

RULES FOR STROHMANDELN

Strohmann-Tarock (Dummy Tarock, Strohmandeln)

Number of players: 2 Number of cards: 54 Suit cards: 32
Total points: 70 Tarocks (trumps): 22 Special cards: none

The Sküs is the highest trump.

Suits: Spades, Clubs, Hearts, Diamonds

Suit cards (in rank): King, Queen, Knight, Jack; black suits: 10 to 7; red suits: ace to 4

Tarocks (in rank): Sküs, XXI, XX, XIX, XVIII, XVII, XVI, XV, XIV, XIII, XII, XI, X, IX, VIII, VII, VI, V, IIII, III, II, I (*Pagat*)

Special cards: none

Point values: Sküs, XXI, I, King: 5; Queen: 4; Knight: 3; Jack: 2; all others: 1

Counting method: in threes (subtracting two points); or count each point card with two empty cards; or use fractions (Sküs, XXI, I, King: 4 1/3 points; Queen 3 1/3 points, Knight 2 1/3 points etc.)

The most interesting Tarock game for two players is *Strohmann-Tarock*, usually called *Strohmandeln*. Even if the bidding possibilities are severely reduced in comparison to the four-player versions, *Strohmann-Tarock* is nevertheless a sophisticated game with many attractions. Of particular interest is that, while players are prevented from seeing some of their own cards for a portion of the game, at the same time they do get to look at a part of the opposing hand. In addition the suit cards are here of far greater significance than in other varieties of Tarock, so that good players not only count the Tarocks that are played but also pay close attention to how often each suit has been played and which suits have been trumped by the opponent with Tarocks. A player who obtains in this way an exact picture of the suit cards in his opponent's hand can often still decide a game in his favor at the last moment, even if he was much weaker in Tarocks.

Strohmandeln is played today not only in Austria, but also in Hungary. There it is called *Strohmandli*. In other countries of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire it does not seem to be common. *Strohmann-Tarock* might have developed at the latest in the 1880's, perhaps already somewhat earlier.

The cards and their values

Strohmandeln is played by 2 players with 54 cards. King, Sküs, Mond and Pagat each count 5 points, Queen 4 points, Knight 3 points, Jack 2 points and each empty card 1 point. The method

of counting is "in threes." The entire deck of cards comes to 70 points. To win a game, at least 35 points plus 2 cards are necessary.

The deal

The dealer deals each player 15 cards, five at a time. The remainder of 24 cards is distributed so that on the table in front of each player are 3 packets of 4 face-down cards each. These 6 packets, also called *Strohänner*, are dealt out in the same fashion as the hands, so that Elder (the non-dealer) receives the first packet, the dealer the second one, etc.

If a player does not have a Tarock in his hand, then he may (after the deal and before the *Strohänner* are revealed) fold. In this case, the same player deals again.

The auction

After the deal each player examines and arranges the 15 cards in his hand. Then Elder must declare whether he will undertake the game, i.e. wants to venture a game. He does this with the words: "I take (*Ich nehme auf*)!" If Elder passes, by saying "I pass (*Weiter* or *Ich passe*)!", then the dealer has the right to venture the game and so to undertake it. If the dealer also passes, then a "simple game" is played nevertheless.

The difference between an *undertaken game* and a *simple game* is that the first is worth more, as follows: The *undertaker* of a game wins 3 game points, if he attains at least 35 plus two cards (counting in threes); if he loses, his opponent earns 4 game points. A simple game, however, is worth only 2 game points, whether won or lost. The undertaker thus has the chance to win 1 more game point than in a simple game, but he risks losing 2 more game points.

Three *Strohänner* belong to the hand of each player. A player can, according to specified rules, take them up into his hand and/or play them. Before the actual play begins, each player uncovers the topmost card of the first (leftmost) *Strohmann* before him. If this card is a Tarock or a King, then he takes it up into his hand. If it is a suit card lower than a King, then it remains uncovered as the top card of the *Strohmann*. Each player can continue taking up cards, in succession, until he uncovers a suit card lower than a King. This procedure is followed in exactly the same way with the other two *Strohänner*.

