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# Social card games

Ken Hutton

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- The Vim text editor – to write and edit the content, markup and filter programs.
- GNU Awk – to process the ebook's xhtml and to convert it to ConTeXt.
- epubcheck and Info-zip's zip – to test and put together the ebook.
- ConTeXt and pdfTeX – to generate the pdf for print.
- git – to keep a record of edits and – if necessary – revert changes.
- Guix system, Linux, GNU Make, Bourne-Again SHell (bash) and Coreutils – to stick all the other software together and make it work.

All of that is Free Software, so thank you to everyone who has contributed to those projects and to the Free Software community at large.

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## Preface

Working on this book began as a recovery project after a chest infection and I'm a little surprised to find it finished and ready to publish – even if it has taken over two years. It may never have gotten this far if the world hadn't become sick just as I was recovering. It's September 2021 as I write this and the UK has no legal restrictions to suppress Covid. We're expecting an October lockdown in the UK, ever since the government officially denied planning one. So panic buying is back, bad enough to drain the petrol stations of fuel every day.

I'm staying out of that, but I think I can empathise with how those people are feeling. Like many people, I had a hard time coming out of lockdown and getting back into the world – hard enough to delay this book by at least a month. The vaccines are reassuring, but not enough to stop me suffering anxiety attacks. Still, I have seen more of friends and family and I've been heading out into town and country, exploring those nearby places I used to take for granted. And I've been playing cards again – playing online has never held the same appeal for me as passing the time with good company. I hope this book feels as relevant to potential readers as it does to me.

Publishing a book today is a scary prospect – am I really going to make two years wages out of this? There are so many options and so many people ready to assure you that the money you spend on their services will be worth it. The reality seems to be that things are changing so much right now that even experienced professionals can't be sure they are giving the right advice. So I feel like I'm betting two years wages on the roll of a dice – and I don't like to gamble.

The process of creating the book has been about 50% pleasure and 50% pain. Pleasure from the creativity, the problem solving and the reminiscences brought about by thinking about the people I have

played these games with. Pain from fear of failure and the laborious restructuring that comes from one of two causes. I made some poor decisions early on like working on the print version first and not considering the ebook from the start – it turns out it's much easier to convert xhtml to TeX than to go the other way. I also had some bright ideas later on, like abandoning my attempt to categorise the games and arrange them in chapters. From there it took about a fortnight to figure out what order to put the games in so that new concepts are instead presented between the games, one or two at a time. Who knew the graph theory I learned with the Open University would come in handy here? It then took another month or so to carry out the revision. It would have taken a lot longer if I weren't so familiar with a programmer's text editor like Vim. Is time spent learning something new ever wasted? My education certainly repeats on me in some strange ways.

I probably could have avoided some of the pain if I'd worked with a publisher. I certainly had every intention of paying an illustrator and a cover designer. But time has been my most plentiful resource through the lockdowns so I have authored, edited, illustrated, marked up and typeset the book myself. Maybe I'm deluding myself, but the illustrations and cover design seem pretty good to me. Distribution and printing will be handled by Ingram, so I can't claim to have done *everything* myself. I might choose to collaborate more on future books anyway – I like the control of working alone, but it can be lonely.

The optimist in me thinks my next book will be easier, with the lessons I have learned – but the optimist in me thought this one would be out last Christmas. Still, I'm proud of this little book of card games. I hope you enjoy it and that as the world recovers it will help you fill the back of your mind with happy, sociable memories that you can be reminded of some day.

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## Introduction

Even in an age of smartphones and online games consoles, card games remain a popular pastime. Some folk are excited by the reckless buzz of casino games or the psychological duelling of high stakes poker. Others treat card games like a sport, playing large tournaments to find out who is “best”. But for many people the appeal of card games is that they provide entertainment without preventing conversation – you can talk as little or as much as you like while you play.

This book contains games to suit such social players, whether you like to play with your family on a rainy afternoon, with a close friend or lover after work, or with guests between dinner and dancing. I played a lot of games with my brothers and parents as a child, with friends in my high school canteen, with flatmates at University, with new friends and old, and passing acquaintances... There are games here for two players and others to suit twelve or even more – recommended player numbers are listed in the contents.

It is a simple matter to carry a deck or two of cards in your pocket, handbag or luggage. Even if you forget them you will have to go some distance to get away from any store that would sell you some and further still before you couldn't get a deck delivered. Many games are easy to teach to new players, even past a language barrier. It is little wonder then that card games are so popular with backpackers and other travellers, or that so many of us remember holidays that have been salvaged from bad weather by a deck of cards. I might even go so far as to say that knowing a few good card games is a valuable life-skill.

