

Ambition

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1. Introduction

Ambition is a trick-taking card game, played with the traditional 52-card deck. I developed it during the fall of 2003 in Budapest, Hungary. My aesthetic objective was to create a trick-taking game where “hand-luck”, or the chance factor incident from variations of quality in dealt hands, played as minimal a role as possible, thereby making the game optimally skillful. I believe I’ve succeeded; the role of hand-luck is qualitatively observed to be small, and preliminary statistical analyses indicate that it accounts for about 3% of the variance in a 1¼-hour game.

The first three pages (§1-10) of this document contain all that is necessary in order to learn Ambition; §11 contains rules for a bidding mechanic in favor among advanced players; §12, a “short game” variation. The appendices contain auxiliary material about the game, and at the end of this document I provide “reference slips” and a scoresheet that players are encouraged to use during the game.

2. How to start

In order to play Ambition, one must assemble:

- four players,
- a standard deck of 52 cards,
- counters or chips, recommended in denominations of ten (“blue”, x7), five (“red”, x5), and one (“white”, x17);
- a pen and paper (for scorekeeping).

Nothing more is needed. Teaching Ambition takes about five minutes; the length of a game is 60 to 90 minutes.

3. The deck

The ace, king, queen, and jack of each suit are called *honors* and the numerical cards (2-10) are *spot* cards. The rank order is: 2(high)-A-K-Q-J-10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2(low); a 2 in the led suit becomes high (and wins) if an honor of that suit is played to the trick, but plays as low otherwise. There is never a trump suit in Ambition; therefore, a trick is always won by the highest card played in the suit led.

4. Round structure

A game of Ambition consists of several (usually, about 8) *rounds*. Each round is a unit of play consisting of four phases:

- *The Deal*: Each player is dealt a hand of 13 cards.
- *The Pass*: Players pass three cards to other player(s) and receive 3 to replace them.
- *The Tricks*: The main part of a round. Tricks continue until all cards have been played.
- *Counting & scoring*: Evaluation and scoring of the round.

5. The deal

After a thorough shuffle-and-cut (preferably seven or more riffle shuffles; poor shuffling noticeably alters the game) the dealer deals, starting at his or her left and proceeding clockwise, to each player until the deck is exhausted. If the deal is performed properly, each player will receive 13 cards.

While one player is dealing, another should arrange the chips (7 blue, 5 red, 17 white) in the center of the table. Some players prefer, for ease of counting, that blue and red chips be stacked in pairs, while whites are stacked in fives or free.

6. The pass

According to the number of the round, each player selects three cards from his or her hand and passes them, face down, to the appropriate player(s), receiving three cards to replace them. Passing occurs “simultaneously”: players do not view the cards passed to them until they have already passed.

Round #	Pass type
1, 5, ...	Left: Pass 3 cards to player at left
2, 6, ...	Right: Pass 3 cards to player at right
3, 7, ...	Across: Pass 3 cards to opposite player
4, 8, ...	Scatter: Pass 1 card to each player

7. The tricks

Familiarity with the trick-taking genre of card game is assumed; those unfamiliar with the concept should consult Appendix C, which provides an explanation of the trick-taking mechanic.

After passing is finished, players begin at tricks. The *opening lead* is always the 5♦; the player holding this card leads it to the first trick. Each subsequent trick is led by the winner of the one preceding it. The play of tricks continues until all players have exhausted their hands.

When taking a trick, its winner adds up the point values (as given below) of the component cards and announces the total, the value of the trick. She places the cards face down in a region of the table (“cache”) that clearly indicates that they are hers. She also moves into her cache a number of chips equal to the number of points taken (blue, 10; red, 5; white, 1).

8. Counting

Associated with each card in the deck is a number of points, as follows:

- ♦: **5 pts.** for 5♦; **3 pts.** for honors; **1 pt.**, other spots (**25** in total).
- ♥: **7 pts.** for 2♥; **3 pts.**, for honors; **1 pt.**, other spots (**27** in total).
- ♠: **10 pts.** for A♠; **5 pts.**, other honors; **2 pts.**, for spots (**43** in total).
- ♣: **17 pts.** for K♣; **0 pts.**, all other clubs (**17** in total).