It can thus occur that one player takes a whole *Strohmann* or two into his hand, while the other player has the bad luck not to see a single King or Tarock among the first three cards he turns over, so that he must wait each time until he gets rid of the first card before he can turn the next.

The opponent has the right to see the cards from the *Strohänner* before they are taken up into the hand. It is therefore advisable to lay them aside face-up, so that the opponent can observe them at his leisure, and then afterwards to take them into the hand. When a card is exposed from each *Strohmann*, the actual play begins.

Play

Elder leads. Following suit is required; a player who cannot follow suit must play a Tarock. If this too is impossible, he can play any suit card. The trick is won by the highest card in the led suit, or by the highest Tarock if any are played. The winner of the trick leads to the next. Usually the tricks are not set aside separately but are simply stacked one on top of another.

A player may use the cards resting face-up on the Strohmänner in the same fashion as the cards in his hand. He can lead them, take the trick with them, or lose them.

If a player cannot play the suit led by his opponent from his hand, he must do this from the Strohmänner, if a card of the appropriate suit rests atop a Strohmänn. If a player cannot play the suit led by the opponent from the Strohmänner, he must play a card from the hand.

If a player uses the top card of a Strohmänn to lead, win, or lose a trick, he must, immediately after laying aside that trick, turn over the card lying beneath it so that the opponent can see it and, if this card is a King or a Tarock, take it into his hand. The next cards are handled as described above. If he uncovers a suit card lower than a King, it is left atop the Strohmänn.

The last card of a Strohmänn can be taken up immediately, even if it would not otherwise qualify for admission into the hand. However there is also the variant rule that any last card of a Strohmänn lies on the table until it is played. This has no effect on the course of the game, as it merely takes away the challenge to the players' powers of memory.

It can, by the way, occur that a player has played all the cards from his hand and from then on only plays (or rather, must play) from the Strohmänner to finish.

Old Tarock books recommend not bothering to play a simple game but instead folding the cards. Subsequently, the same dealer deals again. If this rule is being observed, then it is advisable to deal at first only the cards for the two players' hands, and to go on and deal out the Strohmänner only if the game is undertaken.

If a simple game is allowed for, then there is also the rule that a simple game is called a draw, if neither player reaches 35 points plus 2 cards. In other words: A final score of 35 to 35, or of 34 2/3 to 35 1/3, is a draw in a simple game. In these cases the next round, consisting of 2 games, counts double.

Bonuses

The classic variant

Additionally Trull (i.e., Sküs, Mond, Pagat) in the hand and Four Kings in the hand can be bid; this, however, is not obligating. Whether these cards are additionally found in the pile of the player's tricks at the end is of no consequence for winning this bonus bid. The bids must be made, at the latest, after the first of the Trull cards or the first of the Four Kings is played. For players who have three Kings in the hand at the beginning, it can thus be advisable to hold back from this bid at first, because the fourth King could emerge, in the course of play, in one of the Strohmänner. The same applies to those cases where only one card is missing from the Trull.

Trull and Four Kings in the hand are honored with 1 game point each. Pagat ultimo (which can only be played unannounced) and Pagat captured in the last trick are likewise worth 1 game point each. An announced Pagat is not allowed for, because success or failure in many cases would depend on whether a Tarock is in the opponent's last Strohmänner-cards. An unannounced Pagat ultimo is already difficult enough.

An unannounced Valat (taking all the tricks) gets 12 game points but occurs extremely rarely.

The extended variant

Since the bids of Four Kings in the hand and/or the Trull in the hand grow ever rarer in current forms of play for 4 players, it has—also in Strohmänn-Tarock—become the practice to allow, in lieu, for bonuses for Four Kings and the Trull taken unannounced in tricks.

Players accustomed to play Königrufen with Uhu (winning the penultimate trick with II) and Kakadu (winning the antepenultimate trick with III) will be pleased to accept both these bids into the rules of Strohmänn. In this case it is recommended that an unannounced Uhu and an unannounced Kakadu count 1 game point each - thus just as much as an unannounced Pagat.

