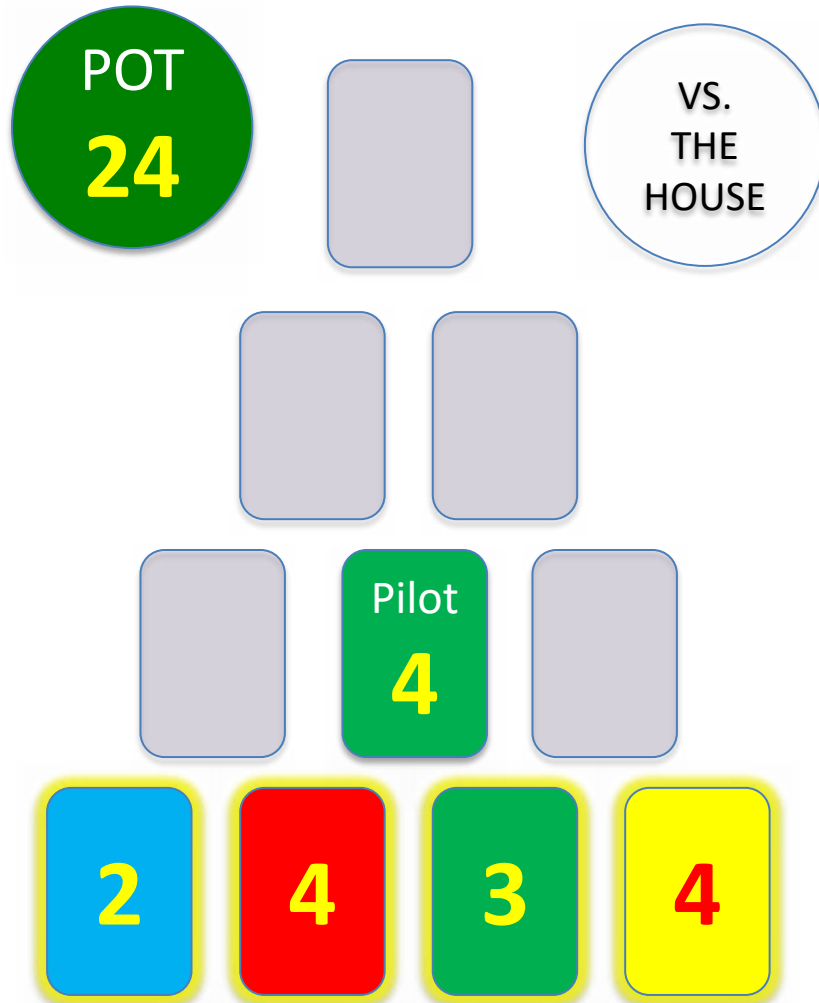
Deck 1 Pilot Actions



You do not have to take an action; you might want to save them. But you need to get rid of that misfiring thruster in the third card.

So you buy an action, ticking your pilot counter down by one...

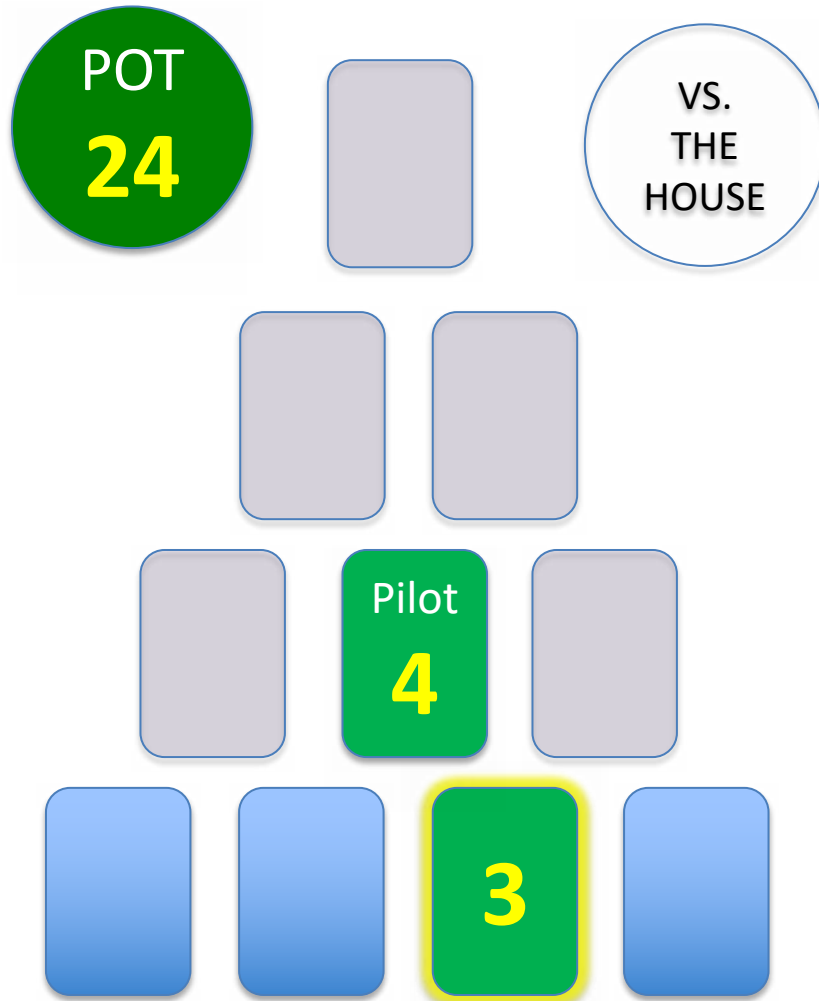
Deck 1 Pilot Actions



...and replace the third card. Now you have a functioning group of thrusters and can survive to a showdown!

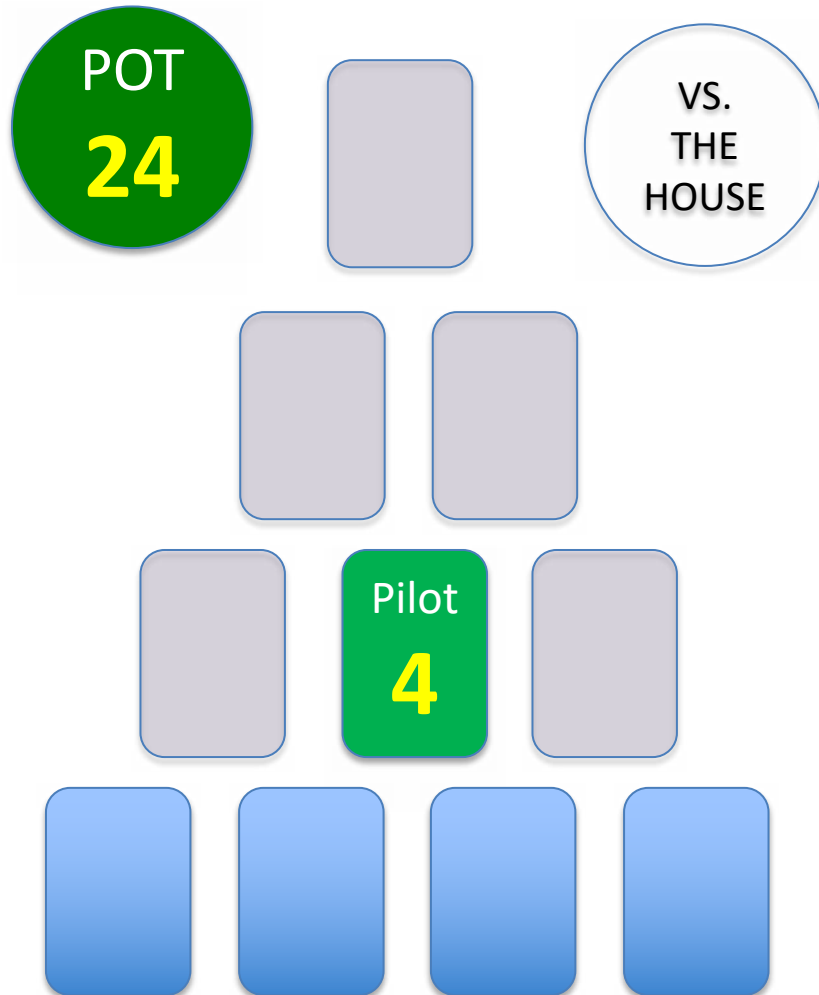
While you can try again later, it's dangerous — a working thruster might go bad.

Deck 1 Pilot Actions



Note that while your hole cards remain hidden, the changed card must be revealed. It stays upright until the end of the game, moving if you re-sort your order.

Deck 1 Pilot Actions



If you did use your action to re-sort your cards, they would all remain face-down. In this case, your opponent would know you are going for a barrage — but they would not know how close you are.

Deck 1 Pilot Actions

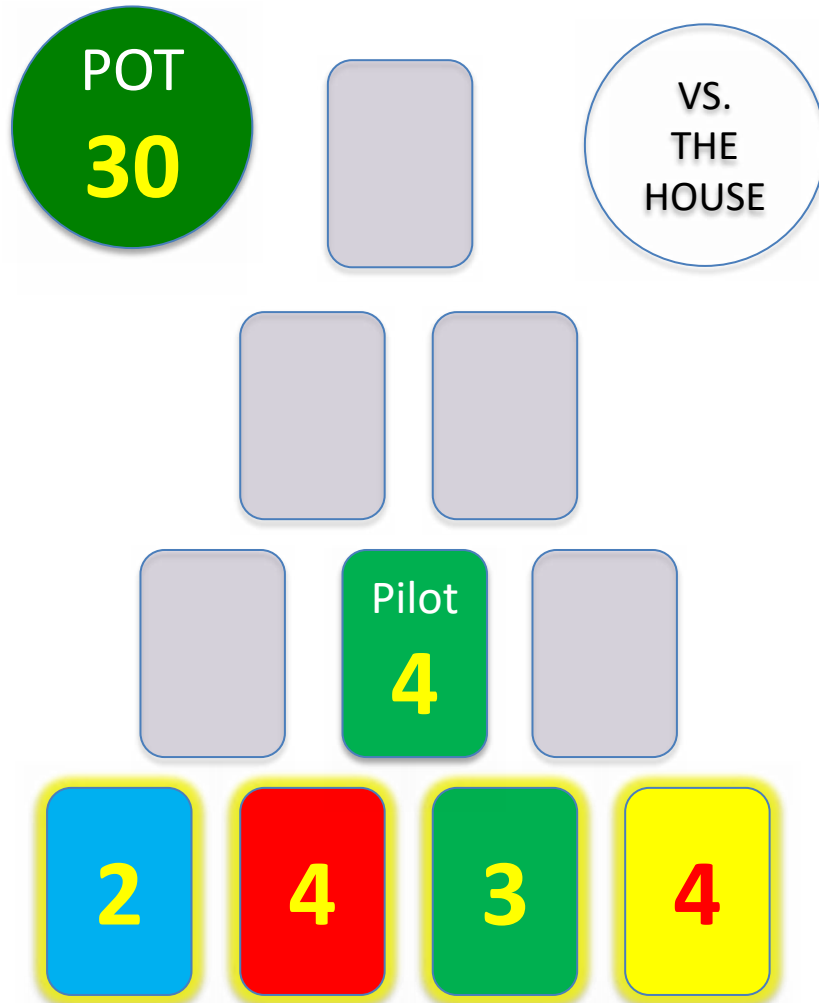
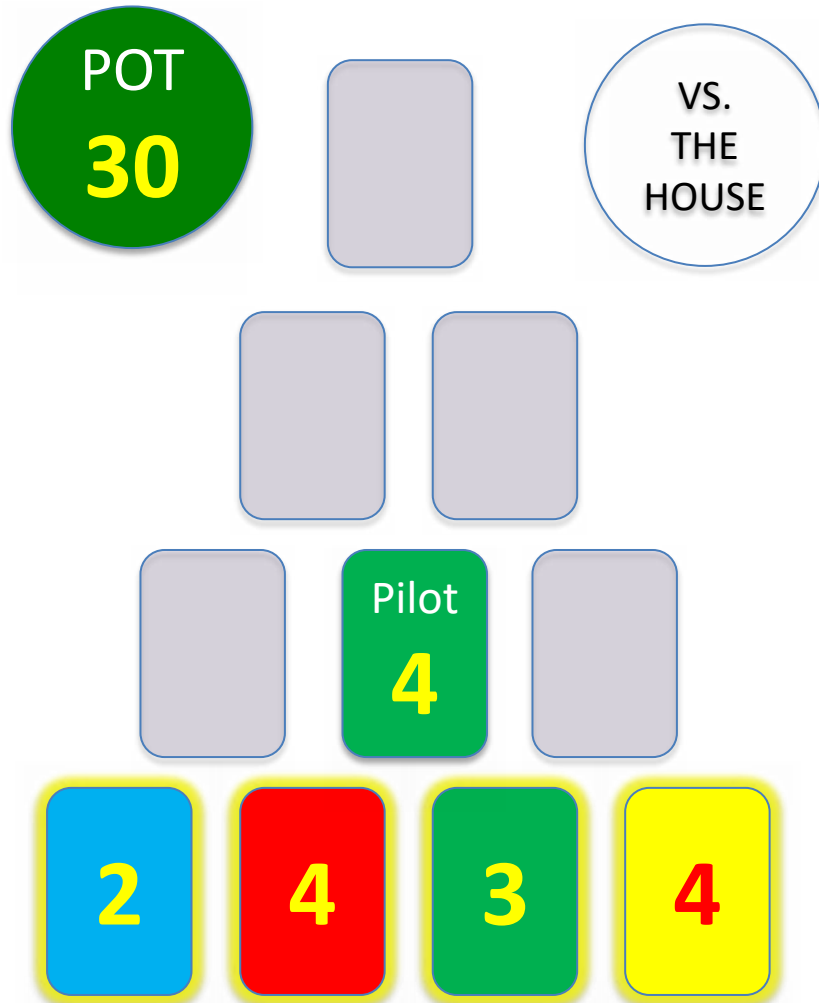


Figure all three opponents paid to either change a card or re-sort them.

