

**The Helsinki Finnish Club**

# **Handbook of Skruuvi**

## **The Finnish Whist-Bridge**



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Editors of the Finnish version: Olli Meretoja (Editor-in-Chief), Juhani Isomeri, Jaakko Karvonen, Yrjö Orispää, Kari Pylkkänen, and Pellervo Erkkilä

English version translated and edited by Olli A. Jänne, Kai Kiilamo, and Kari Pylkkänen

ISBN 978-952-93-7694-0 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-952-93-7695-7 (PDF)

Forssa Print 2016



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# Preamble to the English Version

Skruuvi is one of the best kept secrets among the trick-taking card games. "Skruuvi is absolutely the best card game in the World". This bold and unanimous statement is made by skruuvi enthusiasts who all are very experienced players of other trick-taking games, including bridge. Why is this?

Skruuvi is a very social card game. During a regular play, all four players team up with each other in succession. Skruuvi has more alternatives than other card games. There are two different types of trump or no trump games (kitty and no kitty) together with *misère*, in which low spots are best cards. The four-card kitty, face down on the table, offers an extra element of risk to be managed – or an extra advantage to be grasped. Thus, after a deal, you can never be sure about the cards that you will have for your final bid. The card exchange between main players gives an extra option to bid higher contracts. Defenders may also change one card, which strengthens their defense and increases the risk to main players. Undoubtedly, skruuvi teaches its players to manage risks and reach best available options under complicated circumstances.

All the above means that you will never be a fully learned player. You may learn more in every session. The game remains fascinating for all the players, even for those with decades of experience.

How to learn to play skruuvi? Experience in any trick-taking game – such as different forms of whist, including Bismarck, or bridge in particular – provides a good background. The Helsinki Finnish Club, the publisher of this Handbook, has organized annually "The Skruuvi Academy" courses for beginners. Seasoned players have taught and supervised the students both in theory and practice. This approach is a recommendable way to start playing this complex but extremely rewarding card game.

If you have played trick-taking games previously, we are convinced that you can also learn skruuvi with the help of this Handbook. Its chapters "Skruuvi in a Nutshell" and "Concise Auction Instructions" (page 55 onwards) describe fairly succinctly the game's essential elements and should aid beginners to start playing skruuvi without expert supervision.

This Handbook is the first English publication on skruuvi. Since skruuvi is a unique Finnish card game, its Finnish terminology was sometimes difficult to translate verbatim to English. Therefore, we have tried to adhere to more commonly used terminology, especially that of bridge. Nonetheless, we mention and explain some of the terms used by the Finns, and also provide their potential etymology.

We wish that this Handbook will encourage new players – men and women alike – to start learning and playing skruuvi and experiencing the enjoyment and fascination of this best card game in the World.

Helsinki, June 2016

*Olli A. Jänne, Kai Kiilamo, and Kari Pylkkänen*  
*Translators and editors of the English version*

## Foreword to the Finnish Version

Skruuvi is one of the oldest card games played with a regular 52-card deck using written rules. Skruuvi has been played at the Helsinki Finnish Club since the founding of the Club in 1876. “Regler för Skruf-Whist” from 1895 was the first guidebook to skruuvi. It reveals that a distinct gambling aspect was initially a part of the game. There is no monetary component any longer in skruuvi; however, risk management and related gambling features are still its intimate parts and bring about additional enticing characteristics to skruuvi.

The current Handbook of Skruuvi – written in both Finnish and English – has been prepared to have skruuvi included in the UNESCO’s list of intangible cultural heritage as a unique Finnish card game. The Handbook is based on its predecessors listed in the references, together with the experience and knowledge of outstanding skruuvi players at the Helsinki Finnish Club and elsewhere in Finland. It contains a number of renewed instructions and strategic aspects to improve the information gained by the players through bidding, card exchange and signaling.

The Handbook was created through voluntary activities of avid skruuvi players. It has been my great privilege and pleasure to follow and oversee the working groups’ enthusiastic and keen labor at different stages of the project. In particular, I would like to extend my cordial thanks to the editors, the translation team, and the governing board who have all contributed in an invaluable manner to the success of this task.

The Helsinki Finnish Club’s financial support is gratefully acknowledged.

*Pellervo Erkkilä*

*Chairman of the Skruuvi Section, The Helsinki Finnish Club*

## More Playing Fever

The Helsinki Finnish Club maintains through its active membership a number of hobbies, ranging from brain training to physical exercise. These wide-ranging activities are geared to benefit our members, and they will undoubtedly provide preventive measures to safeguard both mental and physical well-being.

Skruuvi has gained a distinct role among the Club’s membership activities. This card game is an excellent way to exercise one’s brain functions and develop memory. The popularity of skruuvi has increased markedly, thanks to the current active skruuvi players. In addition to regular weekly club events and national tournaments, playing skruuvi has been connected to traveling abroad or even to hunting. It is thus a very social card game that brings together and invigorates its enthusiasts. The new Handbook was written to facilitate recruitment of new players, not only at our Club and elsewhere in Finland but also outside Finland. The Club appreciates and thanks its editors.

I wish the best of luck and enthusiasm to the current players and look forward to the recruitment of new players to their health and inspiration.

*Matti Viljanen*

*Chairman, The Helsinki Finnish Club*

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# Glossary of Terms

<b>All-pass misère</b>	A type of skruuvi played when all players pass in the first round of bidding
<b>Auction</b>	Having examined their own cards, the players make a series of bids in rotation, which is called the auction or the bidding
<b>Bid</b>	The act of describing the cards in hand; the dealer bids first in auction
<b>Bidding</b>	See auction
<b>Bolshevik</b>	A special form in skruuvi involving one player playing a seven-level contract in misère against the other three players
<b>Contract made</b>	The declarer side has won the promised number of tricks
<b>Cross-ruff</b>	The main players use trumps to win extra tricks by ruffing in both hands alternately
<b>Deal</b>	The 13 tricks dealt to players, using all the 52 cards of the deck, and played out
<b>Dealer</b>	The player who deals the cards for a hand; the first dealer is the player on the left of the bookkeeper
<b>Deck</b>	Standard playing-card deck consisting of 52 cards in four suits
<b>Declarer</b>	The player with the highest bid in the auction or after main players' card exchange
<b>Defender</b>	The opponent of the main players
<b>Dictator</b>	An alternative in bolshevik, when the player bids seven trump or grand (no trump) instead of seven misère
<b>Discard</b>	To play to a trick a card that is neither of the suit led nor a trump The first card discarded can be used as a signal to the partner
<b>Double</b>	A call that increases penalty points two-fold if the main players fail to make the contract; it also increases the bonuses two-fold if they make it
<b>Draw trumps</b>	To remove (exhaust) the opponents' trump cards
<b>Eagle game</b>	No kitty game dubbed this way by the Finns
<b>Encouragement bid</b>	The player requests the partner to make the kitty bid by bidding one step lower than the desired kitty bid
<b>Entry card</b>	A card that allows to win a trick that partner or an opponent has led to
<b>Extended bids</b>	The bids made by the main players after the exchange of cards
<b>Finesse</b>	To play of a lower honor even though holding a higher one, hoping that a player who has already played to the trick holds the intermediate honor
<b>Final score</b>	The individual total score of the play, <i>i.e.</i> , the scores of the three sessions combined, plus the personal scores of a (possible) bolshevik played
<b>Follow suit</b>	To play a card of the same suit as the one that was first led to the trick
<b>Fork</b>	A broken sequence of (often) honor cards ( <i>e.g.</i> , AQxx)
<b>Grand</b>	No trump game played in kitty and no kitty games
<b>Hand</b>	52 cards in the deck divided by four players equals 13 cards per player – 13 tricks
<b>Honor</b>	Ace, king, queen, jack, ten

<b>Kitty bid</b>	The highest bid that permits taking the kitty cards
<b>Kitty game</b>	A basic form of skruuvi with 12 cards dealt to each player, and a kitty of four cards on the table (called Starting game by the Finns)
<b>Lead</b>	The first card played to a trick; to play the first card
<b>Main players</b>	The declarer and his partner
<b>No kitty game</b>	Another basic form of skruuvi with 13 cards dealt to each of the four players, and the lowest bids are allowed at six-level (dubbed Eagle game by the Finns)
<b>Opener</b>	The player who makes the first bid of his/her side
<b>Opening bid</b>	The partnerships' first bid in the auction (a pass does not count as a bid)
<b>Opening lead</b>	The first card led by defenders
<b>Overtrick</b>	The declarer side has won more (or in misère less) tricks than contracted
<b>Partner</b>	A player who completes one session with another player; the other member of the partnership
<b>Pass</b>	A player passes if s/he does not want to make a bid
<b>Pre-empt</b>	A high-level tactical bid by a weak hand to make it difficult (or even impossible) for the opponents to continue bidding
<b>Play</b>	A total of three sessions, in which every player has played a session with each of the three other players
<b>Responder</b>	The partner of the opener
<b>Ruff</b>	To play a trump on a trick when a plain suit was led
<b>Signals</b>	The first card discarded can be used to signal a suit that the player is able to win a trick in trumps or misère. In Italian signaling, an odd-numbered card signifies the suit in question, and a high even card the higher and low even card the lower ranking suit that remains
<b>Session</b>	A total of eight (or 12) deals – four kitty games plus four no kitty games (and four bolsheviks, if so agreed by all players)
<b>Session score</b>	The total score of all the games of a session, scored by pairs
<b>Singleton</b>	Only one card in a particular suit
<b>Short suit</b>	Partner's shortest suit in misère as revealed by exchange of cards
<b>Spots</b>	The cards from 2 to 9
<b>Stalker</b>	A player in bolshevik whose task is to pressure the declarer and who plays the opening lead and sits to the opener's right
<b>Stopper</b>	A high card (usually honor) to prevent the opponents from running a suit in grand
<b>Suit</b>	Spade (♠), club (♣), diamond (♦), and heart (♥)
<b>Tail-ruff</b>	One of the main players has a few trumps that s/he can use to win tricks in his/her void suit permitting the partner to lead spots in the same suit to render the suit stronger
<b>Trick</b>	One card is laid down by each of the four players, the highest card being the winner
<b>Trump</b>	The suit chosen that will beat all other suits regardless of rank. When two cards are played from the trump suit, the higher card wins the trick
<b>Undertrick</b>	The declarer side has won less (or in misère more) tricks than contracted
<b>Void</b>	No cards of a given suit. Natural void means holding less than four suits after the cards have been dealt

## History of Skruuvi, The Finnish Whist-Bridge

Skruuvi is a versatile, challenging and exciting partnership card game for four players that, similar to bridge, has its origin in an English trick-taking game, whist. Whist, in turn, is a descendant of the 16th century popular variant of trump (“triumph”) known as ruff (“ruff and honours”; “ruff and trumps”), which was developed by early 17th century. A guidebook entitled “A Short Treatise on the Game of Whist” was published in 1742. In the 19th century, whist had become a fashionable card game in Europe, and a number of variations were developed from it. In the 1890s, a variant known as bridge-whist became popular, and it eventually evolved into contract bridge. The word bridge is the English pronunciation of the game called “biritch” (no trump). The oldest known reference to the rules of this game dates from 1886 and calls it “biritch, or Russian whist”. Despite the popularity of whist, the latter game and variants of it, bridge and bridge-whist, became fashionable in the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1890s. Taken together, Russian whist is a forerunner of bridge; nowadays the most popular card game in the entire World.

Skruuvi’s predecessor is vint that is a card game developed from whist and Russian preference in the latter half of the 19th century in St. Petersburg (Enciklopedicheski slavar, 1892). The first rules of vint – means a screw in Russian – were published in 1881, and it became a very popular trick-taking card game in Finland while the country was an autonomous part of Russia (Grand Duchy of Finland in 1809–1917). Vint arrived in Finland in the 1870s, most likely with the officers who had served in the Imperial Russian army. Only trump and no trump games were initially played in vint; each player received 13 cards and the value of a trick was dependent on the suit lead and its level, similar to the current day bridge. There was only one round for bidding. Vint is no longer played in Russia.

When the Finns started to amend the rules of vint, they renamed the game as skruuvi. The origin of the Finnish name is the Swedish word skruf/skruv, a screw in English. The first guidebook to skruuvi (“Regler för skruf-whist”) was published in 1895 in Turku. Already at that time, the kitty was added to the game. The highest bidder took a kitty of four cards and gave one card to every other player. Or alternatively, s/he gave four cards to his/her partner who, in turn, gave one card to all other players. These card exchange features have rendered skruuvi clearly distinct of vint or bridge.

All-pass misère became part of skruuvi at the end of the 19th century; this form of playing ensues when all players pass in the first round of auction. Each of the four players has an active role in skruuvi and plays with his/her cards in hand as opposed to, for example, bridge in which game the declarer’s partner is a dummy, whose cards are exposed on the table after the opening lead and played by the declarer. All these developments in the rules of skruuvi rendered the game highly multi-faceted, involving among other things expertise in risk taking and risk control as opposed to bridge, in which a sophisticated bidding system and management of statistical odds are the main features of the game.

In the early 20th century, skruuvi developed into a more and more challenging game of strategy. For example, the opponents were permitted to double and the main players redouble; the tricks taken by aces became countable; and it was made possible to declare misère as the

final contract. Around the same time in the 1920s, two other forms of playing were added to skruuvi: no kitty games and bolshevik. In the former, a contract of at least 12 tricks has to be declared already in the first-round auction. In the bolshevik, a single player plays against the three other players with a contract of seven misère – that is, no tricks at all are permitted – while the opponents aim at preventing this from happening. The end result of all these developments is that skruuvi is indeed a unique Finnish card game. In view of its origins, it is dubbed in this handbook as “Skruuvi – The Finnish Whist-Bridge”. Skruuvi differs from bridge in a number of ways as outlined below.