There are **112** points in the deck.

The total number of points won in tricks by each player is his or her *points taken* for the round. This will usually equal the number represented by the player's chips, but the cards in his or her cache should be counted to verify the chip totals.

9. Scoring

Scoring is where we discuss the objective of Ambition. It is important to note that *points taken* in tricks are not the same as *points scored* to the game. After each round, points (good) and strikes (bad) are scored according to the outcome of the count, as follows:

- If any player takes **72 points** or more (Slam, symbol ψ) he or she scores 40 points. Other players score points taken, up to 14. No points are scored for taking none (Nil) and no strikes are assessed to any player.

Otherwise,

- A player taking the **greatest total**, but 71 points or less, receives a *strike* and scores no points ("overstrike", symbol ω). In ties for the greatest total, the tied players overstrike.
- A player taking **14 or more points**, but not the most, scores points taken, up to 40.
- A player taking **1 to 13 points** scores points taken, but receives a strike (known as "understrike", symbol ϵ).
- A player taking **no points** receives a 24-point bonus (Nil, symbol θ).

If a round occurs such that, according to points taken, all four players strike, it is counted as void: no points or strikes are scored. (This is extremely rare.) Strikes and points accumulate throughout the game. At the end of each round, if no player has four strikes (per the game-ending condition given below) another round begins.

10. Game-ending condition

At the end of each round, the game ends if any player has earned four strikes. All players with four strikes are ineligible from winning. The winner is the player, among those with three or fewer strikes, who has scored the most points.

11. Optional: Nil bidding

This section contains an optional rule, recommended for advanced play. Here I introduce a bidding mechanic that increases the risk of the “Nil” strategy, allowing skilled players to use the feature to further advantage, while penalizing the Nils that fall “by accident” rather than from skilled play.

Required additional materials are eight cards from another deck (the card backs should be different): four black and four red. At the beginning of each round, one of each color should be given to each player. After passing is complete, but before the first trick is played, each player discards one of them (face-down) and keeps the other as his *bid card*.

A red card indicates a Nil bid; a black card declines to bid. Each player’s bid remains secret until the end of the round, when all are revealed. A player who does not bid Nil (black) scores as given in §9, with one change: Nil, when not bid, earns only 14 points.

A player who bids Nil (red) scores 35 points if he achieves it (symbol: ν). If he fails his bid (symbol: κ) and has 3 or fewer strikes, he scores one strike, but otherwise scores as given in §9. Only one strike may be given for the round, so if he also earned an under- or overstrike, only one is given. If a player failing a Nil bid has three strikes, he does **not** suffer the fourth (and fatal) strike for this alone, but instead a 21-point deduction to his score. In a round where Slam is achieved, bids are irrelevant; recall that no strikes are assigned in a Slam round, nor is Nil scored.

Remark 1: The reason for a fourth strike not to be given for a failed Nil is that, otherwise, a player could spend part of a round in a “lame duck” or, worse, kingmaker situation. My view is that a game should generally not progress much beyond a point where it is impossible for one player to win. An alternative solution would be to disallow the Nil bid entirely to a player with 3 strikes.

Remark 2: As given in §9, “If a round occurs such that the points taken would have all four people strike, it is counted as void: no points or strikes are scored.” κ -strikes do not count toward this rule. Therefore, if four strikes are given but at least one is a κ -strike, the round nonetheless stands. This is because, in my mind, the κ -strike is not assigned for the round at its end, but for the incorrect prediction made at its beginning.

12. Optional: “short game” variation

I would recommend that players who wish to shorten the game *not* use hard caps on the number of rounds, nor reduce the number of strikes required to lose the game. Hard caps create scenarios in which it becomes impossible for a player to win (e.g. trailing by 81 with two rounds left). That’s no fun, and one of the virtues of Ambition is that it remains “anyone’s game” right until the end. Ending the game at 3 (or 2) strikes increases the likelihood of a very early end. Instead, players can shorten the game by introducing a winning condition: a player who reaches 150 points, leading by at least 15, wins. (One might also want to stipulate, for aesthetic reasons, that the winning condition may not be triggered by a player scoring a strike for the round.) The game will last 6-7 rounds, or roughly an hour.