An interesting enrichment of Strohmänn is the *Grand Point* (Grammel-Punkt). This rule means that a player who obtains at least 45 points in his tricks receives a bonus of 1 game point. In this case his opponent has 25 points or less. If the opponent has at least 26 points, then he does not have to pay a Grammel-Punkt.

Also the bid *Rostopschin* can be used well in Strohmänn. This consists of taking two consecutive tricks with Tarock XVII and Tarock XVIII, whereby when playing Tarock XVII one says "Ross!" and when playing Tarock XVIII "Topschin!" A player playing Tarock XVII and Tarock XVIII consecutively, without saying "Ross!" and "Topschin!" has not earned this bonus. He thus also cannot lose the bonus, if one of the two cards (or both cards) are captured.

In order to be completely exact: The first trick of a Rostopschin can also come by the fact that one takes one of the other player's cards with Tarock XVII and in addition says "Ross!" Subsequently, one plays Tarock XVIII with "Topschin!" and wins the trick. A won Rostopschin counts 1 game point. There is no sense in providing in the rules of Strohmänn for a bid of Rostopschin at the beginning of play.

The values of bids and bonuses

We show here in the middle column the classical variant. In the right column we describe the extended variant, which we ourselves play and in which further bonuses such as Grand Point, Uhu, and Kakadu are also provided for.

	<i>classic variant</i>	<i>extended variant</i>
simple game		
won/lost	2 game points	1 game point
both players under 35/2		draw
winner at least 45 points		2 game points
undertaken game		
won	3 game points	3 game points
lost	4 game points	4 game points
undertaker at least 45 points		4 game points
undertaker less than 26 points		5 game points
Bonuses		
Four Kings in the hand, announced	1 game point	

Trull in the hand, announced	1 game point	
Four Kings in the tricks, unannounced		1 game point
Trull in the tricks, unannounced		1 game point
Pagat, unannounced	1 game point	1 game point
Uhu, unannounced		1 game point
Kakadu, unannounced		1 game point
Rostopschin		1 game point
Valat, unannounced	12 game points	12 game points

It is not advisable to allow for doubling in the rules, unless one decides that an undertaker can be doubled, but otherwise no doubling is possible. Since the undertaker in the case of loss loses an additional point anyhow, the problem arises when using the doubling rule that the undertaker can lose 8 points and win only 6 points.

In addition doubling is risky, because the play often takes a surprising turn through the revelation of the Strohmänn cards.

If a tie results after play and bonuses are tabulated, then the next round, consisting of 2 games, counts double. This double round is called *Nullrunde*.

Tips on playing tactics

How strong is your hand?

In order to undertake a game, you need a strong hand with which to obtain the majority of the points. Consider that at the beginning of the game of 12 your 27 total cards (approximately 45%) lie in the Strohmänner. In other words: At the beginning of the game you cannot view almost every other card that belongs to you!

How strong does your hand have to be to venture to undertake a game? We have determined that one can risk an undertaken game if one has safe tricks in the hand worth 20 to 25 points. If one has only barely 20 points, then the undertaking is rather risky; if one comes into the range of 25 points or even more, then the prospects for success are very good.

What are safe tricks? Naturally Sküs and Mond, but in addition the Pagat, which in Strohmänn-Tarock can usually be brought home (unless you **always** have the suits led by your opponent, which does not occur often, or your opponent possesses so many high Tarocks that he runs you out of Tarocks and fetches your Pagat). Further safe tricks in Strohmänn-Tarock are Kings (and of course Queens of the same suit). Also Queens of suits well-represented in the hand usually guarantee a trick without the matching King.

Let us assume that you have in your hand (before first uncovering the Strohmänner) Sküs, Mond, King of Hearts, Queen of Hearts, and several Clubs including the Queen. If you add the values of the Trull cards ($4 \frac{1}{3}$ each), the King ($4 \frac{1}{3}$) and the two Queens ($3 \frac{1}{3}$ each), you get $19 \frac{2}{3}$ points. Risk-loving players will undertake in this case and hope for above-average cards in the Strohmänner. If these don't show up, the game is lost.

