



THE GAME OF TAROT

ORIGINS, RULES,
AND STRATEGIES

Perfect for beginners!



A TRADITIONAL FRENCH CARD GAME THAT COMBINES BIDDING, ALLIANCES, AND STRATEGY!

Take the most important cards to gain a predetermined number of points, or stop your opponents from doing so. A balance between anticipation and dedication, let yourself be charmed by the rich strategy of Tarot!

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF CARD GAMES BY THE FRENCH PLAYING CARD MUSEUM

The origins of card games remains a mystery. The paper and printing came from China, but the idea of associating multiple series of cards into hierarchies may have originated elsewhere. Some card fragments found in Egypt (estimated from the 13th century), a game from the end of the 15th century preserved in the Topkapi Palace Museum (in Istanbul), and the mention of "Saracen cards" in Italian texts point to the **Middle East as a possible origin**. However, it is indeed in **Europe** where we find the **first mention of "playing cards" in the 1370s**, and where we find the oldest examples. It is also in Europe that this type of game experienced the greatest growth.

Cards added a **new tactic** to the world of tabletop games: bluffing, as well as countless combination possibilities. It's astonishing to imagine the vast diversity of games that were designed, modified, and played on quays and sidewalks, in gambling dens, inns, and aristocratic salons. **In just a few decades, card games became widespread**. Their presence is recorded in 15th century Egypt, then in China. From the 16th century onwards, an original cardmaking tradition developed in Persia, then India, with sets of eight or ten suits painted entirely by hand. At the same time, Japan adopted European cards, which were introduced to the region by Portuguese merchants.

Since they adapt to all kinds of uses (play, of course, but also divination, art, education, etc.), traditional playing cards have always been able to reinvent themselves while remaining faithful to their original form.

HISTORY OF TAROT BY THE FRENCH PLAYING CARD MUSEUM

The big innovation that Tarot introduced was the addition of a series of cards to the conventional playing card deck, which served specifically as trump cards. The idea is said to have originated around the year 1415, about fifty years after playing cards were introduced to Europe, from Marziano da Tortona, the secretary to the Duke of Milan at the time.

A type of Tarot, similar to the Tarot of Marseille - with Latin-suited cards (cups, swords, clubs, and coins, four face cards, and a series of allegorical trump cards - appeared shortly thereafter in Milan and Florence. It then spread throughout Italy, Switzerland, and France around 1500, as well as in Flanders and the Germanic countries. It wasn't until the 18th century that German card makers abandoned the "Italian Tarot." They then adopted French suits (spades, hearts, diamonds, and clubs) and more entertaining subjects (animals, costumes, landscapes, etc) for the illustrations on the trump cards. The trumps represented scenes from daily life, periods of life, seasons, or various activities.

During the 19th century, "German Tarot" reached France, to the detriment of Latin-suited Tarot. On the request from the State in 1898, the largest French playing card manufacturer, Grimaud, copied one of the forms of Tarot and sold it under the name "German Tarot." This Tarot, known as "Tarot Nouveau" after World War I, was mostly used for gambling, while the Tarot of Marseille and its countless forms were reserved for divination.

TAROT IN POP CULTURE

War is responsible for the popularity of "Tarot Nouveau." Though it was already well known, it was widely distributed in France in 1946, after World War II. Included in soldiers' packages, they played it in their free time and taught it to their parents and friends after returning home. The French Tarot Federation was formed in 1973. Today, it hosts more than 320 clubs and 7,400 members!



TAROT CARDS

The cards you hold are a revised version of the traditional game. The number and value of the cards have not been changed. However, French artist Charlène Ingouff has reinterpreted the themes of the trump cards, traditionally represented in the engraving style.

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A game of Tarot uses 78 cards, divided as follows:

- **56 pip cards separated into 4 suits (spades ♠, hearts ♥, diamonds ♦, and clubs ♣)**

These include cards with values 1 to 10, in addition to 4 face cards: the jack, knight, queen, and king. The 1 (or ace) is the weakest pip card.

- **21 trump cards**

These include cards numbered 1 to 21 with no suit, identified by the unique illustration on each card.

- **1 special card, "The Excuse"**

This card has a star symbol ★.

Out of all these cards, the 3 below are the most important in the game. They are called the "honors."

- The 1 of trumps (called "The Little One")
- The 21 of trumps
- The Excuse



The Little One,
1 of trumps



The 21
of trumps



The Excuse



HOW TO PLAY

Bet on your success and try to gain the best cards to win against others!