Most of these games are classics and you may well know some of them already, perhaps under different names. For example if you are looking for CHASE THE ACE, then take a look at SQUIFFY DANCER

(*page 31*), CUCKOO (*page 36*) and SHOOT THE MOON (*page 68*), all of which are popularly known by that name. You might know KNOCKOUT WHIST (*page 58*) as TRUMPS or SCROUNGE. And if it's a game with a rude name you are looking for then it might be STOP THE BUS (*page 57*), PINHEAD (*page 120*) or RHAPSODY (*page 126*) – I decided to keep this book family friendly. You might also know games that are not in this book – these are my recommendations, not every game I could think of or research.

I made some minor modifications to a few games to make the rules more consistent between the games – typically to older games or those popular outside of the United Kingdom. These changes are mostly to how the games are scored. For example my scoring for BLIND DON (*page 97*) is simpler than the traditional game. I have proportionately lowered the scores for some games so that they may be scored with counters or cribbage boards.

There are a few games here that I invented myself – I hope you will find them as entertaining as the classics. THIRTY ONE BONES (*page 48*) is a 'push your luck' game for children, a cousin of simple casino games like PONTOON and BLACKJACK, which you will not find in this book. TRICK BRAG (*page 81*) is a trick taking game in which three cards at a time are played by each player and the best combination wins. To complement the four player temporary alliance game SOLO WHIST (*page 155*), I created BIGWIG (*page 150*) for three players and PLANTAGENET (*page 144*) for five.

There is a whole family of fishing games that is not widely known in the English speaking world, despite being popular globally. Many such games require a Spanish or Italian 40 card deck or a stripped down standard deck. So I created SUM-RUN-SET (*page 104*) to use a 52 card deck and to be a little more approachable to those familiar with CRIBBAGE (*page 85*) and other north European games.

None of the games require gambling to make them fun and none should involve players saying "ssh, I'm trying to think!" or "sit back

everyone – my turn’s going to take *ages!*” Which is not to say they are not interesting or strategic. I’ve also tried to avoid games that seem overly complex, with rules that are hard to remember and add little to the fun. That rules out just about any game that has been described as the ‘national’ game of anywhere, so NO BRIDGE, SKAT OR EUCHRE. Try QUINTO (*page 111*) or BIGWIG (*page 150*) instead – their rules are simpler but they are just as deep.

The book begins with some simple games suitable to play with small children. The first five in particular require little more than the ability to recognise the symbols on the cards. From there each game only introduces one or two new concepts so if you learn each game in turn there should be no overwhelming information dumps. Of course this doesn’t mean you can’t skip ahead. SEVEN CARD WHIST (*page 54*) might be a good starting point for adults who have never played card games before. Some of the earlier games are fun for grown ups too though – those included in COMPENDIUM IN THE WOODS (*page 135*) in particular. Experienced card players might like to start around SUM-RUN-SET (*page 104*) or just take a look at the games they don’t recognise. If you do find a game description confusing though, it might well be worth trying some of the earlier games first.

## Shuffling the pack

'Shuffling' a pack of card jumbles the order and is normally done between pitches so that melds (*page 41*) are broken up and players don't know which cards are coming. There are many ways to do this and I'm going to briefly describe three of them here. Try to avoid methods you may have seen that involve excessive bending of the cards and lots of noise. That's for show-offs and magicians, and if you make a rough job of it and put creases in someone else's deck it may annoy them.

If the cards get sticky or worn at the edges then the pack may become harder to shuffle. You can get a lot of games out of a deck of playing cards, but they don't last forever.