Additional Information

A. Licensing

Rules of Ambition, and the game itself, are Copyright 2003-2006 Mike Church. You may freely distribute, copy, and use the rules for all noncommercial purposes. You may also propose modified rules (variations) for Ambition, but should indicate them as such. Commercial use (casino gambling, for-profit publication) requires prior permission of Mike Church. Convivial, low-stakes gambling is considered noncommercial, so long as (1) all monetary transactions are among the players; i.e. there is no premium (“rake”) collected by the venue, and (2) no party to the game partakes on an employment basis.

B. Feedback

Below is a form that can be used for feedback on Ambition; please send all correspondence to ambition_game@yahoo.com.

Feedback: Ambition

Name:

Date:

Location:

Number of games played:

Please evaluate Ambition, briefly, according to the following objectives.

Enjoyment/Fun:

Clarity of Rules:

Strategic Balance:

Luck/skill Balance:

Overall:

What is your favorite aspect of Ambition?

What is your least favorite aspect of Ambition?

Other comments:

C. Trick-taking essentials

The main component of Ambition is the play of *tricks*. A trick is, in essence, a miniature contest in which each player selects one card from his or her hand and puts it, face-up, into play. The structure of a trick is as follows:

1. *Lead*: One player always has the right and obligation to play first in the trick, and (except on the first trick) may lead with any card in her hand.
2. *Follow*: In turn according to physical position (clockwise, in most English-speaking countries) each player follows by playing a card from his or her hand, until all have played.
3. *Resolve*: The high-ranking card is determined; the person who played it wins the trick. She collects its component cards, face-down, then leads to the next trick.

Players are required, if able, to “follow suit”; that is, to play in the suit of the lead. (Players unable to follow suit, because of being void in it, may play as they wish.) For example, with a hand containing the Q♠, 4♣, A♣, and 9♥, a player’s options would be as follows:

Lead	Options	Notes
5♣	4♣, A♣	He’d play the ace if he desired to win the trick, the four if he wanted to lose it.
6♥	9♥	He has only one choice; this is a “forced” play.
4♦	Anything	He cannot play in the led suit, can play any card in his hand.

The requirement of following suit is taken **very** seriously. A breach of this rule, known as *revoke*, will not be detected immediately, but attentive players will eventually catch the irregularity. If a player is caught in revoke, it is either corrected or the round is cancelled. If other players wish, the offender may be assigned a penalty strike. In trick-taking games, intentional revokes are considered tantamount to cheating, and therefore should not be committed at any time.

In Ambition, the highest-ranking card of the suit led wins the trick, with the 2 considered high in any trick to which an honor (J, Q, K, A) of the same suit is played. Some example tricks are shown below:

Lead	Other 3 cards	Winner	Reason
5♦	9♦, J♦, A♦	A♦	highest card of suit led
7♠	8♠, 10♠, 2♠	10♠	highest card of suit led
K♣	8♣, 4♣, 2♣	2♣	2 becomes high because of king
5♥	2♥, Q♠, 9♥	9♥	off-suit queen doesn’t activate 2
3♦	A♠, K♣, 2♥	3♦	only, hence high, card of led suit

D. Controversies, resolved and otherwise

1. Nil: no points or no tricks?

The rules state that Nil is awarded to a player who takes no *points* in the round; therefore, a player may take a 0-point club trick and still achieve Nil. Purists believe that Nil should be awarded only when a player takes no *tricks*.

I once agreed with this; when Nil was introduced (Nov. 2003) it was only awarded to a player who took no tricks. This allowed 0-point understrikes. Often, this happened to players who were new to the game, because they misunderstood the Nil rule. There can be academic debates about when Nil “should” be awarded; but, ultimately, I succeed as a game designer if and only if people enjoy my game. The stricter Nil left enough first-time players with a foul taste of the game that I saw fit to loosen the rule.

Awarding Nil for no *points* makes Nil slightly easier, of course, but in practice, not much. A Nil player can exploit this levity, without risk, only on a 0-point club trick, and then only in the fourth position-- a leftward opponent might be void in clubs, and ruff a stray point card. Moreover, the fact that the 0-point clubs may be won with no danger to Nil adds a small, but measurable, dimension of strategic character to some otherwise bland cards.

