

Bizon

Complete guide

Table of Contents

Historical background.....	1
Rules.....	2
1) Basics.....	2
2) The dealing.....	2
3) First round of bidding: eating or not eating?.....	2
4) Second round of bidding: freely choosing the trump.....	4
5) If anyone eats the Bizon Grass during the first round of bidding.....	4
6) If anyone eats the Bizon Grass during the second round of bidding.....	4
7) The actual game starts.....	5
8) The endgame.....	8
9) A few more stuff before you go.....	9

Historical background

First of all, Bizon is not a bison. A bison is an animal. Bizon is a card game. Very different.

As a matter of fact, Bizon is a popular Belgian card game. Well that is to say three Belgian friends designed it together somewhere in Europe, but they don't really remember in which country, so it's Belgian, as they are. Lawyers call this principle *Ius Sanguinis* and aside from the fact that latin sounds badass, it really is quite convenient when you can't remember where your kid was born but you do remember which government you're the propriety of. Also, full disclosure, this "they" includes me, but I'm feeling important writing about us using the third person.

I also had a couple of my other friends, not necessarily from Belgium, play it, and they generally liked it, so that's it for the popular part.

This all makes Bizon a lot like the Holy Roman Empire, except it is everything it claims to be. It most definitely is a card game, in any case.

As we were traveling through Europe by bike, my two buddies and myself, we didn't have any good card game available to play during the evenings spent camping, as in our opinion most good card games are designed for four players. That's how Bizon came to be.

It takes its roots in a couple of other trick-taking card games, such as Couillon, and Belote, so if you know how to play these games, learning Bizon will be very easy for you. The main difference is that we adapted the rules to make it actually enjoyable for three people to play. There are other by-products of these card games that don't need four players, and actually offer more freedom regarding the number of players, but none of them met our standards, and besides, Bizon can only be played with three players, so no freedom here.

To be fair, *Belote de comptoir*, a by-product of the traditional Belote, offers a lot of freedom regarding the number of players and is also rather enjoyable to play, but we had yet to discover it at the time. If you've never heard about it, I recommend having a go at it. There should exist online versions somewhere on the Internet.

Rules

1) Basics

Bizon is a trick-taking game, much like Couillon, Belote, Whist and many others, though it is a lot more simplified than Whist, for instance.

It is played with three players. In this computerized version you'll play against two AI's whose names are respectively Goat and Sheep. Those are their names. They aren't actual sheep and goats. They're AI's. Not animals. Pets aren't allowed in this game.

Bizon is played with a deck of 24 cards, ranging from the 9 to the ace, with the ace being the strongest, followed by the king, etc, all the way down to the 9, the weakest card. It is played with all four traditional suits: hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades. If you got yourself a deck with acorns, bells, swords or morning stars, there is nothing we can do for you except hope you have a bit of creativity. You won't need any creativity for this computerized version, though, because all suits are the above mentioned.

The trump suit is a suit that is chosen at the start of each game and whose strength is above all other cards from all other suits. This means that a 9 from the trump suit will always be stronger than an ace from any other suit.

2) The dealing

The dealer deals either three cards to each player and then two, or two cards and then three so that each player has five cards in total in his hand at the end of the dealing. He then deals one more card, from the bottom of the deck, this time, and puts it face up on the table, for everyone to see. This last card will be known as the Bizon Grass, and each of the three players will have the choice to include it in their own hand, one after another, under certain conditions. This move is called "eating the Bizon Grass", and will bear consequences for the rest of that game depending on how and when it is done.

It is forbidden, at any time during the game, to reveal your hand, in whole or in part, and it is equally forbidden to talk about what you assume is in the other players hands. In short: it is forbidden to talk about anything that is not disclosed for everyone to see at any time. The only exception to this rule is about the latest trick, which we'll come back to later, and which, although generally put face down as soon as it's been earned, can be disclosed and talked about publicly on simple demand.

3) First round of bidding: eating or not eating?

Here is what a Bizon table looks like right after the first dealing round :



As you can see you are at the bottom of the screen.

The traditional turn order goes clockwise, so Goat will always play immediately after you, and then Sheep.

In this computerized version, the dealer has grey token with a yellow D next to his name, so that it is easy to check who the dealer is at any time during the game. The player to the left of the dealer speaks first. He can choose to either eat the Bizon Grass or to pass. The name of the player whose turn it is to play switches from white to yellow at the start of his turn, and then back to white once it has played, so that it can be easily told whose turn it is to play at any time.