### **Skruuvi**

Rotating partners  
Kitty  
Exchange of cards  
No dummy  
Misère, kitty games, bolshevik  
Versatile  
Risks and their management

### **Bridge**

Fixed two-player partnership  
No kitty  
No card exchange  
Dummy  
None of these variants  
Regulated  
Counting

Skruuvi became a fairly popular trick-taking card game in Finland, but with increasing number of players in various regions of the country, playing rules and habits started to diverge to some extent. In 1939, Johannes Nyrkiö (Nygren) had received permission to print a 200-page manuscript entitled “The Game of Skruuvi”. The manuscript contained rather detailed descriptions of different forms of playing, together with instructions pertaining to bids and tactics. Unfortunately, Nyrkiö’s book got never printed at the time, owing to harsh economic conditions during Finland’s Winter War against Soviet Union in 1939–1940, at the onset of the Second World War. When the author started to amend his manuscript, other guidebooks were already being prepared, and he decided not to pursue printing of his own manuscript.

Skruuvi was mainly played by people with higher education up until the Second World War. At the war times – especially during the trench warfare in the Eastern front – the officers were the main skruuvi players. The rules of skruuvi were codified at this time – that is, in early 1940s – in two separate guidebooks written by pseudonyms O.L. (1942) and E. N. Maalari (1944). The main purpose of these guidebooks written by experienced skruuvi players was to make the rules of the game uniform and to solidify the scoring systems, both of which had become somewhat variable in preceding years among different playing parties in Finland. Of note, it was not permitted at that time to transmit any information about one’s hand to the partner, for example, during the exchange of cards or by the first card discarded. Moreover, the scoring system was very complicated and involved a number of specific features, such as the number of honors, the sequence of touching honors, opening leads, etc.

Skruuvi players at the Helsinki Finnish Club participated actively in the development and simplification of the scoring system and, as a consequence, it was totally revised in the 1950s. The new system was published later on in printed form by Hannu Taskinen in 2004 in the book entitled “Skruuvi”. Not only was the scoring system modified, but it had also become acceptable to pass on information to one’s partner during the exchange of cards, and instructions to this effect were also provided. More recently, the revised rules and regulations of skruuvi were collected together in 2013 in the “Guide to Skruuvi” edited by Kari Bergholm, who as a skill-

ful and experienced skruuvi player succeeded very well indeed in assembling the fundamental features and rules of skruuvi in a succinct fashion in this guidebook.

The present Handbook of Skruuvi describes improved and more clear bidding schemes along with extended instructions as to how to transmit information of one's hand to the partner during the exchange of cards. The amended scoring system involves, for example, lower points awarded to made *misère* contracts and increased points for its undertricks. These amendments have been made, in order to render the scoring even more balanced and simple, and collectively, closer to the traditional system to score points in various playing forms of skruuvi.

During its close to 150-year history in Finland, skruuvi has indeed been developed into a unique and exciting Finnish trick-taking card game, the principal elements of which involve not only playing skills but also analysis and evaluation of potential risks. In his guidebook from 1944, E. N. Maalari delineates the game as follows: *"In order to excel at skruuvi, one has to be able to use his/her brain and count the cards in crucial suits, be very observant, possess excellent psychological skills and be brave as well"*. Hannu Taskinen (2004), in turn, described requirements for an excellent skruuvi player as follows: *"Good observational and judgement ability and especially strategic skills are more important than good memory. The player needs to see the options provided by his/her cards and those of the partner, make decisions on the basis of this analysis for the goals, and plan the strategy for playing the game in a successful fashion."*

Skruuvi has been played by members of the Helsinki Finnish Club since the founding of the club (1876), and this tradition has continued strongly up until today. Professor Arvo Ylppö (1887–1992), a long-time Archiater (the honorary chief of all physicians in Finland), was a legendary skruuvi enthusiast who continued playing this game past his 100th birthday. One of the cabinets in the Helsinki Finnish Club is dedicated to honor his memory. Although skruuvi was initially played mostly by men, there have been from early on female skruuvi players as well, such as Minna Canth (1844–1897), the famous suffragette and writer in Finland.



*Skruuvi game in Minna's parlor in Kuopio in the 1890s. The players from left are Hanna Levander, Alma Tervo, Maiju Canth and Minna Canth; Maiju was Minna's daughter. Minna Canth was a renowned Finnish writer and advocate of women's rights.  
(Picture: Kuopio Cultural History Museum)*

# Basics Concepts of Skruuvi

Skruuvi – the Finnish Whist-Bridge – is a trick-taking game that is played with an ordinary deck of 52 cards without jokers by four players in two competing partnerships, with the players facing each other at the table forming a team and being *partners*. The other two players are their *opponents*. The initial seating arrangement of the players does not matter, since each player will partner every other one in succession. The partners share the points won or lost in a session. There are three different forms of playing in skruuvi – kitty games, no kitty games, and bolshevik – and four different types of playing – *trumps*, *grand* (no trump), *misère* and *all-pass misère*.

## The Different Forms and Types of Playing in Skruuvi

**Forms** kitty games, no kitty games and bolshevik

**Types** all-pass misère, misère, trumps, and grand (no trump)

Each player has the same partner for one session comprising four kitty and four no kitty games. After the requisite eight deals, the players rotate in such a fashion that each player ends up partnering with every other player for one session. A complete play – three sessions – is usually accomplished within four hours. Should there be shortage of time, the players may agree on a lower number of deals (*e.g.*, two kitty and two no kitty games in a session). Likewise, swift playing could permit a session of bolshevik being included. In this latter case, one person plays against the other three with a contract of seven misère, that is, s/he aims at winning no tricks while the other players team up and try to prevent this from happening.

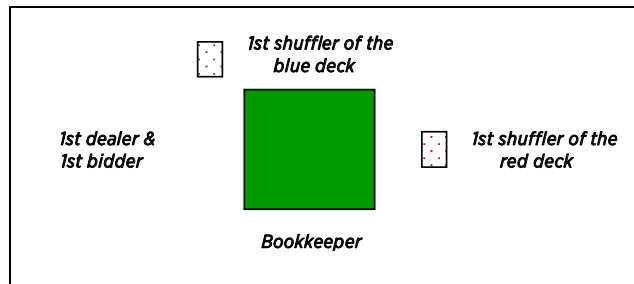
The rank order of the suits in skruuvi is the following (lowest first): spade (♠), club (♣), diamond (♦), and heart (♥). Aces, kings, queens, jacks, and tens are called *honors*; the other cards are termed *spots*. Should a player have no cards of a given suit, s/he is *naturally void* in that suit.

## Dealing Cards

Two separate decks, a blue one and a red one, are regularly used, in order to expedite playing and avoid mix-ups. One of the players is chosen to serve as the bookkeeper whose task is to keep score. S/he will continue in this capacity during all three sessions. At start, the partner of the bookkeeper shuffles the blue deck, and the player to the right of the bookkeeper shuffles the red deck. The shuffled deck is placed to the shuffler's right; face up, with a middling card visible (not an ace, a king, a 2 spot, or a 3 spot). The dealer takes the shuffled deck on his/her left, turns it face down, and presents the deck to the player on his/her right. This player cuts the pack by removing a number of cards from the top of the deck — at least two, at most 50, preferably 10 to 40 — and places the cards removed next to the dealer.



The first deal is conducted by the player to the bookkeeper's left with the blue deck. The second dealer is the next player with the red deck, while his/her partner shuffles in the meanwhile the blue deck. The dealer deals the cards onto the table one card at a time; face down, in a clockwise fashion starting from the opponent to his/her left. If a kitty game or bolshevik is being played, the dealer chooses any four cards – apart from the first or the last card of the deck, or four consecutive cards – and places them face down onto the middle of the table. When all cards have been dealt, each player takes his/her cards without showing them to the other players, and arranges them by suit and rank, with the ace having the highest rank.



*Shuffling and dealing cards at the start of the game*

## Auction

Like bridge, skruuvi involves *auction*. The auction begins immediately after dealing. It is a process that comprises strict procedural and ethical protocols to determine the declaring side and the final contract. By making *bids*, the players transmit information about their cards to each other (and unfortunately, to their opponents as well) and aim to reach an optimal game for themselves, or alternatively, to *pre-empt* the opponents' attempts to the same. It needs to be emphasized that the purpose of some early bids is often to exchange information rather than to set the final contract.

The dealer bids first; after this, the auction proceeds in a clockwise rotation with each player having an equal opportunity to bid. The bids are made aloud, and they must include the denomination and the level of the game; for instance, one spade, three grand, or four misère. The auction continues around the table towards a higher level, and is thus reminiscent of a screw being tightened – the name of the game actually originates from this analogy.

In trumps and grand (no trump), the level denotes the number of tricks that the side promises to win in excess of six; in misère, the number of tricks less than seven. Each bid must surpass – that is, be higher than – the previous bid. Should a player have nothing to bid, s/he says pass or *passes*. In case a player starts bidding, s/he ought to realize that, unless the opponents bid higher, his/her partnership has to make the contract at five-level (kitty games) or six-level (no kitty games) at the minimum.

The auction continues to additional rounds, and the dealer starts always a new round. Should all players pass in the first-round auction, the bidding is over, and all-pass misère will be played. In other cases, the bidding is over after everyone has passed twice. The first bidder of each side is called the *opener*, his/her partner is the *responder*. The player with the highest bid is called the *declarer*. The side with the highest bid gets to play, and they are called the *main players*, their opponents are termed the *defenders*.

## Progress of the Play

The highest bidder in kitty games – the declarer – takes the kitty, turns the cards face up for all to see and inserts the cards into his/her own hand. Subsequent to this, s/he gives four cards to his/her partner who, in turn, gives one card to each of the other three players. In no kitty games, the declarer gives four cards of his/her choice to the partner and receives four selected cards back from the partner. The cards that are handed over will not be shown to the defenders.

After the exchange of cards, the main players have the option to extend bids, in order to find an optimal contract that becomes final upon two passes by the main players. The defenders are allowed to exchange one card in kitty games after the announcement of the final contract, providing that the opening bid in the first-round auction by the declarer side was not at six- or seven-level. By contrast, the defenders are not permitted to exchange cards in no kitty games.

The *opening lead* is made by the player to the declarer's left; in all-pass misère by the player to the dealer's left. At each trick, the player to lead can play any card in his/her hand. The other players have to *follow suit*, that is, they have to play a card in the suit led, if they hold any card in that suit. Should a player have no cards in the lead suit – that is, s/he is *void* in that suit – s/he may play any card. In skruuvi, there is no obligation to play a higher card or a lower card, or to play trump. The first card *discarded* can be used to signal important information to one's partner.

A trick consists of four cards played in succession. The trick is won by virtue of the winning card being the highest in rank in the suit led, or alternatively, the highest trump card. The winner leads to the next trick. After tricks, the cards played to each trick are laid on the table in such a fashion that they are turned to the direction of the side that won the trick. In misère, the aces are shown face up and turned in the same way. Each player is permitted to see the cards of the last two tricks played. As soon as a new trick is being played, only the cards of the preceding trick can be seen.

## Playing Skills

Skruuvi is a card game with a plenty of social interactions. All players are not only partners but also opponents to each other at the three sessions of play, which creates friendly spirit and camaraderie among the players. Good humor, happy laughing and lively conversations are typical features at the skruuvi table; despite this, all bidding and playing the dealt cards take place strictly within the rules of the game.



This Handbook of Skruuvi describes the different forms and types of the game in a fairly detailed fashion. Succinct instructions for playing and bidding are compiled in two later chapters of this Handbook (“Skruuvi in a Nutshell” and “Concise Auction Instructions”, page 55 onwards). These instructions are not meant to substitute for the more comprehensive text; rather, they provide quick and compact guidance in the game to both beginners and sporadic skruuvi players.

This Handbook summarizes the most important strategic aspects involved in each form and type of skruuvi. It should be born in mind, however, that the game encompasses more planning and risk taking than, for instance bridge, and that a poor outcome in a given session does not necessarily reflect poor playing skills but rather represents a future challenge.



*Professor Arvo Ylppö, a long-time Archiater (the honorary chief of all physicians in Finland), is playing skruuvi at the Helsinki Finnish Club in the 1960s with Dr. Rolf Koulumies (in foreground) as his partner, and Dr. Viljo Karvonen (left) and Professor Olli Renkonen (right) as his opponents. The painting on the wall is the portrait of the latter's farther, Archiater Werner Oswald Renkonen. (Picture: Photo archives of Orion Ltd.)*

## KITTY (STARTING) GAMES

(The Finns call this form of playing as starting games – the starters – as if there would be a more demanding form of playing – the main course – to follow up later on.)

Each player receives 12 cards, and a kitty of four cards is dealt face down onto the table. The players take their cards without showing them to other players, arrange the cards by suit and rank, and consider options for playing the different types of the game, that is, all-pass *misère*, *misère*, trumps, or grand (no trump).

The partners aim to bid the game that is best suited to their cards. The auction is hence an important element in *skruuvi*. A player should bid only on the basis of his/her own cards. Even though it is sometimes mandatory to deviate from the rules and instructions given for bidding in this Handbook, erroneous bids should not be made, as they almost invariably result in *undertricks* and minus points. The auction should proceed without unnecessary delays.

The dealer bids first; after this, the bids proceed in a clockwise rotation. Should a player have nothing to bid or s/he does not want to reveal information about his/her hand, s/he says pass or passes. Should all players pass in the first-round auction, all-pass *misère* will be played (see page 35 onwards).

Prior to passing a player needs to assess the suitability of his/her hand for playing all-pass *misère*. Should the cards be poorly suited to this particular type of playing (a hand with three cards in each suit, no low spots, and high cards in many suits) and would result in poor outcome, the player ought to bid even with his/her mediocre hand. A suitable hand for all-pass *misère* includes one short suit (one or two cards), two suits with some high *entry cards* (K or Qxx), and a long suit with an ace. A high card can be used to win a trick, after which a card that helps the partner is led to the next trick.

It needs to be emphasized that a contract made in trumps or grand (no trump) in kitty games necessitates winning of 11 tricks, and thus, a single good suit suffices only very seldom. In view of this, the bidder ought to have, in addition to a strong suit (at least three honors and two spots), also an ace in another suit (see Auction on page 17 onwards). Should *misère* be bid as the final contract, the player's hand should contain both low spots and an ace in a long suit (an ace at least fifth).