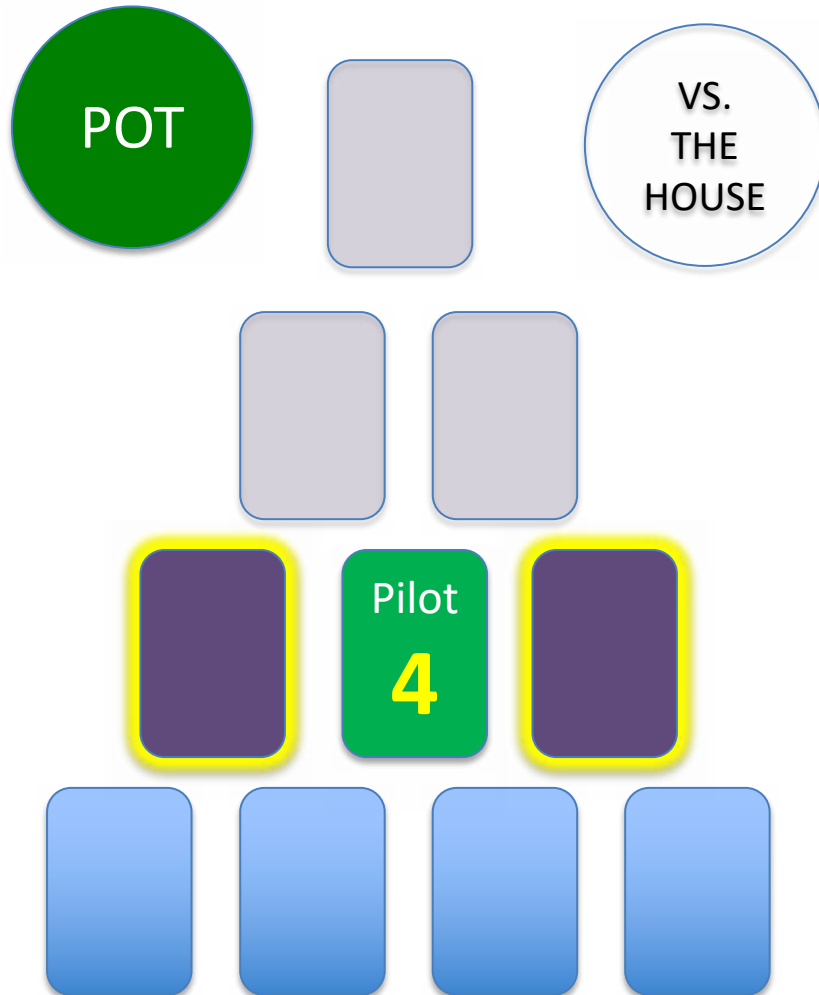
Now we are up to 30 in the pot — quite a number given where we started.

Deck 1 Pilot Actions



After the Deck 1 pilot actions, there is a third and final betting round, once again with limits of 4x ante and a three-raise limit. There is a LOT of betting in Zinbiddle!

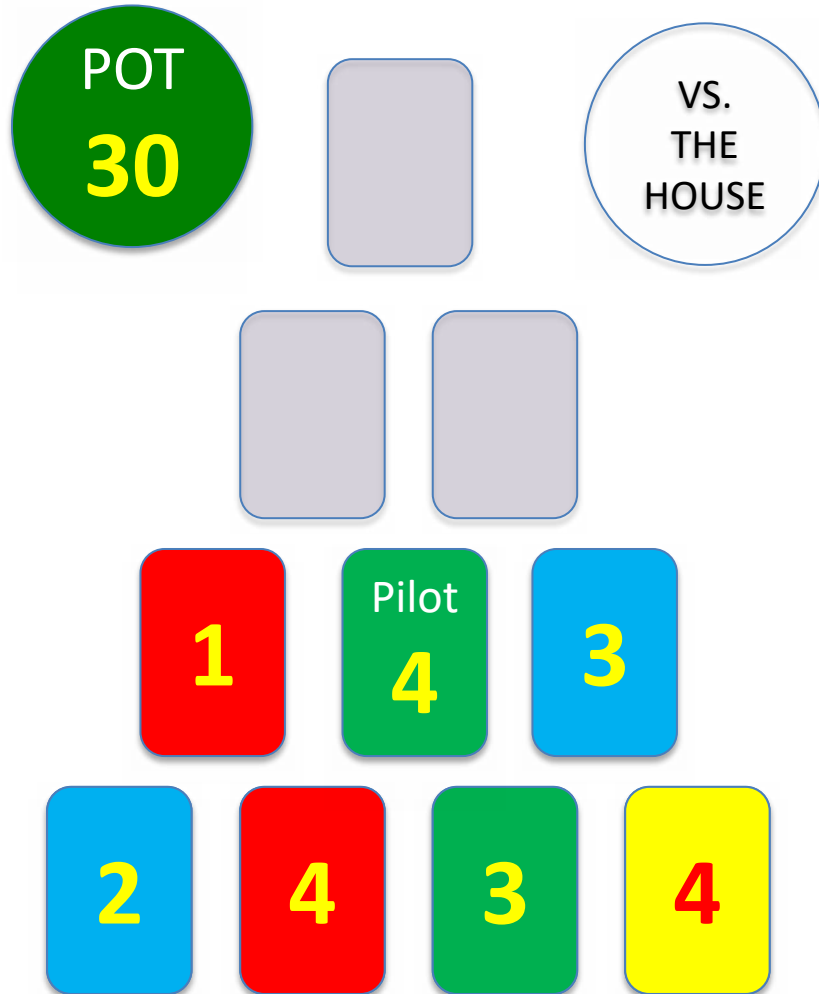
Playing Deck 2



Now it is time to build the second deck — sometimes called the shields — on either flank of the pilot.

Remember, here we are looking for straights, not four of a kind.

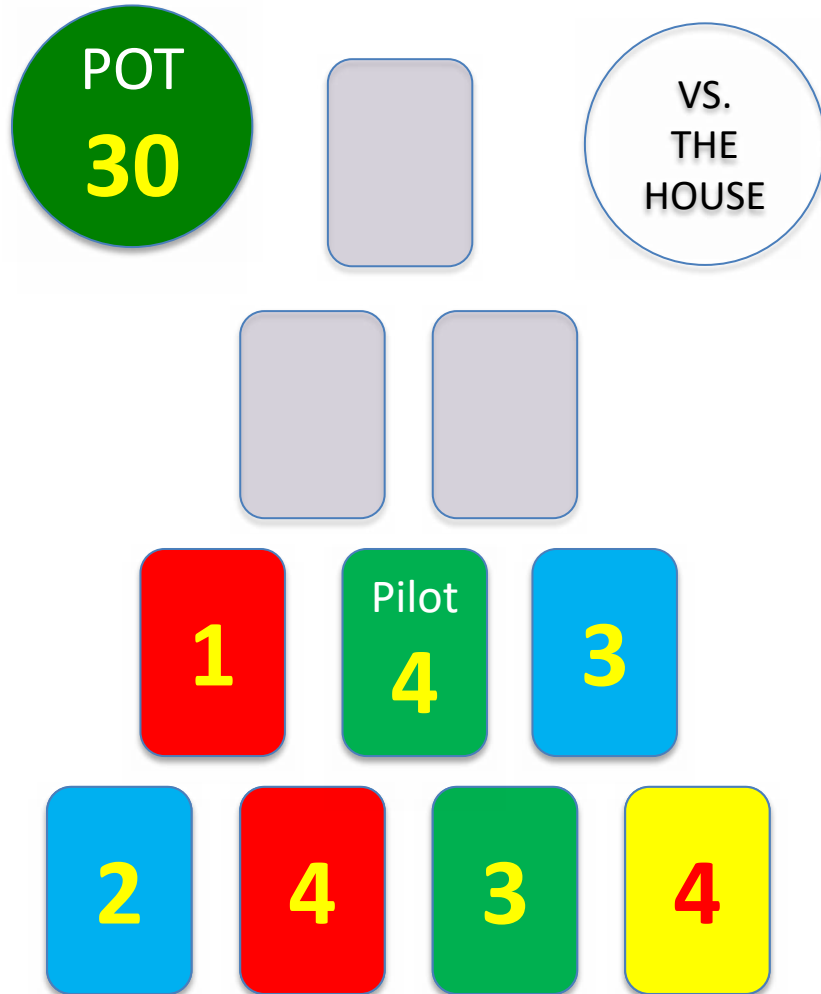
Playing Deck 2



We draw our next two cards, on either side of the pilot.

This is mixed news on the port flank; that 1 isn't great, but it can be moved or changed later. The 3 on the starboard side is just what we want to see!

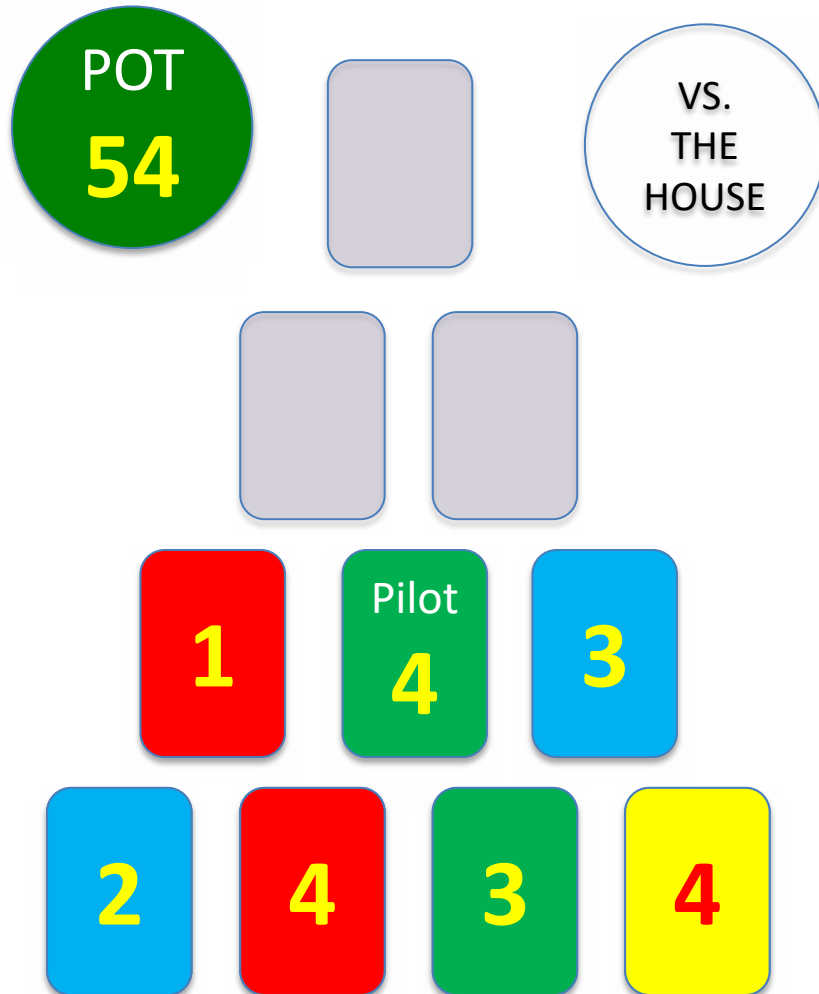
Playing Deck 2



So now another round of betting, pre-pilot actions. Here, our limit is 8x ante, with a three-raise limit.

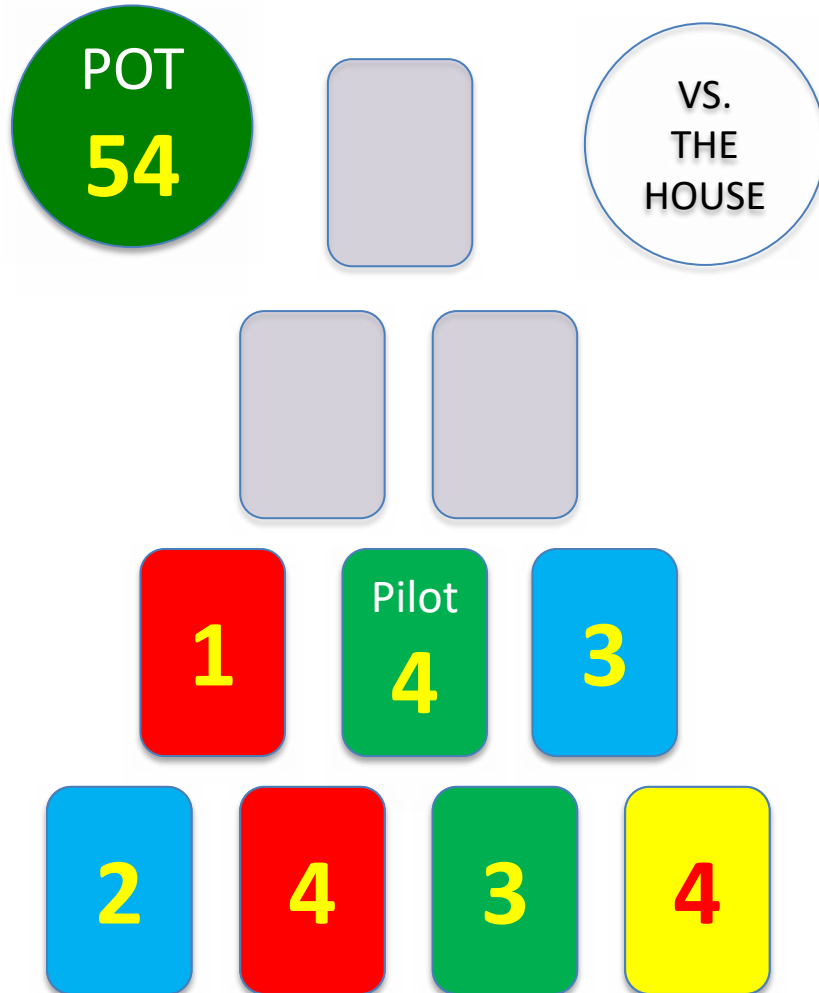
Let us figure our player checks, but someone else bets and everyone calls.

Deck 2 Pilot Actions



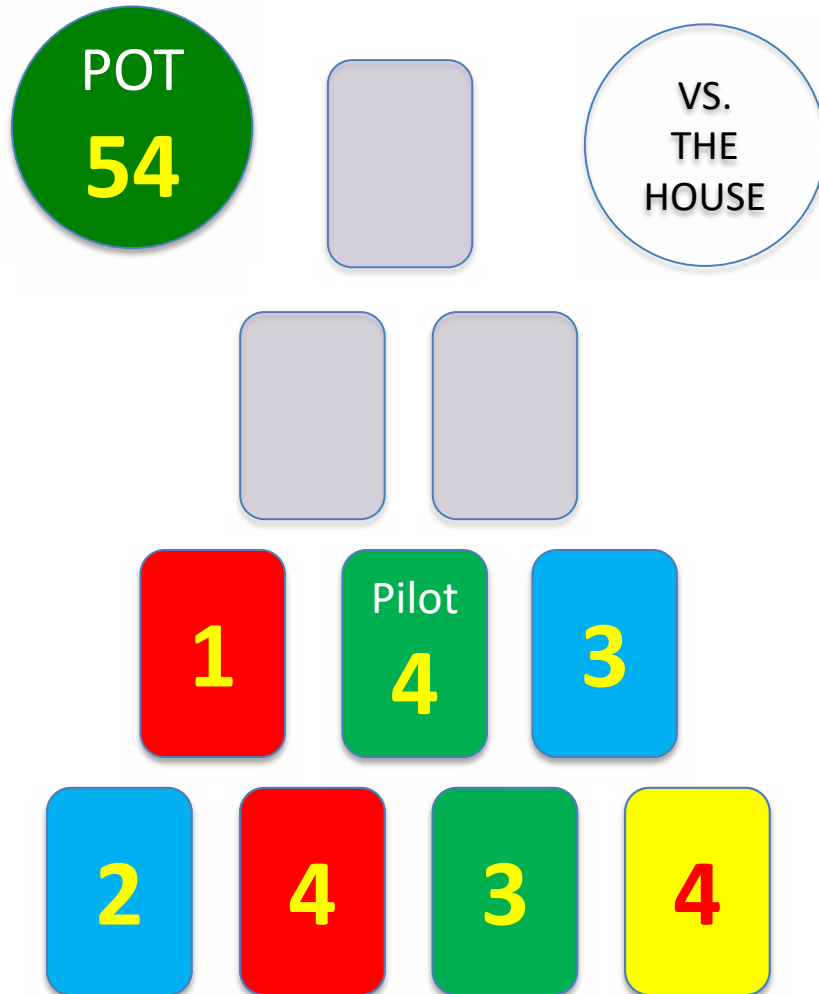
This time, again, you have the choices of replacing a card anywhere — or of transposing two adjacent cards. The starboard and port shield cards are considered adjacent.

