

Twisted Shithead

Twisted Shithead is an elaborate variation on the popular card game *Shithead* (also known as *Palace* or *Karma*) which favours strategic play and reduces the amount of chance involved. It takes longer to learn than regular shithead, but it becomes more of a thinking game which is less tiresome and more addictive. The name **Twisted Shithead** has emerged as a descriptive simplification of the historic names *Super Hyper Wankee Shithead*, *Twisted Knot of Discontent* and *Super Hyper Twisted Knot*.

Learning to play *Twisted Shithead* does take some time and effort, but it is worthwhile. If you've never played regular *Shithead* then don't worry, the instructions below describe *Twisted Shithead* from scratch; no previous knowledge is required. If you've played regular *Shithead* to the point where it starts to bore you then this game is definitely for you; but it may help the learning process if you try to think of it as a completely new game.

It is sometimes observed that *Twisted Shithead* bears a strong resemblance to the fictional game *Go Johnny Go Go Go Go!* mentioned in the TV series *The League of Gentlemen*

Getting Started

What you need A normal pack of cards, a reference sheet, and 2 or more people with intelligence and patience. Jokers are used in the game. Multiple packs of cards can also be used, this lengthens the game and allows more people to play. It is best to start learning with 3 players and one pack.

The Aim of the game is to lay (get rid of) all your cards.

Suits (i.e. hearts, diamonds etc) are irrelevant, and not part of the game.

Dealing Shuffle well and deal the cards. Each player receives a single pile of cards face down in front of him. All the cards are dealt. Players do not look at any of the cards in their pile. Note that at the end of a game the cards will be bunched together; thorough shuffling before each new game is essential.

Starting Play The players all take one card from the top of their pile and hint at the value of their card to decide who should go first. The player with the lowest value card (see below for values) goes first. For your first few games, I recommend that you look at all the cards and choose the lowest, since you don't know the values.

Eventually, you will not want the other players to know the exact value if you aren't starting. Lines like "Hmm....I could be starting", "I probably won't be starting" or "I might be starting" are common.

Once the first card is laid, the player to the left of the starter* has to beat that card, in a similar way to regular *shithead*. However, beating the card is not simply a matter of laying higher than that card. Each card has specific requirements to be beaten, which we will come to shortly.

* Note: If the first card is a jack, a king or a ten, play does not move to the starter's left, see below for more details.

A Turn

If the player can beat the top card then he can lay his card on top of that, and play moves on to the next player.

If he can't then he must pick up the card (and any cards underneath it), and hold them as a hand. That player must then play (in turn) from that hand until all those cards are laid, when he can move back to his pile.

If the player wishes, he may pick up the cards and hold them in his hand even if he can beat the card on top. This would be done for strategic reasons, most obviously to give the impression that he can't beat the card, or to obtain certain cards that have been laid. If the player voluntarily "picks up" in this way he must still play all the cards in his hand (in turn) before moving back to his pile.

If the player "picks up", voluntarily or not, play immediately moves to the next player, who can lay anything, as there are no cards to beat.

Multiple cards of the same value can be laid together as one (but they don't have to be).

It is usual to continue playing until only one player has cards left and thus a loser has been found. Like *Shithead* the aim of the game is to not lose, rather than to win.