Bid *misère* and all-pass *misère* are clearly dissimilar entities. In bid *misère*, the hand should contain both low spots and an ace in a long suit (at least fifth). Moreover, the main players' ability to exchange cards in bid *misère* gives them a much better opportunity to organize their hands in comparison to the one-card exchange in all-pass *misère*.

# Auction

The dealer bids first; after this, the auction proceeds in a clockwise rotation. In case any player has bid in the first round, the auction continues until all players have passed twice. Each bid must surpass – that is, be higher than – the previous bid in either the denomination or the level. For kitty games, the rank of the playing types and suits is the following (lowest first): *misère*, trumps (spade, club, diamond, heart), and grand (no trump). Each round begins with the dealer. That is, when the dealer bids (or passes) for the third time, it signifies the beginning of the third round. Each auction round has its own information purpose.

A player can bid even if the opponents have already bid. Potential defenders should more often than not refrain from bidding, especially when it is obvious that the opposing side will declare, *i.e.*, make the highest bid. On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that sometimes a pre-empt is a worthy bid, in order to minimize the potential loss in points. A pre-empt is particularly applicable when the opponents have shown strong cards and the partner has passed. (Note that a pre-empt bid might also turn out to be a successful contract.)

The initial bids are meant to describe long suits and the number of their honors as well as the overall strength of the hand. Thus, the purpose of some early bids is to exchange information rather than to set the final contract. Single high cards will be described by bids in subsequent auction rounds. As a rule of thumb, the bids should start at the lowest possible level, in order to leave room for bids in later rounds. In some instances, a jump to a higher level is worthwhile, especially when the hand is particularly strong.

## First-Round Auction

The purpose in the first-round auction is primarily to describe the overall strength of the hand and/or a long, strong suit – or alternatively, the desire to play *misère*. Therefore, the bids in this round involve – under the prescribed conditions – showing either a strong suit, a strong overall hand or a *misère* option. As mentioned above, the defenders are free to make competitive bids or aim by pre-empting to prevent the opener's side from describing their cards in a thorough fashion.

### The Opener's Bids

#### First round suit

• *e.g.*, 1♦

• *e.g.*, 2♦

- At least three honors, two spots, and a side suit ace (or *e.g.*, KQx) for example, ♦AKJ84 and ♠A
- Two high honors and four spots (*e.g.*, ♦AK9864), and a side suit ace
- Super strong suit (four honors in a six-card suit or three honors in a seven-card suit) for example, ♠9 ♣K75 ♦AKQ1086 ♥A6

### Three or four aces

- one grand (no trump)
- Two aces (Should a player hold a long suit, it is preferable to bid it.)
- two grands
- Four aces

### High cards

- Holding about seven honors and an unsuitable hand for misère, the player bids three in his/her best suit (Should all suits be equally strong, the bid is three grand.)
- *e.g.*, 3♦
- ♦ is the best suit but not good enough for a first round suit for example, ♠Q98 ♣K75 ♦AK98 ♥A8
- three grand
- All suits equal in strength, none suitable for a first round suit

### Misère

- *e.g.*, six misère
- Holding low cards, two or three 2 spots, and ability to hand two of these over to the partner, for example, ♠3 ♣A87542 ♦1042 ♥54 (A particularly good bid, when the opponents have bid strongly, and the partner has passed.)
- *e.g.*, five misère
- A typical bid to pre-empt the opponents' bidding. The number of low spots is less than that in six misère. (The bid five misère is not as good as the six one, as the opponents are able to exchange one card and inform each other about the shortest suit.)

## Bids by Opener's Partner (Responder)

### First round suit

- *e.g.*, 1♥
- Three honors and two spots (side suit ace is not mandatory) for example, ♥AQJ74

### Raise in opener's suit

- When the responder holds at least four cards, including one honor, in the opener's suit (Raise directly to five- or six-level, especially if the responder has nothing else to bid.)

### Response to one grand

- Two grand (fourth ace, but no long suit)

### Response to three grand

- Best (longest) own suit; bidding to four-level (The opener's response is a five-level bid in the responder's suit, and after taking the kitty, s/he gives his/her cards in this suit to the responder. This suit is a likely trump candidate.)

### Response to three suit

- Best suit, first round suit is not required

### Low level misère

- The responder is naturally void or has only one spot in the opener's suit

### Encouragement bid

- Should a defensive player bid five or six misère (a pre-empt), and the responder has a strong suit, s/he can encourage the opener to raise the bid to one step higher.

For example, 3♣/grand → five misère → 5♦ (encouragement to the opener to bid 5♥)

Should the responder's best suit be ♠, then the following bidding scheme is applicable:

3♣/grand → five misère → pass → pass (the opener is asked to bid 5♠; s/he can refuse to comply, if five misère is suitable for his/her hand)

### Example of a Makeable 5♠ Contract That Is Prevented by a Six Misère Pre-empt

Player A opens with a bid of 1♠, while players B (nothing to bid) and C (no first round suit) pass. Player D bids six misère, after which all players pass twice. The kitty is ♣KQ53, and the contract will be made.

Player D hands over ♥5♠3♥3♠2 to his/her partner and receives ♦9 in return.

Player B hands over ♦K and ♣J to the opponents.

The contract of six misère will be made, giving some 40 points to players BD.

Should player C raise the bid to 6♠, then, owing to the kitty, players AC will have an excellent side suit. If player C hands over ♣3♠Q67, and player A voids ♦, the contract becomes makeable.

After three tricks won by trumps, player A realizes that s/he will lose one trump trick to B, who has received ♠3 from his/her partner. As a consequence, player A leads a ♣ to the next trick and can discard ♥6 to the third ♣ trick. Player B can win this or a later trick with his/her trump, but all other tricks are won by player A, which results in a made 6♠ contract.

#### Player C

♥J1097

♦QJ8

♣A6

♠Q76

#### Player D

♥53

♦A10432

♣1072

♠32

#### Player B

♥KQ842

♦K9

♣J8

♠J95

#### Player A

♥A6

♦765

♣94

♠AK1084

## Second Round Bids

The bids in the second round usually involve description of a strong suit or a somewhat weaker but long suit. The responder (the opener's partner) can bid in the second round in spite of having passed in the first round. In case a responder has bid the lowest possible misère in the first round – that is, s/he is unable to support the opener's suit – the second round bid by the responder describes his/her best suit.

The opponents can pass, bid a second-round suit or make a pre-emptive bid of five/six misère in the second round as well; the latter one, when the opening side appears to have very strong cards.

A second-round suit does not have to be as strong as that of the first round. It suffices that the suit has two honors and three spots, or three honors and a spot. The requirement for a second-round suit to the opener is less stringent: two honors and spots or three honors with an ace (or KQJ). A player can also bid in the second round, if s/he has not shown something that should have been bid in the first round. Should the opener's second round bid involve a suit that is strong enough for the first round, the bidding can step over one level (1♠ → pass → pass → pass; 2♦ → ...).

## Third and Fourth Round Bids

The third round is used to bid aces – that is, to indicate their possession to the partner. A player bids the lowest possible in the suit that s/he holds an ace. If a player has earlier shown three aces, s/he now bids the suit of the missing ace. The players continue to bid aces in the fourth round, as well as kings and queens in suits where aces have already been bid. Should a player pass in the third round, his/her bid in the fourth round shows a king. If a player has already bid an ace, a new bid in the same suit refers to a king. Should a player hold aces in both suits his/her side has bid, s/he should bid grand in the third round.

### Examples of Bids to Show Aces and Kings

First round	1♠ → pass → 1♦ → pass
Second round	pass → pass → pass → pass
Third round	1♥ → pass → 2♦ → pass
Fourth round	3♠ → pass → pass → pass
Fifth round	4♠ → pass → pass → pass

The opener has first round ♠ and his/her partner first round ♦ suit. In addition, the opener has ♥A together with ♠AK and the partner has ♦A.

In case a player holds AKQ in a suit, s/he can step over one level in the third round. For example, should the highest bid in the second round be 2♣, then the third round bid 3♥ indicates the possession of these three honors.

If a player has passed first and then bids the lowest misère in response to his/her partner's bid – s/he cannot support the partner's suit for trump –, then the third round bid indicates his/her longest suit, and the fourth round is used in this instance to show aces.

## Encouragement, Pre-emptive, and Competitive Bids

A player makes a kitty bid when s/he wants to become the declarer and take the kitty. In most instances, the desired contract is bid. When a player wants his/her partner to make the kitty bid, s/he makes an encouragement bid. In this case, the player bids one step lower than the desired kitty bid. The partner needs to make the kitty bid, unless s/he holds a *singleton* in the trump suit that can be handed over to the partner anyway.

Should an opponent attempt to pre-empt the opener's bid by five misère, the opener makes an encouragement bid to the partner, in order to indicate that s/he wants to play trumps in the opening suit. For example, 1♥ (opener) → five misère (a pre-empt) → pass (does not support ♥ in this round) → pass (content with five misère); → 5♦ (encourages the partner to bid 5♥ and take the kitty) → pass → 5♥ (the responder's kitty bid to comply with the encouragement).

By a pre-empt, such as five/six misère after the opening bid, defensive players attempt to make it difficult or even impossible for the main players to continue bidding, for example, to describe their side suits and aces. A pre-empt is particularly appropriate when the opponents have shown strong cards, and the partner has passed. In order to make it, the bidder needs to hold a reasonably good hand for misère. It ought to be kept in mind that the opponents may also pass. As a consequence, the pre-empting side must declare and play the misère contract that they bid.

The pre-empt of six misère in the first round is usually better than five misère, as it prevents the opponents from exchanging cards. (Note that the partner of the misère bidder has to pass in the first round.) It is much more difficult for the opponents to play defense against six misère without being permitted to exchange cards to inform, for example, about their shortest suits.

Should a player bid five misère after an opening bid of 1♣, and the opener's partner bids 5♣, then the pre-empt bidder's bid five grand is an encouragement to his/her partner to bid six misère (1♣ → five misère → 5♣ → five grand; → pass → six misère...). Likewise, in no kitty games, the sequence 6♠ → six misère → six grand → 7♥ signals an encouragement to bid seven misère.

Should a player's cards not permit pre-empting, it is usually worthwhile to pass, in order to avoid revealing one's own cards to the opponents.

In case the opposing side opens, and the responder (the opener's partner) bids misère in response to the opener's suit bid – that is, s/he is void in the partner's suit or has one low spot in that suit – it is usually recommended to pass and follow the opponents' attempts to make further bids and the final contract. However, a defensive player can bid, providing that s/he holds an especially suitable hand.

### Example of a Pre-empt Followed by an Encouragement Bid

1♠ → pass → 1♦ → pass  
2♦ → five misère → 5♣ → pass  
5♦ → pass → pass → pass

The opener finds ♦ – bid by his/her partner – to be a good suit for trump by bidding 2♦. The responder encourages the opener to bid 5♦ by bidding 5♣ after the opponent's pre-empt of five misère. In other words, the encouragement bid is one step lower than the desired trump suit, *i.e.*, the kitty bid.

If the opponents are about to declare, it is always worth pondering whether or not the defenders' side would lose less by bidding over the opponents' potential contract and thereby ending up with one or two undertricks, even if these tricks were doubled. For example, a 5♠ contract made scores 25 points, whereas a 5♦ contract with two doubled undertricks loses only 20 points. If the 5♦ bid forces the opponents to bid at six-level leading to an undertrick, then the pre-empt has been successful indeed.

## Kitty Bid

At the end of the auction – that is, all players have passed twice – the player with the highest bid takes the kitty, turns the cards face up for all players to see and inserts them into his/her own hand. In most instances, the desired contract is bid. In trumps, it is usually best that the partner of the first-round-suit bidder takes the kitty, as an attempt to get all the partnership's trumps into one hand. Prior to making the kitty bid, the partner of the potential declarer should be permitted to pass once to make sure that all worthy bids have been made. By contrast, in misère, it is usually best that the player who bid misère first takes the kitty, because s/he often has low spots that are necessary to help the partner.

In case the partner of the first-round-suit bidder does not appear to make the kitty bid, then the opener can make an encouragement bid that the partner must obey, for example, bid 5♣ to encourage the partner to make the kitty bid with 5♦.



## Exchange of Cards by Main Players

The highest bidder (the declarer) takes the kitty and shows the cards to other players. Subsequently, s/he selects four cards and hands over them to his/her partner. These latter cards are not shown to the opponents, as they transmit important information to the main players, such as void/continuity of a given suit and the presence of an ace or a high honor not bid before.

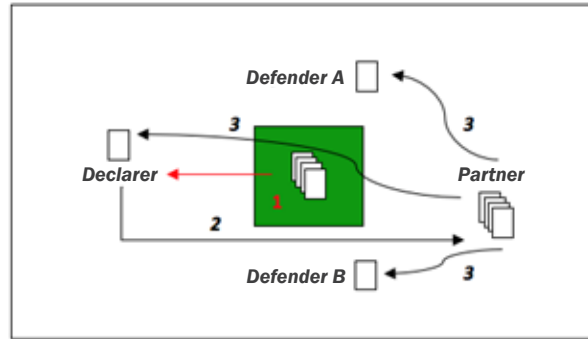
In most instances, the desired contract is bid in the preceding auction and hence, there is no need to reiterate this information by the exchange of cards. Should the top card of the four-card hand-over be a low spot, it indicates the presence of an ace in the declarer's hand.

### Card Sequences to Indicate Void and/or Continuity of a Given Suit in the Declarer's Hand

- Should the partner receive four cards of the same suit in rank order (e.g., ♠KQ97), this suit continues in the declarer's hand. The cards in mixed order (e.g., ♠97KQ) indicate that the declarer has voided him/herself in the suit in question.
- In case the hand-over has a pair of two-card suits, the lower suit (nearest to the table) is voided and the upper continues (e.g., ♠♠♦♦ diamonds are void). If the two suits are mixed, then both are void (e.g., ♠♦♦♦). Should the suits be in a booklet format (e.g., ♠♦♦♦), then the declarer is not void in either suit.
- If the declarer hands over one suit of three cards and one card of another suit, then the lowest card (nearest to the table) indicates the void suit (e.g., ♠♠♠♦ diamonds are void). Should the single suit be second from bottom (e.g., ♠♠♦♠), then both suits are void. The single suit present second from top (e.g., ♠♦♠♠) indicates that both suits continue in the declarer's hand.