Deck 2 Pilot Actions



Actions now cost 6 (ante times three players times Deck 2). If you did not expend an action before, you may now expend as many as two — so long as you end the round with at least two actions left.

Deck 2 Pilot Actions



Our player has reasons to think it might be good to wait and replace that Red 1, either completely or in a swap with the card that comes in on the third deck. So our player stands pat.

Deck 2 Pilot Actions

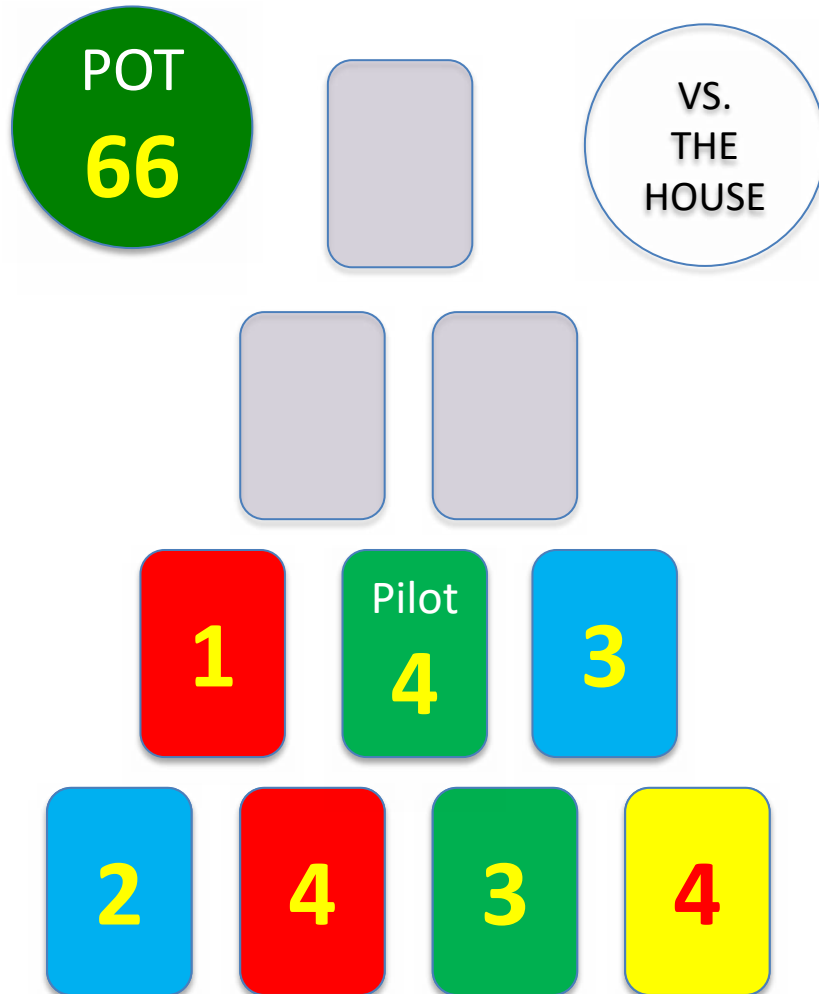
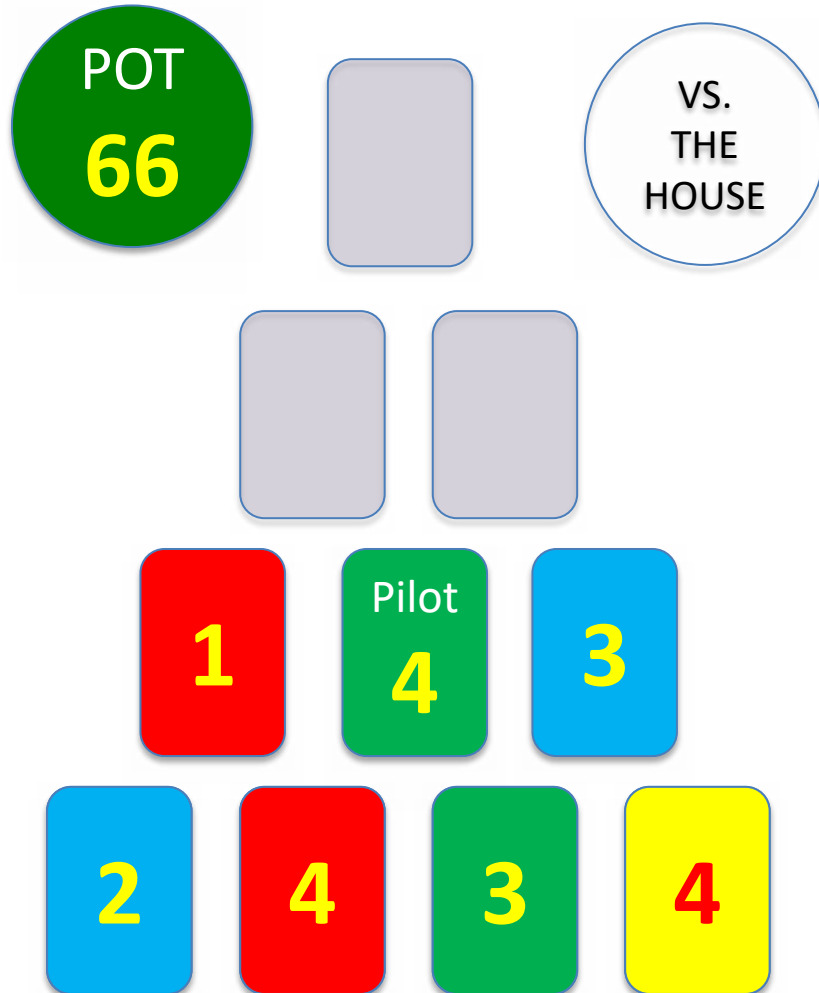


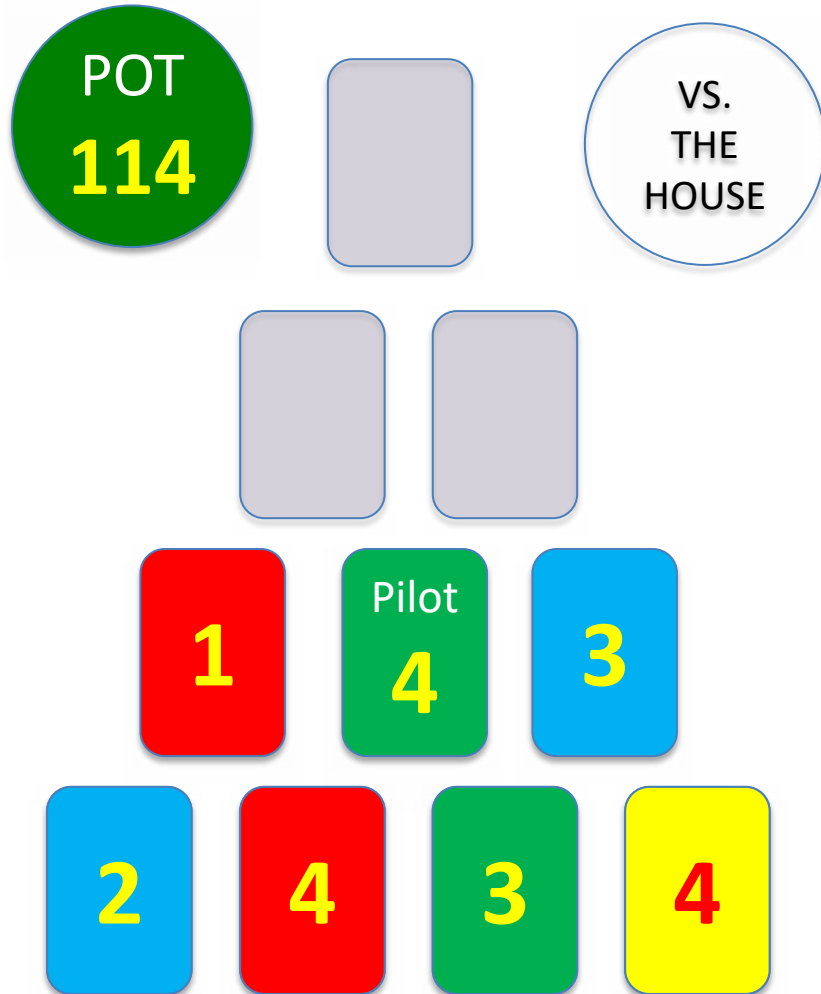
Figure both opponents expend an action, paying 8 each into the pot. So our pot odds have improved, and we are carrying more pilot actions into the next round. But the actions will be pricier.

Deck 2 Pilot Actions



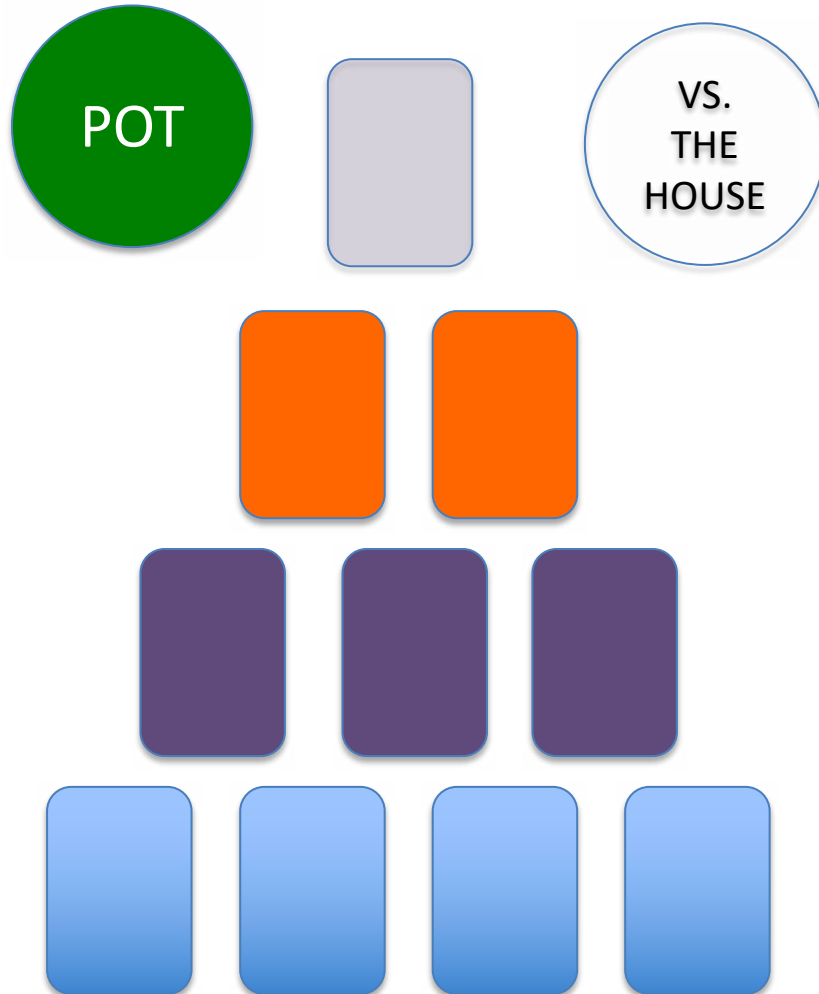
If more than one action is performed in a round, that additional action must be after everyone else finishes — so play would cycle around.

Playing Deck 2



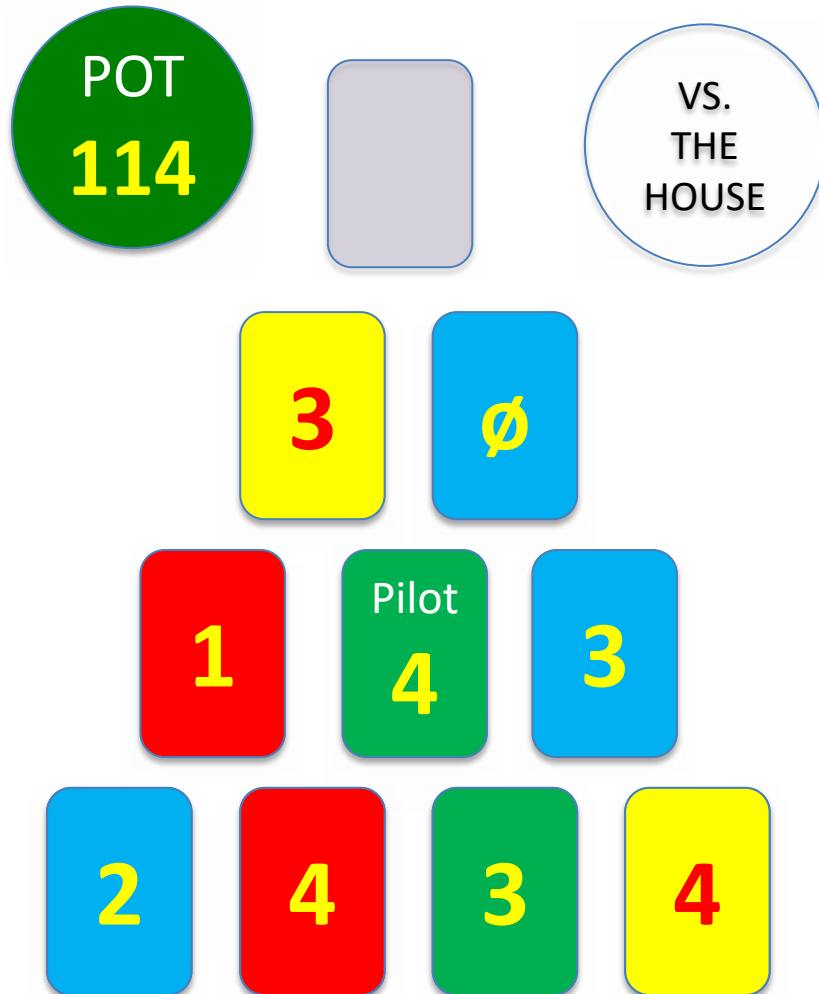
Deck 2 play would end with a final betting round — again, with 8 being the amount. Figure that this time generates a bet and a re-raise that everyone calls, boosting the pot.

