

Postas Games

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Game One: *Prima Carta*

Background: In the early 8th Century, about 40 years before the development of *Vines*, the Sierin region of Carrisor played a languid gambling game called *Prima Carta*. The game was popular for more than 20 years, but fell out of favor in the late 730's and early 740's, being replaced by faster variations and newer games. Games in the Postas family are often called "Postas" or "Patent" games.

Design Notes: *Prima Carta* is intended as an "ancestor" game, a precursor for many games in a family of descendents that have yet to be designed. *Prima Carta* fills the same evolutionary niche as Faro or Knock: these are older games that share some traits with more modern games, but may have fallen out of fashion. And if you don't know how to play those games, you're not alone. Faro was a fairly dull game, but in the Old West it was often the only game in town.

The Deck

Prima Carta uses the Postas deck, which is a 50-card forerunner of the *Vines* deck. The Postas deck has five suits, each numbered 1 through 10. Later on, the deck gained an eleventh rank, the Emperor (E), which also appears in the version from Crab Fragment.

Suits: There are five suits representing five elements of society: **The Crown** (Red Crowns, the Nobility); **The Estate** (Blue Locks, the Merchants); **The Land** (Green Fruit, the Commoners); **The Watch** (Brown Swords, the Military); and **The Faith** (Purple Cups, the Church).

Ranks: The ten ranks are just the numbers 1 through 10, though they also have names and stories. The ranks are given below, including a synopsis of what they represent:

1. **The Hermit:** Solitude and Survival
2. **The Sisters:** Friendship and Support
3. **The Bandits:** Dishonesty and Petty Crime
4. **Family:** Society and Tradition
5. **The Wanderer:** Individualism and Rebellion
6. **Service:** Loyalty and Devotion
7. **Mastery:** Greed and Despotism
8. **Leviathan:** Upheaval and Change
9. **Ruin:** Death, Failure, and Loss
10. **Peace:** Calm, Finality, and Emptiness
11. **Emperor:** The Eternal Overseer

About The Emperor: In the late 730's, concurrent with the decline of *Prima Carta*, an eleventh rank (Emperor, or "The Emperor") was added to the Postas deck, bringing the total number of cards to 55. Our deck includes this card, to make it compatible with all the games in the Vines collection. However, *Prima Carta* is played with just 50 cards.

Basic Rules for Prima Carta:

Summary: These are the basic rules for *Prima Carta*; variations, strategies, and historical notes are given later. Note that these rules describe the "tavern" game, where each player takes a turn at dealing. The more formal "house" game has a designated dealer.

Postas is a standard gambling game, which means that each hand is self-contained, and there is no fixed end point. Players may join or leave the game after any hand.

Players: 2 to 5

You Need: The Postas deck, and chips for betting
(Remember to remove the Emperor cards.)

The Deal: Choose any player as the first dealer. The role passes to the left after each hand.

The Suits: Each player chooses one suit. For example, player 1 might choose Crowns. These suits are typically arranged in the following order: Crowns, Locks, Fruit, Swords, and Cups. If practical, players in the same order as their suits. The E cards can be placed in front of each player to designate which player owns which suit, since they are not used in the deck.

First Bets: Each player makes a bet of one coin to start. These coins go into a central pot which will go to the winner. Players are betting on their chosen suit to "win," which means their stack will collect all ten cards before any other suit.

First Pass: Shuffle the deck and begin dealing cards off the top. These cards will usually fall into a discard pile, except when they can be "played up" and stacked on others of their own suit (compare to Klondike solitaire), as follows:

- The first card of each suit automatically becomes the foundation of its stack.
- After that, only the next card in ascending order can be played on the stack. For example, the Blue 9 plays up on the Blue 8, and so on.
- The Ace (1) plays on the 10, closing the circle of ranks.
- Any unplayable card goes to the top of the discard pile.
- Cards can be played up from the top of the discard pile. Before dealing a new card, always check if the top discard can be played up. Occasionally you will be able to play several cards in a row from the discards.
- "First pass" ends at the bottom of the deck.

Second Bets: Now players must make a choice: either to pay more money and continue, or to drop out of the hand. This round of decisions begins with “Prima Carta,” the player who received the very first card of the deal, and proceeds to the left.

