



PENGUIN BOOKS

The Penguin Book of Card Games

A former language-teacher and technical journalist, David Parlett began freelancing in 1975 as a games inventor and author of books on games, a field in which he has built up an impressive international reputation. He is an accredited consultant on gaming terminology to the Oxford English Dictionary and regularly advises on the staging of card games in films and television productions. His many books include The Oxford History of Board Games, The Oxford History of Card Games, The Penguin Book of Word Games, The Penguin Book of Card Games and the The Penguin Book of Patience. His board game Hare and Tortoise has been in print since 1974, was the first ever winner of the prestigious German Game of the Year Award in 1979, and has recently appeared in a new edition. His website at <http://www.davpar.com> is a rich source of information about games and other interests. David Parlett is a native of south London, where he still resides with his wife Barbara.

The Penguin Book of
Card Games



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To Dan Glimne...Ace of Swedes

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Preface

This book aims to provide a working description of as many card games as possible that are or have been played in the western world with the traditional four-suited pack. It is based on my Penguin Book of Card Games, which first appeared in 1979 and is widely regarded as a standard authority, but which, for several reasons listed below, needs to be revised. For instance:

1. Some standard games played at tournament level, such as Bridge and Skat, have undergone revisions to the official rules published by the appropriate authorities.
2. Popular or 'folk' games that are not subject to official rules (but which account for well over 95 per cent of all card games played) are in a constant state of flux, and it is obviously desirable to keep abreast of developments.
3. Many previously unrecorded games have come to light in the past 30 years – some relatively new, some previously thought to be extinct, and some actually extinct but whose rules have now been recovered.

Two modern developments have boosted the discovery, or recovery, of many more games than might have been thought possible a few years ago.

One is a growing awareness that a society's indoor games are as distinctive of its culture as its arts, cuisine, or social customs, and are worth recording for the light they throw on that community's personality. The exploration of card games has become a particular pursuit of the International Playing-Card Society, founded in the late 1960s originally as a forum for playing-card collectors. Many field researchers are members of the Society, and report their findings in its bi-monthly Journal, now known as *The Playing-Card*.

Another has been a growth in the popularity of card-play itself, and that, paradoxically, through the very medium which might have

been expected to have led to its decline – namely, computers. A quick trawl though the murky water of the Internet will soon throw up opportunities to indulge in live play with physically remote opponents, news of clubs and tournaments devoted to an increasing variety of games, newsgroups seeking information as to the availability of cards themselves or rules of obscure games, and websites devoted to a miscellany of cardophilic enthusiasms.

The most important of these is the Pagat website, <<http://www.pagat.com>>, conducted by John McLeod, a prominent member of the IPCS and himself a well-travelled field researcher. Its intrinsic authority is constantly enhanced by the contributions of interested and knowledgeable players from all over the world, making of it a living, growing, interactive encyclopedia of the cybersphere. This links directly to the home page of the Society via <www.netlink.co.uk/users/pagat/ipcs>. Other useful sites include my historic card games pages <<http://www.davpar.com/histocs/>>, and that of Roderick Somerville, <<http://www.playingcardsales.co.uk>>, for the purchase of national, regional and other specialist playing-cards. The various sets of national suit symbols used throughout this book were taken from a font designed by Gyula Szigri which can be downloaded from <<http://www.pagat.com/com/cardstff.html>>. The designer makes no charge for their use beyond the normal courtesy of acknowledgement.

Many thanks are due, and are duly tendered, to John McLeod and Andrew Pennycook, with whom I have shared much information and discussion over the years, and both of whom read various drafts of the text and rescued me from a number of errors. (I regret to record that Andrew Pennycook died in 2006.) Further embarrassments have been saved me by Roger Wells, my eagle-eyed copy editor, with whom I have shared mutually rewarding discussions on matters of grammar and punctuation. My brother Graham has, as usual, been invaluable as a foreign language consultant.