Let us assume that you have in your hand at the beginning Sküs, Pagat, King of Spades, Queen of Spades, King of Clubs, and several Hearts including the Queen. In this case you have 24 points in tricks and will probably undertake. The missing points for the game goal (35 points and 2 cards) should in most cases present themselves.

It is important, however, that you also possess at least 6 to 7 Tarocks. For a player beginning a game with very few Tarocks in the hand must fear that his opponent is particularly strong in Tarocks and will take some fat tricks of suit cards.

Play out the Strohmänner rapidly!

It is important that you play your Strohmänner rapidly, so that you win full insight into all your cards. Conversely, it is nearly always a good thing to prevent the opponent from playing out his Strohmänner in order to keep him in uncertainty about his strengths and weaknesses. For example, if your opponent has Hearts and Diamonds resting on top of his Strohmänner, then you would play Spades or Clubs, ideally from your Strohmänner. This leads to a reduction in the number of cards in your Strohmänner, while your opponent must use cards from his hand and sit idly on his Strohmänn cards.

In any case, you should never get into a situation, towards the end of the game, where your opponent has already taken up all his Strohmänn cards, while you have played all your hand cards and are therefore forced to play from your Strohmänner. If this unpleasant situation should arise, your opponent will dictate the course of the game according to his desire and will claim your cards in succession.

You should immediately play a Queen resting on the Strohmänner, even if you do not have the King in your hand. Even if you are quite long in this suit, you will rarely succeed in playing from low to high and bring home the Queen. In addition, the probability is quite large at the beginning of the game that the King is sleeping in one of the Strohmänner and you will thus bring the Queen home. (Four times out of ten you will succeed.) You should abstain from playing a Queen from atop a Strohmänn only if your opponent has at least 2 lower cards of the same suit exposed.

If you play an exposed Queen and your opponent plays a lower suit card to it, then a sleeping King was responsible. This means you should quickly play the remaining cards of this suit. If your opponent should later take up the King from his Strohmänner, you will then capture it with a Tarock. Only if your opponent is particularly strong in Tarocks, can he run you out of Tarocks and bring home the King at the end of the game, when you possess no more Tarocks.

Everything we have said about exposed Queens applies in a general manner also to exposed Knights.

If the Queen and Knight (or Knight and Jack) of one suit are lying atop two of your Strohmänner, then you should usually play the higher card. The same applies to pip cards (Ace-4, 7-10); there is always the possibility that the next higher court or pip card is still sleeping in the Strohmänn.

If you have, exposed atop your Strohmänner, two or three pip cards of one suit, in which you possess one of the higher courts (King, Queen, or Knight) in your hand, while your opponent has no card of this suit exposed, then you should play the court from your hand.

If you have the King in your hand and the Queen of the same suit atop a Strohmänn, then it is advisable to play the Queen first; if both courts are in the hand, while the Knight the same suit lies atop one of your Strohmänner, then the Knight should be played rapidly. In this way you will sooner get possession of the concealed cards.

If your opponent leads a suit in which you have only pip cards (both in your hand and on top of your Strohmänner), then you should play from the Strohmänn. If the Jack of this suit is on top of a Strohmänn, and your opponent has played a higher court card, then play the Jack, even if you have one or two pip cards in your hand.

Weak Strohmänner players love not to play any cards from their Strohmänner when there is a suit in which they possess no cards. They are waiting for the opponent to play this suit, so that they will then be able to win the trick with a Tarock. But the opponent will probably be suspicious, since he possesses a greater number of cards in this suit. He will only play this problematic suit when the Strohmänner have been reduced in large part, so that he possesses an overview of the distribution of cards in this suit.