Should the declarer find upon taking the kitty that his/her cards are also suitable for *misère*, s/he will indicate this to the partner in the following manner. If the hand-over comprises a long suit (three or four cards), then the lowest card of the long suit nearest to the table refers to *misère* possibility. Should the hand-over have a pair of two-card suits, the lower card of the lower suit (nearest to the table) indicates whether or not *misère* is possible. A low card next to the table refers to *misère* option.

Upon receiving four cards from the declarer and inserting them into his/her hand, the responder gives one card to each of the three players, after which all players have a 13-card hand.



***Taking the kitty (1) and exchanging cards (2, 3).  
Should the defenders be permitted to exchange cards, the player to  
the declarer's left hands over a card first to his/her partner***

The bids along with the card exchange by the main players have usually revealed the type of playing that ensues. Nonetheless, should there be some ambiguity concerning the best trump suit, a final contract at grand (no trump) is a potential alternative. Likewise, it is also possible that the information received by card exchange reveals that misère would be the most viable option. These three types of playing – the trumps, the grand, and the misère – and their special features will be described and discussed in more detail below.



*The trophy of the most-respected skruuvi tournament in Finland, the Toro tournament, that has been played continuously since 1963 in honor of Professor Arvo Ylppö, a long-time Archiater in Finland. (Picture: The Helsinki Finnish Club).*

# Trumps

When the main players plan on playing trumps, an important goal in card exchange is to get all trumps in the hand of the player who bid first the suit in question. In view of this, his/her partner should make the kitty bid and take the kitty, in order to enable him/her to hand over the trumps to the partner, *i.e.*, the first bidder.

In some instances, it is beneficial to have trumps in both hands of the partnership; in particular, when short side suits can be voided. As a consequence, when the partner of the declarer leads the void suit, his/her teammate is able to win – even with spot trump cards – tricks that would otherwise be won by the opponents. This type of playing is called *cross-ruffing*, the purpose of which is to enable both main players to win tricks by playing trumps to respective void-suite leads. If the declarer has – after taking the kitty – five or six trump cards in his/her hand, a cross-ruff is usually the best alternative (see pages 29–30).

As a rule of thumb, the kitty bidder hands over all trump cards to his/her partner and/or, in addition, a low spot card on top of the trumps to mark the possession of an ace. In case a player has multiple aces, the ace in the suit not bid should be marked. Should a player have two high honors (*e.g.*, AK), s/he can mark their presence by handing over two low spots as top cards. If the kitty bidder does not have four trumps or an ace, s/he should hand over the highest honor in the suit that the partner has honors as well.

Should the kitty bidder have five or more trumps, s/he may hand over the four highest trumps (in rank order) to the partner or consider playing cross-ruff as described above. In the latter case, s/he must void the shortest suit. It is of particular importance that the players maintain the ability to play safely to their partners – that is, hold entry/communication card(s) – since an AKQ in a given suit may become useless, if the partner is void in the same suit. Likewise, should a player have an ace in a suit, his/her partner should not void this suit, in order to be capable of playing safely to the partner.

Upon receiving four cards from his/her partner, the player who bid the trump suit first has the following options.

- If s/he received trump cards and wishes to void a suit, s/he hands over the highest card of this suit to the partner and the remaining cards of the suit to the opponents.
- If s/he received the partner's all trumps but has a broken sequence of trump honors (*e.g.*, AQJxxxxx), s/he can hand over a trump spot to the partner to be used as a lead card in a *finesse* attempt.
- Should s/he want to make sure that the partner will win a trick, s/he will hand over an entry card (*e.g.*, an ace) to the partner.
- In case the kitty bidder did not hand over a single trump card – or only some of them together with cards to void a suit –, the usual purpose is to play cross-ruff. In this instance, the partner should void one suit and hand over the highest card of this suit to the kitty bidder.

- Should s/he hand over a card in the suit to be voided only to one opponent, this card should be given to the opponent to his/her left, in order to avoid loss of a trick to this opponent's higher trump.
- If s/he hands over a card in the suit bid by the opponents only to one opponent, this card should be given to the opponent who did not bid this suit, in order to avoid the latter voiding the suit in question.

## Extended Bids by Main Players

The main players are permitted to extend bids after they have exchanged cards, enabling them to achieve additional information about their hands. The kitty bidder commences this process. More often than not, extended bids are not necessary, and the main players just pass twice. Or alternatively, the player who initially bid the trump suit will decide the contract level best suited for the main players' hands, after which they will pass twice. Of note, through extended bids, it is possible to amend the type of playing (*misère*, trumps or grand), and its level may also be changed. Likewise, the declarer may be switched. The aim of the extended bids is to find out – on the basis of the preceding bids, the kitty and card exchanges – the optimal and makeable contract for the main players.

The bids need to adhere to the players' own cards and the information conveyed by card exchange. Search for a new trump suit is sometimes necessary, owing to the fact that card exchange failed to result in a makeable trump suit. Under such a condition, bids will start from the lowest suit upwards until both players have passed twice. It is not worth it to gamble and bid the final contract overly high; by and large, it results in an undertrick. The lowest permitted level for a final contract in kitty games is five, that is, the main players have to win at least 11 tricks (trumps and grand) or not more than two tricks (*misère*).

It is usually advisable for the player who bid first the trump suit to bid the final contract and become the declarer. As a consequence, s/he will be the fourth player to the opening lead and may win the trick either by a low honor of the suit led or by a spot trump. In case the first bidder's partner has a side-suit fork – a broken sequence of honor cards (*e.g.*, ♠AQxx) –, it is usually preferable that s/he makes the final bid to become the declarer. S/he will now be the fourth player to the opening lead and be potentially able to win a trick with the lower honor. For example, if the opening lead is a low ♠, s/he is able to win trick in this suit by both ♠A and ♠Q.

## Card Exchange by Defenders

The defenders (side players) are permitted to exchange one card in kitty games, providing that the main players' opening bid in the first round was not at six- or seven-level. The player to the left of the declarer hands over first.

In trumps, the first hand-over is usually the highest trump card. Should a defender have three or more trump cards, s/he will hand over the highest card of the shortest/weakest suit to the

partner. Another potentially good card to be handed over is that in the main players' side suit, as it strengthens the partner's hand in this particular suit. The other defender will, in turn, hand over the highest card in the shortest/weakest suit, if s/he received a trump card, or alternatively, his/her highest trump card, if the card handed over by the partner was not a trump.

In case a player has a singleton in a suit, s/he can hand over this card as an attempt to ruff the trick led in this suit for the first time. With regard to trumps, a player has to ponder, on the basis of the bids, whether or not a trump should be handed over to the partner or kept. More often than not, it is preferable to hand over a singleton in any side suit – especially if the partner has already handed over a card. This will often permit the defenders to play a surprising ruff, when the opening lead is in the suit of the singleton.

## Doubles and Redoubles

A *double* duplicates and a *redouble* triplicates the score of the game, as will be explained in detail in Scoring of Points (see page 51). The player who does not want to double says pass. The defensive player to the left of the declarer has the first right to double, and should s/he pass, his/her partner has the next opportunity. Should either one of the defenders double, the main players can redouble. The player to the left of the doubler is the first to redouble. Should s/he pass, his/her partner is still permitted to redouble.

A double will penalize the main players by doubling the points lost in undertricks. However, a doubled contract made will increase the scored points two-fold as well. As a consequence, the defenders should double only when they are fairly sure that they will succeed, *i.e.*, that the main players' contract is not makeable.

It should be relatively easy to decide when a double is worthwhile in trumps – a successful double requires usually high trump cards. Of note, a double should not rely on aces in side suits only, since the main players may be void in these suits.

The play itself begins by the opening lead after doubles and redoubles have been bid.

## Opening Lead

The defender to the declarer's left plays the opening lead. The defenders' goal is to create undertrick(s) to the main players. To achieve this, the defenders need to win three tricks at five-level, two tricks at six-level and one trick at seven-level contract. The opening lead is of vital importance for achieving these goals.

The main players' bids, the kitty and the cards exchanged by the defenders are of great importance for selecting the opening lead. It is impossible to give an all-encompassing guidance covering all possible situations. Therefore, the following instructions offer only general advice – recommendations that have in most instances, but not always, turned out to be useful.

The opening lead in trumps depends on the card exchange by the defenders. If an opening leader has received a side-suit card and not a trump, s/he will usually lead with a card in this suit, unless the card received is in his/her short suit that is likely the main players' side suit. Thus, it is worthy of saving this card for a potential undertrick to the main players. In case the opening leader's partner has doubled, the opening lead must be in the suit handed over by the partner, who is most likely void in this suit and capable of "stealing" the trick by ruffing.

Should a defender hold two touching honors (e.g., ♠KQxxx), the opening lead is with the higher honor. In case an opening leader has received a trump – or if the defenders have not been permitted to exchange cards –, the opening lead should be in a suit with two touching honors or with the second highest card in the longest side suit. If a defender wins a trick in the side suit, s/he continues the same suit.

## Playing Tactics

If one does not know whether to play high or low, a good rule of thumb in trumps is the *second hand low*, the *third hand high*. Thus, when a main player leads a suit, the first defender plays a low card (unless s/he is sure about winning the trick) causing the second main player to ponder whether or not the other defender has the honor not yet played. Likewise, when a defender leads, his/her partner will play the highest card required in the suit, in order to win the trick or to strengthen the suit in the teammate's hand.

Should the contract be at risk, a player can try a *finesse* as an attempt to win the requisite number of tricks. The player to finesse may have AQxx in the suit led but misses the king. Should the partner or the main player to the right lead this suite, then the second or third player will not play his/her highest card, but plays a queen instead of an ace, knowing that there is a 50% chance that the left-hand opponent holds the king in that suit. If the finesse is successful (a 50% probability), both the queen and the ace win a trick.

In case the main players' trumps are held in one hand, they strive for making this player to win a trick as early as possible, in order to draw trumps – that is, to exhaust the opponents' trump cards. Should a defender win a trump trick, the main players must nevertheless play trumps as soon as possible, in order to prevent the defenders from being able to ruff with their remaining trump(s).

Should the second or third player be void in the suit led and attempts to ruff, s/he needs to play a trump card high enough to prevent the opponent to his/her left from winning the trick with a low trump card.

Cards disposed of by defenders may influence the outcome of the game in a significant fashion. To save automatically only high honors may not be the right tactics, and these cards may end up being useless, as the main players could be void in the suits in question. It is important and skill-demanding to be capable of saving the right suit(s) when discarding cards.

## Cross-ruff and Tail-ruff in Trumps

When the main players cross-ruff, they alternate in leading the partner's void suit. As soon as either one of the partners has run out of trump cards, s/he signals this to his/her partner by leading another suit. After this, the main player who still has trump cards will draw trumps.

Should one of the main players have a few trump cards, they can be used to render the opener's side suit spots worthy of tricks by *tail-ruffing* the first tricks led in this suit. For example, if the opener's side suit comprises ♠AKxxxx and the partner is naturally void or voidable in ♠, the main players are likely to succeed in tail-ruffing. The opener leads a ♠ spot that the partner ruffs and plays back to the opener. When the partner's trumps are depleted, s/he signals it by changing the lead suit. As soon as the opener has drawn trumps, s/he will lead ♠A and ♠K to exhaust the defenders' spades, in order to win tricks with his/her remaining ♠ spots.

In case the defenders think – on the basis of the preceding bids and hand-over of the cards – that the main players are likely to cross-ruff or tail-ruff, the opening lead should be a low trump, in order to reduce the number of tricks that can be won by cross-ruffing or tail-ruffing. Likewise, should the defenders win a trick, and they know or presume that the main players are going to play cross-ruff or tail-ruff, they should lead a low trump card.

**Cross-ruff** Both main players have trumps for several alternate ruffs.

**Tail-ruff** One of the main players has a few trumps for a limited number of ruffs. As soon as the last trump is used to ruff, the lead suit must be changed.

### Example of a Contract That Can Be Made by Tail-ruffing

**First round:** Player A bids 1♥, B passes, and C responds with two misère. After this, players B and D pass all the way.

**Second round:** A bids 2♠ and C passes (or bids 2♦).

**Rounds 3–5:** A bids ♠AK and ♥A starting at the lowest level.

**Sixth round:** A passes and C makes the kitty bid – the kitty is ♥942♣K.

If C hands over ♥95♠45, then a 5♥ contract will be made when A voids ♦ and gives ♠2 to player B.

After player A's bid of 5♥, B hands over ♦A to his/her partner and receives ♥10 back.

#### Player C

♥5  
♦QJ764  
♣QJ65  
♠54

#### Player B

♥K7  
♦A103  
♣A10732  
♠76



#### Player D

♥103  
♦K92  
♣984  
♠QJ108

#### Player A

♥AQJ86  
♦85  
♣ -  
♠AK932



Note that should player C hand over four ♥, it would result in one undertrick, because player B wins then one trick with his/her trump and player D two tricks with his/her ♠QJ. Playing tail-ruff results in strengthening the opener's spades, and the contract is makeable with an *overtrick* (or without it, if player B leads a trump).

## Signaling

*Italian signaling* – adapted from bridge – can be used to inform one's partner about an entry card suit. To win a trick with such a card is of particular importance in *misère*, in order to help the partner. Likewise, in trumps or grand, signaling may be important for the defenders, in that, after a trick won by them, it would help pondering which suit to lead next.

The signal is the card that a player discards for the first time when s/he is void in the suit led and needs to play a card that is neither of the suit led nor a trump (*the first discard*).

A player can signal his/her entry card suit by using either an even- or odd-numbered card. An odd card marks the suit in question. In many instances, a player does not want to discard a card of the suit in question, but uses an even card as follows: a high even card asks partner to lead the higher non-played suit, while a low even card requests the lower non-played suit.