Playing Deck 3



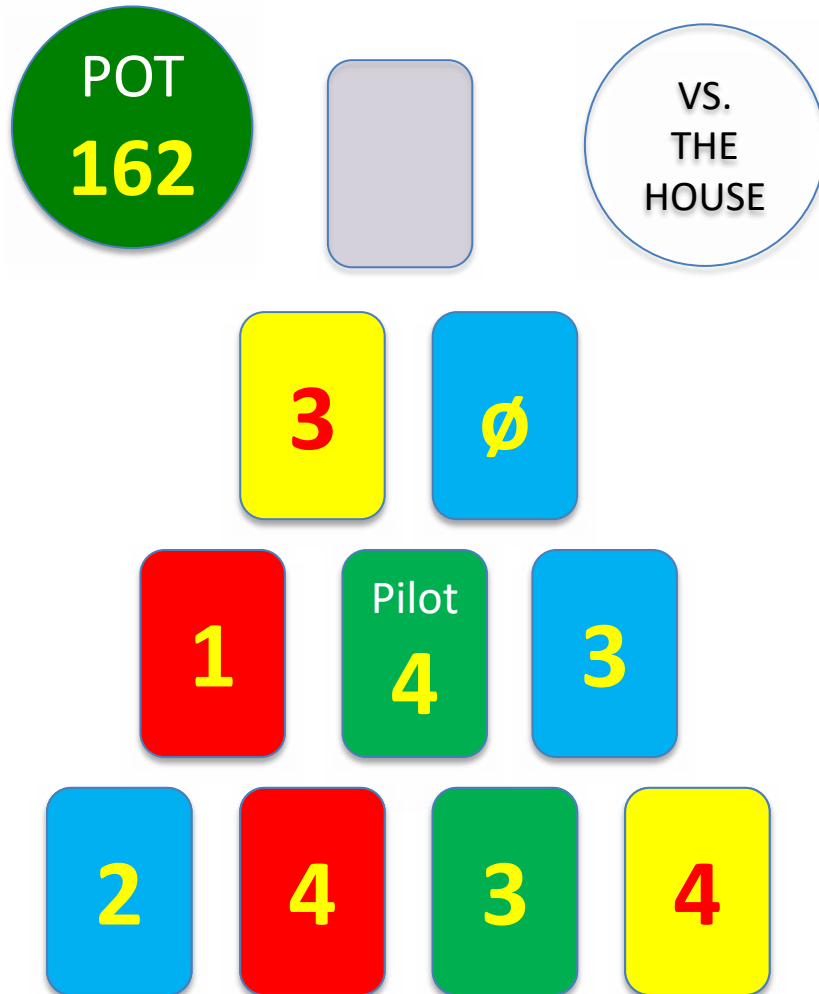
Now we are up to the gunners, the penultimate deck. By this time, players will know whether their flanks are going to help them win the overall pot or not.

Playing Deck 3



Here we see a calamity — a null card at starboard. You cannot make the showdown with that, so it will have to be replaced. Good thing the player saved an extra move!

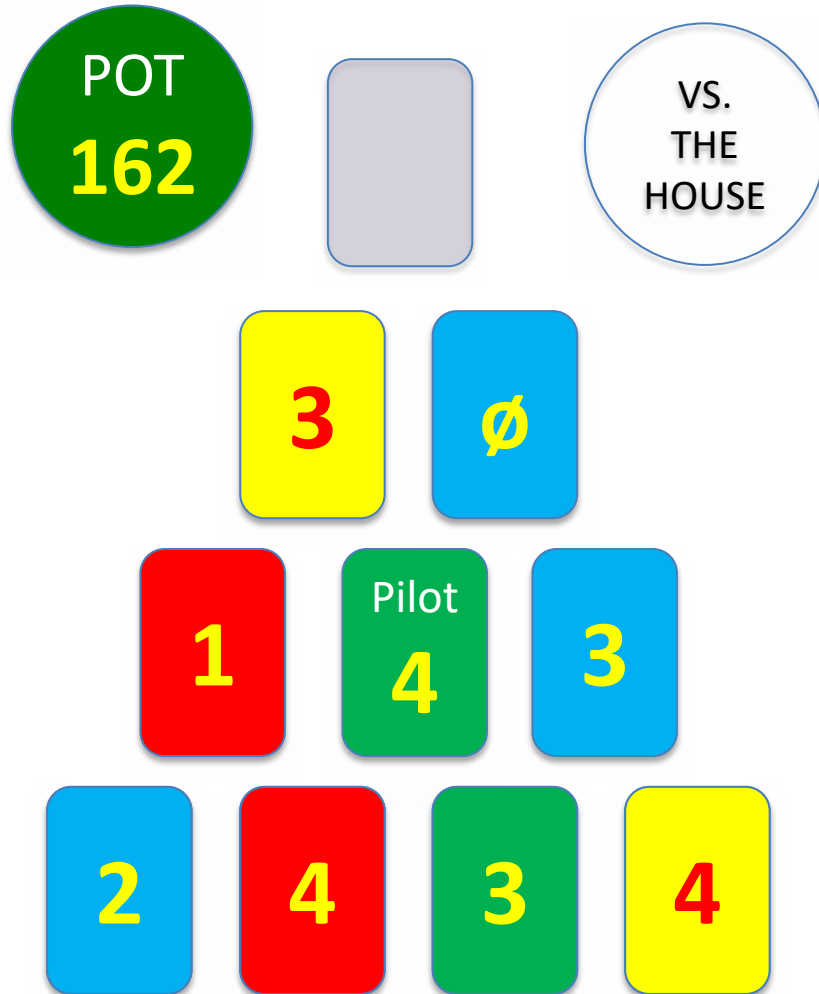
Playing Deck 3



First, though, there is another betting round — and now, starting bet is 16. Getting pricey now!

But note that the pot will break four ways, so the value of each of the three hands has grown to 40.

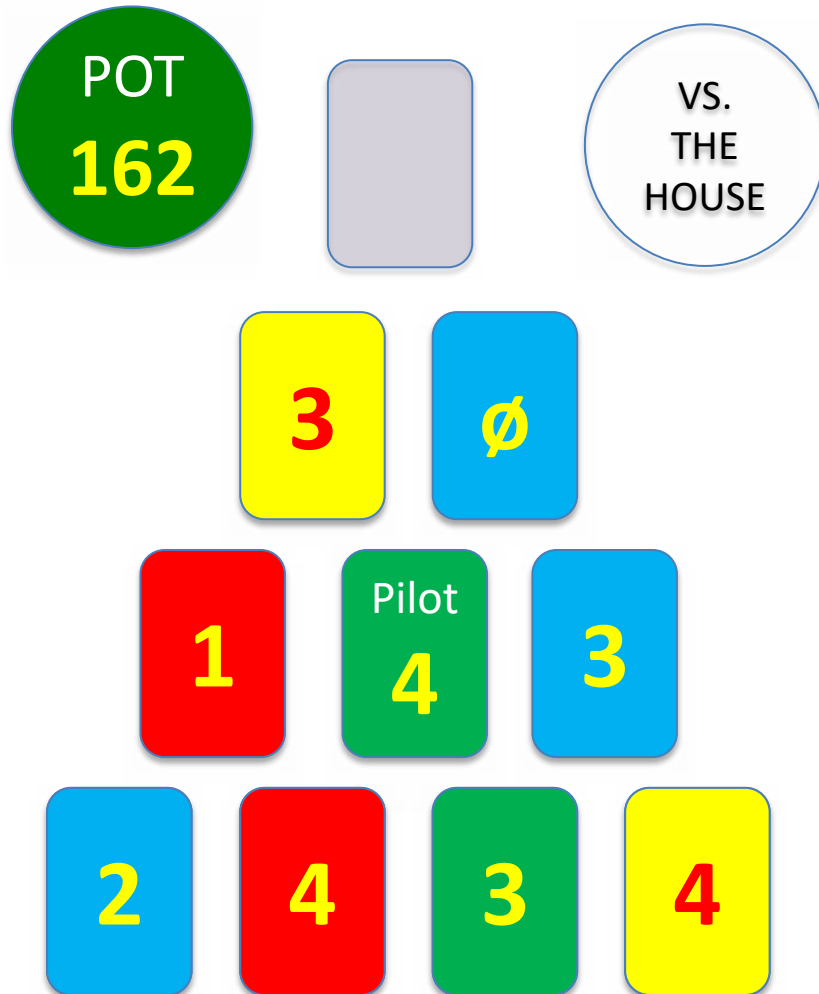
Playing Deck 3



First, though, there is another betting round — and now, starting bet is 16.

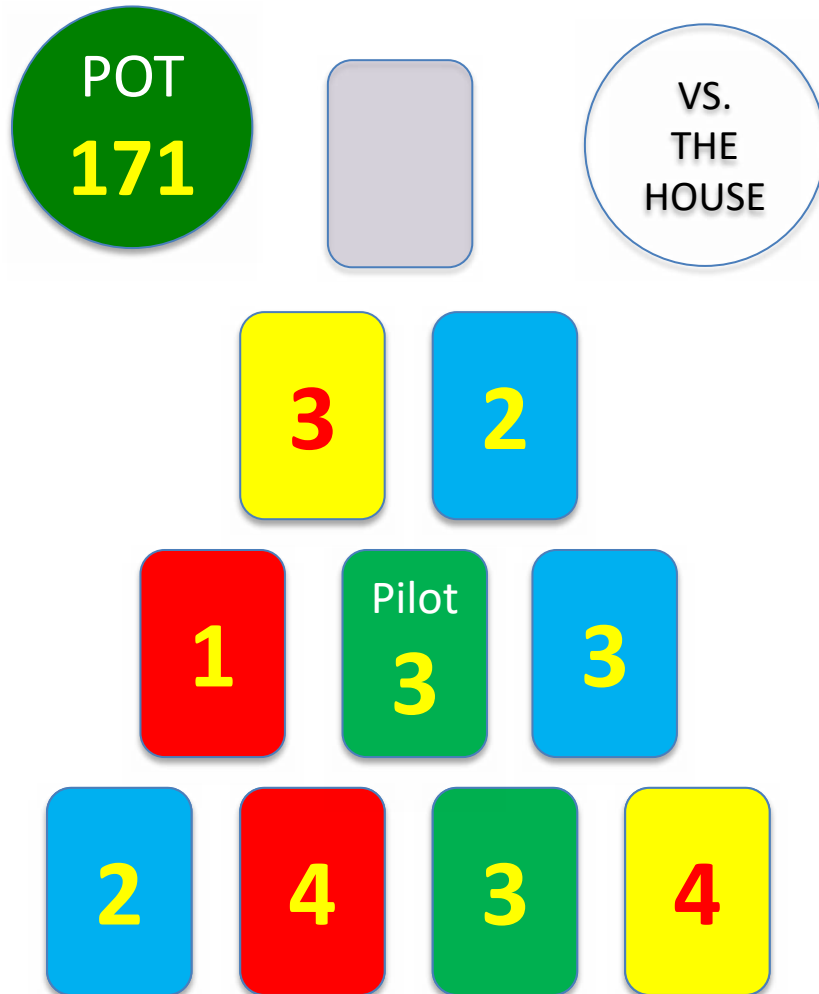
One bets and all call. Getting pricey now! But note that the pot will break four ways, so the value of each of the three hands has grown to 40.

Deck 3 Pilot Actions



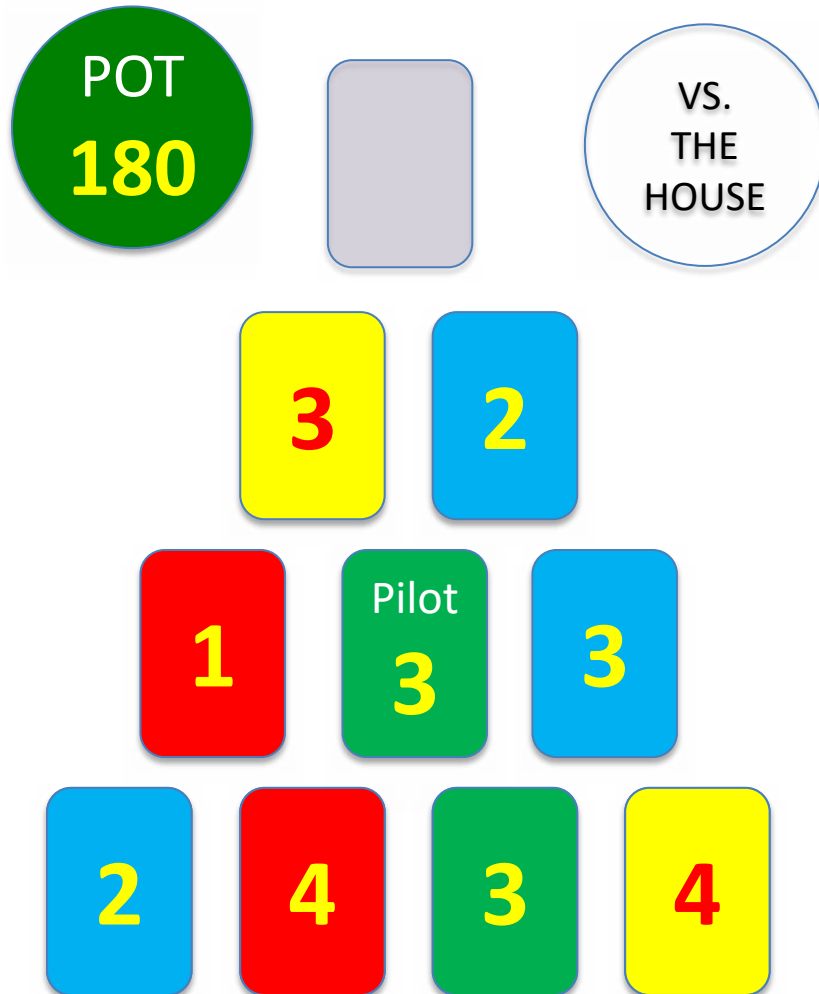
Now time for pilot actions again. Our player can take two, since there was one left over from the second round. Two actions must be held for the final deck. Cost now is 9 per action.