The game of Tarot is overseen by the French Tarot Federation. The normal rules are very detailed and could be overwhelming for beginners, so we decided to divide the learning process into 3 steps. In short, you will discover the full version of the game after completing **3 practice games**.

The idea of customs is also very present in the traditional practice of Tarot. You will find the best practices to incorporate in your games at the end of the rulebook (p. 28). We suggest reading them after you have a good grasp on the gameplay.

OVERVIEW AND GOAL

The game of Tarot plays over several rounds during which players gain points. The player with the most points wins the game.

Before beginning, you can define the number of rounds you want to play (according to the time available to you).

On your turn, play 1 card from your hand. Once all players have played a card, the strongest one wins: this is called a "trick!"

VOCABULARY

Your **hand** represents the cards dealt to you.

A **trick** represents the cards played during a round, then collected by the player who played the strongest card.

The **suit** represents the category of a card: clubs, hearts, spades, or diamonds.

The **dealer** is the player who distributes cards.

The **taker** is the player who wins the bidding phase (see p. 16) and sets the bet to win the round.

The **defenders** are the players who work together against the taker.

The **dog** represents the cards discarded during the deal (see p. 10).

The **aside** represents the cards set aside by the taker (see p. 17).



SETTING UP A ROUND

The rules below describe a 4-player game (see Variants for 3 and 5 Players p. 30).

DEALING CARDS

Choose a random player. **This player is the dealer;** they divide up the deck by giving **18 cards to each player**, then they set aside the **remaining 6 cards**, face down. These 6 cards are called the "dog."



Once the cards are dealt, players can look at their hands. You cannot describe the contents of your hand at any point during the round.

TRICK OVERVIEW

The round will last as many tricks as the number of cards in players' hands. Taking turns, starting with the **player to the left of the dealer** then continuing clockwise, **play 1 card from your hand, face up**, respecting the following conditions.

PLAYING THE TRICK

The first player of the trick plays any card. The first card of the trick determines what the other players must play.

- *The first card played is a pip card (♠, ♥, ♦, or ♣):*

You must play a card of the same suit, no matter the value. If you don't have any, you must play a trump.

- *The first card played is a trump:*

You must play a trump.

HOW TRUMPS WORK

If you must play a trump since another player already played one, you must play a **trump with a value that is stronger than every other trump on the table**. If you cannot, play any trump. If you don't have any, play any pip card.

WINNING THE TRICK

After the trick is over (once every player has played a card), the **strongest card** wins, according to the following criteria:

- If no trump was played, the strongest card of the same suit as the first card played wins.
- If at least one trump was played, the strongest trump wins.

Example:

Here, the 10 of ♣ was played first, so the queen of ♣ wins the trick, since the king of ♠ was not the required suit.



However, in this situation, the 2 of trumps wins the trick (it is the only trump in the trick).



Here, the first player played the 6 of trumps. The other players must play trumps with stronger values. The second player plays the 15 of trumps; the third player the 19 of trumps; and, since the last player doesn't have a trump stronger than 19, they play the 5. The third player wins the trick.



TIP!

When a player plays a trump, that means they don't have the required suit. Remember this information about their hand and use it to your advantage.

FINISHING THE TRICK

The player who played the strongest card takes all 4 face-up cards (the trick) and places them in a face-down stack in front of them, on top of any other tricks they previously won. **Now it is their turn to play the first card of the next trick.**

You can never look at tricks you won during the game. When players have no more cards in hand, the round ends.

PLAYING THE EXCUSE

The Excuse is neither a trump or a pip card. **You can play it on your turn at any point:** you therefore excuse yourself from playing another card. If you play the Excuse as the first card of the trick, the next player can play any card. This card determines the required suit.

TIP!

The Excuse lets you avoid playing a card that would benefit your opponents.



When the trick is over, take the Excuse and keep it in front of you, face down, **with your other trick cards**. You can never lose it. In exchange, give the player who won the trick any card, value 1 to 10, from your previously won tricks, so they receive the appropriate number of cards. If you haven't won any tricks, give them a card as soon as you can later on in the game.



PREPARING THE NEXT ROUND

The **player to the left of the deal becomes the new dealer**. Take back all the cards and return to DEALING CARDS (see p. 10).

Practice Game #1

Stop reading after this text box.

Set up the game as described in DEALING CARDS (p. 10). After dealing cards, return the dog to the box. Finally, play your first round and finish your first tricks as described in TRICK OVERVIEW (p. 11).

Gain the most face cards and honors to win!

At the end of the round, count the number of face cards (jack, knight, queen, and king) and honors (Little One, 21 of trumps, and Excuse) in your tricks. Each of these cards is worth **1 point**. The winner is the player with the most points!