For example, when a ♦ is led, and the player is void in this suit and wants to signal ♣ as his/her entry card suit, s/he can lead to the ♦ trick a ♣5 (an odd card) or ♥10 (an even card, higher from the non-played suits ♠ and ♣) or ♠4 (an even card, lower from ♣ or ♥).

## Grand (No Trump)

Even though the bids of the main players are regularly geared towards a specific trump suit, the kitty bidder's hand and the kitty may have not provided a trump suit strong enough for a contract that evades doubling. In these instances, grand (no trump) may be the best option in lieu of a search for another potentially weak trump suit. A significant advantage of grand over trumps is that grand is more difficult to double than trumps, even under the conditions when an undertrick looks inevitable. The reason is that the defenders do not usually know the longest suit of the main players.

For a successful contract in grand, it is important to get a strong suit entirely into one hand. Another important goal is to avoid situations, in which the opponents can have a breakthrough, that is, win tricks in one suit even by their low spots. It is always mandatory for a main player to hold a connection card for a safe play to the partner, as otherwise s/he may remain playing alone, and his/her partner's strong hand is not reachable.



The kitty bidder hands over all his/her cards in the partner's long/strong suit and, if pertinent, the best card(s) in his/her shortest suit. The responder will, in turn, hand over the best card in his/her shortest suit to the partner, and the weakest cards in the same suit to the opponents. Of note, the best hand-over in grand requires experience and is usually not that straightforward.

## Exchange of Cards by Opponents and Doubles

The defenders hand over the highest cards in their shortest suits to each other, hoping that the suit in question will get strong in the partner's hand. It is also advantageous, if the defenders were able to strengthen each other's hands in suits bid by the main players.

Successful doubling is relatively easy to predict in grand – high honors are usually needed in multiple suits to secure the desired outcome. In case a defender playing the opening lead has the requisite number of *stoppers* (e.g., A, AK, AKQ, etc.), s/he can double without any hesitation. The main players may be capable of making the contract without playing a given suit at all. As a consequence, a single strong and long suit in a defender's hand may not suffice for a successful double.

## Opening Lead

The opening lead in grand obeys the same principles as those of trumps, that is, the highest of two touching honors in a long suit or the second highest card in the longest suit. Should a defender win a trick, the same suit should be led to the next trick.

## Playing Tactics

In case the main players possess a long and super strong suit (e.g., AKQJxxxx), the entire suit is played to win all tricks in this suit. It is very important to pay attention to a connection/entry card – the ability to play safely to the partner – while the long suit is being played.

Similar to trumps, finesse is often needed in grand to make the contract. Should a player not have a high honor, s/he can try to finesse by playing a lower honor and hope that the missing high honor is not in the hand of the player to his/her left.

The defenders ought to remember the same rule as that in trumps “the second hand low, the third hand high” to avoid unnecessary use of their high cards that must to be saved for critical tricks.

## Misère

Misère can be bid in kitty games either as a pre-empt (often directly six misère, to prevent the opponents' card exchange) or as an active bid with the aim of making the contract. Johannes Nyркиö defined the special features of misère right to the point as follows: "When bidding misère, one has to remember that the end result is highly dependent on the partner's hand. Trumps and grand may potentially be played successfully even without the partner's help, if the declarer's hand is good enough to win the requisite number of tricks. By contrast, the declarer's good hand is of marginal importance in misère, if his/her partner is not able to take care of him/herself."

Despite the above words of caution, it should be noted that, more often than not, a successful misère bid does not require such a high number of low spots as an uninitiated player might assume. By and large, the better and more experienced the players are the more often they bid misère.

There are several important differences between misère and the other types of playing skruuvi. The main players win most tricks in trumps and grand, and often dictate the flow of the play. By contrast, the initiative in misère is usually with the opponents, who decide which suit to lead and the way by which the deal is played out. This feature explains the reason as to why sometimes a bid misère contract is made even with very poor cards and, on the other hand, why excellent misère cards may occasionally lead to undertrick(s).

## Exchange of Cards

The player who bid misère first makes usually the kitty bid as well, in order to enable him/her to hand over low spots to the partner. At the same time, s/he aims to void at least one suit – or potentially two of them. It is of significant advantage if voiding a suit can indeed be combined with a hand-over of low spots. In case the kitty has comprised cards poorly suited for misère, the declarer is often forced to void only his/her shortest suit and hand over the lowest (or also the highest) card(s) in his/her second-shortest suit.

A kitty bidder can inform the partner about the suit that can accommodate even poor cards by organizing the four card hand-over in a fashion similar to that explained for no kitty games (page 43 onwards). In the case of misère, instead of a trump suit, the hand-over indicates a safe suit with several low spots. The partner may retain a middling card of this particular suit in his/her hand, as the declarer has lowest spots in the suit.

The cards handed over indicate to the responder the suits that continue in the declarer's hand. The responder gives the lowest card in his/her shortest suit to the declarer and the poorest/highest cards in the same suit to the opponents. If needed, s/he may forward a poor card received from the declarer to an opponent.

In some instances, the responder's hand may still contain high/poor cards in a given suit (e.g., KJ98) without low spots. In such a case, a feasible option is to hand over two highest/poorest

cards to the opponents and another poor card to the partner. By this means, the two poor cards in the main players' hands can be played to the same as opposed to two separate tricks.

Special attention needs to be paid on 2 spots during card exchange. A 2 spot is in the right hand when it belongs to a player's long suit. Neither main player should have a long suit without a 2 spot, and voiding this kind of suit should not be attempted by either player.

### Crucial Requirements for Card Exchange in Kitty Games

<b>Trumps</b>	All trumps in one hand (that of the first bidder) In cross-ruff, trumps and a void suit in the hand of each main player Ace mark to permit safe play to the partner
<b>Grand</b>	A long suit in one hand An entry/connection card permitting safe play to the partner
<b>Misère</b>	A void suit Poor/high cards in a short suit should be split between the main players

### Card Exchange by Defenders

The defenders hand over the lowest card in the shortest suit to each other. Should a defender be naturally void in a suit, s/he should give a middling card in his/her three- or four-card suit and subsequently play a lower card of the same suit when the suit is led for the first time. The partner should now recognize the naturally void suit. The void suit is usually easy to grasp on the basis of preceding tricks.

### Doubles

When a double is being contemplated, it needs to be emphasized that the partner may have really poor cards despite the potential doubler's hand being excellent, since by bidding misère, the main players have already indicated their possession of low cards. Therefore, the player who doubles should have a good number of low spots together with a king as an entry card to win a trick and be able to challenge the main players by his/her low spots.

### Opening Lead

The opening lead depends on whether or not the defenders have been permitted to exchange cards. In case the defenders were permitted to exchange cards, a high card in the partner's short suit – the suit received from the partner – is played first followed by a low card in the same suit. Should the opponents win the second trick, the opening leader's partner has three options: (i) to signal the entry suit, (ii) to commence voiding a suit, or (iii) to discard an ace

to this trick. If an opening leader holds two touching low cards (*e.g.*, ♠KJ954), it is better to lead the lowest card to the second trick to permit the partner to count the remaining low spots.

In case the defenders have not been permitted to exchange cards and a defender holds a 2 spot, the opening lead is the defender's second lowest card in this suit. If s/he has no 2 spots, the opening lead is the lowest card of his/her shortest suit. The partner is obligated to guess which one of two holdings s/he has; it will nevertheless be resolved by subsequent tricks. When a defender wins a trick, s/he continues in the same fashion, except when s/he holds a 2 spot in the suit his/her partner has already played. In the latter case, this suit is to be continued.

## Playing Tactics

It is mandatory that the defenders understand each other and have the skills to stick to a common plan. They should agree as soon as possible on the player to be in charge. Should a player have doubled, s/he will be in command. A successful defense in *misère* does not usually permit changes in the game plan.

The defenders should try to challenge the main players in one or two selected suits. Main pressure should be placed on the player who appears to have a weaker hand. Already the opening lead should be aggressive in the defense against six- or seven-level *misère*. The opening lead should aim at a liable suit of the main players and should be informative with regard to a low card in the player's suit. Even though the points for aces are scored by the ordinal number of tricks, the first few tricks taken by the defenders are not that costly, even when the aces need to be disposed to subsequent tricks.

If the main players are forced to win tricks, it is better to win them right away rather than in the endgame, as the aces potentially discarded to early tricks of the main players would not be that costly. If a player notices that his/her partner is in trouble, s/he can voluntarily win a trick and then lead a card in his/her partner's void suit.

Should one have three or four aces, it is usually worthwhile to play one or two of them at the first opportunity, even if the aces are discarded to tricks taken by the player's side. However, it is not usually worthwhile to lead aces to the first few tricks in the aggressive defense against six- or seven-level *misère*.

On occasions it is clear that a defensive player is unable to help his/her partner – s/he has no low spots in the partner's void suit. One way to handle this situation is to use signaling similar to that described in the context of all-pass *misère* (see page 38): the card discarded to the second trick is in the suit in which the player has a small spot, and it is aimed at signaling to the partner to exhaust this particular suit. Subsequent leads in the partner's void suit would permit the partner to void the signaled suit and thus be helped in this suit.

In case a player does not believe that s/he is able to memorize all cards played in various suits, it would be worthwhile to memorize at least the cards discarded in his/her partner's void suit. Likewise, one should be capable of keeping track of the cards played in his/her longest suit.

## All-pass Misère

All-pass misère is not a bid form of playing, but it becomes the only remaining option to play when all players have passed in the first-round auction in a kitty or no kitty game. In all-pass misère, the dealer distributes the kitty (when applicable) to the players, one card to each in a clockwise fashion. Each player's hand has then 13 cards. Both sides are permitted to exchange one card, with the players next to the shuffled deck on the table handing over first – “the deck hands over”.

All-pass misère is the most often played – perhaps also most variable and demanding – type of playing skruuvi. Its overriding principles are to help the partner and to void short suits. In order to help his/her partner, a player ought to be able to win a trick or tricks. Therefore, it is important to hold initially an entry card (preferably a king). All-pass misère is very different from misère bid in a kitty or no kitty game, and the hands required for these two forms of misère are clearly distinct.

**Good hand for all-pass misère**

♠3 ♣AK7542 ♦Q54 ♥K4

**Good hand for bid misère**

♠3 ♣A87542 ♦1042 ♥54

In addition to low spots, it is advantageous to hold a king or a queen as *entry cards* in all-pass misère. Moreover, holding low cards in the partner's short suit is preferable. By contrast, a good hand in misère bid in kitty or no kitty games does not necessitate holding an entry card, and a potential ace should be in a long, safe suite (an ace at least fifth).

In all-pass misère, one minus point is scored for every trick that a partnership wins. In addition, every ace discarded to a trick won by the partners yields minus points, as determined by the ordinal number of the trick (that is, from 1 to 13 minus points). Consequently, an important goal is to discard the aces to the opponents' tricks. In case a player has poor cards for all-pass misère, his/her aces will likely be discarded to late tricks of his/her own and hence, the aces should be discarded to early tricks, even if the tricks are won by his/her own side. To discard aces successfully to the opponents' tricks requires that the partner holds low cards in the player's void suit, and that the partner, after winning the preceding trick, leads a low spot in the partner's void suit (see below). An ace is safe in hand only when it belongs to a long suit.

## Exchange of Cards

A rule of thumb is that the players hand over the lowest card of the shortest suit (ace is considered in this context as the lowest card) to their partners. Exception to the rule is an ace under certain conditions. An ace in a short suit is usually handed over to prevent a forced trick when the suit in question is led. However, when the shortest suit is A2 or A3, the spot (2 or 3) is handed over; in particular, if a player holds another ace in a short suit.

Holding two or three equally short suits, the lowest card is usually handed over. However, in case one of the short suits includes a king, a small card – even if not the lowest one among the low cards – in this suit is handed over, as it will insure a trick when this suit is led. After this, there will be an improved opportunity to help the partner to discard an ace to an opponent's trick.

In case a player is naturally void in a suit, s/he will signal this by handing over a middling card in his/her three- or four-card suit and by playing subsequently a lower card in the same suit when the suit is led for the first time.

Should a player receive a card from the partner to his/her shortest suit, s/he needs invariably choose another suit for a hand-over, as no useful information is gained by handing over back a card in the same suit. In case the handed-over card is in the partner's naturally void suit, then this card can be returned. And finally, as a general concept, a player has to take into account that the partner's short suit may also contain three cards.

### Example of Hands and Hand-overs in All-pass Misère when All Players Have 13 Cards

The deck is located between players B and C.

Player B hands over ♥10 to the partner and receives in turn ♠2.

Player C hands over ♣2 to the partner and receives ♦A back.

Player A is able to help C discarding ♦A to the opponent's trick in ♣ (A♣ will be in AC's own trick).

Player B can help D discarding ♥A in a ♠ trick won by the opponents, and player D is able to aid B in discarding ♠A:n to the opponents' ♥ trick.

The final score of the deal is some five plus points to the BD partnership.

	<b>Player C</b>	
	♥J95	
	♦J7642	
	♣A2	
	♠Q87	
<b>Player B</b>		<b>Player D</b>
♥10		♥AQ832
♦KQ3		♦1085
♣J953		♣Q106
♠AK643		♠J2
	<b>Player A</b>	
	♥K764	
	♦A9	
	♣K874	
	♠1095	

## Doubles and Redoubles

The dealer is the first to double. If a player doubles, his/her opponents are permitted to redouble – the opponent to the doubler's left is the first to redouble or pass.

A thoughtful consideration is essential prior to doubling. Even if one's own hand is excellent for misère, the partner may have a hand that is neither suitable for misère nor strong enough for bidding in the first round (kitty games) or for a six-level bid (no kitty games). In view of this, the player who doubles ought to be able to help the partner in the suit that s/he has handed

over. It helps a double to succeed, if the doubler is able to hand over to the partner a 2 spot or a singleton low card in his/her own shortest suit. Of note, it is not as beneficial in doubled as in non-doubled all-pass *misère* to drive down an opponent's ace(s) – that is, to play several cards in succession in the suit on which the opponent has an ace until s/he is forced to win a trick with that ace – because each trick won scores two minus points to the doubled side.