Additional thanks are due to all who have variously sent me

games, answered queries, allowed me to quote from their reports, or checked portions of the text from an expert's point of view, in particular: Bob Abbott, Mike Arnautov, David Bernazzani, Thierry Depaulis, Dan Glimne, Lynn King, Veikko Lahdesmaki, Noel Leaver, David Levy (US), Matthew Macfadyen, Babak Mozaffari, Robert Reid, Pamela Shandel, Elon Shlosberg, Anthony Smith, Gyula Szigri, Butch Thomas, Nick Wedd and Jude Wudarczyk.

Introduction

Cards by nature

No man who has wrestled with a self-adjusting card table can ever be quite the man he once was.

James Thurber

Playing-cards are flat, two-sided gaming pieces with identifying marks on one side and a uniform pattern on the other, and are employed in such a way that only their holders can see their identifying marks. Dominoes and Mah-Jong tiles are similar, and all are ultimately related through a common ancestor traceable back to the China of more than a thousand years ago.

Because of their bipartisan nature – secret from one viewpoint and identifiable from another – cards are used for two types of activity: gambling games of chance, in which (basically) you bet on the identity of a card or cards seen only from the back; and games of varying degrees of skill in which you manipulate them in such a way as to win cards from your opponents, or form them into matched sets, or pursue whatever other objective human ingenuity may devise. The skill factor of any given card game is largely the degree to which it enables you to plan your play by reference to information revealed or inferred about the lie of cards in other players' hands. Bridge is a great game (bv no means the only one)

for the high degree of information that can be acquired before you play a single card, and Eleusis one that bases its whole structure on the acquisition of information.

Everyone knows, even if they do not play, that there are 52 cards in a pack; that they consist of four suits called spades, clubs, hearts and diamonds (♠♣♥♦); that each suit contains numerals 1 to 10, topped by three courtly figures called Jack, Queen, and King; that the '1' is called Ace, and often counts highest of all. Most packs contain one or two additional cards called Jokers. They belong to no suit, are used in relatively few games, and then in various different ways.

Not everybody knows, however, that this particular pack, though universal in extent, is indigenous to only a few countries, including France, Britain and North America, and is native only to France. Its universality is due to two factors. One is inherent, in that it is the simplest in design, therefore the cheapest to produce, and the easiest for newcomers to become acquainted with. The other is cultural, in that it is the pack from which have sprung such internationally favoured games as Whist, Bridge, Poker, Rummy, and Canasta.

Because the pack of international currency coincides with the national pack of France and Britain, and their former colonies, the inhabitants of these countries are generally unaware of any alternatives. In fact, however, other European countries (and their former colonies) still employ packs with different suits, different courts, and different numbers of cards in each suit, and, not unnaturally, prefer them for indigenous games that have never been played with anything else.

Earlier card-game collections published in English describe national or 'foreign' games as if played with standard 'international' playing-cards. In this book they will be described as played with their own cards, but (where practical) accompanied by a translation into their French-suited equivalents in case you cannot find a supplier.

Six basic types of European playing-card systems are shown in

the accompanying table. You don't have to learn them in order to use this book, as all will be explained as and when necessary. But you may find the following notes of interest.

The word spade probably represents the Old Spanish spado, 'sword', while club is a direct translation of basto, implying that Spanish suits were used in England before the French ones were invented (around 1490). The bells of German and Swiss cards are hawk-bells. The situation is complicated by the fact that some German games are played with French-suited cards but of a German design and with German names (♣ = Kreuz, ♠ = Pik, ♥ = Herz, ♦ = Karo, with courts of König, Dame, Bube).

The oldest court cards were all male. Caballo and cavallo mean 'horse', but, as they refer to their riders, are better termed cavaliers. Ober/Over and Unter/Under are taken to mean, respectively, a superior and inferior officer, but originally referred to the position of the suitmark. It has often been pointed out that Latin suits and courts are military, Germanic ones rustic, and Anglo-French ones courtly in nature.



Italian: swords batons cups coins



Spanish: swords clubs cups coins



Swiss: acorns escutcheons flowers bells



German: acorns leaves hearts bells



French: trèfle pique coeur carreau
English: clubs spades hearts diamonds

Above Major European suit systems showing probable lines of evolution from earliest and most complex to latest and simplest.