When it becomes your turn to speak, that is, after all the previous players have passed (or as soon as the game starts if you're located directly to the left of the dealer), you are given the choice between eating and passing. You can do that by either clicking one of the boxes at the bottom right of the screen, or by directly clicking the deck (passing) or the Bizon Grass, i.e. the card next to the deck (accepting it inside your hand).

Two scenarios can happen depending on your decision:

- If you take the card, jump to (5) to know what happens next.
- If you choose to pass, the next player gets to speak (maybe for the second time). If he hasn't spoken yet, he's faced with the same choice you were faced with just a second ago. If he's already spoken once, he's faced with a slightly different choice that will be explained in (4).

4) Second round of bidding: freely choosing the trump

The screenshot shows a card game interface. On the left, there are three players: Goat, Sheep, and You. Goat has a stack of four red patterned cards. Sheep has a stack of four red patterned cards. You has a hand of five cards: Queen of Spades, Ace of Spades, 9 of Hearts, Jack of Spades, and King of Spades. In the center, there is a stack of red patterned cards and a 10 of Clubs card. On the right, there is a scoresheet, a latest trick section, and a communication and interaction section with buttons for Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs, Spades, and Pass.

Scoresheet									
You	->								
0 SP									
Goat	->								
0 SP									
Sheep	->								
0 SP									

Latest trick

Communication and interaction

You can freely choose the trump suit:

If all three players have passed once, the first player who spoke gets to speak again, but this time he can freely choose the trump suit, with the exception of the Bizon Grass's suit, now rendered unavailable (if you click on the greyed out box, nothing will happen).

- If anyone chooses a suit here, jump to (6).
- If everyone passes, the cards are all taken back, the deck is shuffled, and the player to the left of this game's dealer becomes the next dealer. This game then ends and a new one starts. Also, everyone gets 0 SP in the top right records, because the game did happen, but no one won nor lost. See (8) for more details about these SP.

5) If anyone eats the Bizon Grass during the first round of bidding

If anyone eats the Bizon Grass during the first round, two more cards are given to him from the deck, and three more to each of the other two players, following the usual clockwise order starting from the player to the left of the dealer. Now that the 24 cards of the deck are all dealt and everyone has eight cards in their hand, the actual game can start.

Anyone eating the Bizon Grass at this point will make its suit the trump suit. On the above picture, with the 10 of clubs, the trump suit will be clubs.

From here, jump to (7).

6) If anyone eats the Bizon Grass during the second round of bidding

If anyone eats the Bizon Grass during the second round, two more cards are given to him from the deck, and three more to each of the other two players, following the usual clockwise order

starting from the player to the left of the dealer. Now that the 24 cards of the deck are all dealt and everyone has eight cards in their hand, the actual game can start.

Now this bit was exactly the same as in (5), right? Well the only difference is with the trump suit. As the person chose it freely, it doesn't have anything to do with the Bizon Grass in this case, and instead is whatever they chose.

From here, jump to (7).

7) The actual game starts

Now the fun starts. The player who ate the Bizon Grass and chose the trump suit will now be the Bizon for this game. This means that he's trying to win, and that the other two have to try to make him lose. The other two will play as a team, and will be known as the Otters, but their tricks will be accounted for separately (that is to say that each player's tricks are his own and cannot be mixed with his ally's).

Because both Otters' tricks are individually owned, each of them had better try and assess the strength of his hand at the beginning of each game and decide whether he wants to try and get all the tricks he can, or if he's going to give as many points as possible to his ally because he thinks he has a higher probability to win against the Bizon than he himself does.

Teamwork and strategy are of the utmost importance between the two Otters in order for them to beat the Bizon, but remember: no one can talk about hidden information such as your own hand or any other players'. You have to make your own opinion about what's best to do without talking.

The screenshot shows a card game interface with the following elements:

- Goat:** A vertical stack of 8 red patterned cards.
- Sheep:** A horizontal row of 8 red patterned cards.
- Community Cards:** A 9 of clubs, a 10 of spades, and an Ace of spades.
- You:** A horizontal row of 8 cards: 9 of spades, Jack of spades, Queen of spades, 9 of hearts, Jack of hearts, 10 of clubs, and King of clubs.
- Scoresheet:** A table with columns for player names and scores.
- Latest trick:** A text box for recording the current trick.
- Communication and interaction:** A text box containing game information.

