

# **L'Hombre - La Bete**



## **Background**

**Among the most popular trick taking games of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, L'Hombre developed in Spain from an earlier version. It quickly spread throughout Europe and was very popular with the Dutch, Germans, Swedes, and was even played Iceland. It was also called Hombre, Ombre, and La Bete.**

**Like many card games, L'Hombre has a particular terminology. When played in Denmark, a mixture of Danish, French, and Spanish terms are used. In the English version, the Danish terms were replaced by English ones, but the French and Spanish terms remained as in Denmark.**

**It is a trick taking game that uses a deck of 40 cards in the four standard suits. From a standard deck of 52 cards, the 8s, 9s, and 10s are removed. It is played by 4 players paired as partners. During play, the player opposite the declarer sits out.**

### **Ranking of Cards**

**The ranking of the cards during play depends on the type of contract.**

❖ **Nolo contracts – There is no trump suit.**

➤ **The black suits and the red suits are ranked differently as follows:**

➤ **Black: K Q J 7 6 5 4 3 2 A**

➤ **Red: K Q J A 2 3 4 5 6 7**

❖ **Game contracts – There is a trump suit.**

➤ **The black aces are permanent trumps, independent of which suit otherwise is trumps.**

▪ **Ace of Spades - called *spadille* (abbreviated S)**

▪ **Ace of Clubs - called *basta* (abbreviated B)**

➤ **The trump suit has the following ranking**

➤ **Black: S 2 B K Q J 7 6 5 4 3 (11 cards in all)**

➤ **Red: S 7 B A K Q J 2 3 4 5 6 (12 cards in all)**

## **Terms**

- ❖ **Spadille** – the Ace of Spades and is always the highest trump
- ❖ **Basta** – the Ace of Clubs and is always the third highest trump
- ❖ **Manille** - The second highest trump (abbreviated M) and is the card that would have been the lowest ranking card in that suit if it had not been chosen as trumps (black 2 or red 7)
- ❖ **Ponto** – the Ace in a red trump suit (abbreviated P) and is the fourth highest trump
- ❖ **Matadors** - The collective term used for the highest three trumps:
  - *spadille*
  - *Manille*
  - *basta*
- ❖ **Backhand** - the dealer
- ❖ **Middlehand** - the player to the dealer's left
- ❖ **Forehand** - the player to the dealer's right
- ❖ **Talon** – the remaining 13 cards left over after the initial deal
- ❖ **Declarer** – the player who wins the bid of the auction

## **Dealing**

**The dealer is chosen at random. The deal passes to the right after each play. The dealer shuffles and the middlehand cuts. The dealer deals 9 cards to each play in groups of 3. The deal goes counter clockwise to the right. The remaining 13 cards are set aside face down and are called the talon.**

## **Auction**

**After the deal, the auction begins.**

### **❖ Order of Bids**

- **The first half of the auction takes place only between the forehand and the middlehand with the forehand going first.**
- **Each continues in turn until both have called and at least one has passed**
- **The backhand (dealer) enters the auction, which continues with the 3 players taking turns until the entire auction is settled**
- **The player opposite to the dealer doesn't bid**

### **❖ Bid, Self, or Pass**

- **Pass – the player drops out of the bid and cannot bid again**
- **Bid – the player makes any bid that outranks any previous bid made – see Types of Bids**
- **Self - A player may equal a bid previously made in the auction by a player who is after him in rotation**

### **❖ The auction ends when two players have passed**

- ❖ **If all three players simply passed, the hand is a wash-out, no play is made, and the turn to deal proceeds to forehand.**

## **Types of Bids**

- ❖ **Simple Game – A Game Contract.** The Declarer names the trump suit. First declarer, then the defenders exchange cards with the talon.
- ❖ **Spade Game – A Game Contract.** Similar to Simple Game except spades are trump.
- ❖ **Tourné - A Game Contract.** The top card of the talon is turned up and determines the trump suit (for this purpose, *spadille* and *basta* signify spades and clubs, respectively). When declarer exchanges with the talon, he gets the faced card as his first card.
- ❖ **Simple Nolo – A nolo Contract.** No trump. Declarer (only) exchanges with the talon.
- ❖ **Grand Tourné - A Game Contract.** The top card of the talon is turned up and determines the trump suit like tourné, but the bidder must have been dealt the *spadille* and the *basta*. The custom is for the bidder to show the two cards as he bids.
- ❖ **Solo - A Game Contract.** Declarer names the trump suit and plays his hand as dealt; the defenders exchange cards with the talon.
- ❖ **Pure Nolo - A nolo Contract.** It ranks equal to Spade Solo - Neither declarer nor the defenders exchange cards.
- ❖ **Spade Solo - A Game Contract.** It is like Solo, with spades as trumps.  
The first of these two bids made in an auction outranks the other.
- ❖ **Nolo Ouvert - A nolo Contract.** Like Pure Nolo, but when declarer plays his first card, he also faces his hand for both defenders to see. He continues to play his own cards at his turn.