Below Each system has its own courts (face cards) and range of numerals. Packs often appear in a shortened version (omitted numerals in brackets).

nation	length	courts	numerals
Italian	52, 40	King Cavalier Soldier	(10 9 8) 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Spanish	48, 40	King Cavalier Valet	(9 8 7) 6 5 4 3 2 1
Swiss	48, 36	King Over Under	Banner 9 8 7 6 (5 4 3) 2
German	36, 32	King Ober Unter	10987(6)2
French	52, 32	King Queen Valet	10 9 8 7 (6 5 4 3 2) A
International	52	King Queen Jack	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 A

The numerals are not complete in all traditions. Most French

games are played with 32 cards (formerly 36), Spanish and Italian with 40, sometimes 48, rarely 52. Most Spanish and Italian games omit the Tens, and the Ten is replaced by a Banner in Swiss games. Aces are merely Ones in Spanish and Italian games. The Swiss equivalent of an Ace, although so called, is actually a Deuce, as it bears two suit-signs.

Plan of attack

I have made a heap of all I have found.

Nennius, *Historia Brittonum*

Most of the games are accompanied by a ‘working description’, which means enough of a description to enable you to play the game in its most basic form.

This is not the same as the so-called ‘official rules’ of play. For one thing, such rules include detailed instructions on how cards should be shuffled and cut, what to do if someone deals out of turn or exposes a card while dealing, etc., and there isn’t enough room to be fussy about such niceties. For another, most games are played informally and are not equipped with official rules. Official rules are drawn up for games played at tournament level, and should be regarded as the official rules of the appropriate governing body, not the official rules of the game itself. The vast majority of card games are not book games but folk games. As such, they are played informally, without reference to books, by schools of players who are quite able and willing to make up rules to fit whatever disputes may arise (referring, if necessary, to the local oldest inhabitant as a final arbiter), and to inject new ideas into the game that may, with time, eventually cause it to evolve into something else. The proper

function of a card-game observer and collector lies in describing how games are played rather than in prescribing how they should be played. Far too many card-game books have been perpetrated by writers who, being primarily Bridge-players, imagine that the only true way of playing every other card game is to follow what was written about it in a book whose original text may be a hundred years out of date. (And that's no exaggeration. Nearly all descriptions of Brag published in the twentieth century describe only the nineteenth-century game.)

Since many games are played in different ways by different schools, or even by the same school at different times, I have restricted my descriptions to the most basic form, and have marked additional or alternative items as variations.

In some cases I have given a sample deal and made suggestions as to skilful play, but this is not the primary function of the book, which is designed to be extensive rather than intensive in its coverage. I have preferred to devote space to introductory notes on the historical and ethnic background of the game in question, since, unlike skilful play, this is not something you can pick up for yourself as you go along.

The collection is divided into two dozen chapters, each covering a group of similar or related games. This has necessitated classifying card games according to their various methods of play, which may be introduced and explained as follows.

Trick-taking games

The vast majority of European card games are based on the principle of trick-play. Each in turn plays a card to the table, and whoever plays the best card wins the others. These cards constitute a trick, which the winner places, face down, in a winnings-pile before playing the first card to the next trick. The 'best' card is usually the highest-ranking card of the same suit as the card led – that is, of the first card played to it. Anyone who fails to 'follow suit to the card led' cannot win it, no matter how high a card they play.

Winning a trick is therefore doubly advantageous, since you not only gain material but also have free choice of suit to lead next. If you lead a suit which nobody else can follow because they have none of it left, you will win that trick no matter how low a card you play.

The trick-playing principle can be varied in several ways. The most significant is by the introduction of a so-called trump or 'triumph' suit, superior in power to that of the other three, the non-trump or 'plain' suits. If, now, somebody leads a plain suit of which you have none, you can play a trump instead, and this will beat the highest card of the suit led, no matter how low your trump card is.

Trick-games vary in many different ways, and in this book are arranged as follows.

Plain-trick games Trick-taking games in which the object is to win as many tricks as possible, or at least as many tricks as you bid, or (rarely) exactly the number of tricks you bid.