For the above reasons, I prefer Nil to be set at no points, rather than no tricks.

2. Strike-out: last place, or just not first?

Some people believe that a player with 4 strikes (“striking out”) should automatically take *last* place; others merely believe that it should exclude a player from taking *first* place. My view is the latter. Therefore, a point-leader who strikes out would be assessed *second* place rather than *fourth*.

3. Tie-breakers

Some players consider a gap of less than 10 (or 5, 7, 15) points to be an “essential tie”. Philosophically, I agree, if the outcome is to represent each player’s level of skill: a player ending with 160 points did not decisively outplay one who put up 155.

However, for a small gap to be counted as a tie, *in practice*, I do not advise; this sterilizes the endgame. I have no illusions about Ambition being decisive at the level of a few points-- Ambition has less “hand luck” than almost any trick-taking game yet written (~3% of the total variation in scores) but it’s not a game of pure skill. Chaotic strategic interplay, “cliffs” (e.g. that a 71-point take is an overstrike; 72, a Slam) and even table position add other “luck” factors to the game. Therefore, four players can play multiple games and see radically different outcomes, especially if they are close in skill level. This I consider a credit to Ambition; if the game were so tight, from a skill/luck perspective, that any set of four players would come up in the same order each game, there would be no reason to play it more than once.

An often-proposed tie-breaker, in the event of identical scores, is to use strikes; e.g. 0/163 would be counted ahead of 1/163 (but behind 3/164). I initially included such a tie-breaker in the original (Nov. 2003) rules, but am staunchly opposed to this. Two players who achieve identical scores (unless one has struck out) ought to be considered in a dead tie, regardless of strikes.

4. Removing patchwork; no more -6 LT

The previous edition (23 May 05) of *Ambition*'s rules involved an optional 6-point deduction to the player taking the last trick. I have removed it, after my latest revisions to the scoring system, and I hope not to need it again.

Ambition is a no-trump game, which means that it's not uncommon for players to get stuck in the lead toward the end of the round. In the original version of *Ambition*, this factor dominated each round, even more than the K♣ or high spades. Dodging late tricks should be *one* component of play, but not so dominant. Most rounds were end-loaded-- players held cards with high point values till late in the round-- aggravating the problem.

The -6 LT option was a bit of obvious patchwork and, while it worked for the purpose intended, it grew unsatisfying: an additional rule for me to explain to new players, an admission of a design flaw in the game. Moreover, to keep my desired total (then) of 85, I added a rather arbitrary 6 points for the 6♣. The value to the game of this somewhat inexplicable point card, while not negligible, was not enough to justify the existence of another additional rule.

A year later, I saw fit to attack this problem in a different way: I revamped the point values so as to *front-load* rounds. The 5-point 5♦ on the first trick, clearly, helped toward this end. Also, the 2♥ and A♠ were promoted to higher point values. They become, thus, more powerful as they are both high-ranking and worth a large number of points. This encourages players to use them early or in the middle of the round, when play is less chaotic, further encouraging front-loaded rounds.

These changes made the last-trick deduction, in my estimation, unnecessary under the new scoring system. Of course, it still happens that some rounds will be end-loaded, and evolve into "lead dodges" toward the end. That's fine, because this element deserves to be present in play, just not as dominant as it was in the game as originally written.

E. Scoring example

Because the scoring system of Ambition is complicated, I've provided an example game, in the interest of showing how the scoring system plays out in practice. Most scenarios that players will encounter are seen in the game below. The Nil-bidding mechanic given in §11 is used.