Deck 3 Pilot Actions



Our player takes the first action to replace that terrible misfire. It is a lucky draw — that blue two at starboard gets the player close to a straight there.

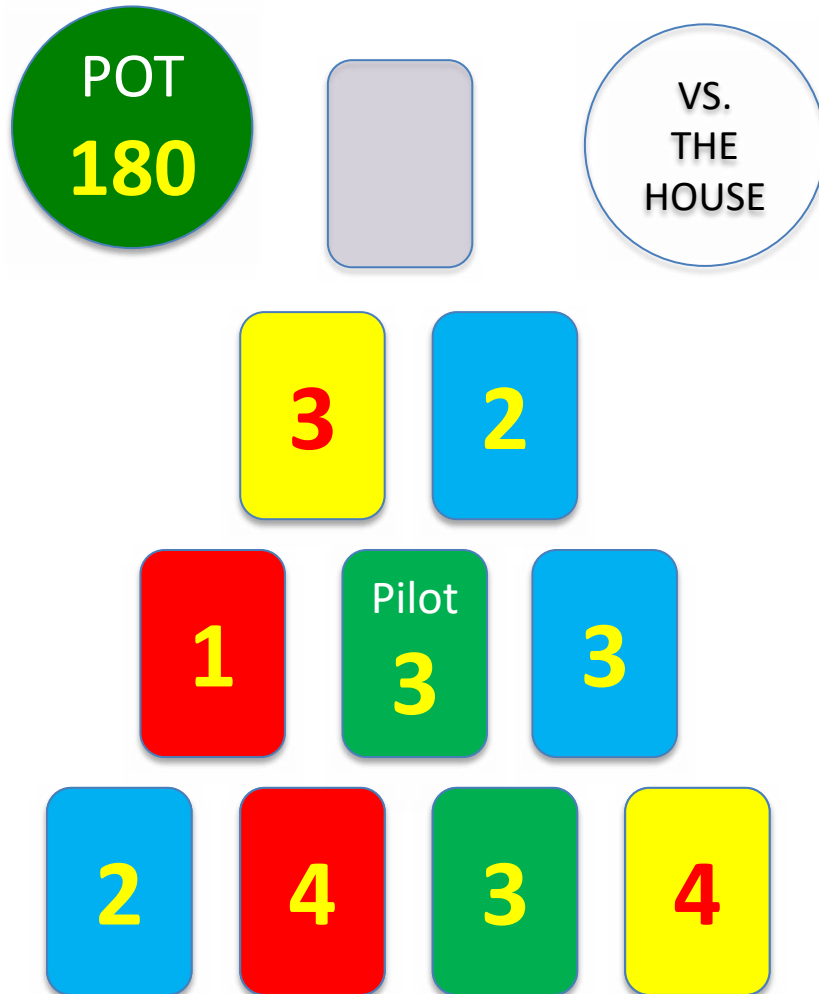
Deck 3 Pilot Actions



Only one opponent uses an action, leaving one player with one to spare for the final deck. But it's back to us, now.

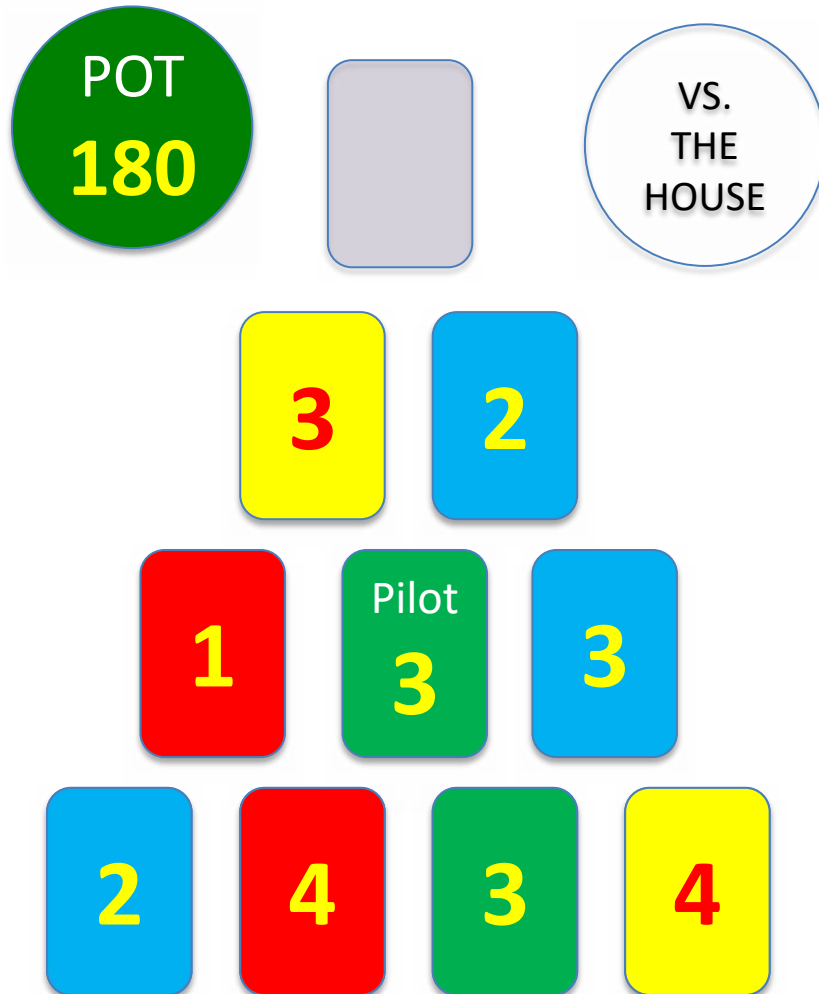
Since our player can see the other pyramids, that helps decision-making.

Deck 3 Pilot Actions



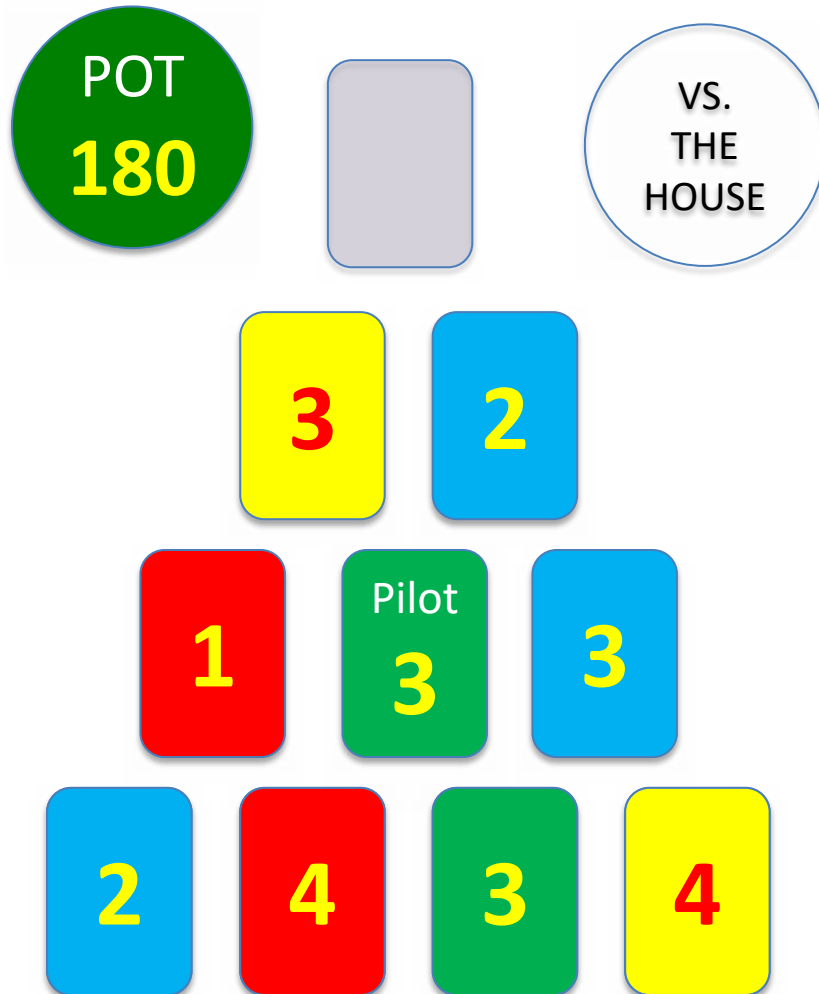
Strategy, now. Our player knows there is a 1 on the port side that can be sorted to the top next round; that completes a straight at starboard. But it is not clear the thruster row will win with just a pair.

Deck 3 Pilot Actions



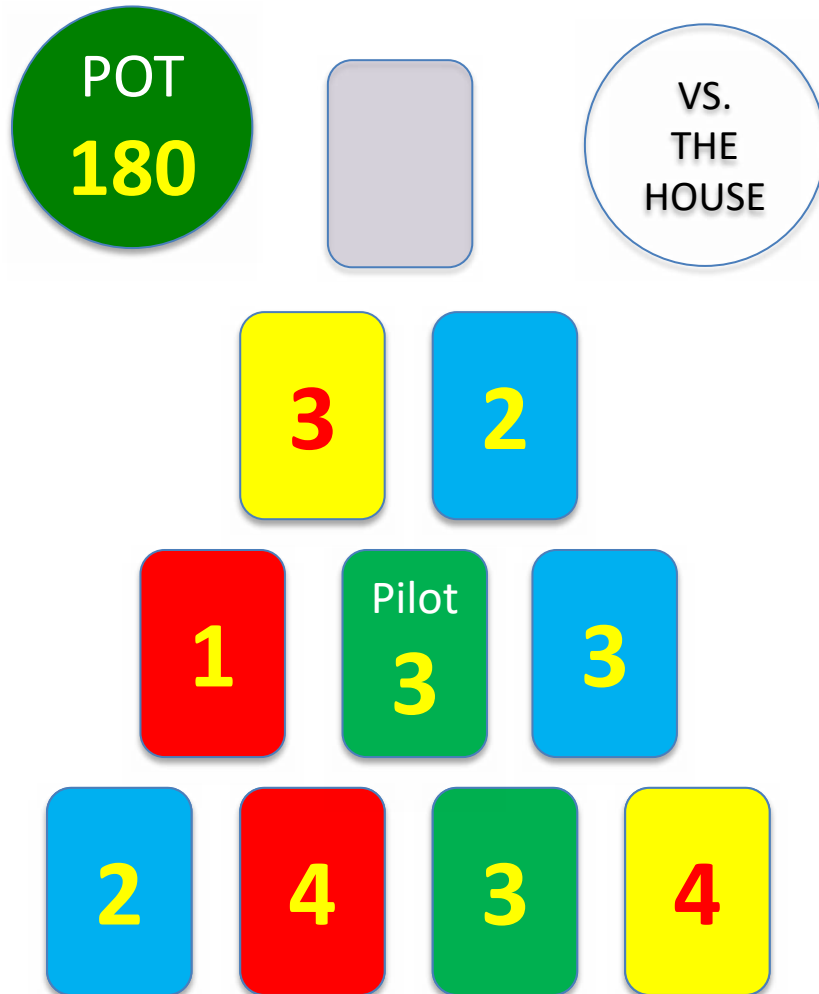
The problem is, a misfire now would be really dangerous. One of the final pilot actions would have to be taken to fix it. So our player stands pat, saving three actions for the end.

Playing Deck 3



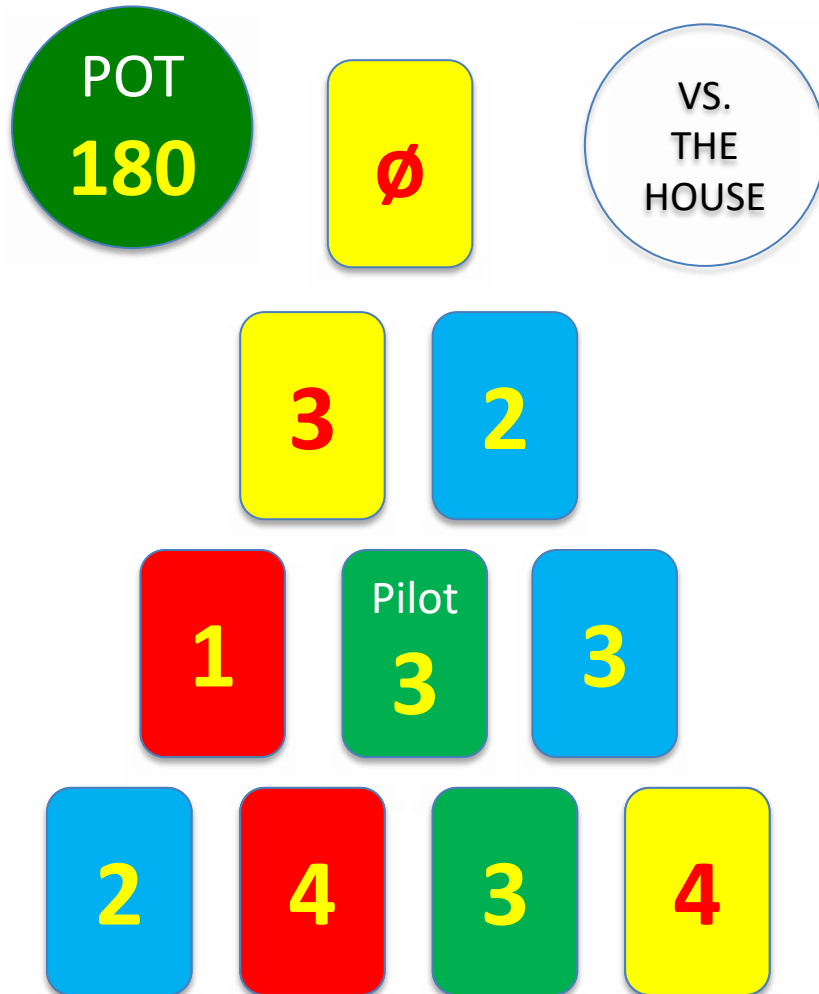
A final betting round for Deck 3, but this time nobody bets — opponents see standing pat as a sign of confidence as much as a sign of things needing to be fixed.