- **Copa:** To continue means paying a “copa” or “cap” bet, which is equal to the number of cards now in your stack. This will be at least 2 cards and could be as many as 10 (which means you have already won!) These coins also go into the pot.
- **Fold:** To fold means to drop out of the game. Since these decisions are made in turn order, if only one player remains at this stage, they win immediately and take the pot.

Second Pass: The dealer now begins going through the deck again, picking up the discard pile *without shuffling it*. The rules for dealing are the same as above. This process repeats for as many passes are required to find a winner, with no further betting. The winner is the first live player whose stack contains all ten cards, their entire suit. (A “live” player is a player who does not fold; if an abandoned suit finishes, continue dealing until a live suit wins.)

Basic Strategy for Prima Carta

Theoretically, if you can remember the exact order of the cards after First Pass, and can compute which suit will win the hand, then you should pay the second bet only when you know that your suit will win. However, this computation is difficult if not impossible, but some basic heuristics can be applied.

The strategy below presumes that you have *no memory of the order of the cards*, so it would be appropriate to follow this strategy if the deck were shuffled after First Pass. This is also the basic strategy for the first player only, assuming that *all other players will stay in*. Generally, as more players fold, you should decide to play more often. You should of course use any additional information at your disposal to modify these basic suggestions.

1. If you are in the lead, or tied for the lead, always play.
2. Fold if the total number of cards above you is:
 - a. 2 or more in 1 card, except: Play 2 vs 2-2-2-4
 - b. 3 or more in 2 cards, except: Play 3 vs 2-2-4-4
 - c. 4 or more in 3 cards, or
 - d. 5 or more in 4 cards
3. Otherwise bet, except:
 - a. Fold 3 vs 2-4-4-4, 3-4-4-4
 - b. Fold 4 vs 3-5-5-5

The strategy above will give you the best results in more than 99.5% of games. But again, since there is no shuffle, the winner is technically knowable after First Pass. If you have some memory or insight into the order of the discards, you can do better than this basic strategy table.

Using the Postas Deck for Vines Games:

Functionally, the Vines and Postas decks are the same, if you include the eleventh rank in the Postas deck. But the card ranks are different, and this can lead to some confusion in games where specific ranks have special rules.

Traditionally the 1 (Ace) is the *lowest card* in the Postas deck. This has no effect in some games, such as *Coralon* and *Thief*, where specific card ranks are not important. But the card order can sometimes interfere with rank-specific rules. For example:

- **Ducks and Geese:** This game is built around the modern Vines deck. To play *Ducks and Geese* with the Postas deck, you must treat Aces as high, 2's as Deuces (no change), and Nines as Geese. (The dragon on the Ruin card did in fact evolve into the Farmer's goose.)
- **Bishop / Baronet:** Again, Aces must be declared high. The point cards are the 8, 9, 10, and E, with "War" being designated as E's and 8's, and "Peace" being the 9's and 10's.
- **Chevalier:** Aces are low in this variant, and the poison rank is 6. This is appropriate since the 6 card is a knight, or cavalier. Alternatively, you can make Aces high and keep the 7s as the poison cards.
- **Up and Down:** If Aces are low, then the low block is Ace through 6, and the high block is 7 through E. If Aces are high, then the division is in the same place as in the Vines deck: 2 through 7 are low, and 8 through Ace are high.

History and Traditions of Prima Carta

Note: This section also describes the basic rules, but with more historical detail and using terms of the period. The simpler and complete rules are listed above.

History: *Prima Carta* is a nearly obsolete gambling game from the Sierin Peninsula. It was played with the Postas ("Pillars") deck, a 50-card deck with ten ranks in each of five suits. Gambling halls called "djegos" (from *casas de juego*) were specifically organized for playing the game. These gambling halls were common between roughly the years 680 and 740, after which the game fell quickly out of favor. Over the majority of its lifespan, *Prima Carta* was technically illegal, but this law was mainly ignored except when it was used to selectively persecute those proprietors who ran afoul of the local power brokers.