Player	Alice	Brian	Charles	Diana
Rd. 1; Nil bid?	No	No	No	No
Pts. taken:	27	45 (ω)	21	19
Pts. scored:	27	X	21	19
Total:	0/ 27	1/ 0	0/ 21	0/ 19
Rd. 2; Nil bid?	No	Yes	No	No
Pts. taken:	47	0 (ν)	51 (ω)	14
Pts. scored:	40	35	X	14
Total:	0/ 67	1/ 35	1/ 21	0/ 33
Rd. 3; Nil bid?	No	No	No	No
Pts. taken:	41 (ω)	6 (ε)	35	30
Pts. scored:	X	6, X	35	30
Total:	1/ 67	2/ 41	1/ 56	0/ 63
Rd. 4; Nil bid?	No	No	Yes	No
Pts. taken:	29	72 (ψ)	0	11
Pts. scored:	14	40	0	11
Total:	1/ 81	2/ 81	1/ 56	0/ 74
Rd. 5; Nil bid?	No	No	Yes	No
Pts. taken:	33 (ω)	24	22 (κ)	33 (ω)
Pts. scored:	X	24	22, X	X
Total:	2/ 81	2/105	2/ 78	1/ 74
Rd. 6; Nil bid?	No	Yes	No	Yes
Pts. taken:	0 (θ)	0 (ν)	68 (ω)	44 (κ)
Pts. scored:	14	35	X	40, X
Total:	2/ 95	2/140	3/ 78	2/114
Rd. 7; Nil bid?	No	Yes	No	No
Pts. taken:	30	13 (ε, κ)	29	40 (ω)
Pts. scored:	30	13, X	29	X
Total:	2/125	3/153	3/107	3/114
Rd. 8; Nil bid?	No	No	No	Yes
Pts. taken:	56 (ω)	8 (ε)	34	14 (κ)
Pts. scored:	X	8, X	34	-7
Total:	<u>3/125</u>	<u>4/161</u>	<u>3/141</u>	<u>3/107</u>
Place:	3d	2d	1st	4.
Rel. score:	- 4.33	+15.67	+17.00	-28.33
RS per rd.:	- 0.54	+ 1.96	+ 2.13	- 3.54

We examine what happened in each round. Outcomes that merit special discussion have been **boldfaced** in the table above: refer to §9-11 for clarification on scoring. Most scenarios that players will encounter with regard to scoring occur on the chart above. One exception, not given here, is the ultra-rare void round, where the round is discounted because it has all four players strike.

Round 1: **Brian** took the greatest total among the four players, with 45. Thus he earned an overstrike: 1 strike and no points. The other three players scored points taken.

Round 2: **Brian** bid, and achieved, a Nil (he *took* no points in the round). Thus, he *scored* 35. **Alice** *took* 47 points, managing not to take the most (Charles took 51). Because there is a 40-point cap on each round, she *scored* only 40 of those points.

Round 3: In addition to Alice's overstrike, **Brian** earned a strike for taking too few points in the round-- only 6. He did *score* those points, as follows from an understrike.

Round 4: Slam! In this round, **Brian** managed to take 72 points, exactly the total needed for a Slam. This *scored* him 40 points for the round. **Alice** took 29 in the round, but only *scored* 14; this is the cap for a non-Slam player in a Slam round. **Charles** bid Nil and achieved it, but because Nil is not recognized in Slam rounds, scored no points. **Diana** took 11 points and scored them; in a non-Slam round, she would also get an understrike, but no strikes are assessed in Slam rounds.

Round 5: **Alice** and **Diana** both took 33 points, tying for the most. Each earned an overstrike, scoring no points. **Charles** bid Nil and failed it, taking 22 points. He scored those points, but also earned a strike for failing his Nil.

Round 6: **Alice** and **Brian** both achieved Nil. Brian bid it; Alice did not. Alice earned 14 points for her unbid Nil, where Brian earned 35 for his bid Nil.

Round 7: **Brian** bid Nil and failed it with 13 points; thus, he struck for two reasons: the understrike and the failed Nil. However, only one strike may be awarded to a player per round, so he only suffers one.

Round 8: **Brian** earns his fourth (fatal) strike with an 8-point understrike. This ends the game. **Diana** bid Nil and failed it. Having three strikes, she does not earn the fourth, but suffers a 21-point deduction in its place: $14 - 21 = -7$.

Outcome: **Brian** is the point-leader, but with four strikes, he **loses**. **Charles**, having scored the most points among the non-struck-out players, **wins**. For calculations of relative score (and other concerns of score relevant mostly to tournaments and stat-keeping) Brian's score is considered to be 140 because, although he was the point-leader at 161, he lost and Charles (with 141) won.