Playing Deck 4



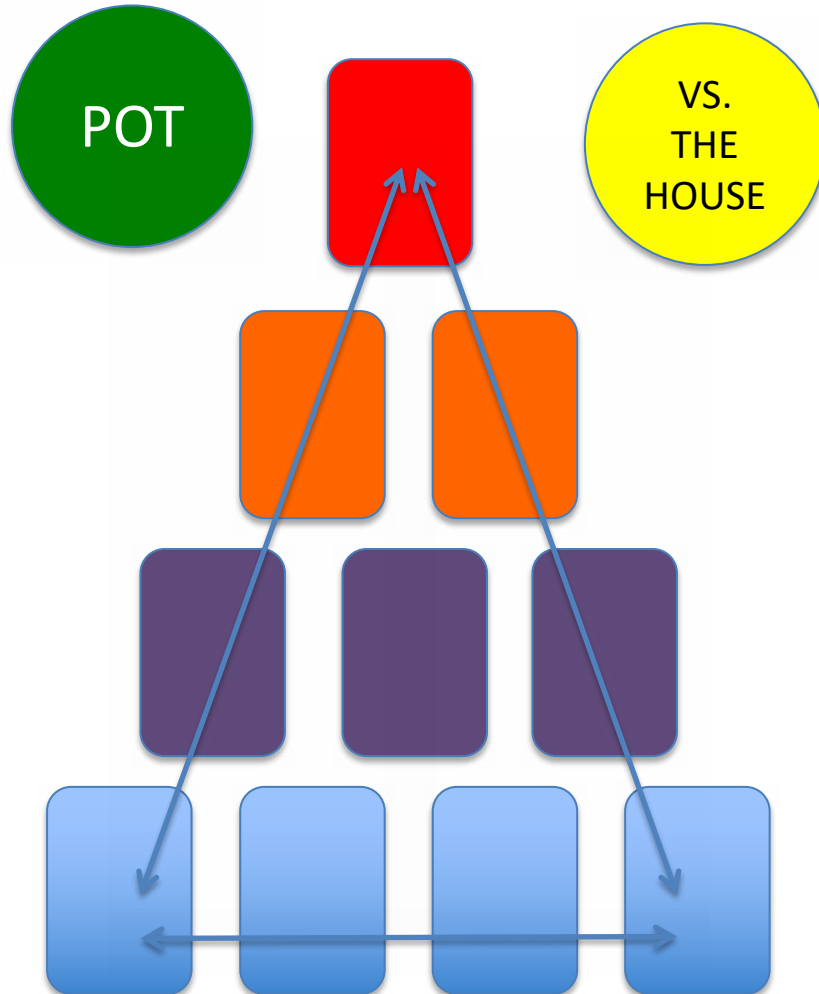
And so we get to the big gun, the capstone card. This means everything...

Playing Deck 4



Another misfire!
Fortunately, the player saved an action — to go along with the two actions players get to expend at the top level.

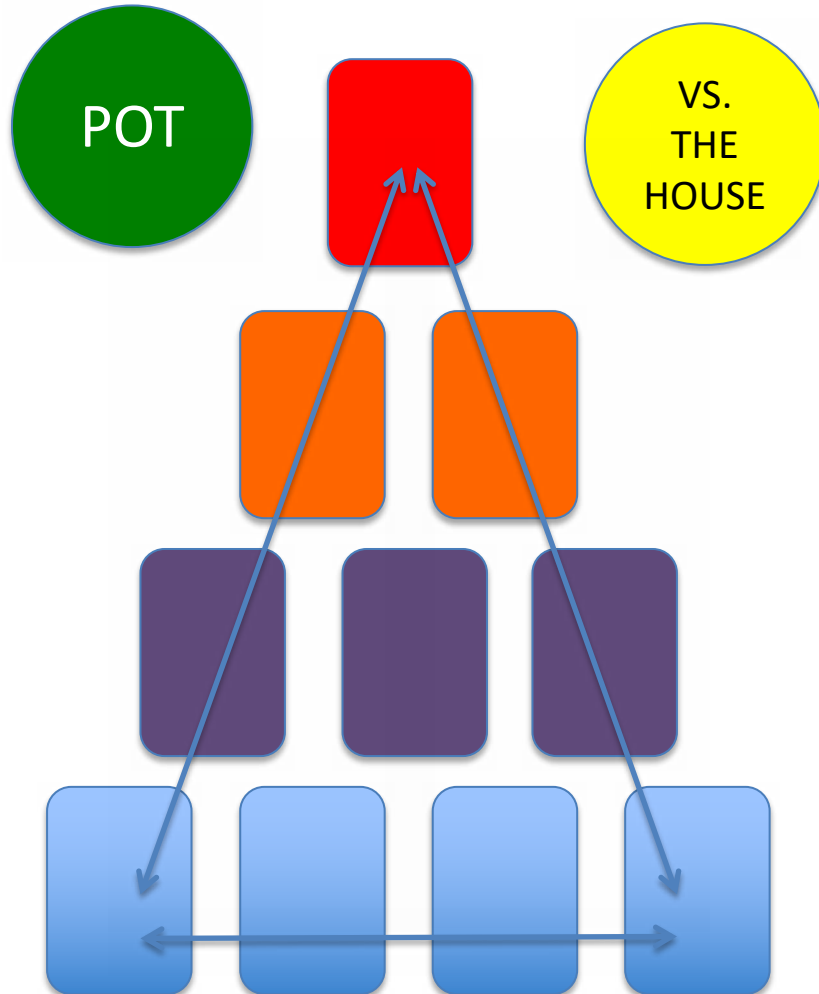
The Ion Barrage



If a player had an Ion Barrage, it's shown immediately, with the hole cards being upturned. The house would also pay out any side jackpots.

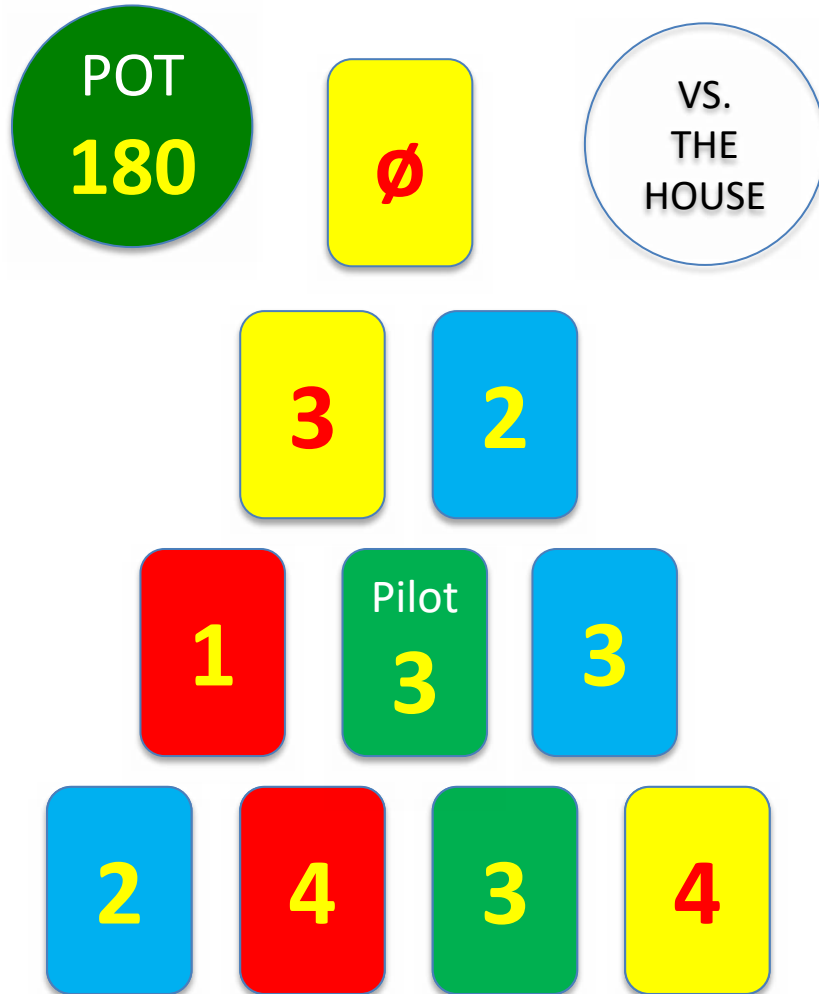
Remaining players would turn up their hole cards and receive their capstone cards one by one.

The Ion Barrage



At this point, the only way the later players can win is if they too have “ion barrages,” capped by the Vermilion Six. The odds are very high against it. In “The Ride,” Wodi does exactly this to Kaljach.

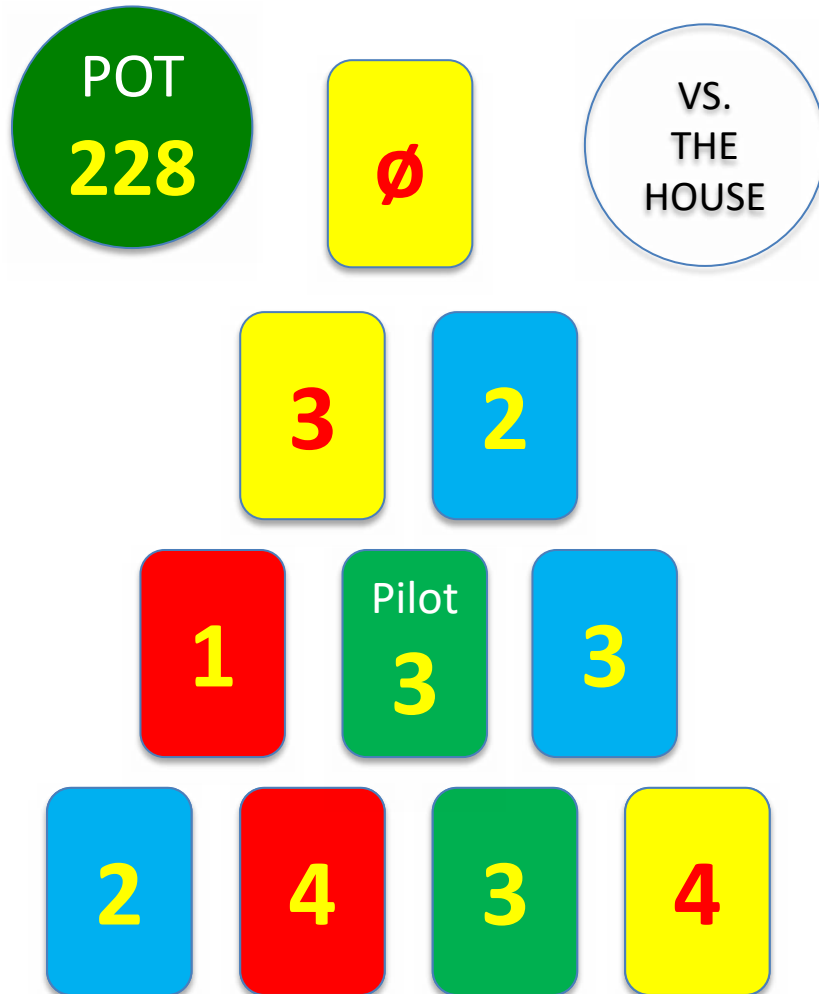
Playing Deck 4



After all draw, there is another round of betting — it costs 16 to bet this time.

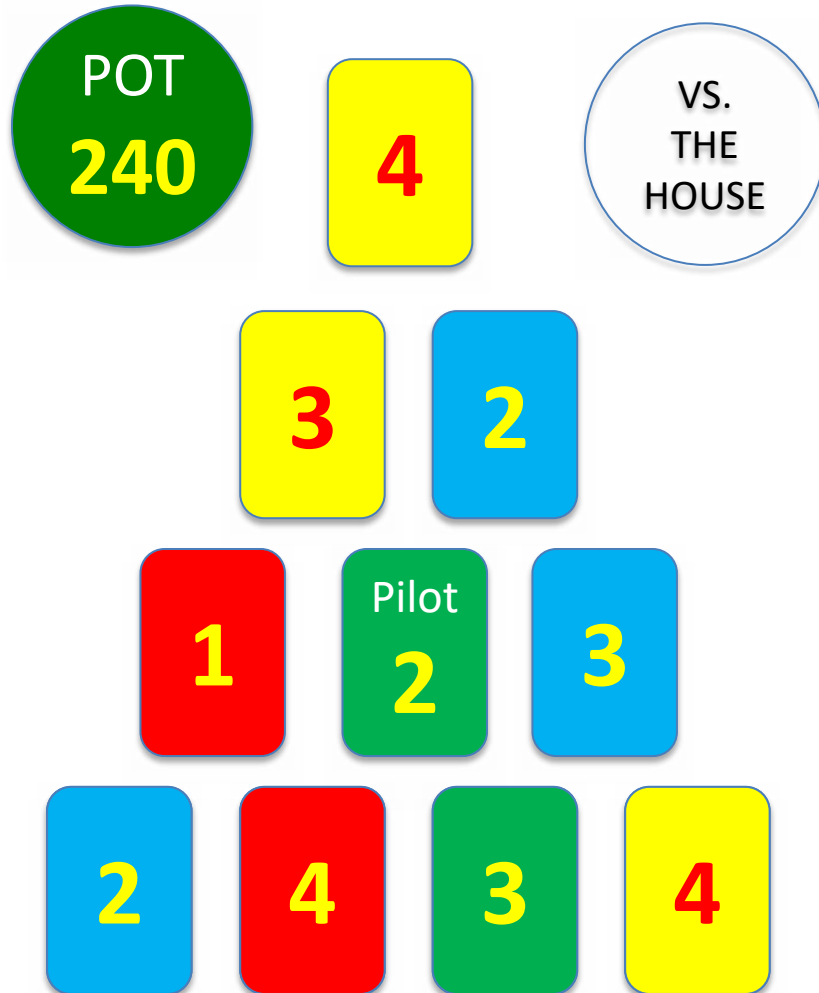
Remember, most of the hole cards are still hidden, so our player can act as if there are no more problems than the one that was just dealt.