1. Whist, Bridge, and related partnership games with all cards dealt out. Most are games of great skill.
2. Solo Whist and other games resembling Whist-Bridge but played without fixed partnerships, so everyone finishes with a score of their own.
3. Nap, Euchre and others in which not all cards are dealt out, so that only three or five tricks are played. Many of these are gambling games.
4. Hearts, and relatives, in which the object is to avoid taking tricks – or, at least, to avoid taking tricks containing penalty cards.
5. Piquet, and other classic games in which the aim is both to win tricks and to score for card-combinations.
6. Pitch, Don, All Fours, and other members of the 'High-low-Jack-game' family.
7. A miscellany of point-trick games including Manille, Tressette and Trappola.
8. Skat, Schafkopf and other central European games of the 'Ace

11, Ten 10' family.

9. Marriage games. These are 'Ace 11' games that give an extra score for matching the King and Queen of the same suit, the best-known being Sixty-Six.
10. Bezique, Pinochle, and other 'Ace 11' games in which scores are made not only for marriages but also for the out-of-wedlock combination of a Queen and Jack of different suits.
11. Belote, Jass and other marriage games in which the highest trumps are the Jack and the Nine.
12. An eccentric family of northern European games derived from a medieval monstrosity called Karnoffel.
13. Tarot games, in which trumps are represented by a fifth suit of 21 pictorial cards. Tarots were originally invented as gaming materials, not fortune-telling equipment, and hundreds of games are still played with them in France, Germany, Italy, Austria and other European states.

There is room here only for a small but representative selection.

Non-trick games

Games based on principles other than taking tricks are arranged as follows.

Card-taking games Games in which the aim is to collect or capture cards by methods other than trick-taking.

14. Cassino, Scopa and other so-called Fishing games, in which cards lying face up on the table are captured by matching them with cards played from the hand.

15. A variety of relatively simple capturing games such as Gops, Snap, and Beggar-my-Neighbour, of which some (but by no means all) are usually regarded as children's games.

Adding-up games

16. Games in which a running total is kept of the face-values of cards played to the table. and the aim is to make or avoid making

certain totals. The most sophisticated example, Cribbage, also includes card-combinations.

Shedding games These are games in which the object is to get rid of all your cards as soon as possible.

17. Newmarket, Crazy Eights and others, in which the aim is to be the first to shed all your cards.

18. Durak, Rolling Stone and others, in which it is to avoid being the last player left with cards in hand.

Collecting games Games in which the aim is to collect sets of matched cards ('melds').

19. Rummy games, and others, in which the aim is to be the first to go out by discarding all your cards in matched sets.

20. Rummy games of the Canasta family, in which it is to keep collecting and scoring for matched sets before deciding to go out.

Ordering games

21. Patience games, in which the object is to set the shuffled pack in order. Most of these are solitaires (one-player games) but, as there are enough of them to fill an encyclopedia of their own, this section restricts itself to competitive varieties for two or more players.

Vying games

22. Poker, Brag and other gambling games of skill, in which players vie with one another as to who holds the best card-combination, or is likely to finish with the best when their hands are complete.

Banking games

23. A selection of gambling games, such as Pontoon (Blackjack) and Baccara(t), limited to those that can conveniently be played at home.

Original card games

24. Finally, I have appended a selection of some of my own games. Some of these were first published in *Original Card Games* (1977, no longer available). I have invented others since, and

include the best of these. One of my originals, Ninety-Nine, has become so widely known, being described also in books by other writers and turned into computer software, that I have included it in the main body of this collection.

Excluded from these contents are games played with non-standard cards, whether proprietary cards (such as Rook cards and UnoT) or with traditional cards other than the four-suited pack, such as the Japanese Hanafuda, the Indian Ganjifa, the European Cuckoo, the Jewish Kvitlakh, and many others.

Included are what might be called children's games, but not in a separate chapter of their own. Many are ancient games of historical interest that throw up enlightening relationships with standard card games.

Also included are several games of mainly historical interest. One reason is that any cultural heritage is worth preserving and needs to be re-assessed and transmitted every generation or so. Another is that many games mentioned only by name in history or literature have recently become playable through the recovery of lost descriptions, or even, in some happy instances, by the discovery of communities that still play them. By far the most important reason, however, is that many of them are simply excellent games, and well worth reviving.