### Pack to pack

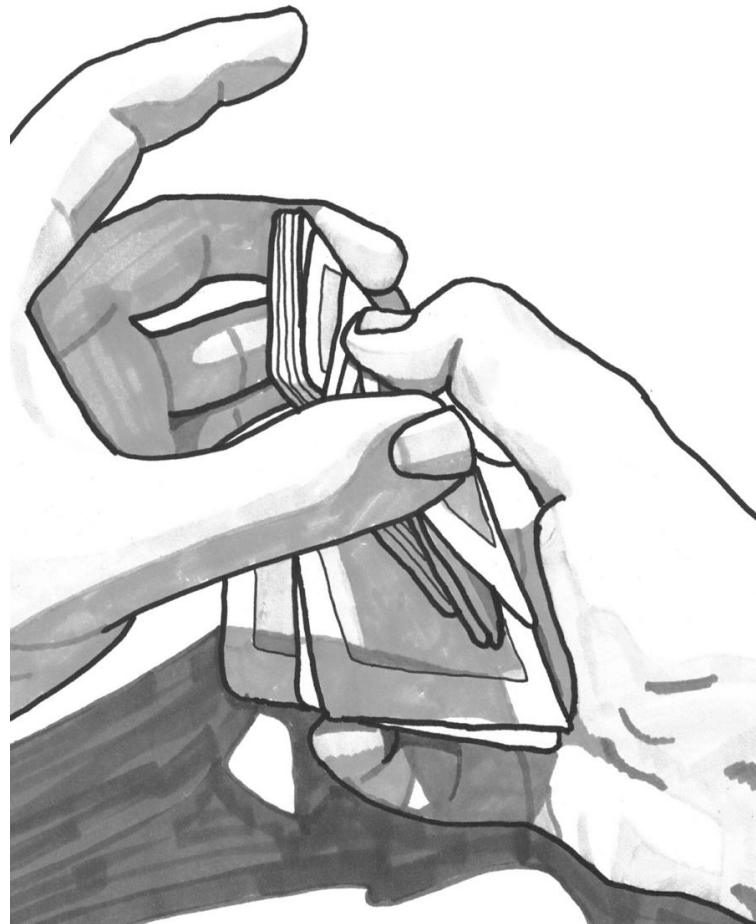
This method requires the least dexterity to perform and is more random and less damaging to the cards than spreading them all over the floor and picking up a few at a time. It is good for children and if some disability prevents you shuffling in other ways then you may find this easier. Simply place the pack face down on the table and move a few cards from the top to start a new pack next to it. Then you repeatedly move a few cards from the top of the old pack to the top of the new one until they have all been transferred.

You'll need to do this about five times to properly randomise the deck. The methods below are essentially just quicker versions of this one. The only difference is how the two decks are held in the hands to make quicker shuffles possible.

### **The overhand shuffle**

Hold the pack in your off hand by the short edges, with your fingers pointing upwards, and reach across the top of the pack with the thumb of your dominant hand to take a few cards at a time. Drop these small packets into your dominant hand to form a new pack.

A variation on this is to shift your grip on the old pack to release a few cards from the top and then flick your wrist to launch them over to the other hand. I have seen a one-armed player shuffle by throwing the packets down on to the table, presumably after a fair bit of practice.