A popular feint consists in playing the Knight in response to a led King, even when one also possesses a pip card in one's hand. The idea is to lead your opponent into the erroneous belief that the Knight was the last card of this suit in your hand, and you are hoping that he will therefore omit to go on and play the Queen. This maneuver is however so transparent that it can only be used once or twice in a partie. As soon as all 6 Strohmänner are diminished, your opponent will recognize anyhow whether you were bluffing.

Playing from low to high

It is a given in Strohmänn-Tarock to play from low to high in suits that are not solidly held. You should not capture an Ace or a Ten of the opponent's straight away with the King, because the King could win a fatter trick, a Queen or a Knight. Therefore, if you cannot take the trick with a lower court card, you should save the king and play a pip card. But consider that at the beginning of the game, on average, 3 cards of a suit lie in the Strohmänner. Thus you also shouldn't overdo the tactic of playing from low to high at the beginning, otherwise it can happen that your King is captured by a Tarock.

Let us assume that your King has in fact been captured by a Tarock (because too many cards of its suit were in the Strohmänner), but you still have the Queen or the Knight in your hand. In this case you should wait: Perhaps your opponent will get one of the still missing suit cards from his Strohmänner, and then you can take another trick with the Queen or the Knight nevertheless.

If the cards of a suit not solidly held are rather evenly distributed between the two players, then the results of playing from low to high will often depend on who "makes the first move" with this suit, i.e. who leads a card of this suit. Here, the following principle applies in many cases: The player who first begins to play the contested suit will have a worse point balance in the suit to show for it in the end. Usually, however, this play-off will not occur in only one suit, but in at least two, if not in three.

The player who is stronger in Tarocks will play Tarocks before moving into a suit not solidly held. In this, it is advisable to proceed so as to obtain as many tricks as possible in the Tarocks.

You should therefore always first play from a solid run of Tarocks; of what rank is not important. If you have III, VI, IX, XIV, XV, XVI, XVII, XX and Sküs, then you should play the solid series Tarock XIV to Tarock XVIII. If, on the other hand, there is no solid run in your Tarocks, e.g. you have V, VII, XI, XVI, XVIII, then you should play one of lower Tarocks, in order to take tricks with the higher ones later. If it turns out that you were too weak in Tarocks, you will eventually switch back to the suits.

Of course it is left up to the player's skill to decide which of several contested suits he should give up by making his move into it early on. The art of Strohmändeln consists of setting the right priorities in these cases.

Capturing or bringing home the Pagat

Let us assume that you have more than half of all the Tarocks in the game, i.e. more than 11 Tarocks in your hand, probably including a solid run of some length, but you are missing the Pagat. In this case you should try to hunt down and claim the Pagat, which may be in your opponent's hand. You can manage this by using your Tarocks before you play suits.

If you have the Pagat with only a few other Tarocks, say 7 or fewer, then do not miss the next opportunity to win a trick with it, so that you can shift your main focus to playing the suits.

The unannounced Pagat ultimo

It is very difficult in Strohmänn-Tarock to pull off the Pagat ultimo, even though this is only done unannounced. Only if you have more than half of all the Tarocks after the first uncovering of the Strohmänner, i.e. more than 11, in your hand, is it worthwhile to have hopes of getting this unannounced bonus. But even in this case, you will only in the rarest cases achieve your goal by running your opponent out of Tarocks. You need, in addition, at least one long suit, with which to make your opponent play Tarocks.

If there are signs that your opponent wants to play the unannounced Pagat ultimo, it can be worthwhile to delay playing out the Strohmänner. If you find some Tarocks in the last cards of the Strohmänner, you can sometimes succeed in intercepting the Pagat even though you were quite weak in Tarocks at first.

However this tactic is recommended only if the game is already lost. When playing with Grand Point, it is absolutely inadvisable. In some cases you will perhaps succeed in preventing the unannounced Pagat ultimo, but you will fall so far behind in the game that you will usually have to pay the Grand Point in exchange.

Rostopschin

The Rostopschin is an old Tarock rule that was already quite popular between the wars in Vienna, presumably especially in four-player Tarock. It is described in detail in Friedrich Torberg's *Die Tante Jolesch oder der Untergang des Abendlandes in Anekdoten*. It also leads to interesting constellations in Strohmänn-Tarock.