Playing the game

Well, you were supposed to be teaching me the game, and I saw you were cheating all the time, so I thought it was allowed by the rules.

Leslie Charteris, *Enter the Saint*

Card-play occurs against a backdrop of long-established

traditional procedures amounting almost to ritual. They are worth observing, partly as a mark of civility (there is no fun in playing with louts unless you are one yourself), and largely because they are designed to prevent anyone from gaining, or appearing to gain, an unfair advantage by doing anything out of the ordinary.

Love or money?

It is a mistake to characterize all card-play as a form of gambling by definition. All games (even Chess) can be played for money and, to that extent, are potential occasions for gambling, but whether or not they are so played depends partly on the inherent nature of the game in question and partly on the inherent nature of its players. Some seem incapable of taking any card game seriously unless it is played for money, while others will never, on principle, play for money at all. Extremists of either sort (and I speak from the non-monetary end of the spectrum) have no option but to acknowledge the views of the other, and avoid meeting at the same table.

As to the games, they fall into three groups. At one extreme lie games of skill, such as Bridge, which so engage the intellect as to obviate the need for additional monetary interest. At the other lie entirely chance-determined betting games involving no card-playing skill at all. Some of these are potentially dangerous betting games, but others are played for fun and not necessarily for cash: they include children's games, which can be played for sweets and treats, and drinking games, which are traditional methods of deciding who pays for the next round. Between the two lie games of skill like Poker, in which the actual instruments of play are not cards but money, and the skill involved has nothing to do with card sense but everything to do with money management and ad hominem psychology.

Scoring

Gambling games are normally played for hard score – that is, coins, or chips or counters representing coins and eventually redeemable for cash. Intellectual games are played for soft score, meaning points recorded in writing, on which monetary transactions may be based when the game is over. If you are playing for money, the advantage of hard score is that you always know where you stand, and the disadvantage of soft score is that the mind contains an endless supply of points which the pocket may later be unable to match. For those who are not interested in money, the disadvantage of some intellectual games is that they have not developed refined scoring systems but retain the zero-sum format of their ancestral hard-score gambling games, which can make for many complications in any attempt to keep track of all the pluses and minuses on the balance sheet. Unless you have a numerate and trustworthy scorekeeper to hand, you may find it more convenient to play such games for hard score, even if only matchsticks and paperclips.

Some games are played with scoring devices of traditional design, such as Cribbage boards and Piquet/Bezique markers. If you have any of these, they can often be found useful for other games.

Players, partners and positions

Many card games are played by four in two partnerships of two each, partners sitting opposite each other and playing alternately instead of consecutively. If partnerships are to be made at random, it is usual for each player to draw a card from a pack spread face down on the table, and for those drawing the two highest cards to become partners, the one with the highest having choice of seats and dealing first. Tied players draw again. When there are not partnerships, the same system is used to determine seats and first deal. The importance of seating may be regarded as a hangover from more superstitious times, in which hardbitten gamblers still tend to live.

Rotation

The order in which cards are dealt around the table, the participants take turns to play, and the deal passes from person to person is normally to the left (clockwise, viewed from above) in English-speaking and north European countries, but to the right (anticlockwise) in southern Europe and many other cultures. The player sitting to the dealer's left in clockwise games, or to the right in anticlockwise, is called eldest (hand) or forehand. In nearly all games it is eldest who leads to the first trick or otherwise makes the first move, or who has priority of some sort over everybody else, and the dealer who comes last or has least priority.

The shuffle

The purpose of shuffling is to ensure that cards are randomized before being dealt. Perfect randomness is impossible to achieve in a short time, but that is not the point: the object is merely to prevent anyone from locating the position of any given card and to ensure that, in games based on putting cards in order, such as Rummy, the game is not spoiled by having them come out in order to start with. As a matter of interest (because contrary to expectation), excessive shuffling in trick-taking games is more likely to produce freakish suit distributions than relatively light shuffling or none at all.