## Opening Lead

The player at the dealer's left makes the opening lead. The purpose of the first tricks is primarily to help the partner void his/her shortest suit. After this, a lead in the same suit usually permits the partner to discard an ace to the trick won by an opponent. According to this scheme, the opening lead can be either a king (should a player have one) or a middling card in the suit in question. Since the opening leader is usually not aware of the number cards (none, one or two) that the partner still holds in his/her short suit, it is seldom worthy of leading a single low card in this suit to the second trick. However, should the opening leader have touching low spots (*e.g.*, xxx32 or xxx43), s/he can lead the lower spot to the second trick. In case a player wins also the second trick (*e.g.*, KQ or KJ, when Q was played to the first trick), then it is safe to lead the lowest card in the suit in question to the next trick.

If a player fails to have low spots in the partner's shortest suit (*e.g.*, only a 7 spot), his/her opening lead can be a middling card in this suit, hoping that the opponents would win the trick and the partner be able to void the suit. In case a player is unable to help in his/her partner's shortest suit, s/he needs to pay careful attention to the suit that the partner is discarding, in order to consider whether or not s/he could be capable of helping the partner later on in this latter suit.

Should the opening leader have an ace in one or more suits, or otherwise a poor hand for *misère*, s/he may need the partner's help to enable disposing of the aces as soon as possible. In this situation, his/her opening lead is not in the partner's shortest suit; rather, it is in his/her own shortest suit – that is, the one s/he handed over to the partner – as a request for help. In case the player already voided his/her shortest suit by hand-over, the request for help can entail an opening lead with a middling card in a suit different from the partner's shortest suit.

The dealer and his/her partner should aim at winning a trick as soon as possible. Upon winning the first trick, they continue playing using an approach similar to that of the opening leader. The aces discarded to early tricks are “cheap” but get more and more “expensive” the later they are played to tricks. It is sometimes worthwhile to win an early trick with an ace – in particular, when the hand contains multiple aces – as it will not score too many minus points to the trick-winning side.

In case the opponents lead a suit that is the player's shortest suit, it pays off very seldom to continue playing this same suit, unless one's hand contains its lowest spots. By contrast, it is worthwhile to let the opponents keep leading this suit and try in each instance to play low and help the partner by this means.

## Signaling

When a player's void suit is led, s/he has at least two options to discard a card to this trick: an ace or another card. If s/he is unable to discard an ace – there is no prior assurance that the opponents will win the trick –, s/he will discard a card in a suit different from that led. This particular card can be used as a signal, as described on page 30. The teammate will then know which suit needs to be led, in order to permit the partner to win a trick and be able to provide help if needed. The discarded card may also be a high, liable honor in the player's hand, for example, a singleton. It needs to be emphasized that entry cards should not be disposed of prior to knowing for sure that they are no longer needed to help the partner.

Sometimes a player is able to help his/her partner only in one suit that is not the partner's shortest one. One option to play under these circumstances is to signal the suit that his/her partner should start discarding. Thus, a player leads to the second trick a suit in which s/he has a low spot, thereby telling to the partner to dispose his/her cards in this suit. The player leads to next consecutive tricks the partner's void suit, permitting him/her to exhaust the previous suit, thus creating an opportunity to be helped in this suit. Should this new suit be long in the partner's hand or s/he has an ace in the suit, the above scheme may not be workable.

**A crucial feature in all-pass misère is to help the partner**

**Entry cards must be held as long as they are needed**

## Playing Tactics

Less experienced players may not always remember the card handed over by the partner. To avoid this ambiguity, it is recommended that this card is inserted in one's hand far left or right, and perhaps the entire suit in question moved next to it.

When a player notices that his/her partner does not have an ace any longer, s/he should dispose high cards, and then try to push the opponents to win the last tricks of the deal. Even then, it should nevertheless be pondered whether or not, after winning a trick with a high card, it is still possible to play the remaining tricks to the opponents.

When pressured by the opponents, the only option is often to win a trick with an ace. Should a player hold a low spot in the same suit, the ace should be used to win the next-to-the-last trick in this suit, and then lead the low spot to the next trick for the opponents to win it. On favorable occasions, the partner is able to discard his/her ace to the same trick.

It is often worthwhile to attempt playing the "tail-end" of a deal to the opponents' tricks. One possibility to achieve this is to recognize an opponent's long suit and have a 2 spot – or the lowest card not yet played – in this suit. Subsequent to counting the cards in other suits in the



the-long-suit-holder's hand, a player leads to exhaust the opponent's hand from these suits, wins a trick in the long suit, and leads a 2 spot (or the lowest card not yet played) to the next trick. The opponent becomes now trapped to this suit and inevitably collects the remaining tricks of the deal. One potential approach to protect against the above entrapment from happening is to continue playing the long suit, in order to exhaust the chaser's cards in this suit. In case the player is then able to play the next trick to his/her partner or the opponents, s/he has succeeded in eliminating the lurking catastrophe.

Partners' cooperation is essential to their ability to discard the aces to the opponents' tricks. Therefore, one should be ready to help the partner as long as needed, and dispose entry card(s) only after this. A reasonable guideline is "win a trick at the beginning but play low towards the end of the deal". In any event, distribution of the cards in the partners' hands directs the playing possibilities very strongly.

The opponents' play needs to be interrupted as soon as possible. The fourth player to a trick is able to do this without a risk, but the second in line must usually play low, in order to avoid an ace being discarded by an opponent to the trick.

On most occasions, an ace ought to be discarded to the opponents' trick at the earliest possibility. To continue holding an ace in such an instance – as an attempt to score more minus points to the opponents – gives the partner a wrong message, as s/he now assumes that there are no aces in the partner's hand and disposes his/her cards held to help the partner. As a consequence, the opponents could force the not-yet-discarded ace to win a later and more costly trick. However, when a player has handed over an ace to his/her partner, s/he knows where the ace is and plans on playing accordingly independent of the partner's activities.

It is sometimes advantageous to play a high liable honor instead of an ace to the opponents' trick, for example, in a situation when this high card would later on win a trick with a discarded ace from the opposing side. In general, a high card should preferentially be held in a suit that the opponent to the left has as well, but one should avoid holding such a card in the shortest suit of the left-sided opponent.

In case a player has handed over his/her singleton card to the partner and does not play the suit received from the partner, s/he should lead a low spot in another suit. When the partner wins a trick, s/he can lead outright a low spot in the teammate's suit who should be void in this suit.

If a player has several cards in a suit where an opponent has an ace, s/he can play cards from the top in succession, until the opponent is forced to win a trick with the ace. When playing such a long suit, one has to avoid getting entrapped to this suit and being forced to win the remaining tricks of the deal. Moreover, it needs to be kept in mind that every trick won scores minus points, two points each when doubled.

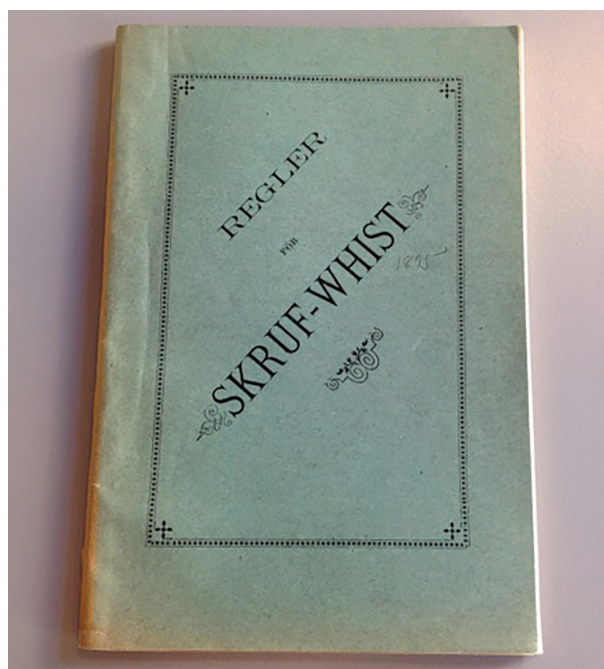
Counting the cards at least in one suit is required for a successful *misère*. More often than not, it is the partner's shortest suit. All cards need to be taken into account, that is, the ones disposed of and those played to tricks. It is not unusual that a player leads at a later stage a low spot to realize that the other players are already void in this suit. Under the best of conditions

– when all aces have already been discarded – it may nevertheless be beneficial to the playing side, in that the partner may be able to discard a liable high card to this trick, after which rest of the tricks might be playable to the opponents. The low spot (“an orphan 2 spot”) may also be a signal to the partner – in case s/he still holds an ace – to discard the ace to this trick and thus score a lower number of minus points. However, the orphan 2 spot trick permits frequently the opponents to discard their ace(s) to this trick, thus making the counting error costly.

The following preconditions appear mandatory for a successful all-pass *misère* (according to Johannes Nyrkiö).

1. The player has several low spots (preferably also a 2 spot) in the partner’s shortest suit
2. The player has enough high cards at least in two suits to enable him/her to win, at the latest, the second trick of the deal
3. The player’s hand contains low cards, in addition to the partner’s shortest suit, also in another suit to permit playing a trick to the opponent
4. After hand-over, the player’s short suit contains only one card
5. The player has handed over a 2 or 3 spot in his/her short suit
6. The player has at least one ace in a relatively long suit

The above preconditions are listed in the order of their importance, and they are very seldom fulfilled *in toto*.



*Title page of the first guidebook to skruuvi from 1895;  
the book is archived in the National Library of Finland.  
(Picture: The Helsinki Finnish Club)*

## NO KITTY (EAGLE) GAMES

[The Finns have dubbed this form of skruuvi as “the eagle games” which refers to the city of Kotka (Eagle in English) where playing skruuvi without a kitty was originally invented in the 1920s. Since the lowest bid in no kitty games is at six-level, the name “eagle” could also be interpreted to refer to a high-flying, vulturous form of playing.]

Each person has a hand of 13 cards after the deal. The rank of the playing types and suits is the following (lowest first): trumps (spade, club, diamond, heart), misère, and grand (no trump), that is, the status of misère is higher than that in kitty games. The opening bid must be at least at six-level, implying that the declarer’s side has to win at least 12 tricks in trumps and grand, or not more than one trick in misère. The lowest possible bid is 6♠. The declarer side can exchange four cards, whereas the defenders are not permitted to exchange cards.

### Auction

The dealer bids first, and the auction continues clockwise. Should all players pass in the first round, all-pass misère will ensue (see page 35). Since the lowest bid is at six-level and the bidder knows nothing about his/her partner’s hand, the main rationale behind bidding is to be the declarer and hand over four cards to the partner. In case a player’s hand is good, or even mediocre, for all-pass misère, it is usually not worthwhile to bid, unless the s/he is quite sure about a makeable contract.

The hand-over will inform the partner about the type of play and the cards that the player wants to receive in return. Therefore, the regularly used opening bid 6♠ does not have to refer to a strong ♠ suit in the bidder’s hand; rather, it strictly speaking indicates simply that the bidder does not want to play all-pass misère. Subsequent to their exchange of four cards, the main players go through extended bidding to decide the type of play and the level of the contract.

#### Most often used bidding alternatives and their preconditions are as follows

##### Six spades (the lowest bid)

- Super strong suit and a side suit ace (e.g., ♣AKJ9873 and ♦A)
- First round suit together with a second round suit (e.g., ♣AKJ87 and ♦AQJ7)
- Seven or more honors, two of which are aces
- Very poor cards for playing all-pass misère (only high cards)

##### Six clubs

- One of the hands needed for bidding at six-level, as described above, but a natural void in spades or in another suit to be revealed by the exchange of cards (the trump suit should not be ♠)

### Six misère

- Low cards and at least two 2 spots, and the ability to hand over low cards to the partner (preferably also 2 spots)
- Misère should not be bid, when the partner has bid and the opponents have passed
- Misère should not be bid, when the hand is naturally void in a suit

### The lowest possible suit

- Hand for one of the bids described above when an opponent has bid and the partner has passed (a competitive bid)

#### Example of a Hand Used to Bid Six Spades

♠84 ♣AK87 ♦K2 ♥AKQ87

- ♥ is the potential trump suit and ♣ a good side suit
- for the exchange of cards and how to play, see page 44

Should a player be naturally void in a suit and does not want to have ♠ as the trump, the opening bid is 6♣. In case the declarer's four-card hand-over includes spade(s), the partner should realize that ♠ is not the naturally void suit; the void suit should be obvious on the basis of the cards that were handed over (see below).

Should a player be naturally void in a suit and does not wish to have ♠ as the trump, but wants to hold the spades in his/her hand, the opening bid is 6♠ followed by 6♣ in the second round. The four-card hand-over should reveal the naturally void suit. A case like this occurs when a player is naturally void, for example, in hearts and wants to hold ♠AK that are the only spades in his/her hand. S/he will tell by card exchange the cards to be returned and the preferred trump suit (see page 44).

Should both ♠ and ♣ be naturally void in a player's hand, his/her opening bid is 6♦.

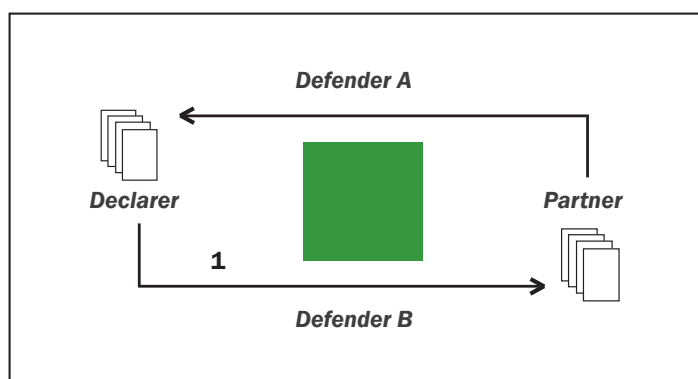
Six misère is potential pre-empt bid after the opponents' opening bid. In this case, a player's hand does not have to be as strong as that described above for the opening six misère bid.