9	3,5,Queen,7,9	Player who lays must discard the same number of cards that he lays 9s.	9,10,Joker,6,Jack,King,Ace,3,4,8
10	3,5,Queen,9,10	Player who lays must have another go for each 10 he lays. Each go must beat the last.	10,Joker,6,Jack,King,Ace,3,4,8
Joker	3,5,Queen,7,9,10	Next player must lay a pair (or more) of cards that beat the card underneath the joker. Two jokers require two pairs, and so on. If the card underneath is a 5 or a 7 the pair does <i>not</i> have to be even or odd respectively. See invisibility for more details.	A pair (or more) of cards that beat the card underneath the joker. The action of the card underneath is not applied.
6	3,5,Queen,9,10,6	None	6,Jack,King,Ace,3,4,8
Jack	3,Queen,7,9,10,6,Jack	When a Jack is laid, play changes direction. If multiple Jacks are laid together, play changes direction the appropriate number of times, so an even number of jacks has no overall effect, and an odd number effectively changes the direction.	Jack,King,Ace,3,4,8 (in a 2 player game, the Jack can only be beaten by a 5. This is because direction of play cannot be changed in a two player game, and is a feature known as 'Magic Jacks')
King	3,Queen,7,9,10,6,Jack,King	When a king is laid, the next player misses a go. If multiple kings are laid, that number of players miss goes.	King,Ace,3,4,8
Ace	3,5,Queen,9,10,6,Jack,King,Ace	If an ace is laid, the player who lays must pass a card (of his choice) to the next player. If multiple aces are laid, the same number of cards must be	Ace,3,4,8

		passed. The cards enter into, or become, that player's hand.	
3	3, Queen, 7, 9, 10, 6, Jack, King, Ace	The 3 has the side-effect of "resetting" the game. It can be laid on "high" cards, but "low" cards can be laid upon it.	Any card except a 2
4	3, 5, Queen, 9, 10, 6, Jack, King, Ace	All cards in play are discarded, and the layer of the 4 has another go.	(a 4 never needs to be beaten)
8	3, 5, Queen, 9, 10, 6, Jack, King, Ace	The 8 is invisible (see invisibility). The card underneath the 8 needs to be beaten. If this card is a 5, the card does not have to be even to beat the 8. If this card is a joker, a pair is not required, the player merely needs to beat the card under the joker (as if the joker were another 8).	

** This does not include beating 8s, or pairs beating jokers, since beating these cards is dependant on beating the card underneath.

Invisibility

The 8 is invisible. Although this means that the card underneath has to be beaten, this happens in card order terms only, in that the card does not have to be even if a 5 is underneath, and a pair is not required if a joker is underneath. The action of the card underneath is not applied. If there are no cards under the 8, then anything can be laid upon it.

The joker is invisible in the same way, with the specific requirement that a pair must be laid that beats the card underneath. This pair does not need to be odd or even if the card underneath is a 7 or a 5. If there are no cards underneath the joker, any pair can be laid.

If a pair of 8s is laid on a joker, the card under the joker dictates what must be laid, as if only a single 8 is laid on that card.

Four of a kind

If four cards of a kind are on top, then all the cards in play are discarded in the same way as when a 4 is laid. These 4 cards can be laid over any number of turns, but they must be together on top of all the cards in play. For example, if Player A lays two 3s, player B lays another 3 and player C then lays another 3, all the cards are discarded, and player C has another turn. If player A lays four 3s, all the cards are immediately discarded and player A has another go.

Reference Sheet:

Card Order (lowest first)

- 2
- (3) Can be beaten by any card except 2
- 5
- Queen (counted as even)
- 7
- 9
- 10
- (Joker) can beat any card 2-10 but is invisible (see below) (counted as odd or even)
- 6
- Jack (counted as odd)
- King (counted as odd)
- Ace (counted as even)
- 3,4,8 - All on same level for beating other cards

Special Functions

2*	Next person must lay Queen
5	Next person must lay even
7	Next person must lay odd
9*	Discard a card
10*	Have another go
Joker*	Next person must lay a pair that beats card underneath joker (i.e. joker is invisible)
Jack*	Change direction (2 players, next player must lay a 5)
King*	Next person misses a go
Ace*	Hand on a card to next person
4	Discard play-pile and have another go
8	Invisible, card underneath must be beaten
Four of a kind	(on play-pile, whether or not they were put there in one go) - Discard play-pile and have another go (same as 4)

* These cards multiply function according to number of cards, ie lay 3 tens, have 3 goes

Tips and Strategies

Use of 9s and Aces

Since most of the game is played with cards in the player's hand, it is important to have a strategy for getting cards from your pile. Simply waiting until you have played all the cards in your hand is generally not good enough, and a common technique is to collect either nines or aces. What you do is say collect 3 aces, play all your other cards, and lay the three aces together. You can then pass three cards *from your pile* to the next player. With nines, you can try to play them last, and discard a number of cards directly from your pile. **Important:** When passing or discarding cards directly from your pile, you are allowed to look at them first.