Only in the rarest cases will you have in your hand, in addition to Tarock XVII and Tarock XVIII, all the higher Tarocks, i.e. XIX, XX, XXI, and the Sküs. Then, without a hitch, you play

Tarock XVII, saying at the same time "Ross!", take the trick, and then play Tarock XVIII with the word "Topschin!"

If you are missing some high cards, things get exciting. If you have only Tarock XIX and Tarock XXI in your hand in addition to Tarock XVII and Tarock XVIII, your opponent will keep Tarock XX and the Sküs for as long as possible, in order to prevent the Rostopschin. If you have more Tarocks than your opponent, you will perhaps also achieve your goal by running him out of Tarocks. At any rate, you have nothing to lose, because if you see that your opponent is going to capture Tarock XVII or Tarock XVIII, you can nevertheless play the two cards and simply abstain from saying "Ross!" and "Topschin!" Thus no Rostopschin is played, and you also can't lose it.

If the disposition of all high Tarocks up to the Sküs is already known, and it is already clear to you that you have won the game, it is worthwhile to sacrifice the Mond. You play the Mond out, and hope that your opponent will capture it with the Sküs, in the belief that he will change the course of the game. But the game is already lost anyhow, and now Rostopschin must be paid in addition. Naturally you may use the Mond-sacrifice tactic only if you have already brought home the Pagat, since otherwise your opponent would win the unannounced Trull.

Mondfang

A Mondfang (capture of the Mond) receives no separate bonus but often decides the game, because the card is a five-pointer. There is a very simple way to defend against a Mondfang: You retain one or two small Tarocks, in order to draw your opponent into winning the trick. He will then lead with a Tarock, which you capture with the Mond.

Experienced Strohmänn-Tarockierer keep Tarock II and Tarock III anyhow, not only in order to get the opponent to play Tarocks, but also in case the unannounced Uhu or the unannounced Kakadu is possible. Mind you, even if one avoids all errors of oversight perfectly, these two unannounced bonuses can only be won by a hand extremely strong in Tarocks.

Renonce rules

If a player uncovers 2 cards from one of the Strohmänner at the same time by a mistake, and the first is not a King or a Trull card, then he must show his opponent these two cards and lay them back face-down on top of the Strohmänn.

If a player has neglected to follow suit or to trump a card from a suit he doesn't possess with a Tarock, this constitutes "Renonce," as in all other Tarock games, and the opponent wins the game and all bonuses realized so far, without having to play any further. The player who committed Renonce, may not score the bonuses he has realized so far. In addition, the opponent can require that play continue and be corrected, so as to preserve his chance for additional bonuses such as the Grammel-Punkt.

The rule in Strohmänn-Tarock is that it does not constitute Renonce if one takes a trick with a Tarock, even though one has the appropriate suit exposed in the Strohmänner. Since the opponent also sees the exposed cards, fairness requires that he point out the error at once and require that it be corrected. The error itself remains without sanction.

The penalty for a misdeal is 1 game point (2 game points during a doubled round after a draw or tie).

Each player has the right to inspect the trick just taken by his opponent. In most circles it is also permissible for a player to look at his own tricks again during a game, but this "Nachwassern" (going back over again) is considered undignified.

If a player in Strohmänn-Tarock has inadvertently played 2 cards, then he can take back one of the two cards. Here the principle is that each player is at liberty to betray information about his own hand and thereby to hurt himself.

Variant rules for Strohmänn-Tarock with 40 cards

Strohmänn-Tarock as described above is played by Tarock players who in groups of four play Königrufen. Those who in fours play Zwanzigerrufen with forty cards will also play Strohmänn-Tarock with 40 cards. Each player receives 10 cards, and in the Strohmänn are made up of one packet of four cards and two packets of three cards. In other respects the rules of Zwanzigerrufen and those of the above-described variant of Strohmänn-Tarock apply, as appropriate.