Deck 4 Pilot Actions



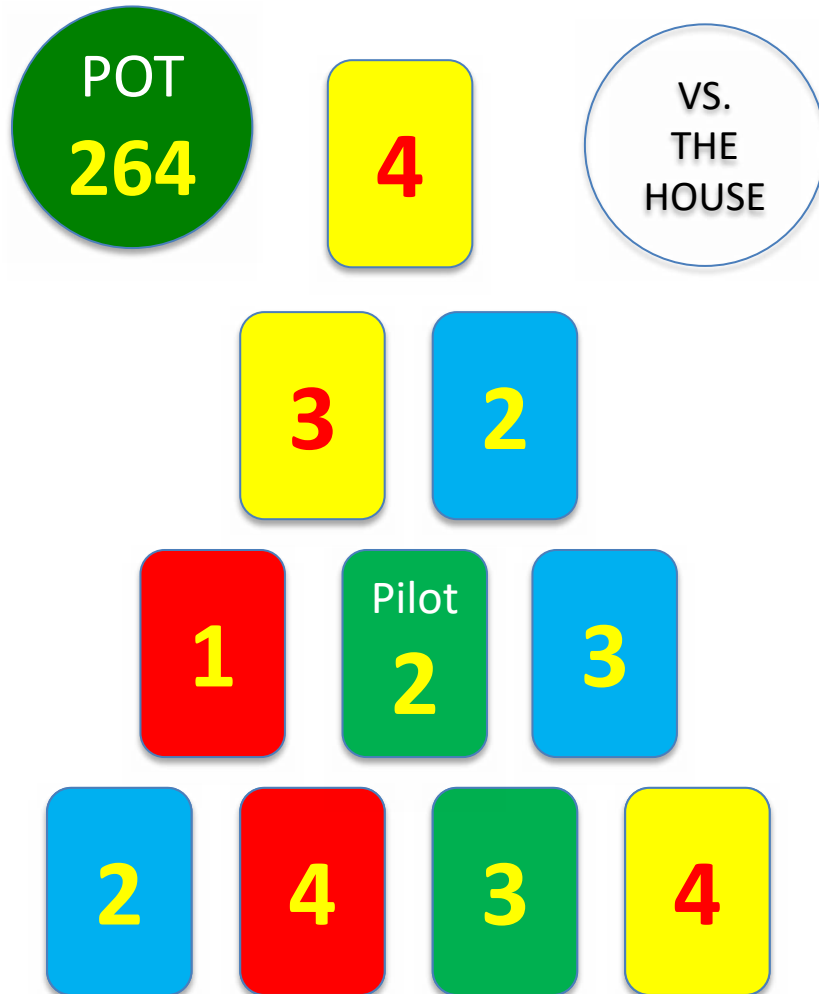
After a single round of betting in which everyone stayed in, it is time for pilot actions one last time. These will cost 12 each. The player has one obvious fix to make, changing the capstone card.

Deck 4 Pilot Actions



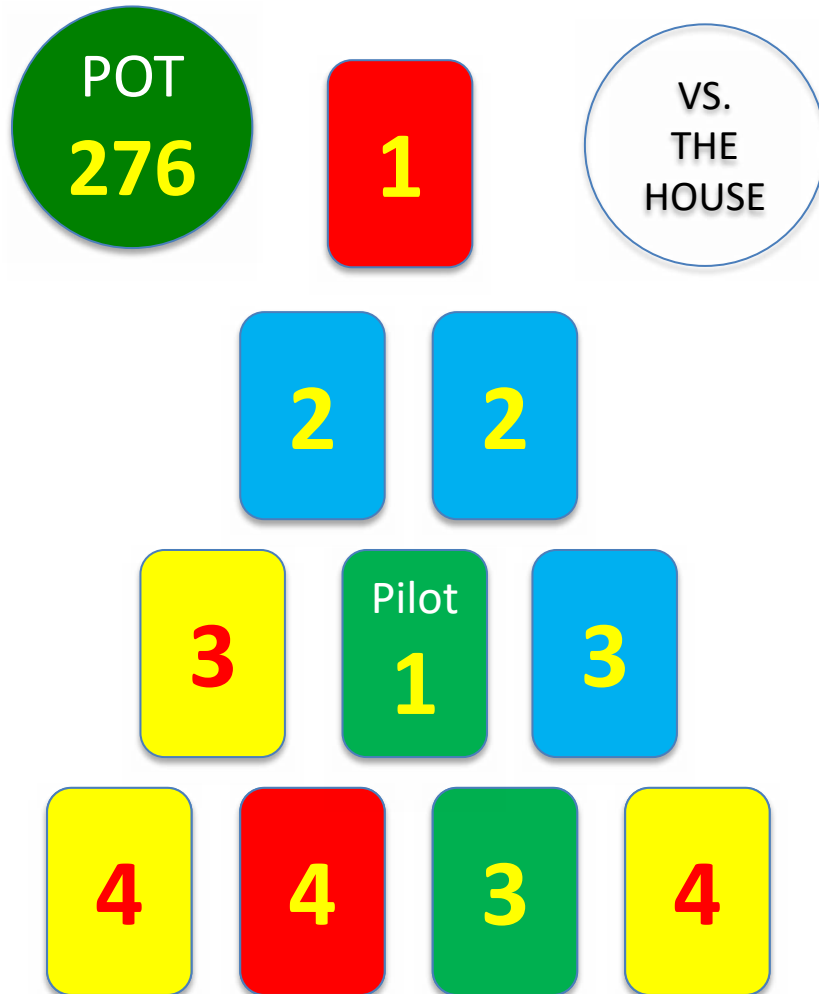
Some better luck, at last. The 4 is no help on the starboard flank, but it is not going to stay there, thanks to the two remaining actions.

Deck 4 Pilot Actions



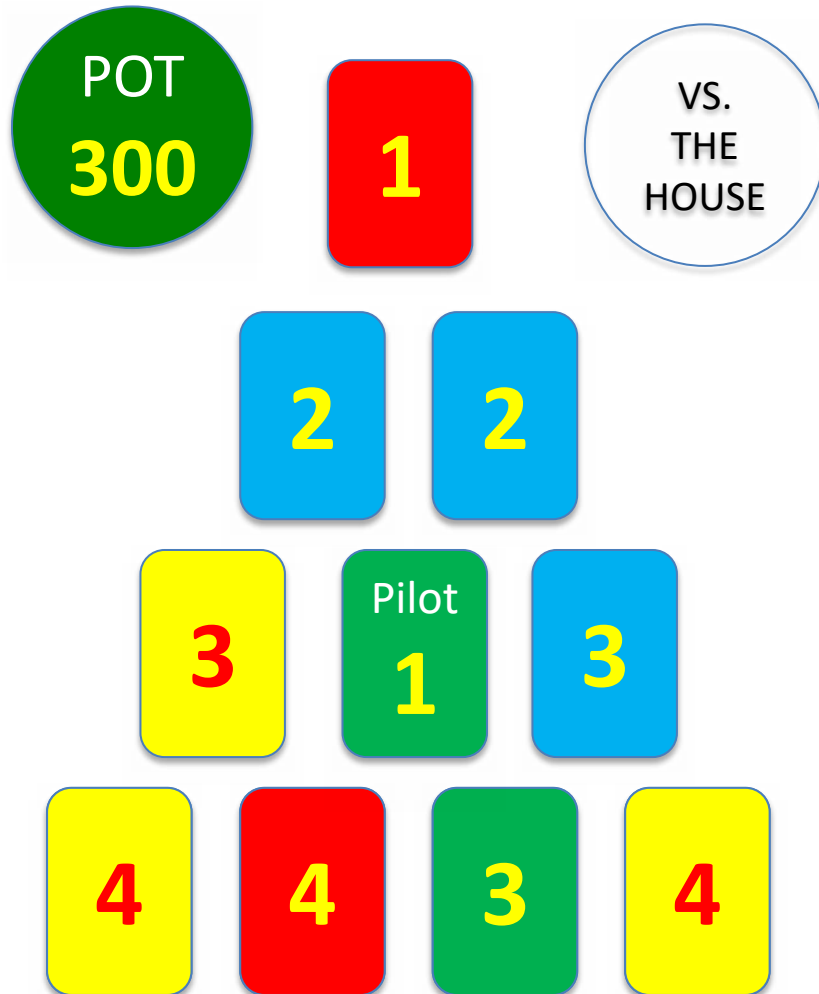
Both opponents take their actions, boosting the pot to 264. It is time now for an action to re-sort one of the sides. At a cost again of 12, the player re-sorts the cards on the left flank.

Deck 4 Pilot Actions



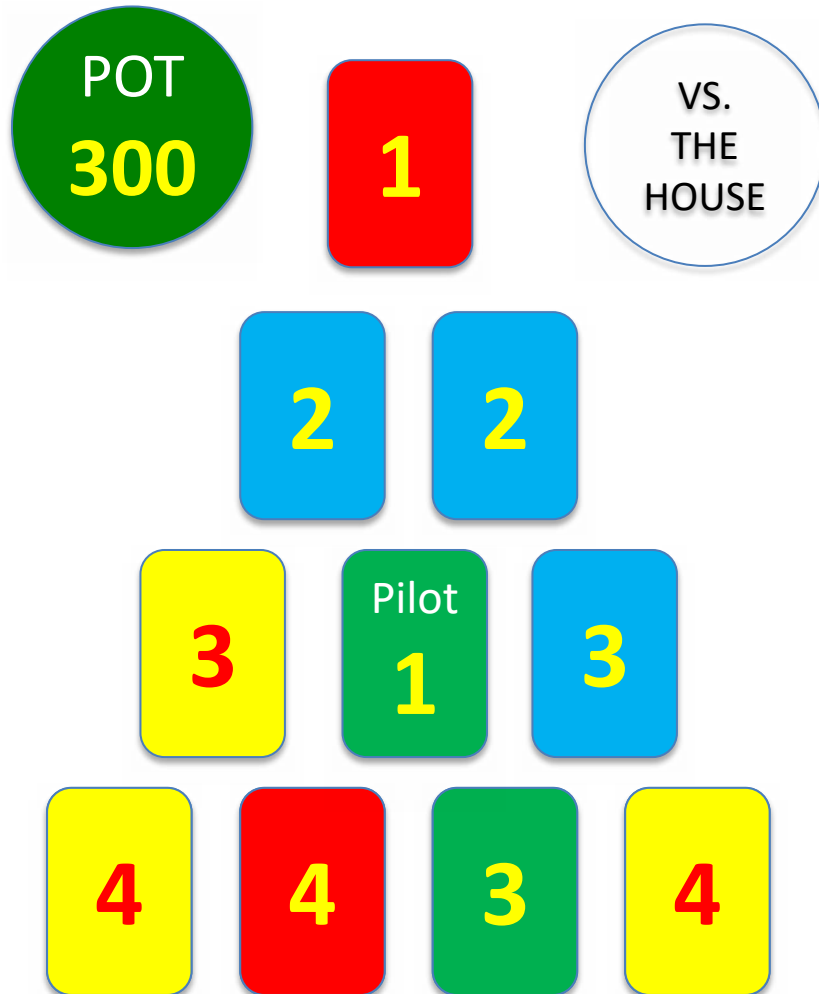
Money well spent, as there is no randomness to this. The skilled pilot has rearranged things to create straights on the port and starboard, with the bonus of three fours on the bottom!

Deck 4 Pilot Actions



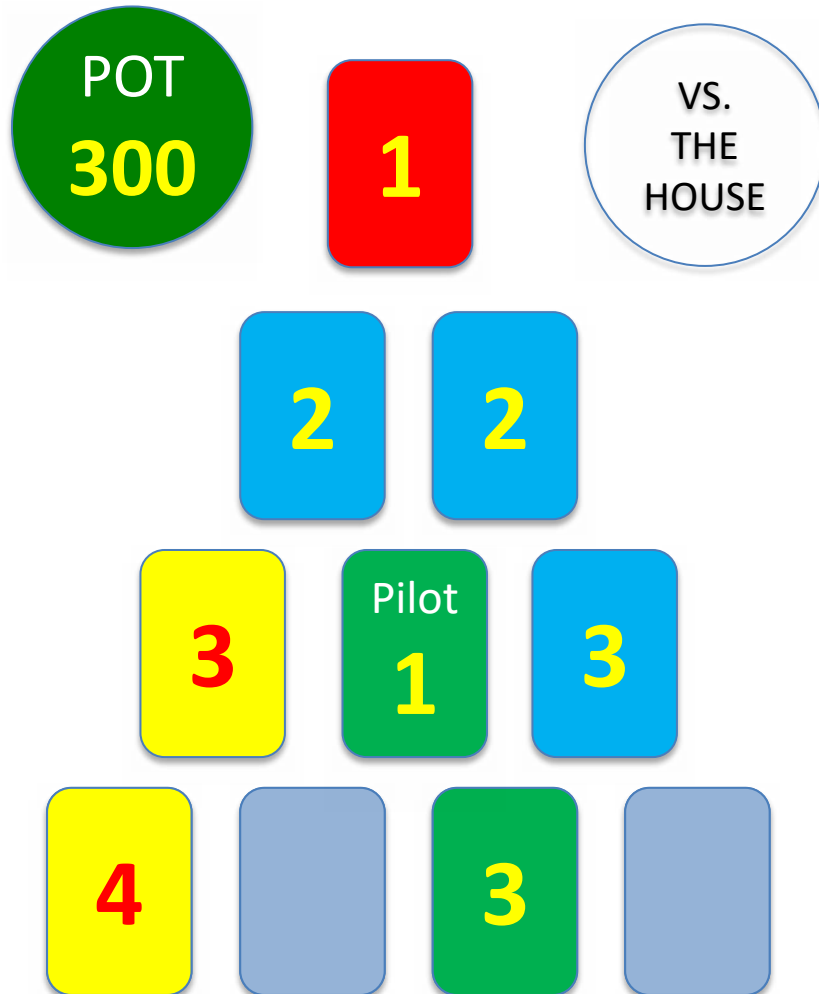
Both opponents burn their second actions; only our player and one opponent have an action left over. But the question is what to do.

Deck 4 Pilot Actions



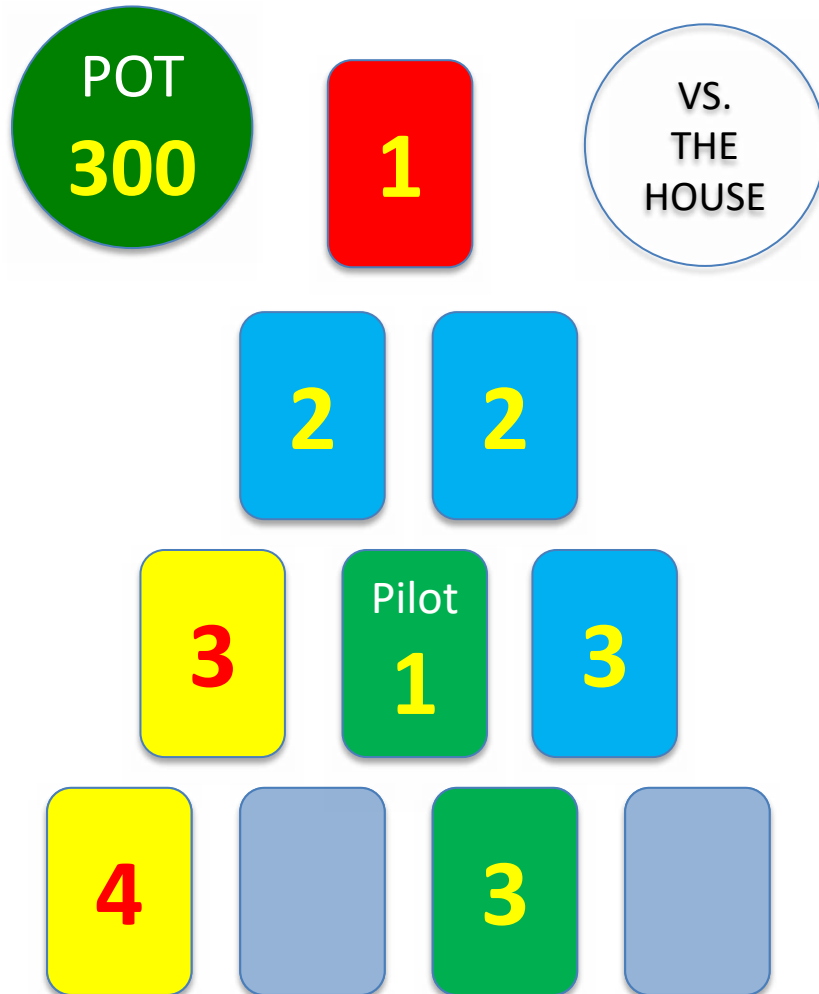
Changing a card could be disastrous, as a misfire could not be rectified. Nor is there really a re-sort that would turn either flank into a rainbow barrage.