3 important points:

- If you have a card in your hand that matches the suit of the first card of the trick, **you must play it** (regardless of its value).
- If you don't have any cards of this suit, **you must play a trump** (if you don't have any, play any card).
- If someone already played a trump and you must also play one, **you must play a stronger trump** (if you cannot, play any trump).

THAT'S IT! Practice these rules until you're comfortable with these cards and taking tricks!

BIDDING

Complete the bidding phase right after dealing cards. *Two Player Aid cards summarize the complete round overview.*

During this phase, players may choose 1 bid out of the following 4 options:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Take (x1) | 2. Guard (x2) |
| 3. Guard Without the Dog (x3) | 4. Guard Against the Dog (x4) |

If a player chooses a bid, this means they think **they can win against the other players**, who will form a team against them.

ANNOUNCING BIDS

Taking turns, starting with the player to the left of the dealer then continuing clockwise, you may **announce your bid** among the list above **or pass**, if you don't want to choose a bid.

The first bid announced can be any type. The other players must **outbid** (announce a bid higher than the one announced previously). The smallest is **1. Take**, and the highest is **4. Guard Against the Dog**.

After going around the table once, the last player to announce a bid wins the bidding phase and becomes the **taker**. They will play alone against the other players, who are now on the same team, and are called the "defenders" (they will make a

shared stack with their tricks).

The taker will benefit from a point multiplier determined by the bid they chose.

If everyone passed, take back all the cards, and deal again. The new dealer is the player to the left of the previous dealer.

The Taker's Goal

To win against the defenders, the taker must successfully achieve the point objective determined by the number of honors (the Little One, 21 of trumps, and Excuse) in their tricks at the end of the round. This objective is called the "contract" (see p. 21).

EFFECTS OF BIDS

In addition to multiplying the score at the end of the round, the chosen bid will impact the dog.

- **1. Take (x1) and 2. Guard (x2)**

With a **take** or a **guard**, after bidding is over, the taker must **reveal the dog to all players**, then add it to their hand. They then choose **6 cards from their hand to place face down in front of them**. These are part of their tricks and are called the "**aside**." Once you set these cards aside, you cannot change or look at them.

You can **never set aside kings or honors**. Additionally, you can never set aside **trumps**, unless you have no other option. In this case, show the set aside trumps to the other players.

TIP!

The aside is very strategic. It lets you separate cards that weaken your hand and put a strategy in place (see Quick Strategy p. 26).

- **3. Guard Without the Dog (x3)**

With a **guard without the dog**, the taker takes the dog and places it face down in front of them, **without looking at it**. The dog is part of their tricks, but they cannot improve their hand by setting cards aside.

- **4. Guard Against the Dog (x4)**

With a **guard against the dog**, the taker gives the dog to the defenders, who add it to their tricks, **without looking at it**.

Example: You are dealt your hand. Apart from your low cards, you have the Little One, the Excuse, 2 kings, 3 queens, 2 knights, and 6 trumps. You think your hand is strong enough to make a bid.



The first player (to the left of the dealer) passes. Now it's your turn. You announce bid 2. Guard (x2). The player to your left passes. The final player decides to outbid you and announces bid 3. Guard Without the Dog (x3). **They are the taker.** They will play alone against you and the other 2 players. They take the dog and put it face down in front of them, without looking at it.

Practice Game #2

Stop reading after this text box.

The taker must complete their contract alone against a group to gain points!

Complete the dealing and bidding phases. At the end of the round, **only the taker counts the number of face cards and honors in their tricks.** Each is worth **1 point.**

To win, the taker must complete their contract by gaining a number of points determined by the **number of honors in their tricks.**

Number of honors	0	1	2	3
Contract	12 pts	10 pts	8 pts	7 pts

At the end of the round:

1. Count the value of the taker's tricks and check if they completed their contract's objective.
2. Then, multiply the value of their tricks by their bid's multiplier.
3. If the taker completed their contract's objective, note **positive** points. If they did not complete their contract's objective, note **negative** points.

3 important points:

- **The more honors in your hand, the easier your objective is to complete and the more reasons you have to become the taker.**
- **The chosen bid does not influence the taker's objective (their contract), but the number of points gained or lost at the end of the round.**
- **If you announce bid 1. Take or 2. Guard, you can supplement your hand with the aside.**

THAT'S IT! Practice these rules until you're comfortable with bidding and contracts!

SCORING POINTS

Two Player Aid cards summarize the following information.