Through its many descendants, the mechanics of *Prima Carta* now influence a family of games played with the *Vines* deck. An original Postas deck is hard to find, but it can be replicated simply by discarding the Kings from a Vines deck. Later editions of the Postas deck (beginning in about 740) added an eleventh rank, the Emperor. Soon after this, the higher-ranked cards became identified with particular nobles, so that the 10, 9, and 8 of each suit changed into face cards: Regent (Soberano), Dame (Dama), and Jack (Marino), which later became Bishop, Farmer, and Tar. Meanwhile the lower ranks lost their identity altogether and became simply number cards. For many games, the Ace was promoted to the highest card.

The suits in the earliest Postas decks were naturalistic icons like flowers, acorns, fruits, birds, and so on. Over time, these suits evolved to represent the five most powerful families in Sierin, and also five distinct classes of society, as explained above.

Each of the five Vines suits has a nickname dating back to these early times. These names predate the current suits, but they are still similar in many cases, and the colors are identical: Red is The Crown (Crowns), Blue is The Estate (Locks), Green is The Land (Fruit, later Trees), Brown is The Watch (Swords, later Anchors), and Purple is The Faith (Cups).

Summary of Play: Players wager on individual suits to “win,” and then watch the deck play out over the course of several passes. After seeing all the cards in the first pass, players must decide whether to continue by paying additional money. The deck is not reshuffled. The deal repeats until one of the active suits is completely played up.

In a formal *djego*, there are three distinct ranks of players. The key players, those who sit at the center table betting on individual suits, are known as “centrales.” Others on the same level are called “secondi” and can make bets against the centrales or against the house. A third rank of player, the “spiritu,” (ghosts, also “vigilantes”), do not interact with the centrales, and can only make bets against the house.

Choosing a Suit: Players may come and go between games, but an individual typically sits at the center table for a long time, and plays the same suit for the duration. Thus, when they join the game, players are often described as “buying the Crown,” “taking the Watch,” etc. Typically the stacks are arranged in the following order, from the dealer’s left to right: Red (Crowns), Blue (Locks), Green (Fruit), Brown (Swords), and Purple (Cups).

The First Bet: Before each game, each player chooses one of the five suits, and places an initial wager on that suit. This starting bet is called the Spike, or *spiga*. This bet is a single coin, of whatever value the players have agreed to.

The Deal: In small tavern games, the players share the job of the dealer. In a *djego*, a trusted employee of the house deals the game. In either case, the dealer shuffles the deck and begins dealing off the top into a single discard pile. From the discard pile, cards are promoted into five stacks, by suit.

Prima: The suit of the very first card dealt from the pack determines the “Prima,” or “Primera.” Sometimes this stack will be marked with a token to remind the players whose card was first. The Prima must act first in the second betting round, or “copa.”

Copa: After the first pass through the deck, players have the option to pay a second bet, if they wish to continue, or to fold (withdraw from the game). This bet is called the “copa” or the “cap” or “keep” bet, and the amount is equal to the number of cards now in the player’s stack. For

example, if Crowns has three cards after the first pass, the price for the Crown player to continue in the game is three coins.

Because one player's decision can affect the others, players must bet in turn order, starting with the Prima and proceeding to their left, through the order of suits: Crowns, Locks, Fruit, Swords, Cups, and back to Crowns.

However, in many tavern games, the rule of Prima is ignored, and cap bets are placed in arbitrary order. Generally speaking, in these environments it is considered weak (or at least discourteous) to dwell too long on this decision, and many players are goaded into continuing, often by skilled opponents who know that they should not.

Repasso: After the caps are complete, the dealer executes another pass through the same deck, without shuffling, and this repeats until a winner is determined. There are no more bets after the copa.

The winner is the suit that finishes first. If no player owns that suit, or if that player has folded, the deal continues until one of the active suits is finished. The winner takes the pot.

House Advantage: There is no fundamental house advantage in the game. Typically, a djego charges players a modest fee for time spent at the table, though some have other means of siphoning money directly from the game. Second-order bets, described below, sometimes carry an advantage for the house, or for the player who banks them.

Corte: In some houses, being "Prima" has an added cost: The player who receives the very first card tosses an extra coin *to the dealer*. This forced tip is called the "corte" or "cut." Since the first card is considered more likely to win, this is seen as a fair tip for a good position. However, mathematically speaking, there is barely any advantage to receiving the first card.