Shuffling cannot be taught in words; it can only be copied from watching good practitioners. However you do it, the most important thing is to ensure that none of the cards can be located, especially the bottom one, for which purpose it helps to hold them as close as possible to the surface of the table. In most games (except Bridge, of course, which likes to be different out of sheer cussedness) it is axiomatic that any one or more players may shuffle if they wish, but the dealer is entitled to shuffle last.

The cut

Between shuffling and dealing, the dealer has the pack cut by the player on his other side from eldest. The pack is placed, face down, on the table, the cutter lifts off the top half and places it face down beside the residue, and the dealer completes the cut by placing the former bottom half on top of the other. The purpose of this is to prevent anyone from identifying the bottom card of the pack, which may have been seen during the shuffle. 'Half' doesn't necessarily mean exactly half. Games with codified rules usually specify the minimum number of cards that should be left in each portion of the pack. A sensible minimum is about one-fifth of the total. If any card is exposed in the deal, or if cards are dealt by the wrong player or in the wrong order, anyone may demand a new deal, including a new shuffle and cut.

The deal

Some games specify that cards be dealt singly, one to each player in rotation, others that they be dealt in batches of two or three at a time to each player in rotation. It is worth noting that this is not done in order to 'stack the pack', thereby yielding more unbalanced and 'interesting' hands, but mainly to save time.

Behaviour

When playing with people you do not know, it is advisable to assume that bad manners will get you ostracized. As to what constitutes bad manners, here are some helpful guidelines (adapted from Esquire magazine):

1. Remember that shuffling is a dramatic art form, and is at its most impressive when performed in mid-air.
2. Pick up your cards as dealt. You will be ready to bid ahead of the others.
3. Talk about other subjects during the game; it makes for good fellowship.

4. Don't try to remember the rules; they are too confusing.
5. Never hurry. Try several cards on a trick until you are sure which one you prefer.
6. Occasionally ask what is trumps. It will show that you are interested in the game.
7. Trump your partner's ace and make doubly sure of the trick.
8. Always ask your partner why he didn't return your lead; this will remind him to lead it next time.
9. Always explain your play, particularly when you lose. It shows your card knowledge.
10. Eat chocolate caramels or candied fruit while playing; it stops the cards from slithering about.

Irregularities in play

The commonest irregularities are playing out of turn and playing an illegal card, especially revoking – that is, failing to follow suit in a trick-taking game that requires you to do so. Highly codified games, such as Bridge, are equipped with laws specifying corrections and penalties for all conceivable irregularities, as well as some tortuously inconceivable. To detail them all in a book such as this would double its size and is therefore out of the question.

Generally, the attempted play of an illegal card in a game involving partners gives useful information to one's partner and ought, strictly, to be penalized by forfeiture of the game by the offending side. An alternative is to play a legal card and to leave the illegal one face up on the table, to be played at the earliest legal opportunity. But in a game where a misplayed card conveys useful information only to the opponents and is corrected before anyone else has played a card, there is no need to impose a penalty.

Game

It is important to establish at the outset what constitutes a game, at what point play will cease and the group will break up. Many

games specify what this end-point should be, but if a game is not so defined then you should agree in advance to play up to a target score, or for a fixed length of time or number of deals. If not playing to a target score, it is desirable for all players to have dealt the same number of times in order to equalize the advantages of position.

Cheating

This interesting subject can be mentioned but briefly. To be effective, cheating must be carried out by a dedicated expert, who will normally either have doctored the pack in some way or be working with the aid of a secret partner – not necessarily one participating in the game. When playing with strangers for money, assume everyone guilty until proved innocent, but make no accusations in case you are wrong. If in doubt, just make an excuse and leave. Note that it is your responsibility to hold your cards in such a way that no one else can see them, and that different national traditions, or local schools, may have different views on what is and is not allowable (as Simon Templar observed in the quotation above).

Kibitzers

Taking their name from the German for ‘peewits’, possibly because of their twittering, kibitzers are onlookers who tend to offer unwanted advice (dictionary definition). Kibitzers by law should sit down, keep quiet, not fidget, and refrain from distracting or encouraging the players.