In the game of Tarot, scoring points is divided into 3 steps:

1. Score **taker points**.
2. Score **round points**.
3. Score **player points**.

1. SCORE TAKER POINTS

After the round is over, **the taker counts the points from tricks they won** to see whether or not they completed their contract (see *The Taker's Contract* p. 21).

Count the taker's points by respecting the following restrictions:

- Score points by combining **2 cards at a time**.
- **High cards** (jack, knight, queen, king, or honor) must always be **combined with a low card** (all other cards).

CARD VALUES

- 5 pts** An honor and a low card.
- 5 pts** A king and a low card.
- 4 pts** A queen and a low card.
- 3 pts** A knight and a low card.

2 pts A jack and a low card.

1 pt Two low cards (valued between 1 and 10; trumps other than the 1 and 21).

Example:



THE TAKER'S CONTRACT

The taker wins if they completed their contract, meaning they reached or exceeded the number of points determined by the number of honors in their tricks.

<i>Number of honors</i>	0	1	2	3
<i>Contract</i>	56 pts	51 pts	41 pts	36 pts

If the taker reaches or exceeded the number of points in their contract, they **win** the round.

Example: Score Taker Points.

The taker's tricks are worth 55 points. Since they have 1 honor in their tricks, their contract was worth 51 points, so they successfully complete it and win the round.

2. SCORE ROUND POINTS

Start by scoring the **difference between the taker's points and the value of their contract** (the larger of the two values minus the smaller one).

Then, add **25 points** (basic score for a round of Tarot).

Finally, multiply the result by the **value of the bid**.

$$(\text{taker's difference} + 25) \times \text{value of the bid}$$

Example: *Score round points, continued from the previous example.*

Knowing that the taker announced a **guard (x2)**:

$$(55-51+25) \times 2 \rightarrow 29 \times 2 = 58$$

Here, the round was worth 58 points.

Practice Game #3

Stop reading after this text box.

The taker must complete their contract alone against a group to gain points!

At the end of the round, count the value of the taker's tricks, then score the points for the round (see Player Aid: Scoring Points).

If the taker **won** (meaning they completed their contract), they gain **positive round points**. If they **failed** (if they did not complete their contract), they gain **negative round points**.

3 important points:

- Kings and honors are worth the most points.

- The 21 of trumps and the Excuse cannot be lost by the player who has them in their hand. However, the Little One (the 1 of trumps) can easily be lost. Try to protect it as best you can by playing it at the right moment.
- If you do not have the Little One in your hand and you are the taker, try to flush it out and win the trick to lower your contract's objective.

THAT'S IT! Practice these rules until you're comfortable with everything! Then add the elements below, then the customs described on p. 28.

3. SCORE PLAYER POINTS

You can also use digital apps to calculate scores.

After scoring **round points**, note the scores as follows.

The taker gains:

- If they **won**: 3x **positive** round points (since they beat 3 opponents).
- If they **lost**: 3x **negative** round points.

Each defender gains:

- If the taker **won**: **negative** round points.
- If the taker **lost**: **positive** round points.

Example: *Scoring player points, continued from the previous example, where the round was worth 58 points and the taker completed their contract.*

Player A (taker)	Player B	Player C	Player D
<i>round points x3</i>	<i>round points</i>	<i>round points</i>	<i>round points</i>
174 pts	-58 pts	-58 pts	-58 pts

Add up your points at the end of each round.

END OF THE GAME

At the end of the game (defined according to your preferences), the player with the **most points** is the **winner**.

BONUSES

Certain scenarios let you **gain extra points**. These are **bonuses**, and they are added to the scoring formula as follows:

$$\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{taker's} \\ \text{difference} \end{array} + 25 \right) \times \begin{array}{c} \text{value of} \\ \text{the bid} \end{array} \pm \text{bonuses}$$

If the bonus is achieved **by the taker**, add them to the round points. If the bonus is achieved **by a defender**, subtract them.

★ HANDFUL

Just before playing your card **during the first trick** of the round, you may choose to show a **handful** to the other players. To do so, **show 10, 13, or 15 trump cards** to declare a single, double, or triple handful. This will make you gain or lose the points indicated below at the end of the round.

<i>Single</i>	<i>Double</i>	<i>Triple</i>
20 pts	30 pts	40 pts

★ SLAM

The taker may, after making an aside, announce a **slam**. If they do, they play first.

Announcing a slam means that **you think you will win every trick except one**.

When the taker **announces and achieves** a slam, they gain 400 points.

When the taker **achieves** a slam **without announcing it**, they gain 200 points.