Cobre: In some houses, a side pot is formed when a *folded suit wins the game*. This pot is called the "cobre" or "copper pot," and it is made of the spiga (the single-coin antes) from all folded suits. This money is sometimes carried forward into the next game, but sometimes it is paid directly to the house, as part of the djego's commission.

Cheating in Prima Carta

To be reliable, the deal and shuffle in Prima Carta must be beyond reproach, a goal that is hard to enforce in practice. In its heyday, Prima Carta was notorious for its schemers and cheaters, and seems to have risen above these drawbacks by being the only game in town.

Professional dealers often worked sleeveless, especially in high-stakes, underground games. Many had a tradition of collecting tattoos showing what famous games they have dealt.

By contrast, dealers chosen for the more civilized “palace” games were often respected friends, family members, or other individuals recognized by all involved as being beyond suspicion. This level of trust turned out to be one of the weakest points in the biggest games.

Outside Bettors

Small tavern games include only the central players, the centrales, and have no notion of side bets or playing against the house. However, in larger games up to a hundred spectators or more can make bets on the action of a single table.

The middle rank of bettors, “secondi,” or “confidentes,” may place bets directly with the centrales, partially bankrolling those players in the main game. Secondi can also make bets against the house. The outermost tier of players, called vigilantes, “spirits” or extraños (strangers), may place only against the house (and with each other).

Confidence Bets: The secondi are essentially backing the centrales, making bets that the centrales collect and pay. These transactions can sometimes be handled by the centrales themselves, though in the best of games, players employ runners and signals to manage these bets. Secondi can also place bets with the house and against each other.

Centrales and secondi always negotiate the terms of their bets, which means that talented centrales can win by making shrewd bets with the secondi. The centrales are the final arbiters of all such bets, although a number of basic rules and traditions keep the action moving smoothly. For example, some well-established bets include:

- **Prima:** This is a bet made before the game with a centrale, that he will get the first card of the game (become Prima). The payout can be negotiated, but the typical return is 4:1, often with some specific exclusions that create an advantage for the centrale.
- **Fuerza:** This is a bet made after the first pass, and only against a centrale who has paid the copa. The centrale and seconde may negotiate any odds for this bet, but it typically pays at 1:1. Essentially this bet works as an “insurance” bet from the perspective of the centrale: the centrale collects the pot if he wins, but must then pay his Fuerza bets; on the other hand, if he loses the main game, he collects the Fuerza bets as a cushion against this loss. The odds of a player winning the hand vary wildly based on their starting position, so each of these bets is typically negotiated based on the cards.
- **Seguro:** The Seguro or “Secure” bet is an offer by a fellow centrale to back a player who would otherwise fold, agreeing to pay a portion of their copa (usually less than half) in exchange for half of their winnings. This offer is usually made by a player who is far out in the lead, and wants to keep others in the game.
- **Other Bets:** Any agreement can be made between the players, and negotiating random proposition bets in their own favor is the stock and trade of any skilled centrale.

Vigilante Bets: Secondi can also make bets directly against the house. Unlike the centrales, the secondi are not committed to a particular suit, and they may bet with or against any of the suits on any round.

These bets are placed directly with a representative of the house, typically via a banker or floating agent who can take and pay these bets. These agents are called “corredors” and are typically chosen for their physical strength, and not their mental agility. They are a low-limit djego’s weakest point of defense against cheaters.

All of the bets below contain some mathematical advantage for the house.