If the partner of the player who bid six misère to pre-empt has also good hand for playing misère, s/he can make an encouragement bid for the teammate to raise to seven misère, in case the opponents have overbid six misère. The bidding may then proceed, for instance, in the following sequence: 6♠ → six misère → six grand → 7♥ (encouragement to bid seven misère).

## Exchange of Cards

The declarer hands over four cards to the partner who, in turn, returns four cards. These cards should reflect clearly the final contract that the main players aim at making. The card exchange should inform about continued and voided suits in the respective hands as well as the possibility to play *misère*, as already described in connection of kitty games (see page 23). The rank order of the cards, the suit next to the table, the cards in mixed or booklet format, and the placement of a single suit within the four-card hand-over are all important elements in the information exchange by the main players.

Since the initial bid of 6♠ is seldom meant to describe the eventual trump suit, it is of crucial importance to make the preferred trump suit unambiguous in the declarer's hand-over. Likewise, it is mandatory to pay attention to the possibility that the 6♠ bidder wants to play *misère*.



*In no kitty games, the main players exchange four cards.  
The defenders are not permitted to exchange cards.*

## Exchange of Cards in Trumps

Should the declarer wish to play trumps, s/he will hand over cards in his/her shortest/worst suit to void it and, if possible, a side suit ace still holding a low spot in this suit to permit a safe play to the partner. The declarer's options are to hand over four cards in one suit, or one plus three cards or two plus two cards in two suits. The card next to the table in the long suit (three or four cards) or that of the two-card suit refers to the possibility of playing *misère*. The two top cards in the long suit or the cards in the top two-card suit inform about the preferred trump suit (or in the case of *misère*, the suit that is capable of accommodating the partner's poor cards).

### The Ways by Which the Declarer Marks the Suit(s) That S/he Wants to Receive in Return

- If the declarer hands over a single suit (four cards), the bottom card refers to a *misère* possibility (the card nearest to the table), and among the remaining three cards, the top card indicates the primary suit preference, and the card next to it the secondary suit preference, that is, the suit to be returned in such a case that four cards in the primary suit cannot be returned. The rank of the cards equals to that of the suits, in that, a card with lowest numerical value refers to the lowest-ranked suit and that with highest numerical value the highest-ranked suit, etc. Accordingly, a hand-over of ♣A47J indicates that *misère* is out of question, the preferred primary suit is ♥ and the secondary suit preference ♠. This four-card hand over contains also a message (the third card from top): the declarer does not want to receive ♦ in return; s/he may even be void in this suit.
- Should the declarer hand over two suits, one of which has only one card, then the highest card of the three-card suit indicates the preferred trump suit and the lowest the *misère* option. Thus, a hand-over of ♣A47♥K informs that ♥ is voided and that the primary suit preference is ♦; ♣ continues as cards are not mixed, and *misère* is not an option as ♣7 is the lowest of the top three cards.
- Should a hand-over have a pair of two-card suits, the lower card of the suit next to the table reveals whether or not *misère* is possible. The upper card of the higher suit indicates the preferred trump suit and the lower one the secondary choice – a higher card points to a higher-ranked suit and a lower card to a lower-ranked suit. Accordingly, the hand-over of ♣A7♥7K indicates that *misère* is not possible and that the primary and secondary trump choices are ♦ and ♠, respectively; ♥ is voided and ♣ continues, since the cards are not mixed.

The example on page 42 for a 6♠ bid; holding ♠84 ♣AK87 ♦K2 ♥AKQ87 and handing-over ♦K♠4♦2♠8 indicates that ♠ and ♦ are voided (the suits are mixed), that *misère* is not an option (♠8 nearest to the table) and that the preferred primary trump suit is ♥ (♦K is the top card). Thus, the aim is to play six ♥.

### The declarer's partner returns four cards according to the following principles

- If a partner has one to four cards in the primary suit preference, s/he will return the card(s) in this suit together with the highest card(s) in the declarer's side suit. According to the example above (the declarer's hand-over of ♦K♠4♦2♠8), the partner should hand over all his/her ♥ and the highest ♣ unless there is an ace in his/her hand (see below).
- In case a partner has only one to two low cards in the preferred suit, but three or four good cards in the secondary suit preference, s/he can return – against the declarer's primary wish – the secondary suit cards.
- It is of great importance in trumps that the declarer has the ability to play safely to the partner. To achieve this, the partner will return an ace mark (a low card on top) in a non-trump suit rather the ace itself; in particular, if his/her hand also holds the king of the same suit. After winning a trick, the partner usually leads this suit to win all available tricks in it, unless s/he is sure that the declarer has an entry card to play safely back to him.

### Example of the Above 6♠ Bid that Was Aimed at Making the Contact at 6♥

Player A bids 6♠, and the other players pass.


The hand-over is ♦K♠4♦2♠8.

The partner (player C) returns ♦4♥539.

A bids 6♥; the other players pass.

Players AC will make the contract, despite C's rather weak hand.

NB! Should player C have returned ♦A, in lieu of the ace mark ♦4, it would have resulted in one undertrick.

		<b>Player C</b>	
		♥953	
		♦A104	
		♣965	
		♠J1073	
		<b>Player B</b>	<b>Player D</b>
		♥J106	♥42
		♦Q653	♦J987
		♣103	♣QJ42
		♠AK95	♠Q62
			
		<b>Player A</b>	
		♥AKQ87	
		♦K2	
		♣AK87	
		♠84	

### Exchange of Cards in Grand (No Trump)

The declarer and his/her partner do not always know whether to play trumps or grand (no trump) prior to card exchange. The difference between a kitty and a no kitty game relates to the four-cards exchange in the latter. This will permit the partner to hand over two suits or strengthen the declarer's good suit by 3–4 cards. It is also important to assure that the declarer holds the ability to play safely to his/her partner, in order for the latter to win all available tricks and, if needed, able to play back to the declarer.

### Exchange of Cards in Misère

The declarer may have bid six misère or pointed out this option by a low card next to the table in the hand-over. The hand-over informs about the suit(s) void in the declarer's hands, as already described in connection of kitty games (see pages 23–24).

If the declarer bids six misère or points out the option to it, s/he ought to have an excellent hand for misère. Should misère be indeed played, the partner has to make sure that the remaining cards in his/her hand are suitable for it. His/her hand may hold a singleton after the hand-over to the declarer; however, the singleton should not be a very low card, since a low card – especially a 2 spot – is invaluable in the teammate's hand, if s/he has a long suit devoid of a 2 spot.

The declarer's partner aims to void his/her shortest/worst suit that is different from those handed over to him/her. If the other suit to be returned to the declarer is poor, s/he should hand over the two highest cards in this suit to the declarer. In case the suit is good, s/he returns the highest and lowest card in this suit. If a player has only high cards in a suit, it is usually beneficial to split these cards into two hands. By this means, the partners are able to play their high cards to the same trick, as opposed to two separate tricks.



## Extended Bids

The declarer bears the main responsibility for selecting the best contract for the main players. S/he is the first to bid after card exchange. In case the suit preferred as trump becomes strong enough after the exchange of cards, the declarer bids it at six- or seven-level. The partner usually passes.

If the primary trump candidate suit does not become strong enough after card exchange, the declarer bids the next suit in rank and listens to the partner's response. Should this suit be fine with the partner, s/he passes. If not, s/he bids the suit next in rank, etc. Finally, the least worst contract could be found in another suit, in grand or even in misère.

It is worth noting that a weak ("leaky") trump at six-level will invariably be doubled, scoring a fair amount of minus points to the main players. Bidding grand in these instances has the advantage that a grand contract is usually not doubled, since a potential doubler is not aware of the strongest long suit of the main players.

Should both players have indicated the possibility for misère, a raise to six misère is often the best alternative.

## Doubles and Opening Lead

The player to the left of the declarer is permitted to double first. The player on the doubler's left will, in turn, redouble first. A double will duplicate and redouble triplicate all other point except for those of the aces in misère.

The player to the left of the declarer plays the opening lead.

The following opening leading instructions are potentially useful for the defenders to bring about undertrick(s) to the main players.

- Opening lead with a middling card in a long suit
- Opening lead with a singleton. Should the partner win a trick, s/he leads the same suit to the next trick that could potentially be ruffed by his/her teammate
- Opening lead in a long suit may be useful, in that the partner is potentially void in that suit and capable of ruffing
- To play the higher of two touching honors as opening lead is often advantageous
- An ace without high honors in the same suit should not be used for opening lead
- Opening lead should not be played with a card in a weak and short suit (holding only middling cards in a two- or three-card suit)
- Should a defensive player's partner win the opening lead trick, s/he should lead the same suit to the next trick, unless there is an especially strong reason to behave otherwise



## Playing Tactics

It is beneficial for the declarer's partner to have an entry card (an ace), in that, after drawing trumps, the declarer will then be able to play safely to his/her partner and the main players capable of winning tricks with their all high cards.

When a partner stops leading his/her high cards, the next lead should be in the declarer's side suit, in order to create an opportunity for the declarer to finesse. For example, should the declarer hold ♥AKJ9, then there is a 50% chance for the ♥J to win a trick.

As a rule of thumb, a player should not double in trumps of no kitty games, unless s/he has two sure trump tricks. The reason is that the doubler is not aware of the main player's void suits, and potential success in doubling is difficult to assess on the basis of the defenders' side suit aces only. In other types of playing in no kitty games, the doubler ought to be sure that his/her hand, independent of that of the partner's, is strong enough to bring about the requisite number of undertricks to the main players.

No kitty games provide an opportunity to make the contract with somewhat weaker hands than in kitty games. This is explained by the fact that the defenders are not permitted to exchange cards, the importance of which is illustrated by the following example. The two defenders have ♠K and ♠J5, respectively, in a contract of 6♠. The ♠K is lost to the trick won by ♠A, and the ♠J to that won by ♠Q; as a consequence, the declarer will win 10 tricks with his/her ♠ trumps. Should the same hands be played in kitty games, permitting single-card exchange by the defenders, the defenders should be able to elicit one or two undertricks to the main players, depending on who hands over first.

If a player doubles in misère, s/he should inform the partner about his/her 2 spot suit by opening lead with a middling card in this suit. Consequently, the partner should aim at disposing his/her cards in this suit as soon as possible. The doubler leads the 2 spot after s/he has exhausted a main player's hand from other suits. The main player is now forced to win tricks with all remaining cards that s/he still holds in the 2-spot suit. To play the tail-end of the deal to the opponents' tricks is often challenging and demands careful counting of the cards. Nevertheless, experienced players are often successful in this endeavor.

# BOLSHEVIK

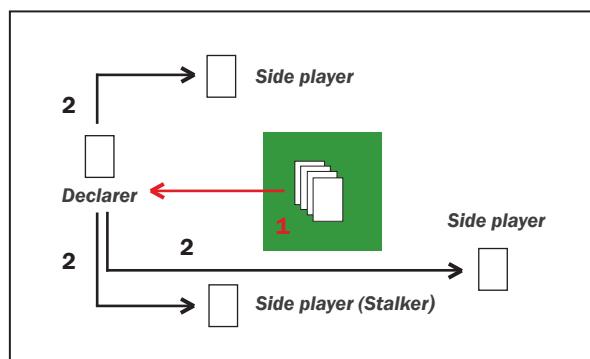
(The etymology of the name bolshevik relates most likely to Finland gaining her independence from then-to-become-bolshevik Russia in December, 1917, as this form of playing was introduced to skruuvi shortly after this event, in early 1920s.)

Bolshevik is played only after a mutual agreement among all the players. Depending on the players and the time allocated to play, bolshevik can be played in connection with every session or with the first/last session only. Playing bolshevik offers a challenging and a different experience in the context of skruuvi. In the following, playing bolshevik in a session as separate deals is described. The way by which bolshevik was traditionally played in connection with all deals is described in the chapter “Alternative Ways of Playing Skruuvi” (page 53).

There is a set-apart session for bolshevik – either at the beginning or at the end of the play – comprising at most eight deals with a kitty, during which each of the four players has to play bolshevik once. In case all four players pass in the first round (or in any of the subsequent rounds) of bolshevik bidding, the deal is annulled, the cards are re-shuffled, and the deal forwarded to the next player. If a player has not bid bolshevik by the eight deal, s/he has to play a forced bolshevik independent of the cards in his/her hand.

One player at the time bids bolshevik and plays alone and independently (sic!) against the rest of the players (side players) with a contract of seven misère (bolshevik) or alternatively, should his/her cards necessitate it, the contract can be seven-level trumps or grand – the game is then dubbed as *dictator*. The rank of the playing types and suits is the same as in kitty games, that is, (lowest first) misère, trumps (spade, club, diamond, heart), and grand (no trump).

The cards are dealt the same way as in kitty games; each player receives 12 cards, and there is a kitty on the table. The player who bids bolshevik takes the kitty and turns the cards face up for everyone to see. Subsequent to inserting the kitty into his/her hand, s/he hands over one card to each of the side players, in order to get rid of the weakest cards in his/her hand.



*Taking the kitty (1) and handing over the cards (2) in bolshevik.*

## Auction

Should more than one player bid bolshevik in a given deal, the first player to bid can decide whether or not s/he takes the game. In the unlikely event that three players are eager to play bolshevik, again the first one to bid can decide whether or not to play; the second bidder being next in line. The player to bid bolshevik ought to have good cards for misère and be able to void at least one suit, independent of the cards brought to his/her hand by the kitty. Likewise, it would be beneficial if high cards in a short suit could be handed over to side players.

On the basis of the kitty and his/her own cards, a player decides whether s/he plays misère or changes the contract to trumps or grand – still at seven-level. A dictator bid is usually made only in emergency, occurring mainly in connection with a forced bolshevik combined with very poor (high) kitty cards. Under those conditions, the dictator bid is assumed to result in a less severe loss of points. A made dictator contract is such a rarity that even the most seasoned skruuvi players have never experienced it.

## Handing Cards Over

The bolshevik bidder takes and displays the kitty and subsequently hands over one card to each of the three side players without showing the cards to other players. The declarer's objective is to become void in one or two suits and get rid of an ace in a short, liable suit.