Scoresheet							
You	->						
0 SP							
Goat	->						
0 SP							
Sheep	->						
0 SP							

Latest trick

Communication and interaction

The trump suit is spades
 The Bizon Grass is the 10 of clubs
 You are the Bizon

In case you have forgotten which card was the Bizon Grass, it is now written in the communication box at the bottom right of the screen. Such is other relevant information, such as the identity of the Bizon, and the trump suit they chose.

The first player to actually play is the one to the left of the dealer, even if he isn't the Bizon. He is free to play any card he wants, which is a powerful advantage that is going to be detailed below.

Whatever card they choose, the other two will have to follow suit. That is, they have to play the same suit. If they don't have that suit in their hand, then they're free to play any card they want.

So, to summarize, you have three possibilities here:

- If you start this hand, you are free to play any card you want.
- If one or more cards are already on the table you have to follow suit with the first one.
- If one or more cards are already on the table and you can't follow suit, you are free to play any card you want.

The act of putting a trump on the table if the first suit wasn't the trump is called "cutting".

Once everyone has played a card and there are three cards on the table, the strongest wins and these three cards become a trick.

Here is how to know which card is the strongest:

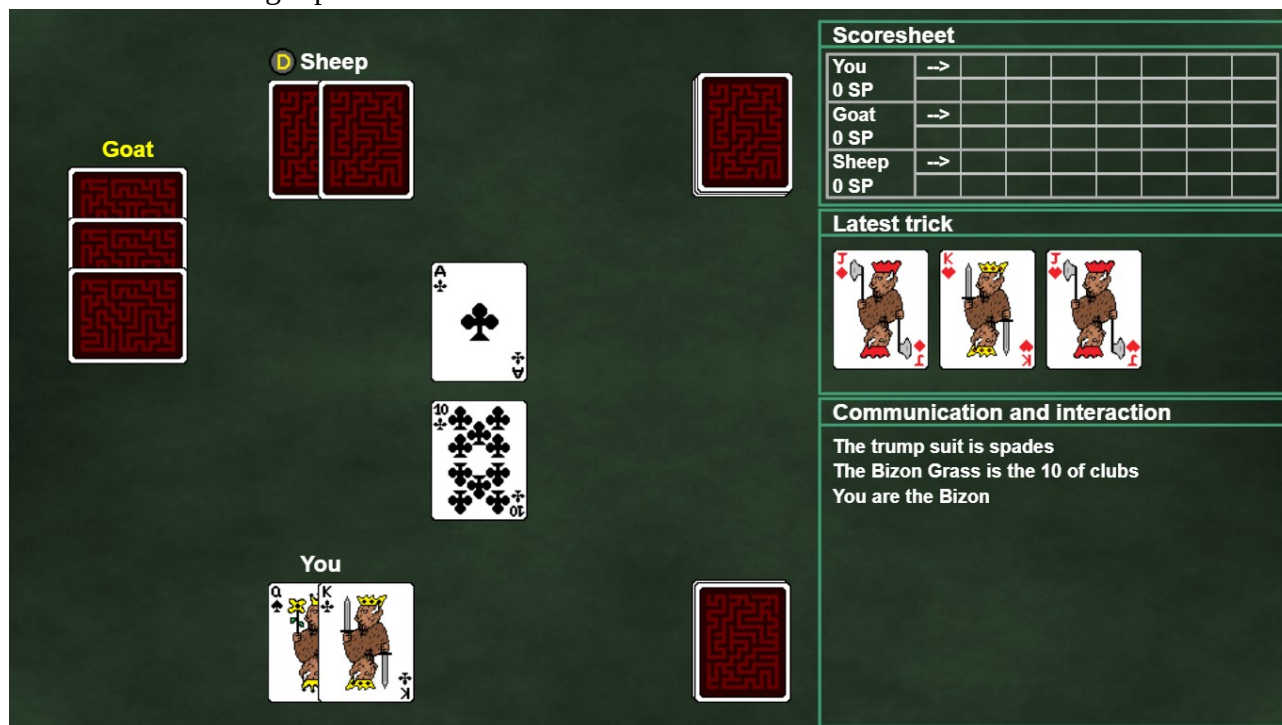
- Any card from the trump suit will always win over all other suits, regardless of its rank and the other cards' ranks.
- Any card neither from the trump suit nor the first suit that was put on the table loses over all other suits and can be ignored all in all for the moment. It can never win the trick under any case but it will be worth points just like any other card later.
- If there is more than one trump card on the table, or at least one player followed suit, we need to look at the ranks to decide the winner of this trick. Here is the order from strongest to weakest:

- * Ace
- * King
- * Queen
- * Jack
- * 10
- * 9

The player who put the winning card gets the trick. All tricks are out of the game and belong to their respective winner but, being out of the game, aren't added to their hand. Instead they're put face down, somewhere next to their owner. In this computerized version, your tricks will appear on the right of your hand, while Sheep's tricks will appear on the right of his, and Goat's tricks will appear under his.

Because players are only allowed to cut when then can't follow suit, it can be a good strategy to try and get rid of the suits where you have few cards early on, so that you are allowed to cut if an occasion arises.

The latest trick can be freely looked at at any time by everyone, such as on the picture below, where Goat won the latest trick (card face down in the bottom left corner) and its content is still visible on the right part of the screen:



In this computerized version, for simplicity reasons, the latest trick is always visible. In real life, though, all tricks are generally always kept face down, and any player can ask at any time to have a glance at the latest one, but that's it: they need to ask.

8) The endgame

There are two point systems in Bizon: the Game Points (GP), and the Set Points (SP).

After exactly eight rounds, when everyone has played all their cards and all tricks have been given to their winner, it is time to count the GP. For this purpose, all tricks will be shown face up and GP will be counted as such, regardless of their suit or the way they were played:

- * Ace → 4 GP
- * King → 3 GP
- * Queen → 2 GP
- * Jack → 1 GP
- * 10 → 0 GP
- * 9 → 0 GP

In this computerized version the computer counts the GP automatically but you can always double-check them by looking at the tricks that are now fully available for being looked at.

There should always be 40 GP in total ($4*4+4*3+4*2+4*1=40$), and the player with the most GP wins. All GP are, again, accounted for separately for each player. Which means that the two Otters fighting against the Bizon are forbidden to mix their tricks together.

A second system of points the SP, then comes into play, depending on whether the Bizon won or lost:

- If the Bizon won, he gets +3 SP, and the Otters -0.
- If the Bizon won with 40 GP, he gets +10 SP.
- If the Bizon lost, he gets -5 SP, and the Otters +3.
- If the Bizon lost without getting any GP, even if he got one or more tricks, he gets -10 SP and the Otters +10.
- If the winners are tied and the Bizon is one of them, everyone gets +1 SP, including the third player, even if he didn't get any GP. If the Bizon isn't one of them, it means that he lost, so the Bizon losing case applies.
- If everyone passed twice during the trump suit discussions everyone gets 0 SP for the record.

In short:

	Bizon	Otters
The Bizon won	+3	-0
The Bizon won with 40 GP	+10	-0
The Bizon lost	-5	+3
The Bizon lost with 0 GP	-10	+10
The Bizon wins in a tie	+1	+1
Everyone passed	+0	+0

As is made clear with this table, the Otters can never lose SP. This is due to the fact that they never chose to be Otters, but became so due to the Bizon's decision to be the Bizon. Only the Bizon can lose SP in case of a bad call, because responsibility for his actions falls upon him directly.

Goat

D Sheep

You

Scoresheet

You	->	1							
1 SP									
Goat	->	1							
1 SP									
Sheep	->	1							
1 SP									

Latest trick

Communication and interaction

You have 20 GP
 Goat has 0 GP
 Sheep has 20 GP
 It's a tie

Keep playing

These SP are shown for posterity in the top right corner's scoresheet, and after 15 games have been played, an overall winner is decided based on the total of these SP, located below each player's name.

On the other hand, the GP are forgotten after each game, almost as soon as they are calculated, because their use is only to find a game winner to award with SP. They aren't remembered by the system like the SP are.

9) A few more stuff before you go

During trick-taking games, dealers usually take care not to shuffle the deck too much, so as to keep the tricks relatively in order. This is so that there is more coherence in every players' hands.

That's all folks! What more did you expect in a game of Bizon? A happy ending?