- **Prima:** A house bet made before the game, selecting which player will get the first card, pays 4:1, but the bet pays only 2:1 if that card is the Ace. **(RTP 96%)** Players who start the game with an Ace are considered “Lucky” but are also called “Broken” because of the half-pay of this and similar bets.
- **Escúcha:** A house bet made before the game on a specific *suit* to win. This bet does not rely on the actions of the centrale, and is simply a 4:1 bet that the chosen suit will win. However, this bet pays only 2:1 if the player’s first card is an Ace. This bet is also called the “Shamay,” or “Shammy,” a corruption of “Escuchame” which is itself a corruption of the original title, which is a corruption of “Suit.” **(RTP 96%)**
- **Máximo:** A bet on which suit’s first card will be the *highest*. This pays 4:1, including when that suit is tied with others for the highest card, but loses if the high card is tied with *exactly one other card*. **(RTP 94.27%)**
- **Conto** The Conto family of bets are placed on the number of cards that have been promoted after the first pass. You can bet “Alto” (High, 17 and above), which pays 8:1 **(RTP 95.92%)**, “Bajo” (Low, 10 or 11), which pays 14:1 **(RTP 95.92%)**, or “Medio,” (Medium, 14 or 15), which pays 2:1 **(RTP 98.39%)**.
- **Cartas:** Cartas bets are placed on a single specific number of cards to come out in First Pass, between 10 and 20, each with its own return. Often these bets are offered only on 12, 13, and 16, to complement the spread of numbers covered by the Conto bets.
- **Começo:** The Começo (starting) bet is a single bet with a variable pay table based on the total number of cards that come out in First Pass. Tables for this bet resemble a pay table for video poker, and vary from place to place, usually awarding something for 10 and 11 cards, nothing for the other low numbers, and then a sliding scale of jackpots for the higher numbers. This type of pay table can be adjusted to any desired RTP.

Modern Variations

Over the decades, Prima Carta earned a reputation as an expert’s game, with a small cadre of savant players who were able to predict the winner with great accuracy, and triumph over all opponents. In reality this was more legend than fact, but nevertheless, many games in the same family fell out of favor, and were replaced with newer and more streamlined games.

Cinco: The modern game of Five Columns (Cinco Columnas, or “Cinco”) is basically Prima Carta, but the dealer passes through the deck only once. The winner is determined by the stack height after first pass, with ties broken by those cards that were dealt *first*. To track this, the stacks in Cinco are not arranged in a fixed order, but in the order they come off the deck. This game is also sometimes called “Settlers” after a mistranslation of “Columnas” as “Colonas”

Jasper Rules: In the city of Jasper and throughout Hope and Carricet, Prima Carta is still played “the old way,” using multiple passes through the deck, though it is a modernized version. The deck still has only 50 cards, but the dealer shuffles the deck after the first pass, removing all skill and making it a strict game of odds.

Peg Leg: Breva and parts south play a game called “Peg Leg,” which is essentially Five Columns, but focused on just one suit. The first card is dealt to establish the key suit, and then players bet on exactly how many of that card will be promoted in a single pass. Players can adjust their bets, rebet, surrender, and so forth after the turn of every card.

Cornice and Capital: Games in the Cornice and Capital families are played with hands of cards, but use a similar build-down mechanic. Though they are primarily self-working, and don’t use any kind of betting, these games are popular family games and have several variations that include a remarkable amount of skill.

Newer Offshoots: Siero, Segundo, Breva, and Banco are other gambling games based loosely on the mechanics of Prima. Generally speaking they are engineered to play faster, to be less trackable, and to accommodate more than five players at the central tier.

Terms and Phrases

Here are some modern phrases that originated in Prima Carta.

“Missing a Lay” This is a term for the dealer failing to promote a card. While this is unlikely with players looking on, if the players do point out a mistake, the dealer has “missed a lay.” Obviously this is critical and could easily cause a suit to lose the game. In modern parlance, “missing a lay” or “missing an up” means overlooking any obvious and critical detail.

“Last Pass” Players will often exclaim “last pass” when they know that a suit will finish on this pass, or even when they are just hopeful that this is true. In modern slang, “last pass” indicates the end of something, similar to “lights out” or “last call.”

“Cover Your Own Suit” This is the vernacular equivalent of “sweeping your own stoop,” or “minding your own business,” meaning to look out for your own interests instead of prying into the affairs of others. It comes from players kibitzing on each other’s odds of winning by pointing out difficulties in the card order, to which the owner of the doomed suit typically replies “Cover (meaning, watch) your own suit.”

“Spiga” Meaning “spike,” this refers to the initial one-coin bet, and this one-word phrase is now the equivalent of “ante up,” meaning “let’s get started.”