What shall we play?

Nothing, apart from rumour, travels as fast as a good game of cards.

Rudolf van Leyden, Ganjifa

Regular card-players are always on the look-out for games they haven't played before, especially younger players, who have more flexible minds and move in more varied social circles. The advantage of a new game is that everyone starts off on the same footing. So long as you are all having to learn new strategies as you go along, there will be less of a foregone conclusion about the eventual winner.

In choosing something new to try, the two most important selection factors are (1) how many of you are playing and (2) what type of game most suits your mood and personality. As to number, most games are designed for specific numbers of players and don't work well when adapted for others. As to personality, it is obviously self-defeating to play a fixed partnership game if you are all rugged individualists, or a brainless gambling game if you have an average IQ of 150, or a highly complicated bidding game like Bridge if none of you is acquainted with simple trick-taking games like Whist. The following recommendations are therefore made primarily by reference to number, and secondarily by distinction between trick-taking and non-trick games.

Two players

The simplest of the classic trick-takers is probably Ecarte. Piquet is more demanding, and spoilt by some old-fashioned complications; nevertheless, the fact that it has been a favourite with serious card-players for many centuries should give some indication of how deep it goes. At least one of the games Bezique, Pinochle and Klaberjass (Clob), which are substantially similar, should be in every player's repertoire. Sixty-Six (Schnapsen) is similar, but quicker and easier, and packs an extraordinary amount of depth and variety into a game played with so few cards. For something

out of the ordinary, try Bohemian Schneider, Sedma or Durak.

The greatest non-trick two-hander is unquestionably Cribbage, though Gin Rummy maintains a huge following. Canasta, though best known as a four-handed partnership game, works surprisingly well for two. Cassino is popular in America, but if you haven't played a game of this type before it may be better to start with a simpler relative such as Scopa. Spite and Malice (Cat and Mouse) is a popular competitive Patience game. For something out of the ordinary, Gops is short and sweet, Zetema long and savoury, and Truc (or Put) a good game of bluff.

Of my own games, Abstrac and Dracula attract the most fan mail. You may prefer Galapagos as an alternative to Piquet; but my favourite is Garbo.

Three players

Don't believe anyone who claims there is no such thing as a good three-handed card game. There are at least as many as good two-handers. That misapprehension is peculiar to English-speaking countries, where most national games are played with the 52-card pack, which divides itself naturally and best into four hands of thirteen. Many other nations use a 32-card pack, which equally naturally divides itself into three 10-card hands and a talon of two. Games based on this pattern include Preference, Skat and Ulti, though it must be admitted that they are all highly complex and not easily learnt from books – a proviso that applies equally to such other excellent games as Ombre and Vira. Simpler three-handed trick games include Ninety-Nine and Terziglio. Tysiacha and Skitgubbe are of intermediate complexity. Many Tarot games are designed for three.

Non-trick games are less well served. Here, however – and this applies as well to trick-takers – three is often the minimum number suitable for a wide variety of games listed below under the heading 'indefinite numbers'.

Four players (partnership)

When it comes to four sitting crosswise in fixed partnerships, you are spoilt for choice. The classic western trick-takers are Whist (simple), Bridge (complex), Euchre, Pinochle, Cinch and Five Hundred. To these might be added Spades and Bid Whist, which have recently achieved enormous popularity in America, the Canadian game of Kaiser, and Don, an increasingly popular British pub game. To extend this repertoire, try national games such as Manille, Doppelkopf, Roque, Sedma, Gaigel, Belote, Durak or Klaverjas. For a real challenge, you might experiment with Karnoffel, Watten, Aluette, or a partnership Tarot game. Quinto and Calypso are two 'invented' games well worth exploring, together with my own game of Tantony.

The classic non-trick partnership game is Canasta, but there is much to be said for Scopone, and Partnership Cribbage has its devotees. If you have ever wondered whether Poker can be played as a partnership game, Mus is a must. Concerto, of my invention, is also based on Poker hands, but is not a gambling game.

Many two-handed games will be found to have partnership equivalents, and vice versa, for obvious mathematical reasons.