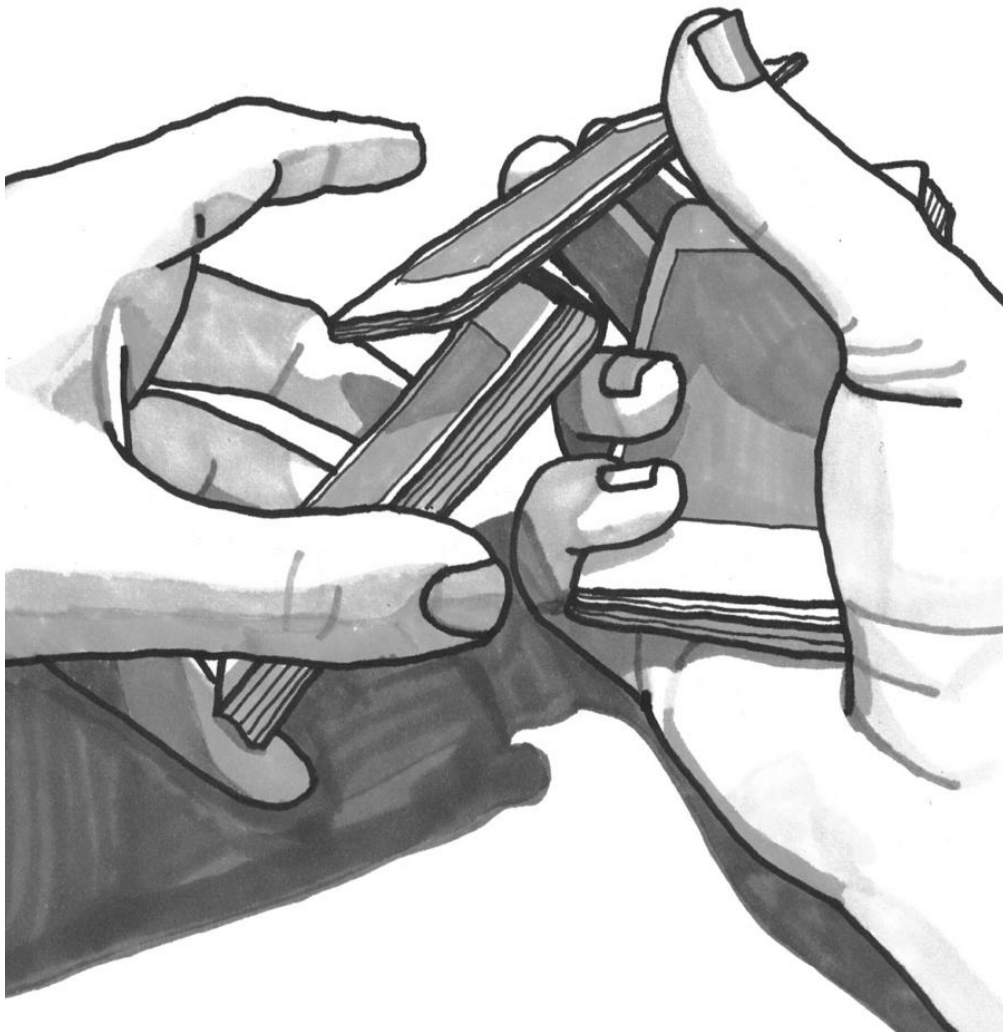




## The Indian shuffle

Also known as the 'Hindu shuffle'. Hold the old pack by the long edges, with your fingers pointing down. Then bring your dominant hand underneath the old pack and lift a few cards off the top. You can lift these cards slightly with the index finger of your other hand to make it easier to grab them – very quick shuffles are possible with a bit of practice. Move your hands apart before dropping the packet into your dominant hand.

When you finish one shuffle put the cards back in your off hands and square them up for the next.



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## Playing in turn

In most card games each player takes a ‘turn’ before the player to their right or left takes the next turn. In northern Europe the turn normally passes to the left (clockwise), but around the world many players expect play to pass to the right. As long as everyone agrees it doesn’t matter which way you go.

---

## SNAP (2–10 players)

Often the first card game taught to small children, it doesn’t get much simpler than SNAP. I’ll describe the rules as simply as possible here – see general rules for capture games (*page 22*) for some extra rules to prevent cheating that aren’t normally needed when playing with small children.

## The pack

A 52 card standard deck. That is four suits of Ace, Two to Ten, Jack, Queen and King – no Jokers, bridge score cards or anything else.

## How to play

### 1. Deal

Share the pack out evenly between the players. It doesn’t matter much if some players have one extra card – or a few extra if you’re not too competitive.

Hold your cards together in one hand, face down. You must not peek at your cards before playing them.

## 2. Lay cards down in turn

In turn, lay your top card down in the center of the table or play area, on top of any cards already played.

## 3. Snap

When the card just played has the same letter or number as the one it is laid on top of, then any player may slap the pile and call “snap!” If you are the first to do so, you capture the pile. Tidy the pile, turn it over and place it under your other cards. The player *after* the one who captures the cards takes the next turn.

## 4. The winner

The game may end when one player runs out of cards, when one player has all the cards, when an agreed time is reached, when Mum says so... If you have the most cards when the game is over then you win.

---

# Packs, packets and piles

In this book ‘pack’ refers to the set of cards used to play a game, whereas a ‘deck’ is the set of cards typically sold or stored together. So in SNAP (*page 18*) the pack is a 52 card standard deck with no Jokers – although you could play the game with any deck where the cards may be paired. In BLIND DON (*page 97*), not only the Jokers but also the Twos, Threes, Fours and Fives are removed from a standard deck to make a 36 card pack. In other games several decks may be shuffled together to form a larger pack typically when playing with more than about five players.

A ‘packet’ is some subset of a pack, such as the cards each SNAP player holds in their hand, and a ‘pile’ is a packet on the table or floor. Generally this will either be a ‘discard pile’ for cards that are not needed again until the pack is shuffled, or a trick like the pile in





**Loser(s) stay on** (Slightly more players than would normally play a game)

Just like winner(s) stay on, but it is the winner(s) that sit out the next pitch. This is perhaps most common amongst gamblers.