“Turning the Boards” Slang for dealing cards, the phrase “turning the boards” once referred specifically to the task of dealing *Prima*, but now commonly refers to any difficult, high-pressure, tedious, or thankless job.

“The Deck is Made” This is a reference to fate, the belief (whether appropriate or not) that nothing can change what is going to happen, because the cards are already in order. Essentially, as soon as the deck is shuffled, the winner is determined. This Calvinistic perspective on fate draws heavily on the mechanics of *Prima Carta*, and survives well beyond the popularity of the game.

“One-Card Pass” Slang for rotten luck. Each pass through the deck is guaranteed to promote at least one card, but getting only one card in a single pass is bad news for your chances of winning, and can represent a dramatic reversal of fortune. Thus, a “one card pass” or just “oner” has come to mean any unfortunate turn of events. Like many of the terms in this list, many people who use the phrase today have no idea of its origins.

“Glory to the Crown” Because the Crown suit is traditionally associated with the monarchy of Carrisor, it’s traditional to utter this slogan every time the Crown wins, despite what suit you’ve actually bet on. This means that losers (those who bet on other suits) shout it ironically, and it has transmuted over time into something that one typically says after being defeated, being humiliated, or otherwise coming up short. It’s strange that this phrase now means almost exactly the opposite of what it implies, since muttering “glory to the Crown” when a bird poops on your head doesn’t exactly paint the Crown in a positive light.

“On the Caps” To “earn it on the caps” or “win it on the caps” is typically a self-deprecating joke, implying overconfidence in one’s abilities. It refers to the “capo” or cap bets, and the general notion that while the game seems random, good players can overcome the odds by making smart decisions on when to continue or fold at the cap bet. Obviously a perfect player would only continue when they were guaranteed to win, though almost no perfect players exist.

“Tick” A “tick” is a deal of a single card, so when people say “tick tick tick” they are not referring to clocks, but to the slow, methodical progress of a series of seemingly inevitable events. Essentially the unshuffled deck is a metaphor for predestination, and we players can merely watch the cards roll out, tick-tick-tick, as the pre-ordered deck decides our fate. People also say “tick tick tick” when they are hurrying other people up, as in “I’m waiting for you to do your thing so this plan / day / whatever can keep moving forward.”

“Next Pass” The phrase “Next Pass,” short for “I’ll get you on the next pass,” is rather like taking a “rain check,” an apology for absence or coming up short, and a promise to make it up next time. In the context of *Prima*, “next pass” is probably going to be too late to make a difference, but at least there’s an implication of contrition.

Game 2, Holdout / *Postes de Cerca*

For the Postas / Vines Deck

By James Ernest, Version 1.1, June 25, 2022



Introduction: A precursor of *Prima Carta*, ***Postes de Cerca*** (“fence posts”) is the game for which the Postas deck is named. It is more commonly known as “Houdout,” and it fills roughly the same niche as modern poker.

Summary: Holdout is a gambling game in which players can contribute vastly different amounts to the pot, depending on their comfort with risk, and the quality of their hand. Players are trying to play the last card into a central tableau. Specifically, you win by playing the last *novel rank*, which means a number that has not yet been played. Holdout can become a very interesting bluffing game, once everyone understands the basics.

Note: *Traditional-format gambling games like Holdout, Prima Carta, etc. are typically explained in terms of a single game, not a longer series. Players can enter and leave the game between hands, and the basic goal is to finish with more money than you started with. We suggest you play as long as you like, and compare bankrolls at the end, but you may also structure a longer series of games using the same methods as any other gambling game.*

The Deck: The *Postas* deck is an ancestor of the *Vines* deck. It contains just the numbers 1 through 10 in five suits. You can play Holdout with a *Vines* deck (with or without the eleventh rank, see below), but this rules doc describes the game in terms of the 50-card Postas deck.

Players: 2 to 4 (*Single Line*) or 4 to 6 (*Double Line*)

You Need:

The Postas deck (or Vines deck)

Chips or coins for betting, about 100 for each player.

A *chilo* (any small token) to designate the current leader.

Holdout, Single Line (2-4 Players)

The basic game, also called “Single Line,” uses a single line of 10 cards in the middle of the table, and is playable by 2 to 4 players. Changes for Double Line (4-6 players) are given below.