Four players (solo)

Four can play in several different arrangements. They may play a three-handed game such as Skat, with each in turn sitting out the hand to which they deal. (This is, in fact, the most usual way of playing three-handers.) Or they may play one of the games listed below under the heading 'indefinite numbers'.

Of games designed specifically for four, some are cut-throat (completely non-partnership), while others are either solo games (the highest bidder plays alone against the other three), or alliance games (an ad hoc partnership may be formed between any two players), or a mixture of the two.

Classic trick games include Hearts and Solo Whist. Classic but defunct are Reversis and Quadrille, their respective ancestors. If you like Hearts, you may want to try some of its more recent elaborations such as Barbu and Tetka. If you like Solo Whist, try Auction or Nomination Whist. Four of my own games with unusual features are Collusion, Mismatch, Seconds and Bugami.

Many Rummy games are suitable for four, the most popular being some form of Contract Rummy, which is played under a vast and confusing array of aliases. Players interested in the history of Poker should try its specifically four-handed ancestor, Bouillotte. A game of Chinese origin that has recently become widespread in the West, and which works best for four, is usually known as Arsehole (or its equivalent, such as Trouduc in French), but in America, whether from prudery or irony, is often bowdlerized to President.

Five players

Very few games are specifically designed for five, but many listed below as 'indefinite' often play best that way. Five is said to be the best number for the Irish game of Spoil Five, though Twenty-Five, its modern equivalent, is largely played by four. My contribution to the genre is called Squint.

Six players

The old French games of Sixte and Sizette are interesting curiosities, and so simple as to be worth making more complicated. My contribution is called Sex (Latin for six, of course).

Indefinite numbers

Games for no specific number of players used to be called 'round' games. Nearly all are suitable for four to six players, some also for three, and some for ∞ . Among the trick-taking games

maybementioned Oh Hell!, Knockout Whist, Nap, Loo, Catch-the-Ten, and the relatives listed alongside them.

To these may be added nearly all the adding-up games (Fifty-One, Hundred, Jubilee, etc.), stops games (Newmarket, Michigan, etc.), Rummy games (notably Manipulation Rummy), vying games (Poker, Brag etc.) and banking games (Pontoon or Blackjack). Crazy Eights and its relatives need no introduction, nor does Spit, but perhaps a word might be put in for Cucumber.

You must remember this...

Play to the left unless otherwise stated

In English-speaking countries the rotation of play is normally to the left, or clockwise around the table (as viewed from above). In many other countries it is the reverse, with play passing to the right. If you are going to play a game authentically, and especially with the appropriate cards, you might as well play it the right way round (or the left way round, as the case may be). Note, therefore, that if no indication is given, play goes to the left; but if it normally goes to the right in the game's country of origin, there will be a note to that effect.

Eldest hand

This denotes the player to the left of the dealer in left-handed games, or to the right in right-handed games. Each player beyond eldest gets progressively younger, so youngest is normally the dealer or, if the dealer does not take part, the player on the other side of the dealer from eldest. In games of German origin. Eldest is called

Forehand and, if three play, the others are respectively Middlehand and Rearhand. Eldest or Forehand is usually the player who makes the first bid or the first play and who has priority in case of equal bids or results. Other technical terms are explained in an appendix.

Abbreviations

T = Ten. I normally denote the 10 of a suit by the single character T, partly because it is more convenient to represent a card by a single character, especially in a list, and partly because there are many games in which the Ten has special significance.

4p = four players, 4pp = four in partnerships; 52c = 52 cards.

† = trump e.g. †A reads 'Ace of trumps'. And * = Joker

He or she

I employ gender-inclusive language wherever practicable and endorse the use of 'they' as a common-gender singular, but have too much respect for my readers' intelligence to submit to the sort of institutionalized illiteracy that passes for political correctness.

Besides, there isn't room.

Don't forget...

- Play to the left (clockwise) unless otherwise stated.
- Eldest or Forehand means the player to the left of the dealer in left-handed games, to the right in right-handed games.
- T = Ten, p = players, pp = in fixed partnerships, c = cards, † = trump, * = Joker.