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Game Play

The object of 4 Towers is to place all cards in order onto their home stacks. The game is won when all cards have been placed in their home stacks (sorted by suit), in rank order from ace to king.

The cards are initially dealt into 10 stacks of 5 cards each, with two cards left over. These two cards are placed into two of the four 'Towers,' which are found above the playing field, between the home stacks.

Any card which is uncovered may be moved, but it may be placed only on the card of the next highest rank in the same suit. In other words, the three of diamonds may be placed only on the four of diamonds. There are two exceptions to this rule: kings may be placed only on an empty space, and any single card may go onto an empty Tower. However, once a card is placed into a Tower, it must be replaced in the playing field only by the normal rules! This means that if the three of diamonds is moved into a Tower, it may be replaced on the playing field only upon the four of diamonds!!

Unlike many other solitaire games, there is no advantage to leaving cards on the playing field which may be placed onto their home stacks. Therefore, the game itself will automatically move any card to the appropriate home which if the move is legal.

Cards are moved by placing the cursor within the card face and clicking with the left mouse button. While holding down the button, drag the card to its desired location. When it is approximately centered over the desired location, release the left button. If the move is a legal one, the card will be dropped into place. If the move is not legal, it will be replaced on its original spot.

Several cards may be moved at once. To do so, click on the exposed area of a 'deeper' card; all cards above it will move with it as a group. However, these cards must all be of the same suit, they must be in sequential order, and the 'deepest' card must be the highest rank for any movement on the playing field to be legal. There is one more constraint. This method of moving cards is 'shorthand' for moving all but the bottommost card into empty Towers, moving the bottommost card to its legal resting spot, and then removing the other cards from the Towers in reverse numerical order. Because of this, you may only move a stack has no more than 1 more card than the number of empty Towers! The practical implication of this is that you may never move a stack of more than 5 cards! Beware of 'burying' cards you want beneath too deep a stack!!

To start a new game, choose 'New' from the Game menu choice.

4 Towers records all of your moves (up to 1000) during a game. You may back up through your moves when you get stuck by choosing 'Undo' from the 'Game' menu choice (or by pressing the 'Delete' key). If you have backed up, you may step forward through the same moves by choosing 'Redo' from the 'Game' menu (or by pressing the

'Insert' key). If you back up and then make a new move, the moves you had saved beyond (i.e. 'forward') your current position will be lost.

If you wish, you may restart a game from the beginning by choosing 'Restart' from the 'Game' menu. After a game has been restarted, you may 'Redo' your moves up to the last saved position.

Options

There are several options available to the user. They are all selected (or deselected) by choosing an item from the "options" menu. Active options have a check next to the corresponding word in the menu

Sound:

If selected, 4 Towers will make sounds when the player picks up a card, correctly places it, wins a game, and in several other places. If this option is not selected, 4 Towers will run completely silently.

Slide Cards:

If selected, 4 Towers will 'slide' cards from the playing field to the home positions. This allows the player to follow automatic moves as they occur. If not selected, 4 Towers will cause cards to 'jump' to the home row. This will go much faster, but can be rather abrupt!

Colored Background:

Normally 4 Towers runs with a white background. If desired, selecting this option will choose a light blue background instead. Users with 16-color displays will see a slightly different color.

Scores:

Selecting this 'option' will bring up the 4 Towers score history, which tracks your wins and losses over time.

Reset Scores:

Selecting this option will allow you to zero out your score history, starting from 0. You will be asked to confirm this option!

Strategy Tips and Shortcuts

4 Towers is a game that, in principle, always has a solution. Finding that solution is often not easy, though! There are several basic strategy tips that might increase your chances of winning.

Don't build big sequential piles which bury other cards...Remember that you can move a maximum of 5 cards (and then only if you have 4 towers free!), so if you bury any low card under a 6-card pile of the same suit, you might as well start over. Big piles are good, but only when they start 'on the ground.'

Don't try too hard to place cards in the home positions early on. This can often lead to trouble.

It's best to try to keep your towers free. You can always put any cards you want back in the towers, but you can't always move cards from the towers to the playing field! If you try not to move cards to the towers unless you already see how to get them down, you'll do much better.

Explore! You have an 'undo' key, and a 'redo' key...you can use them to figure out how to get out of tight jams. 4 Towers stores up to 1000 moves, which is about 5 times more than you'll ever need!

There is a shortcut which is handy while playing: if you want to move several cards from a pile to the Towers, grab them as if you were picking them up to move them...and move them to a free tower. If enough towers are free to hold them, they will each be placed in a tower!

Registration

4 Towers is not freeware. It's 'shareware.' We at Gradient Computing are aware that most users will never pay for it. This bugs the hell out of us, especially when we put our time and effort into creating it. However, we also believe that the reason most people don't register their shareware is that most of it is either poorly crafted or overly expensive. We don't like that, either.

Our solution is to try to create well-crafted shareware which is inexpensive to register. We also try to offer incentives for registering! In this case, we offer larger card faces for users with larger screens (the cards designed for 1024x768 screens are a "must have" if your hardware supports the resolution!), scoring, and a few other nick-nacks that make playing the game a little more fun. All registered users will receive the updated 4 Towers code.

The cost of registration is only \$5, plus \$3 for shipping and media costs if you want 4 Towers on a diskette.

We also offer a larger package which includes the updated 4 Towers games and at least 4 other solitaire games for Windows which we have written. We also write more games all the time, so if we have written more games by the time you register, we'll include them at no extra charge! The cost for the "Premium Solitaire" package is just \$20 (no shipping or media charges), which is pretty cheap these days. Of course, all of the games will have the same quality and playability which was designed into 4 Towers.

We also invite you to suggest new card games for us to write. If we decide to write one which you describe, we'll ship it to you for free. Of course, we buy gaming magazines and books as well, so don't be surprised if we already know how to play your favorite Solitaire game! We are on the look-out for new games, though!

Anyway, we invite you to register your copy of 4 Towers, or to order the premium package for even more fun. If you want to do so, send us a letter with your name and address, plus your check or money order made out to Gradient Computing, to
Gradient Computing
P.O. Box 4549
Austin, TX 78765-4549

If you want us to send you your registered copy of 4 Towers over the net in order to save shipping costs, be sure to send valid e-mail address!

Thanks for supporting small companies like ours by registering your copy of 4 Towers!

Gradient Computing

As mentioned in the section on registering 4 Towers, we at Gradient Computing believe that most shareware is dramatically overpriced and/or under-developed. We'd like to sell you something different: shareware which is well written and inexpensive enough that you don't really mind registering it...hence our \$5 registration fee for 4 Towers!

We also believe that modern computing will revolve around more than just code; it will revolve around resources. As such, we have spent a fair amount of time developing the resources which went into 4 Towers...and those resources are for sale, as well! That includes the card bitmaps which are used by 4 Towers and our other games, the sounds which they make, and even the engine which drives the games. We invite you to write us about using these resources in your own programs!

Gradient is a small group of programmers interested in the possibilities that come from sharing efforts and resources. We write as individuals, but design, discuss, test, and market as a group. If you'd like to learn more, or if you'd like to write a program to sell under our name, drop us a line. We're open to discussion!

If you'd like to contact Gradient electronically, send a note to Dave Read at read@utpapa.ph.utexas.edu