Setup: Give each player 100 chips. Hand the *chilo* (the leader marker) to a random player. That player will act first on the first hand. In subsequent games, this is the winner of the last game.

Ante: Before the hand, each player makes an *ante* bet of 1 coin. Each player keeps their ante in front of them, to indicate that they are still in the game. When a player drops out of the hand, their ante falls into the pot.

The Deal: Shuffle the deck and deal a hand of 5 cards to each player. Deal one more card into the center of the table, to start the tableau. This will eventually be a line of cards in the center of the table, in rank order. After looking at their hands, and the first upcard, all players must pass two cards to the left. Then play begins.

On Each Turn: The player holding the *chilo* takes the first turn. You have the following options:

- **Play a card from your hand.** This card is added to the tableau.
 - If the card is a *novel rank* (a number that has not yet been played), take the *chilo*, and pay money to the pot, equal to the difference between your card and the nearest card. For example, if you play a 2, and the tableau is 5, 7, and 8, you pay 3 coins because that is the distance to the closest card, which is the 5.
 - If the card is a *known rank* (a number that has already been played), stack it on that card, and pay the value of the rank. For example, if you play a 5 on a 5, this costs you 5 coins to the pot.
- **Play the next card from the deck.** This play is blind, sometimes called *acieca* or “seconds.” The prices and penalties are different from the cards played from your hand.
 - If the card is a novel rank, you take the *chilo* and pay nothing.
 - If the card is a known rank, you are knocked out of the hand. When this happens, you must pay a coin for every card left in your hand. This means that if your hand is empty, this cost is free.
- **Fold.** If you feel that you can’t reasonably win, and don’t want to risk any more money, you can drop out of the hand. This has no cost (but do push your ante into the pot).

End of Hand: The hand can end in one of three ways. In all cases, the winner takes the pot and the *chilo*, and they will act first in the next hand.

- **Full Board:** If a player fills in the last gap in the line of 10 cards, they win.
- **Empty Hand:** If the turn comes to the player who holds the *chilo*, and their hand is already empty, they win.
- **One Player Left:** If there is only one player remaining in the hand, they win.

Example of Play:

There are three players: **A**, **B**, and **C**. Each player antes 1 coin and receives a hand of 5 cards. The dealer reveals a 6 as the first card in the line. Each player passes 2 cards to the left.

Player A holds the *chilo* from the last round. She plays first, adding a 4 to the line. This costs her 2 coins, which she pays to the pot, because her 4 is 2 steps away from the only existing card, the 6. The 4 is a novel rank, which means that Player A keeps the *chilo*. This is the tableau after her play:

- - - 4 - 6 - - - -

Player B plays a 3 from their hand, paying 1 coin to the pot because the 3 is one step away from the closest card, the 4. They take the *chilo*, because 3 is a novel rank.

- - 3 4 - 6 - - - -

Player C chooses to “second,” blindly playing the top card of the deck. It is a 10, a novel rank, so this card costs him nothing, and Player C takes the *chilo*.

- - 3 4 - 6 - - - 10

Player A plays a 3 from her hand, which is a known rank. She pays 3 coins (for the rank of 3) and places the 3 on the existing 3. She does not earn the *chilo*, because this is not a novel rank.

- - 33 4 - 6 - - - 10

Player B plays a card from the deck, which is a 6. This is not a novel rank, and so Player B is knocked out. They pay 4 coins because they have 4 cards left in their hand, and they also push their ante into the pot, along with some foul language.

- - 33 4 - 66 - - - 10

Players A and C take several turns playing from their hands, some novel and some not, until Player A has just one card left, and decides to play a card from the top of the deck. This card is a 1, which is a novel rank, and she takes the *chilo* and cheers.

1 22 333 4 55 66 7 88 - 10

Player C also plays a card from the deck, hoping to reveal an unplayed rank, but this card is another 10, and he is knocked out. This costs him 2 coins, for the 2 cards left in his hand, and the game is over because only Player A remains. She takes the pot.

1 22 333 4 55 66 7 88 - 1010

Double Line:

This variation uses two lines of 10 cards, and is more appropriate for groups of 5 or 6 players. (With exactly 4 players you can choose to play either single- or double-line.)