When the taker **announces but does not achieve** a slam, they lose 200 points.

★ ONE AT THE END

If the Little One was played **during the final trick**, whichever team wins it gains the bonus. The 10 point bonus is, contrary to the previous bonuses, **added to or subtracted from the taker's points** (which may influence the completion of their contract).

QUICK STRATEGY

COUNT TRUMP AND FACE CARDS

It's important to **know which suits still have points** (meaning face cards). This lets you reflect on the suits and cards to play in order to gain any available points.

Counting face cards as they are played will give you a sure advantage and let you anticipate how the game will unfold.

Similarly, trump cards mean everything in Tarot. **Remembering which trumps have been played** will let you anticipate the outcome of certain tricks. In this way, you can also **flush out the Little One** if it's not in your hand.

THE DOG

By **making an aside**, the dog gives you the opportunity to **build a strategy**.

Most importantly, it lets you create **voids** or **singletons**.

VOID

When a player has **no card in a given suit**, this is called a **void**. They will immediately play a trump during a trick with this suit. This strategy lets you surprise the other players and gain points, since high cards are often played during the first trick of a given suit.

SINGLETON

When a player has **only a single card in a given suit**, this is called a **singleton**.

With a high card (usually a king), this makes the other players believe you won't play a trump on the given suit. However, on the next trick with this suit, you must play a trump.

MAJORITY IN A SUIT

Having the majority of cards in the same suit can be an advantage. This lets you make the **other players run out of their trumps**. A player without either the required suit or trumps cannot gain tricks, which lets you retain some control over the game.



CUSTOMS OF TAROT

Traditionally, all phases in Tarot play counterclockwise (so opposite of the rules described in this booklet). However, this custom is often ignored by players, as playing clockwise feels more natural.

On the other hand, the following points are **systematically respected by players** and are important elements in the DNA of Tarot.

DEALING CARDS

Traditionally, this phase has the most customs.

- Choose the first dealer by drawing 1 random card each. If you draw the Excuse, draw another card. **Whoever draws the weakest card is the dealer.**
- **The player to the left of the dealer must cut the deck.** Then, the dealer deals cards **3 at a time going counter clockwise**, starting with the player to their right.
- **The dealer can deal cards to the dog at any time, but they cannot deal two consecutive cards or deal the first or last card of the deck.**
- It is customary to **sort your cards at the end of the bidding phase.** This phase often finishes early due to everyone passing, so there is no point in wasting time sorting.

COMMUNICATING

- You cannot exchange information about the **game**. Each player must remember important information on their own.

SCORING POINTS

- Many players do not shuffle cards between deals. They are naturally randomized during scoring and dealing.

THE EXCUSE

- It is impossible to lose the Excuse, unless you play it **during the final trick**. It is taken by the player who wins the trick.

HANDFUL

- It is customary to show your handful in one go and in ascending order. You may show the Excuse in your handful, indicating that you have no other trumps.

We decided not to explain certain special cases. Visit the French Tarot Federation website for more information.

VARIANTS FOR 3 AND 5 PLAYERS

Tarot is a game that is traditionally played with 4 players, but these two variants are also well known. Below, we have only described the points that differ from the normal rules.

3-PLAYER TAROT



In a 3-player game of Tarot, **only the rules for dealing cards and handfuls change.**

DEALING CARDS

Deal cards **4 at a time** instead of 3 at a time.
Players have hands of **24 cards**.

HANDFUL

A single handful has 13 trumps, a double has 15 trumps, and a triple has 18 trumps.

5-PLAYER TAROT



In a 5-player game of Tarot, **the taker plays with a partner!**

DEALING CARDS

The **dog** only has **3 cards** instead of 6.
Players have hands of **15 cards**.

CALLING A KING

Before revealing the dog, **the taker may call a king**. They **announce the suit** of a king out loud. If the taker has all 4 kings, they may announce a queen instead. They may also announce a king that is in their hand or in the dog.

The player with the called king (or queen) **does not reveal themselves**. However, the taker and this player are now on the **same team**. At the end of the round, they will add their tricks together. The other players are the defenders.

During the first trick of the round, you **cannot play the suit called** by the taker, unless the called king (or queen) was the first card of the trick.

SCORING POINTS

If the taker plays alone against 4 opponents (by calling themselves), they multiply the round points (gained or lost) by 4.

If the taker plays as a team with another player, they multiply the round points by 3. The taker gains 2/3 and their teammate gains 1/3.

HANDFUL

A single handful has 8 trumps, a double has 10 trumps, and a triple has 13 trumps.



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