## **Order of Precedence of Bids:**

**These are ranked lowest to highest for precedence during the auction.**

- 1) Simple Game**
- 2) Spade Game**
- 3) Tourné**
- 4) Simple Nolo**
- 5) Grand Tourné**
- 6) Solo Pure Nolo**
- 7) Spade Solo**
- 8) Nolo Ouvert**

## **Contract**

**The winning bid (final bid) becomes the contract and the player who made that bid becomes the declarer, and plays alone against the other two players (defenders) in partnership.**

- ❖ Game contract - The objective is to take more tricks than either defender**
- ❖ Nolo contract – The objective is not to take any tricks at all**

**As a special rule, a player who has won the auction for a bid of Simple Game may define a contract of Spade Game, Tourné, or Simple Nolo at this time. Also, it is usually tolerated that a declarer who won a Solo Contract defines his contract as Spade Solo.**

## **Exchanging Cards with the Talon**

**Declarer has the right to exchange cards with the talon when playing low level contracts (including Grand Tourné). The defenders are allowed to exchange cards against game contracts, but not against nolo contracts.**

**Declarer always exchanges first (if the contract allows it), then each of the defenders exchanges, in rotation.**

**At his turn, a player may exchange as many of the cards in his hand as he wishes, from none at all up to the number of (remaining) cards in the talon. The player first discards (face down) all the cards he wishes to exchange; then he picks up an equal number of replacement cards in order from the top of the talon, so that he again has nine cards. It is a principle of the game that each player remains responsible for the correct procedure. A player who fouls up the exchange procedure is deemed to have lost the contract and pays accordingly; a defender also pays what the other defender owes declarer.**

**Any cards from the talon that are not used for exchange are left face down for the remainder of the deal.**

## **Playing the trick**

**The forehand always leads the first card regardless of the declarer. The cards are played moving in a counter-clockwise motion. Players must follow suit if they can, playing any card they wish from the suit led. A player with no card of the suit led may play any card, including a trump.**

**In game contracts, the *spadille* and *basta* belong to the trump suit, not to the suits marked on them. Additionally, the obligation to follow suit does not apply fully to the matadors (the *spadille*, *manille* and *basta*). When a trump is led, the holder of a matador need not play it, unless a higher matador was led to the trick, and he has no other trumps. It follows that *spadille* can never be forced out.**

## **Taking the Trick**

**Like most trick playing games, the trick is won by the highest card of the suit led, unless it contains a trump, in which case the highest trump wins it. The winner of a trick leads to the next card.**

**In game contracts, each player keeps track of the tricks he has won; in nolo contracts, the defenders keep track of declarer's tricks and no one keeps track of the defenders' tricks.**

### **Game Contract Outcomes:**

- ❖ **Win** - Declarer takes more tricks than either opponent. This happens as soon as declarer has five tricks, or if the tricks are divided 4 to the dealer and 3 and 2 to the other two players.
- ❖ **Bête** - Declarer takes exactly as many tricks as the defender with most tricks. This happens when the dealer takes 4 tricks, one of the other players takes 4 tricks and the third player takes 1 trick, or everyone takes 3 tricks.
- ❖ **Kodille** - The declarer has fewer tricks than one or both of the defenders.
- ❖ **Tout** - Declarer takes all nine tricks. Declarer must announce his intention to take all tricks at the latest as he wins the fifth trick. Leading to the sixth trick is always understood as a try for tout.

### **Nolo Contract outcomes:**

- ❖ **Win** - Declarer takes no tricks.
- ❖ **Bête** - Declarer takes one trick.
- ❖ **Kodille** - Declarer takes two or more tricks. For Pure Nolo and Nolo Ouvert, play ends when declarer takes his second trick. For Simple Nolo, however, any subsequent tricks also count.

## **Scoring**

**After the fate of each contract is known, payment is made.**

- ❖ **Win - Declarer receives a number of chips from each of the other players, depending on the contract. The number of chips is 1 for simple games (including tourné), 2 for Nolo, Grand Tourné, and Solo, 3 for Pure Nolo and Spade Solo, and 5 for Nolo Ouvert.**
- ❖ **Bête - Declarer pays the appropriate number of chips to each of the other players. The rate for each contract is exactly as for winning.**
- ❖ **Kodille - Declarer pays the other players as for a bête, plus an additional penalty. The extra penalty is 1 chip for low contracts, 2 for Pure Nolo and Spade Solo, and 3 for Nolo Ouvert. For Simple Nolo, the penalty is 1 extra chip for each trick in excess of one won by declarer (for example if the declarer in a Simple Nolo takes 4 tricks he pays 5 (2+3) to each defender).**
- ❖ **Tout - If declarer wins an announced Tout, he receives one additional chip from each of the other players. If fails to win an announced Tout, he pays a chip to each of the other players, but he still receives payment for winning the game.**

## **Abandoning the Hand after the Exchange**

**In game contracts (other than Solo and Spade Solo), declarer has the right to abandon the hand provided that he has not yet played to the first trick. He does this by paying for bête and facing his hand. This option is, of course, exercised when declarer's exchange was so disappointing that the risk of kodille outweighs the chances of winning.**