

TAROCK CARD GAME

TAROCCO No. 500

Deck of 54 Playing Cards

INSTRUCTIONS

By John McLeod

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Game rules written and translated by John McLeod.

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INTRODUCTION

The game known as Tarock, Tarot, or Tarocchi has been popular in Europe for over five hundred years, and during that time many different varieties of this game have evolved. They are all played with a special type of deck that includes a dedicated series of trump cards in addition to the usual four suits (Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs, and Spades). Early forms of the game used a deck of seventy-eight cards (four suits of fourteen cards plus twenty-two special cards), and this large deck is still in use in some countries—it has also been adapted for use in fortune telling. Meanwhile, in Central Europe the game of Tarock was streamlined in the early nineteenth century by reducing the deck to fifty-four cards: twenty-two trumps and four suits of eight cards.

The games with this shorter deck were found to be faster and more suited to modern card-playing tastes. Bidding and bonuses were added, transforming Tarock into one of the more entertaining, varied, and skillful card games. The fifty-four-card Tarock deck has become standard throughout the countries of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, and games using it are played in Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Slovenia.

The introduction to Tarock in this booklet is based on the version now played in Slovenia.

For the benefit of new players, we have made some simplifications, which should not affect your enjoyment of the game. You are recommended first to try the **basic game** for three or four players, which will introduce you to the fundamental rules of play and scoring. This basic game is satisfying in itself, but players looking for greater variety and extra opportunities for skill may progressively introduce the **advanced rules**. The full game, with all the advanced rules, is essentially equivalent to modern Slovenian Tarock, but for those who are looking for complete authenticity, some further minor differences are described in the section “The Slovenian Game,” near the end of the booklet.

THE CARDS

The Tarock deck contains fifty-four cards. They are slightly larger than Bridge or Poker cards and do not have the familiar corner indices indicating suit and rank. Despite this, the cards are surprisingly practical and easy to use once you are familiar with the designs. Before playing for the first time you are recommended to lay out all the cards and make sure you can identify them.

Thirty-two cards belong to the familiar suits Hearts, Diamonds, Clubs, and Spades. Each suit has four picture or court cards and four numeral or pip cards.

The highest card of each suit is the **King**. All four Kings have crowns and moustaches (the King of Spades wears his crown on top of a turban).

The second card in each suit is the **Queen**. The Queens are the only female picture cards in the suits and the only ones that do not wear hats.

The third card in each suit is the **Cavalier** (or Knight), who rides a horse.

The fourth and lowest picture card is the **Jack** (or Valet), who has a moustache, but no horse or crown. Instead he wears a hat, sometimes with feathers.

Below the picture cards come the pip cards: 10, 9, 8, and 7 in the black suits, and 1, 2, 3, and 4 in the red suits. They are easily identified by the number of suit pips on each card.

The remaining twenty-two cards are trumps, also known as **Tarocks**. Twenty-one of them are identified by large Roman numerals, indicating their ranking order. The lowest trump is the **I**, which is known as the **Pagat**; then in ascending order come the **II**, **III**, **IIII**, **V**, **VI**, **VII**, **VIII**, **IX**, **X**, **XI**, **XII**, **XIII**, **XIV**, **XV**, **XVI**, **XVII**, **XVIII**, **XIX**, **XX**, and **XXI**. Although the **XXI** is the highest numbered trump card it is only the second highest trump. The highest trump of all is the card that looks rather like a Joker, the only card in the deck with no suit-mark and no number. In this game it functions exactly as though it were the trump **XXII**. It is

known as the **Skis** (pronounced “skeeze”, like the plural of “ski”).

Players who are unused to Tarock cards sometimes wonder how they will be able to see what cards they have in their hand, without the help of corner indices. In practice, after playing the game a few times, you will find that this is not a problem. When you are first dealt your cards, you sort them into suits and trumps, arranging the trumps and the cards in each suit in ranking order. Having done this you have a fair idea what cards you hold and it is not actually necessary to be able to see all of them all the time. You will probably want to keep your cards spread just enough to see which are suit cards and which are trumps; when you want to inspect some of your cards more closely, you can temporarily fan that part of your hand more widely.

In this booklet we will use the abbreviations **K** for King, **Q** for Queen, **C** for Cavalier, **J** for Jack, and **S** for Skis; Arabic numbers **9, 3, 7**, etc. denote pip cards of a suit; Roman numbers **XX, XIV, IX, III**, etc. denote trumps.

OUTLINE OF THE GAME

Tarock is a game of tricks and trumps with bidding—somewhat like Bridge, Pinochle, or Spades. In each hand, the players are divided into two teams, but the partnerships vary from hand to hand. In the three-player game the high bidder (the declarer) plays alone and the

other two players form a team. In the four-player game the declarer usually has a partner, and these two play against the other two players. The cards are played out in tricks, the object being to win tricks containing valuable cards, namely the picture cards in the suits (especially the Kings), the highest two trumps (Skis and XXI) and the lowest trump (the I or Pagat). There is also the opportunity to win various bonuses for your team by particular feats, such as winning the last trick with the Pagat.

VALUES OF CARDS

At the end of the play, the tricks taken by your side are combined into one pile, and you always score **one card point for every three cards that you have**. In addition to this, certain individual cards are worth extra points:

Skis ("trump XXII")4 card points
Trump XXI4 card points
Pagat (trump I)4 card points
Each King4 card points
Each Queen3 card points
Each Cavalier2 card points
Each Jack1 card point

That's a total of fifty-two card points for individual cards. The deck has fifty-four cards,

which is 18×3 , so if you count the whole deck, its total value is $52 + 18 = 70$ card points.

Examples:

♠K + ♥2 + XIII = 5 card points (1 card point for the three cards plus 4 for the King)

XX + XIX + XV = 1 card point (three worthless trumps, so just 1 card point for having three cards)

S + XXI + ♦C = 11 card points (4 + 4 + 2 for the individual cards plus one card point for the three cards)

In each hand, the players are divided into two temporary teams, and at the end of the play, the whole deck will be divided into a pile of cards belonging to each team. The declarer's team wins if they have more than half the card points, so they need **at least 36 card points** to win. If the two sides have 35 card points each, the declarer's side loses.

In some hands, depending on the bid and the number of players, you will find that after counting as many points as you can for sets of three cards, each team has one or two cards left over. In such a case, two cards left over are worth one card point (in addition to the value, if any, of the individual cards) and a single card left over is worth just the individual value of the card.

Examples:

♣Q + VII left over = 4 card points (3 for the Queen, 1 for the two cards)

♠9 left over = 0 card points (worthless card, and nothing for just one card)

BASIC GAME FOR THREE PLAYERS

THE DEAL

The first dealer can be chosen by any convenient method. The traditional way is to take two suit cards and one trump from the deck and mix them face down. Each player draws one of the cards and the player drawing the trump deals first. After each hand the turn to deal passes to the left.

The dealer shuffles the cards and offers them to the player to his or her right to cut. The dealer then places the top six cards face down in the center of the table, without disturbing their order. These cards are known as the **talon**. The dealer continues by dealing out the cards in batches of eight, so that after two rounds each player will have sixteen cards. The players pick up their cards and sort them into suits and trumps.

THE AUCTION

Each hand begins with some bidding. The highest bidder, known as the **declarer**, plays alone against the other two players in partnership.

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