F. Motivation for recent changes

Here I discuss the reasoning behind the most recent round of rules changes since the last edition, published on May 23, 2005.

Point values: The red suits were a problem in the previous edition: they were too weak. They didn't provide a significant number of points, but would bust a Nil. Therefore, high red cards were often undesirable, hence often passed, leading (among some player groups) to lopsided suit distributions and recurring red-suit Slams. The red suits needed more fire; I boosted them by raising the honors to 3 points, and also promoted the 5♦ and 2♥. Later I determined that each suit should have exactly one "special" card and promoted the A♠. The K♣ rose to 17 (from 13) in order to keep pace with the rising total count.

Slam change: I changed the scoring for Slam, in part to account for the new point values, and in part to improve the bonus. Now, when Slam is scored, Nil is not, understrikes are ignored, and other players are capped at 14 points. The reason: when one player is able to dominate the round to such an extent, it's an atypical round. Nil is much *less* of an accomplishment, and understriking is much less severe a mistake. (Also, that no strikes are given in Slam rounds allows players who are behind to catch up without ending the game.) The allowance of up to 14 points for other players provides some incentive for them to attempt to stop the Slam, but still gives the Slam player a decisive leap forward.

40-point cap: I added a cap on the number of points that can be scored per round: 40. The first purpose of this is aesthetics: I wanted Slam to be the best round outcome possible, especially given the risks it entails. The second is to enforce a sort of equality among the rounds, thus preventing the peculiar rounds from dominating the game. Otherwise, a split such as 57-55-0-0 could occur, giving one player a 55-point lead (which is massive) over another.

Nil changes: Nil was overvalued, to start. How difficult it is to achieve depends largely upon the other players, but it's easy for an overvalued Nil to lead the game to a sort of degeneracy, especially among inexperienced players.

In assessing the outcome of a round, what matters is not a player's nominal score, but rather the relative score (RS; that is, the player's score, minus the average of the other three). Positive rounds are good rounds; negative are bad. I decided that Nil should provide, on average, an RS slightly above zero, which made 24 the appropriate value. For advanced play, I added a significantly riskier "bidding" option: it admits an expected RS of +14, but with a downside—a strike—if the bid fails. Unbid Nil in advanced play (as prescribed by §11) is treated as a minor failure, earning an ERS of -7.

4-strike ending: First of all, I wanted to remove the rule that prevented a player from striking out on an understrike—a strike is a strike. This necessitated increasing the number of strikes before the game ended, from three to four. Second, the 3-strike ending often killed the game before it even started; a game that ends after three or four rounds is unsatisfying. I consider 7-9 rounds to be the optimal length of a game, and the new rules seem to provide an average near 8.

G. Contact information

You can contact me at ambition_game@yahoo.com. Ambition also has a blog at <http://ambition-game.blogspot.com/>. I use this blog to post Ambition variants, detailed explanations and motivations for changes in the rules, and various essays on game design.

H. Irregularities and resolutions

(This section only matters in an official context; if you are new to the game and just want to learn how to play, don't read it.)

Irregularities are deviations from a game's rules during play. When they occur, additional rules must be used to correct them. Most often, irregularities result purely by accident and reflect no ill intent on the part of any player. We attempt here to list common irregularities and recommended resolutions; this list is not all-inclusive.

Policies regarding irregularities are similar to card etiquette: they vary according to the tastes of the players. The policies described herein are intended as guidelines, not rigid rules. Players are free to adapt them to the requirements of the game setting—for example, in informal settings, less drastic measures of correction may be used than would be required in a tournament setting.

Sometimes, particularly in tournaments, irregularities merit penalties. (In casual play, the penalties are usually omitted.) A *penalty exposure* is a minor penalty whereby the offender must show one or more cards to all players, leaving these cards face-up on the table for the duration of the round. Cards exposed in this manner are still considered part of the player's hand and may be played to tricks. (After the card is captured in a trick, it is no longer in public view.) A *discipline strike* is a strike awarded for more serious offenses, such as an accidental revoke. The offending player scores one strike, and no points for the round.