1 - 333 4 - 66 7 - 9 10 TOP
1 22 3 4 55 - 7 88 - 10 BOT

Here are the additional rules required for Double Line:

- **Tableau:** There are two lines of cards, designated as “top” and “bottom.” When players play cards, they can play them into either line.
- **Setup:** All players still ante 1 coin each. The deal is the same (5 cards) and the pass is the same (2 cards). Before the pass, the dealer deals one starting card *into each row*.
- **Novel Cards:** A card is novel if it has not yet been played *into its row*. For example, if there is a 10 in the top row, but not in the bottom row, then playing a 10 into the bottom row counts as playing a novel card and earns the *chilo*.
- **Seconds:** When playing a card from the deck, you must designate your row before revealing the card.
- **Ending:** The game ends when the 20th space is filled (completing both lines, not just one). It can also end via the other methods outlined above.

Strategy: Holdout has some interesting deduction elements, which may not be apparent until all players have some idea of what they are doing. Be patient, it will come.

Always remember what cards you passed, and consider what other information you can learn from the cards that were passed to you, and the choices players make. At a certain level of play, you may be able to make deceptive moves to confuse other players, but only if they understand the basic strategies.

In the endgame, it sometimes comes down to two or more players struggling not to play the next-to-last card. This is especially true in Double-Line, and especially when both lines are missing the same final card. This can become a very expensive situation, but it can't last forever, because it only continues as long as players still have cards in their hands. Think carefully about how much you are willing to pay, especially if you do not already hold the *chilo*.

Basic strategy might suggest passing pairs and high cards, but this is not always the best choice. Sometimes holding on to a pair gives you knowledge about how many more of that rank are left. And if your neighbor constantly passes high cards, you might want to hold on to your own high cards trying to build pairs.

It's extremely unlikely to start with all five cards in the same rank. You'd have to start with exactly three, and then your neighbor would have to pass you the remaining two. But once you

have all of those cards, what can you do? In Single-Line, your hand seems strong, but you'll have to pull a lot of cards off the deck (and survive each one) if you want to save those cards to the end. However, in Double-Line, you can stack the first four in the top row, and then be guaranteed to play the last one, making this a very strong hand indeed. This makes it more risky to pass pairs in Double-Line.

Background: In the world of [Carrisor](#), Holdout is one of the oldest known games with the Postas deck. That deck is more commonly associated with the tavern game *Prima Carta*, above, and over time the Postas deck eventually transformed into the Vines deck.

The word "chilo" comes from *cuchillo*, the Sieran word for knife. Traditionally the most common small token available in the early days was a small folding pocket knife. This token is also known as a buck, a button, or a trace.

"Seconds" is the common phrase for taking a card from the deck, which is a corruption of *acieca*, or *a ciegas*, which means "blindly." This terminology also appears in *Prima Carta* slang, where the ranks of players who surround and bet on that game are called "seconds" or *secondi*. This can be confusing since "dealing seconds" is a modern term for dealing the second card of the deck, a simple way for cheaters to control a valuable card.

Holdout was originally played with a single line of cards and no more than four players. Double-Line is a newer adaptation for larger groups. There are also many local variations and house rules which we hope to discover over time.

Playing with the Vines Deck: The Vines deck has eleven ranks instead of ten, but that might not make much of a difference. We actually haven't tried it yet.

Treat Aces as low, and treat the Tar, Farmer, Bishop, and Knight as values 8, 9, 10, and 11 (or just remove the Knights so that the top value is still 10).

Credits: Holdout was designed by James Ernest at KublaCon, Memorial Day Weekend 2022. Testers include Eduardo Baraf, Casey Barker, Mealnie Barker, Jenn Boyer, Phil Boyer, Stephen Capper, David Evans, Matt Forbeck, Ken Franklin, Anthony Gallela, Aldo Ghiozzi, Debbie Guskin, Sam Hozman, Amrit Khalsa, Chris Ory, Eric Price, Jessica Walker, Jeff Wilcox, Ji-Ea Yi.

Please send feedback to us at [Crab Fragment Labs](#), and help us make this game as good as it can be!