Deck 4 Pilot Actions



Remember as well, opponents still aren't able to see everything. The changed hole card from earlier is upright, and the cards from the left flank re-sort were upturned. But not all.

Deck 4 Pilot Actions



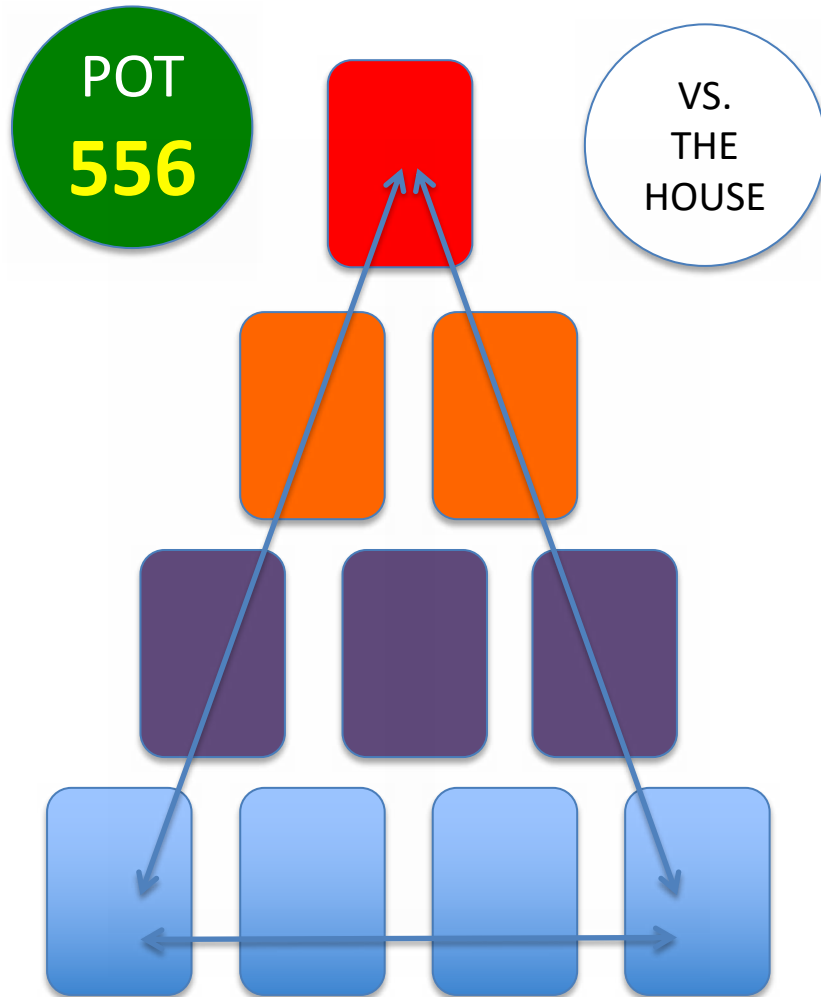
So our player skips the final action, saving the coins — and conveying strength. Figure the final player does the same.

Final betting round



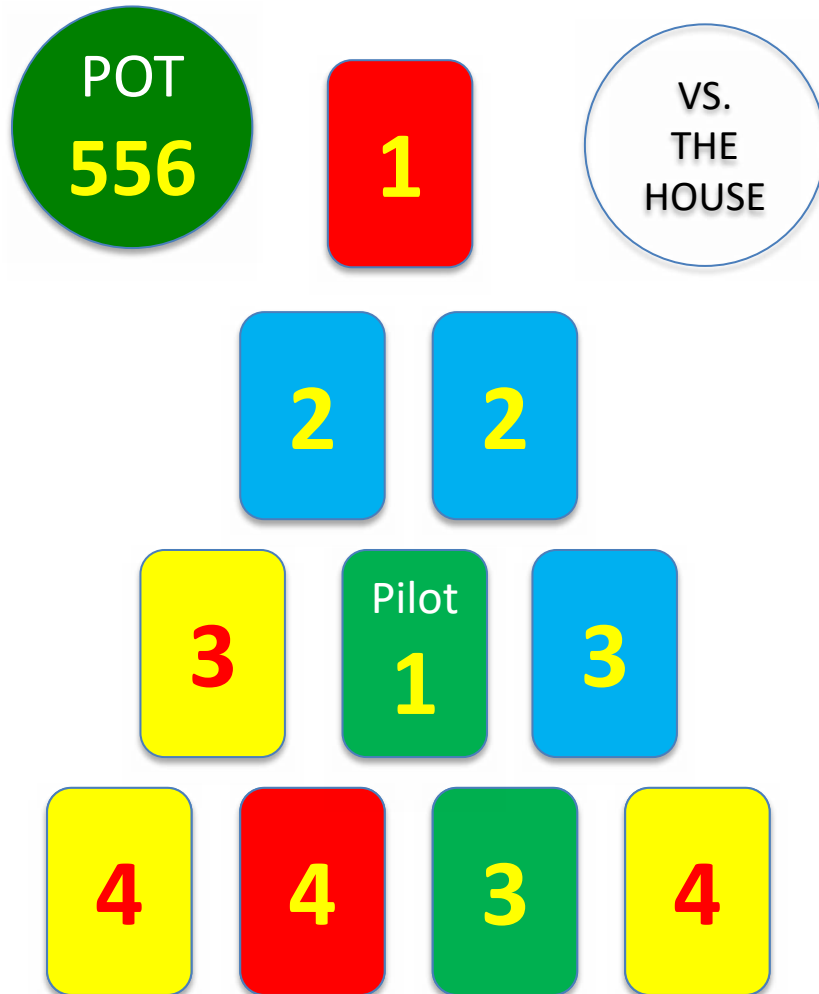
So this is it, the final betting round — again, with a 32 unit bet minimum. Figure one player drops out completely, but we get the full three raise limit. That adds 256 to the pot!

The Showdown



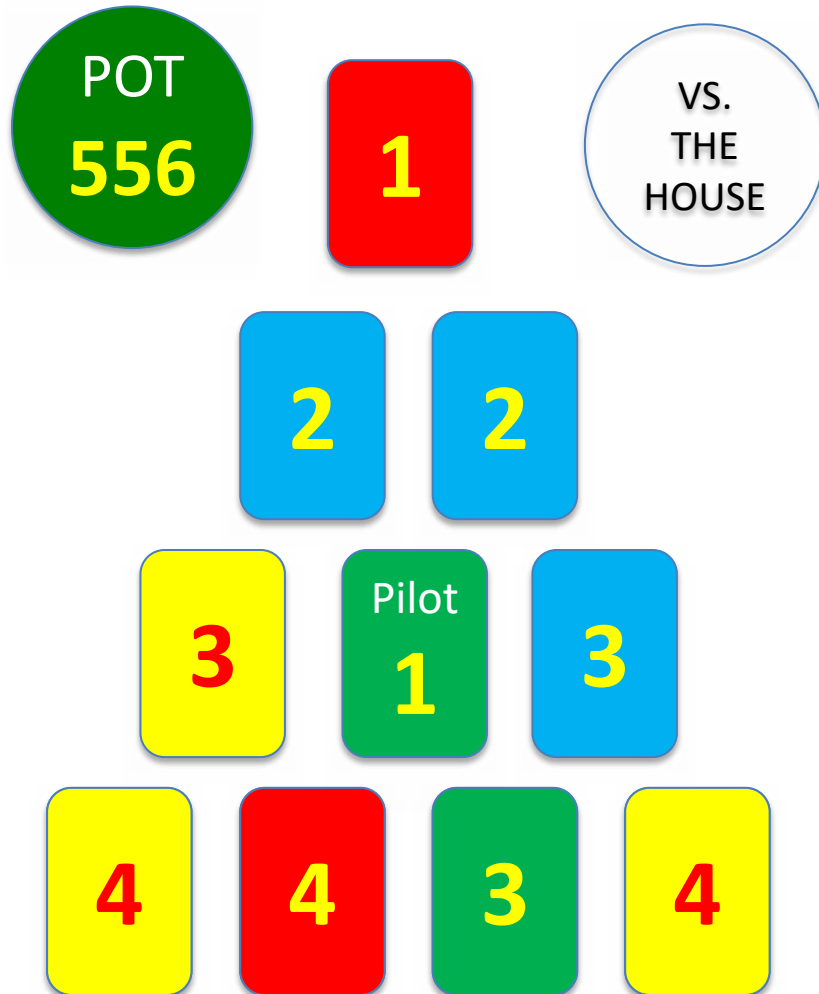
Remember, the pot splits four ways — one-fourth for each competing side and then one fourth for whoever wins at least two sides. So each hand is worth 139.

The Showdown



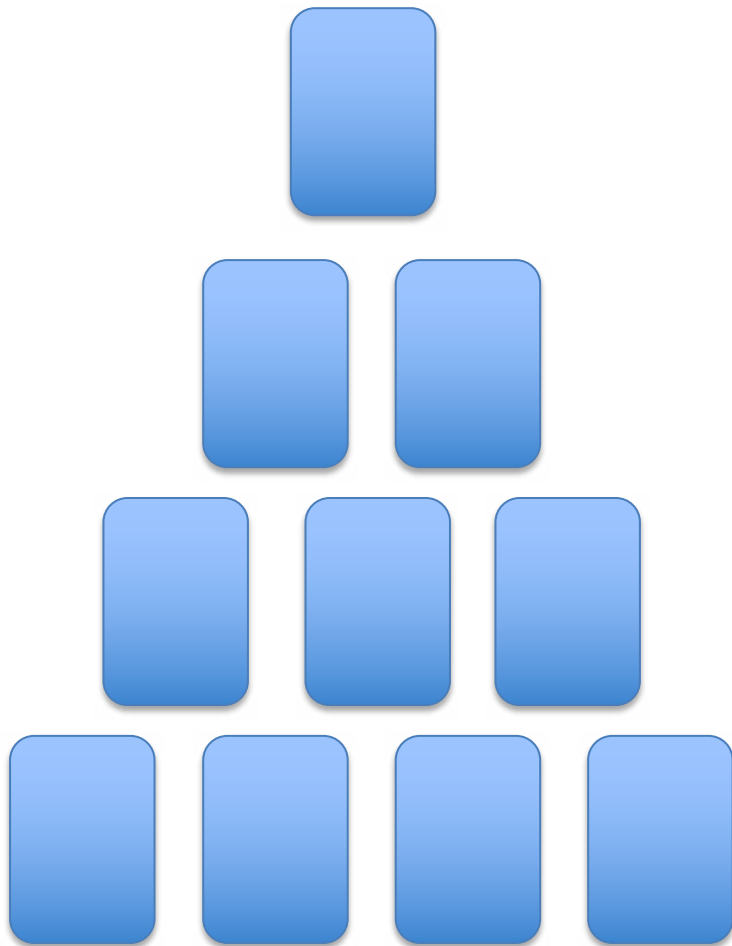
All cards are shown, all hands compared. As it happens, our player drew very well, with two four-card straights and a three of a kind. Only one of the hands ends up losing — the starboard one, to a straight that started with three same-colored cards.

The Showdown



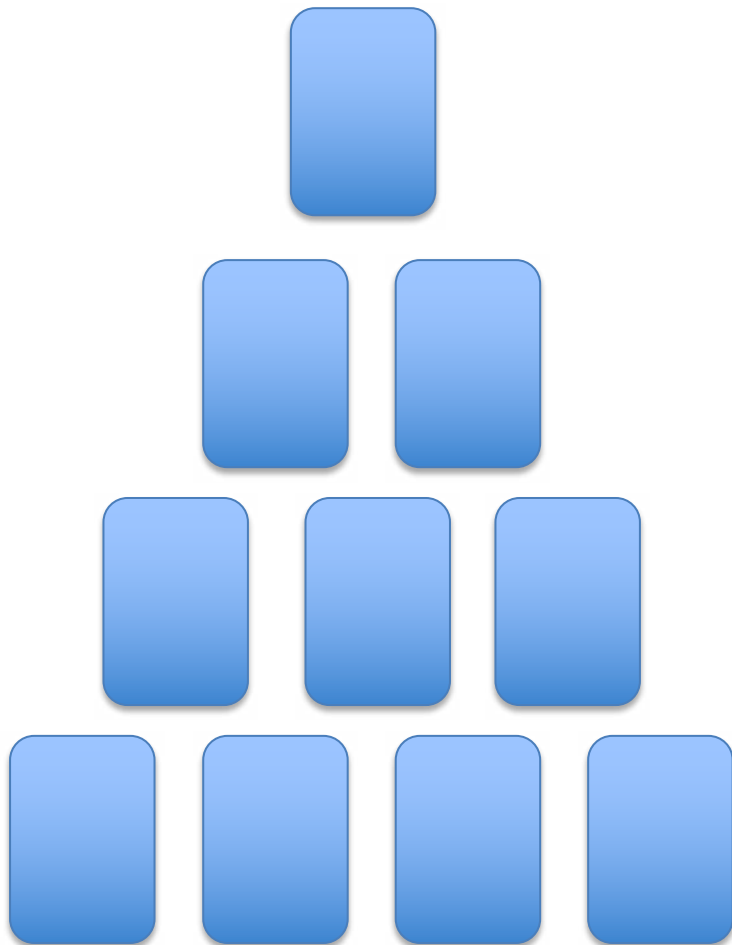
But two out of three wins is enough to net 75% of the pot, of 417 coins, more than double the player's contribution to the pot. And it was done with a pilot action to spare!

Zinbiddle in Canto Bight



Note that we do not actually say the relative rankings of the hands, nor even the values of the cards (beyond the Vermilion Six) in “The Ride”; they may in reality be different. But the game described here does fit the book’s action.

Zinbiddle in Canto Bight



My thanks to editor **Tom Hoeler**, who encouraged me years ago to figure out what the actual rules might be like. And remember you can find the ***Canto Bight*** book from your bookseller of choice!