More serious measures such of social exile and tournament disqualification will usually be afforded for players who cheat—this includes deliberate (and usually covert) introduction of irregularities, such as intentional revoke. This is beyond the purview of these rules, of course.

Collusion: Ambition is strictly an “each-for-his/her-own” game. If two or more players are found to be communicating using secret signals, or playing to each other's favor by overt or covert arrangement, they are in violation of Ambition's rules. Collusion—an accusation that should not be made lightly—requires an arrangement between two or more players to play to each other's favor, usually involving the unauthorized sharing of information. When collusive arrangements are discovered among players, they must immediately be ended—whether or not to treat the action as cheating is left to the discretion of the players.

Exposed card: During the deal, a card which is seen by any player other than the recipient is called *exposed*. The recipient of this card may accept or reject the exposed card. If he or she accepts it, he or she may require the player at fault to take his next card as a *penalty exposure*—it is shown to all players. If he or she rejects the card, the entire deal is rejected as a *misdeal* (see below). Some players count all deals with exposed cards as misdeals, requiring rejection of the

round.) If the player has looked at any other cards in his or her hand, he must reject the card and call a misdeal.

Improper number of cards: Sometimes, an irregular deal may cause players to have unequal numbers of cards. If this is discovered before any player has looked at his or her hand, players may opt to correct this simply by balancing out the hands: The player(s) with a short hand receives cards from the player(s) with a long hand. Alternatively, any player may declare a misdeal. If this irregularity is discovered after players look at their hands but before the start of play, a misdeal must be declared. If it is discovered *after* play begins, the round is void, and the dealer takes a discipline strike.

Incorrect chips: Throughout the round, chips are used to communicate information to the players about the number of points each has taken and how many remain to be taken. On occasion, a mistake by a player will lead to an inaccurate chip count. In determining points taken, the cards are used rather than the chips. If there is a discrepancy, the round is void if and only if an addition or subtraction of the error to any single player's score would result in a change of status (Nil, under, no-strike, over, Slam) for that player; otherwise the round stands. Intentional misrepresentation of one's chip count is, obviously, considered to be cheating.

Misdeal: A misdeal is a deal which is sufficiently irregular that players judge it to corrupt the integrity of the round. If the deal is *proper* (well-shuffled deck, one-card-at-a-time clockwise, dealer last, and no exposed cards) no player may call a misdeal. Otherwise, any player may call a misdeal: the dealer gathers all cards and, after a shuffle-and-cut, deals again. Misdeal may not be declared after players look at their cards, except in cases where it is required by the rules.

Play out of turn: A lead out of turn is invalid: the offending player retrieves his card and the trick is led by the correct person. In other cases, the play stands and cannot be changed (except to correct a revoke). If this is done intentionally, to communicate an intended play, it's considered cheating.

Revoke: Before playing to the next trick, any player may correct a revoke by removing the card played to the trick and, instead, playing a proper card. The redacted card becomes a penalty exposure. Any players who followed the offending player during the trick may alter their cards played to the trick, as well. A corrected revoke results in no penalty to the offending player, but an uncorrected revoke results in a void round, as well as a penalty strike to the offending player.

Table talk: The standards of acceptable "table talk"—that is, conversation directly related to the game—shall be determined by the players. In formal settings, it is normally appropriate to disallow most forms of table talk, but in informal settings, such conversation is common and usually considered benign.

Void round (I): A round is declared void when irregularities occur sufficient to corrupt the entire round. The round is immediately over, all cards are thrown in, and no player scores. The player at fault, if any, may receive a penalty strike.

Void round (II): If a round has such a distribution of points (e.g. 28-28-28-28, or 37-37-37-1) that the rules would have all four players strike, the round is also counted void: no players strike, no points are scored. (This is not technically an “irregularity” so much as an event of extreme rarity.)