## Never ending games

A couple of games in this book have their own rules for ‘never-ending games’. These aren’t quite leagues, as there is no overall winner but I think they deserve a mention here:

**NEVER-ENDING SPACE RACE** (*page 70*)

FOR SHOOT THE MOON.

**NEVER-ENDING RHAPSODY** (*page 128*)

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## SUM-RUN-SET (2–5 players)

This is a game of my own design that takes ideas from several similar fishing games (*page 33*) played around the Mediterranean and elsewhere such as the Italian SCOPA and CICERA, Moroccan RONDA or Ecuadorian CUARENTA. CASINO is the best known version in English speaking countries in spite of being a particularly complicated example. SUM-RUN-SET is designed to be fun and easy to learn – especially if you are familiar with CRIBBAGE (*page 85*).

### The pack

A 52 card standard deck. *Aces low*.

I like to score the game on a cribbage board (*page 82*) but you could use a tally sheet (*page 84*) instead.

## A pitch

### 1. Deal the pond

Deal some cards face up to the table to start the pond (*page 33*). Start with a four card pond for two to four players or a seven card pond for five players.

### 2. Play hands

Multiple hands (*page 28*) are played for each pitch, with the same younger and elder hand, and without collecting the cards or shuffling the deck in between. For each hand:

#### 1. Deal

Deal four cards each for a two to four player game, or three each for a five player game.

#### 2. Fish

In turn, play one card from the hand. This may capture cards from the pond as follows:

#### Sum

A pip card (*page 25*) may capture any number of cards that add up to its face value. For example, a Nine may take a Four and a Five – or a Six, a Two and an Ace. Face cards (*page 25*) can capture cards that add up to 15, but that doesn't include using them to capture a different rank of face card. You score **2 for a sum**, no matter how many cards you capture.

#### Run

A pip card may capture two or more pip cards that form a continuous sequence with it – a run of three or more. So a Three may capture a Four and a Five; or an Ace, a Two and a Four. The only run that can contain face cards is the three

card run Jack, Queen, King. You score **1 per card in a run**, including the capturing card. If all the cards have the same suit then score **2 per card in a running flush**.

### **Set**

Any card may be used to capture any number of cards of the same rank. The score depends on whether that makes two, three or four cards. You should peg 2 for a pair, 6 for a prial or 12 for a mournival (*page 41*).

Points for the captures should be pegged/tallied immediately. If no capture is possible, or if the player chooses not to capture for whatever reason, then the played card is placed face up on the table as part of the pond.

There are two more ways to score points during the pitch:

### **Fall**

If the previous player does not capture and you capture the card they just played then peg 2 for a fall. It doesn't matter if a new 4 card hand has been dealt in the meantime.

### **Sweep**

If you empty the pond by capturing all face up cards then peg 2 for a sweep.

If you empty the pond after the previous player played without capturing then you can score for both a sweep and a fall.

## **3. End of the pitch**

Assuming no one pegged out (*page 83*) during play then there are more points to score at the end of the pitch:

### **Most cards**

Whichever player or partnership captured the most cards gets **3 for cards**.



### **Most honours**

Whichever player or partnership captured the most Fives, Tens and Kings gets **5 for honours**. Honours (*page 66*) are scored for *after* most cards, so if a player pegs out with 3 points for most cards then it is too late to score 5 for honours.

### **Match play**

For a single round play three or four legs – first to 91 or 121 points wins. This normally happens during play because more points tend to be pegged when captures are made than for most cards and honours at the end of the pitch.

For a longer match I'd recommend three leg, 91 point rounds scoring 1 match points for a win, plus 1 for each player lurched (*page 84*). First to 5 or 8 match points wins.

### **Fixed partnerships** (4 players)

If you want to play with fixed partnerships (*page 70*) then peg both players scores together during the pitch. At the end of the pitch the *player* with the most cards wins 3 points for their partnership, then the *partnership* with most honours between them gets 5 points. If one partnership lurched the other then they score 1 for the win and 1 for each *player* lurched – 4 match points altogether.

### **League play** (4–5 players)

A clockwiser league (*page 102*) can be used to mix up partnership matches, and this is how I prefer to play with four players. You could also add a fifth player using an outsider league (*page 101*) if you enjoy partnership play enough to each sit out every fifth pitch. A league of 2 player pitches is possible too, but I would normally only play that way as part of a DUO'S COMPENDIUM (*page 115*) match.