Use of tens and kings

Tens and kings can be used to lay a number of cards at once. If you collect, say, three tens and two kings in a three player game, along with some aces, you can lay the three tens, some sixes, some jacks, the kings, and then your aces all in one turn. The kings are your third turn from the tens and as both the other players then miss a go, you have a fourth turn to lay the aces, and then (hopefully) pass on some cards from your pile.

If you collected two tens with threes and nines, you can then lay then tens, the threes, and end up with the nines so that you can discard some cards from your pile. With more tens you could also lay other low cards (e.g. sevens) between the threes and the nines. This is a useful way of getting rid of low cards, as well as discarding cards from your pile

Saving particular cards so that you can beat other cards

There is a general habit among new players to hold on to queens for the express purpose of using them when the next two comes in their direction. This isn't worth it, and I'll explain why: The two technically beats nothing, and can only therefore be laid on it's own, or on an eight with nothing underneath. Two twos could be laid on a joker with nothing underneath. So the net result of not having a queen is at worst picking up a two and some eights or a joker. Picking up twos isn't as bad as it seems, they generally get passed on again quite quickly, and as for eights and jokers, neither could be called bad cards. Picking up only really hurts when there are a lot of cards, and there never are underneath a two.

In a two player game, a Jack can only be beaten by a five. This is an important part of the two player game since a Jack, unlike a two, can be laid on a large stack of cards. Not having a five at a crucial point can quite simply lose you the game. Like with the twos, laying multiple Jacks requires multiple fives, so keeping track of all the Jacks and fives that might be in play is essential.

Getting out

It is unusual to win just by laying the cards in your hand, generally you will be stuck with a few cards that the other players continually prevent you from laying. To get around this you need to ensure that you have the right number of nines or aces to finish the game. Say you had two cards left on your pile, and five in your hand, including a ten and three aces. You could lay the ten, followed by the aces, pass on the remaining three cards, and you would be out of the game. Obviously this kind of strategy requires careful planning.

Being unpredictable

In this game more than others, being unpredictable is paramount. If the other players know your tactics, they can then manipulate you into losing. Badly. So it is important to change your tactics frequently, and sometimes, playing cards which just leave the other players stumped. Playing at random all the time just doesn't work though, at least not if any of the other players are good.

Making it harder for other players:

This game is often not about winning, but about not losing. The key thing to remember is that you need to try to keep the other players off their piles, and playing from their hands as much as possible. You can do this using the "pick up" cards, like jokers and twos. Even if you don't know what cards a particular player has in his hand, if he has two cards they are unlikely to be a pair, so a joker will probably mean he has to pick up. A player with two cards in his hand is far less likely to have two queens, so those irritating twos come in useful, if you can lay them.

Another thing to remember is that when a player has only one card in his hand, he will need a second card to lay two queens or a pair. If a player needs two cards in this way, then he may take a second from his pile, whether the first meets the requirement or not. Clearly, you do not want him to take from his pile, so it is best not to lay the joker, or to lay only a single two.

Example: If you lay two twos, and the next player has only one card in his hand, he is entitled to a card from his pile whether the card in his hand is a queen or not. If, however, you lay a single two then the next player cannot take a card from his pile, and must pick up the two if the card in his hand is not a queen.

This may seem like a small consideration, but every card that a player takes from his pile brings him one step closer to winning. He has fewer cards on his pile, and an extra card in his hand that may be a good one.

The Origins of "Twisted Shithead"

The game was developed by a group of students at Bath University, England in 1993.