I. Glossary

- cache:* A physical place where each person keeps his or her cards taken in tricks.
- count:* To add up the number of points taken in tricks.
- counting:* The fourth phase in a round of Ambition; after trick-play ends, each person counts his or her points taken in tricks.
- dealing:* The first phase in a round of Ambition, where players receive their hands. The deck is dealt to exhaustion, giving each player a 13-card hand.
- follow suit:* To play in the same suit as that of the card led. Players are required to follow suit when able; failure to do so is *revoke*.
- game:* The largest unit of play in Ambition, a game comprises about 8 rounds and has a clearly-defined winner and loser.
- honor card:* Cards of the ace, king, queen, and jack ranks (compare: *spot card*).
- lead (n.):*
1. The first card played to a trick, strategically critical because it determines the suit in which other players must (if able) play.
 2. The right and obligation to play first to a trick.
- lead (v.):* To play first in a trick.
- misdeal:* A faulty deal which must be rejected.
- Nil:* The bonus awarded for taking no points; see §9, 11.
- overstrike:* The penalty (see: *strike*) given to a player who takes the most points in a round—the player receiving this scores zero points in addition to earning the strike.
- pass:* The process of sending three cards, face-down, to another player. Recall that players do not see what cards are passed to them until they have already passed themselves.
- passing:* The second phase in a round of Ambition; players pass three cards to an opponent. Direction varies by round number.

revoke: Failure to follow suit when able. At no penalty, a player may change a previous play in order to correct a revoke (even after the trick is collected) at any point before he or she plays to the next trick. If revoke is discovered after this point (but before the end of the round) the round is declared *void* and the offending player receives a discipline strike.

round: An intermediate unit of play in Ambition; each round involves a dealing, passing, trick-playing, counting, and scoring phase.

score (n.): The cumulative total of strikes and points that a player has taken, so far.

score (v.): To add points to one's score.

scoring: The final phase in a round of Ambition, in which points and strikes are assessed.

Slam: To take 72 or more points in a round. See §9.

spot card: The cards ranked 2 through 10 (compare: *honor*).

strike: A penalty assessed throughout the game for various reasons—most often, for taking the most points in a round. Four strikes result in game loss.

strike out: To take four strikes and, therefore, lose the game.

take (v.): To capture in tricks. For example, a player might say, “I took the king of clubs” or “I took 23 points this round.”

trick: The smallest unit of play in Ambition. See App. C for a detailed explanation of how tricks work.

trick phase: The third phase in a round of Ambition, wherein tricks are played. The bulk of the actual play in Ambition occurs here.

understrike: The strike awarded for failing to take 14 points in a round. Less severe than an overstrike, an understrike does not prevent a player from taking points in the round.

void round: A round judged to be so corrupted by irregularity that it cannot be continued in good faith or, alternatively, a round which is discounted because the rules would have all four players strike.

Reference slips

This page is intended to be printed and cut along the dividing lines, yielding four small slips of paper containing the basics of scoring for Ambition. Before a game, it's best to distribute one to each player, so that they have this information at immediate disposal and need not refer to the rules document.

2-10 ♥, ♦: 1 point
2-10 ♠: 2 points
5♦: 5 points
A♠: 10 points

J-A ♥, ♦: 3 points
J-K ♠: 5 points
2♥: 7 points
K♣: 17 points

No points:
1-13 points:
Greatest total, <72 pts.:
72 points or more:
Otherwise:

Nil. 14-35 pts, see §9, 11 of rules.
score points taken, 1 strike.
score no points, 1 strike.
Slam. 40 pts, see §9 of rules.
score points taken, up to 40.

2-10 ♥, ♦: 1 point
2-10 ♠: 2 points
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A♠: 10 points

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Round #				
1 (L)	/	/	/	/
2 (R)	/	/	/	/
3 (A)	/	/	/	/
4 (S)	/	/	/	/
5 (L)	/	/	/	/
6 (R)	/	/	/	/
7 (A)	/	/	/	/
8 (S)	/	/	/	/
9 (L)	/	/	/	/
10 (R)	/	/	/	/
11 (A)	/	/	/	/

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2 (R)	/	/	/	/
3 (A)	/	/	/	/
4 (S)	/	/	/	/
5 (L)	/	/	/	/
6 (R)	/	/	/	/
7 (A)	/	/	/	/
8 (S)	/	/	/	/
9 (L)	/	/	/	/
10 (R)	/	/	/	/
11 (A)	/	/	/	/