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## **GIN RUMMY** (2 players)

A popular form of two player RUMMY that originated somewhere in North America. Various people are sure they know who created it but there seems to be no consensus. If this is nothing like the GIN RUMMY you know you've probably been taught 500 RUM under the wrong name – a game I haven't included because of the tendency for a player to take a very long turn while the others can only wait.

### **The pack**

A 52 card standard deck, *Aces low*.

### **A pitch**

#### **1. Deal**

The winner of each pitch becomes younger hand for the new pitch and deals – unless you prefer a Chinese deal (*page 31*). Deal 10 cards to each player, turn one over to start the discard pile and place the stock next to it.

#### **2. First turn**

##### *1. Elder hand*

If you lost the previous pitch – or are elder hand in the first – then you may either take the upcard or refuse it.

##### *2. Younger hand*

If your opponent refuses then you may take the upcard or refuse it.

##### *3. Discard*

If either of you take the upcard, discard one card face up in its place to end the first turn.

#### *4. Elder hand*

If you both refused then elder hand takes the top card of the stock and discards one card.

### **3. Draw one, discard one**

Unlike most RUMMY games you hold on to your runs and sets until the end of the pitch. So a normal turn simply consists of drawing a card from the stock or pile and discarding one to the pile. You can't peek at the stock card then change your mind and take the face up card from the pile. Your aim is to reduce the points value of your deadwood.

### **Deadwood**

You should keep an eye on how much deadwood (*page 64*) you have remaining outside your runs and sets. Pip cards (*page 25*) are worth 1 point per pip and all face cards (*page 25*) are worth 10 points.

### **4. Ending the pitch**

Either player may bring the pitch to an end on their turn if they will have less than 10 points of deadwood after discarding, either by knocking (*page 57*) or 'going gin':

#### *1. Discard face down*

Discard face down on top of the pile to indicate that you are ending the pitch.

#### *2. Call*

If you have no deadwood at all after discarding then call "gin" as you discard, with 1–10 points of deadwood call "knock" or rap your knuckles on the table.

#### *3. Lay down*

After either knock or gin you both lay down (*page 41*) your melds (*page 41*).

#### *4. Defender lays off?*

If your opponent knocked, but did *not* call “gin” then you have the opportunity to lay off (*page 41*) cards from your deadwood on to their melds. You may not swap their cards around. The knocker does not get to lay off on the defender’s (*page 23*) melds.

### **5. Scoring**

#### *1. Score the difference*

If you had the least deadwood then subtract yours from your opponents and score the difference.

#### *2. Gin bonus*

If you went gin you also score a 20 point bonus.

#### *3. Undercut bonus*

If your opponent knocked but after any laying off you have the least deadwood, then you have ‘undercut’ them. You score a 10 point bonus.

### **Match play**

Points are scored for each pitch and a running total is kept for each player. Traditionally the first player to 100 points wins. But I suggest playing three legs of a cribbage board (*page 82*) – first to 91.

There’s a little more to it for gamblers. The winner of each pitch must be noted. When one player reaches 100 points then they add 100 bonus points to their score, 200 if their opponent failed to score a single point. Then both players add 20 points to their score for each pitch they won, the ‘box bonus’. Finally the difference between the scores is worked out and an amount proportional to this is paid by the loser to the winner. The value of each point must be agreed before the game.

**League play** (3–7 players, or more)

Any of the leagues (*page 100*) described for two player pitches will work with GIN. The most traditional are three player loser stays on (to 100 points) and four players in two rotating teams (to 125 points). I prefer outsider or clockwise leagues played to four legs of a cribbage board – first player to 121 wins.

If you are gambling then the rules above still apply – the first player to the target score gets a 100 point bonus, then everyone gets 20 points for each pitch they won. Then each loser pays the winner some multiple of the difference between their scores.

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**Widow**

Some card game rules refer to a ‘widow’, which may sound a little odd. But this is in the old sense of a remainder and just means a small number of cards left over after dealing player’s hands. It could be thought of as a small stock, but a widow is normally used to give a small advantage to one player, either as a bonus or to compensate for a disadvantage.

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**QUINTO** (4 players in fixed partnerships)

Quinto is a lot like PARTNERSHIP WHIST (*page 71*), but interest and strategy are added with ‘quints’ – a twist on honours (*page 66*). It could also be considered a simpler alternative to BRIDGE or EUCHRE, but its strategy is at least as deep as either of those.

**The pack**

A 53 card standard deck – the usual 52 cards and one Joker. *Aces high.*