In general, it is recommended to hand over the lowest card in a suit to the player of the declarer's right – the *stalker* – and the highest card to the player on the left. Of note, it is the stalker rather than the player on the declarer's left who plays the opening lead in bolshevik. The stalker has the best position to pressure the bolshevik bidder, in order to produce an undertrick to him/her. The side players are not permitted to exchange cards.

### The Stalker in Bolshevik

- Plays the opening lead and forces by this means the declarer to think about low cards in other side players' hands
- Should the stalker have a 2 spot, the opening lead is with a low card in this suit
- Stalker is able to pressure the declarer best when permitted to lead trick(s)

## Final Contract and Doubles

The bolshevik bidder may either pass – the contract is then seven misère – or raise it to seven trump (in any suit) or grand to play dictator. As mentioned above, this latter contract is usually played only in forced bolshevik, and/or when the kitty contains high cards. Even though the

aces discarded do not count as minus points in a dictator contract, trumps and grand are more susceptible to being doubled than misère (bolshevik).

The stalker doubles first, and doubling continues clockwise. If the stalker passes, the others usually pass as well, since the stalker plays a central role in bringing about undertricks. Prerequisites for doubling in bolshevik are a holding of at least two 2 spots in at least four-card suits, plus a couple of high entry cards. Doubling does not apply to the side player(s) who has (have) passed. The declarer may redouble if one of the side players has doubled first. A double duplicates and redouble triplicates the points in tricks won, but they do not influence the points of the aces.

## Playing Tactics

The objective of the side players is to produce one undertrick to the bolshevik bidder by a mutual effort. The aces have much less significance in this respect. The possible success depends primarily on the stalker's cards and skills of playing.

When a side player wins a trick, it is usually advisable to play a trick back to the stalker to enable him/her to continue pressuring the bolshevik bidder. In case the stalker holds a hopeless hand, s/he tries to become void in a suit, hoping that the other side players will be able to challenge the bidder in this suit and eventually elicit an undertrick.

### Teamwork in Bolshevik

The defenders team up to produce at least an undertrick to the bolshevik player  
All side player will score the same points and are not competing with each other

The stalker's opening lead is the second lowest card in a suit that s/he holds a 2 spot. If s/he does not hold a 2 spot, s/he plays the lowest card in his/her shortest suit. The other side players must try to deduce the stalker's holding. The defense in bolshevik should be aggressive and attack the declarer with low cards, as opposed to disposing aces to early tricks.

In case the stalker doubles, his/her opening lead must be a low card in his/her 2-spot suit. This will advise the other side players to void this particular suit, in order to allow the stalker – after winning a trick – to lead the 2 spot and produce an undertrick to the bidder. If a side player has a 2 spot in a long suit (*e.g.*, a four-card suit), s/he leads the second lowest card in that suit at the first possible opportunity. The other side players try then to become void in that suit, in order to enable playing an undertrick to the bidder.

Should it become obvious – on the basis of the kitty and the cards handed over – that the bolshevik bidder is likely to make his/her contract, the side players need to play their aces as soon as possible.

# Scoring of Points

## Points in Trumps, Grand (No Trump), and Misère

After the all 13 tricks have been played, the points are scored according to the table below. The winning side collects plus points and the losing side minus points. Overtricks yield plus points and undertricks minus points to the main players.

Level of the contract	Contract made	Overtrick	First undertrick	Subsequent undertrick
<b>Trumps and grand</b>				
five	25	2	5	5
six	35	2	10	5
seven	50	-	15	5
<b>Misère</b>				
five	10	2	10	5
six	20	2	15	5
seven	35	-	20	5

In misère, for an ace in a trick won by a partnership, minus points are scored according to the ordinal number of the trick (range: from one to 13 minus points). In all-pass misère, each trick won yields one minus point.

Doubling duplicates and redoubling triplicates the points of a made contract and those of undertricks. In misère, doubling or redoubling does not influence the points of the aces.

The points in separate deals are compiled to generate the aggregate score in a given session. For an individual player, the final score in the entire play is the summary of points in the three sessions. In case bolshevik was also played, the points scored individually in bolshevik by each player are added to the aggregate score in the three sessions.

## Scoring Points in Bolshevik

The points scored in bolshevik are kept separate from other bookkeeping, since these points are individual rather than being shared by the partners as is the case with other forms of playing.

A contract made scores 20 points to the bidder. The first undertrick yields 15 points and the subsequent ones five points to each of the three the defenders (side players). Aces are scored by the trick's ordinal number. A contract made in dictator scores 50 points, *i.e.*, the same as seven-level contracts in trumps and grand.

The points scored are calculated separately to each player, taking into account doubles and redoubles (points with aces are not doubled/tripled). The aggregate score of the main player (bidder) is the opposite of the sum of the defenders' points. The following exemplifies this somewhat complicated scoring system. A made contract along with aces in trick numbers one, four, five, and 10 scores 40 minus points to each defender, yielding 120 plus points to the bolshevik player. Should one of the defenders have doubled, his/her score would be 60 minus points ( $2 \times 20$  points + 20 points from aces), thus increasing the bidder's score to 140 points.

Upon completion of the bolshevik deals, the points scored by each player are combined individually, divided by three, and rounded up to the closest integer. These points are then added to a player's score from other sessions, yielding his/her final score of the play.

## Playing Tactics

A made contract in a five-level kitty game scores 25 points. In case the opposing side has reasonably good – or even mediocre – cards to make a competitive bid that results in two doubled undertricks, the end result is nevertheless better than that in the first option (20 vs. 25 minus points). Thus, a competitive – or even sacrificing – bid can in certain instances be beneficial.

Long experience has shown that all-pass misère is highly likely to yield less points than a successfully bid contract. A made contract in bid misère is usually comparable to that in trumps and grand with regard to the points scored, when those from tricks with aces are taken into account. When a player aims at doubling in misère – in a bid one or an all-pass one –, s/he has to realize that only points from tricks are doubled.



*Trophy of the biennial tournament in the Mikkeli Club to commemorate the Marshal of Finland, C. G. E. Mannerheim. The headquarters of the Finnish Army during the Second World War were in the City of Mikkeli.*

## Alternative Ways of Playing Skruuvi

This handbook describes the current rules, regulations and instructions in skruuvi. These concepts have been developed during the past several decades, in order to render the regulations uniform and the playing sufficiently straightforward. The means to convey information in kitty and no kitty games have been improved substantially during the last years. As a consequence, potential trump suits are found more readily and void suits recognized better, and therefore, hand-overs in no kitty games occur nowadays very seldom to the partner's void suit.

Bolshevik was played over decades in such a fashion that every session that included bolshevik comprised 12 deals. Each player had to bid bolshevik once in the play, and the first-round auction was reserved for bolshevik only. If no player bid bolshevik in this round, the auction continued as usual in kitty and no kitty games, as if the bidding was still in the first round. In case some of the players had not bid bolshevik in the preceding kitty games, then the kitty was also dealt in no kitty games. If nobody bid bolshevik in a no kitty game deal, then the cards in the "extra" kitty were distributed for each player to have a hand of 13 cards, enabling commencement of a "real" first-round auction in a no kitty game. Instead of being intermingled with kitty and no kitty games, the current way of playing bolshevik as a separate session, as described on page 48 onwards, is a more workable and recommended alternative, as it does not interfere with the normal rhythm of kitty and no kitty games.

Skruuvi was played decades ago also at four-level, that is, the lowest permitted contract in kitty games was at this level. At the time, only four-level misère was actually played to completion, and trumps and grand at this level were considered as made unless someone doubled. It may well be that inclusion of four-level contracts would encourage bidding as opposed to playing all-pass misère. The scoring in four-level games could be as follows: made trumps and grand contracts, 10 points; that of misère, five points; and five minus points for each undertrick.

Should one player of the partnership be absent, there is also a three-player alternative to skruuvi, with an imaginary fourth player substituting for the absentee. More detailed instructions for this form of playing are on page 61 onwards under the headline "Skruuvi with Three Players ("The Bonehead")".

## Violation of the Rules

The most common rule infractions are the lead out of turn and the failure to follow suit. These negligent mistakes have distinct consequences that may also be applied in private and club games.

The overriding rule is that the played card holds. In other words, when a player has played a card in a correct suit and another player has seen it, the card cannot be changed any longer. Should a player have *revoked* by mistake – that is, failed to follow suit despite being able to do so – and this has been observed while the trick is still being played, the card in question is put aside face up as a penalty card, after which a card in the correct suit must be played. When the violated side has the next opportunity to lead, the opponents are permitted to decide whether

or not the penalty card suit should or should not be played. In the case of the former, the penalty card must be played to this trick. In case the opponents lead in the suit of the penalty card, this card must be played. Should a revoked card be noticed only when subsequent tricks are being played, it will result in two penalty tricks. As a consequence, a made five-level contract is converted to two undertricks.

In case a player leads out of turn, his/her card will be put aside as a penalty card. If the player with the out-of-turn lead is the teammate of the one who should have played that card, the opponents are permitted to demand or deny the latter player to lead in the suit in question.

Another negligent mistake is to bid a wrong suit. In this instance, the type of playing cannot be amended, but the bid must be raised to the right level. For example, a bid of 4♣ that follows a 4♦ bid is automatically converted to a 5♣ bid. Likewise, if somebody bids 1♥ in a no kitty game, it will automatically be raised to 6♥.

The above ruling on violations is following meticulously in skruuvi tournaments, but some minor mistakes can be excused in other kinds of playing, if so agreed ahead of time.

## Etiquette of Skruuvi

Skruuvi is an enjoyable trick-taking card game among friendly players in which considerable risk taking involves miscalculations every now and then. This should not be reflected in the good-humored camaraderie among the players. Throughout decades, ranting and raving has unfortunately sometimes taken place at skruuvi tables. However, this kind of behavior must not be part of the game.

The fact that the bids are made aloud increases conversation at skruuvi tables; nevertheless, any discussion of the cards or tricks during the game is strictly prohibited. Likewise, it goes without saying that no signals or wishes to request or give advice – by facial expression or gesture or by means other than bids and cards – to the partner in a voluntary or involuntary manner are not permitted. Should someone have an urge to comment on a deal, this should be carried out between the deals, and even then, only in a friendly, factual and constructive fashion. One has to remember that his/her partner will be the opponent in the next sessions and *vice versa*.

The players are expected to arrive on time to avoid others to wait. There is usually no particular rush in playing; however, unnecessarily slow bidding or playing the cards will affect the players' focus as well as recollection of the bids and the cards played. In view of this, the rhythm of playing should be swift but not hasty.

Gambling for money is not a part of the current skruuvi tradition. Nevertheless, some parties playing skruuvi on a regular basis collect small sums of money, mainly for social activities. For example, the fee for a weakly playing event may be a couple of euros, combined with a penalty of similar magnitude for each 100 minus points scored in a weekly play. The parties may use the funds accumulated by this means, for example, to cover part of the dinner costs at the beginning or end of the playing season.



# Skruuvi in a Nutshell

Skruuvi – the Finnish Whist-Bridge – is a trick-taking game played with an ordinary deck of 52 cards by four players (two pairs). There are three different forms of playing in skruuvi: kitty games (12 cards dealt to each player plus a kitty of four cards on the table), no kitty games (each hand has 13 cards), and bolshevik (a single player against three others).

The four different types of playing in skruuvi are trumps, grand (no trump), misère and all-pass misère. A session comprises eight deals – four kitty and four no kitty games – played with the same partner. Each player forms, in succession, a partnership with the other players in subsequent sessions.

The auction commences after the cards have been dealt (see Concise Auction Instructions on page 58). The purpose of bids in the auction is to describe a player's hand under preset limits. The dealer bids first, and bidding continues clockwise to increasing levels as if a screw is being tightened. Bidding is over when all players have passed twice. In case all players pass in the first auction round, all-pass misère will be played.

Exchange of cards is an integral part of skruuvi. The rank of the suits is (lowest first) ♠ – ♣ – ♦ – ♥. In each suit, A, K, Q, J, and 10 are called honors, and the rest of the cards are spots. A player must follow suit, but playing a trump card is not mandatory.

## Kitty Games

In trumps and grand, the lowest permitted level for a contract is five, that is, the main players have to win at least 11 tricks. In misère, in turn, a five-level contract permits taking at most two tricks. The first and second rounds of auction are mainly meant to describe long and good suits in hand and the possibility to play misère. The third and subsequent rounds aim at showing aces and kings. The rank of the playing types and suits is (lowest first) misère, trumps (♠ – ♣ – ♦ – ♥) – grand (no trump).

On the basis of the information gleaned from the bids, the kitty, and the exchange of cards, the declarer side aims to reach an optimal contract that is makeable. A misère bid is often pre-emptive, in that, its principal purpose is to prevent the opposing side from playing their contract in trumps or grand.

## Auction Bids

A hand for a first round trump suit should include three honors and two spots in this suit as well as an ace or two high honors in a side suit. Should a hand contain a large number of high cards – but not a long suit –, the bid is at three-level in the longest suit. This bid informs the partner that playing all-pass misère is out of question. In case a player bids six misère, s/he must have good low cards (preferably two or three 2 spot). The second round bids involve suits with two honors and two or three spots or three honors and one spot – or a pass. In case the opener's partner is void or has only a low spot in the suit bid, s/he will bid two misère.

However, should this player bid a new suit, an ace in hand is not required for a first round suit. The bids on aces in the third round need to be at the lowest possible level, in order to save room for bids in subsequent rounds. Thus, should the last bid in the third round be 3♦, and a player has both ♣A and ♥A, s/he bids first 3♥, followed by 4♣ in the next round.

## Exchange of Cards and Kitty Bid

The player with the highest bid (the declarer or kitty bidder) takes the kitty, turns the cards face up for everyone to see and inserts the cards in his/her hand. Subsequent to this, s/he hands over four cards to the partner who, in turn, gives one card to each of the three players. The cards exchanged are not shown to other players. After card exchange, the declaring side is able to extend bids until each player has passed twice.

Providing that the main players' opening bid in the first round was not at six- or seven-level, the defenders are permitted to exchange one card; the defender to the declarer's left hands over first one card to his/her partner and receives one card back from him/her. The defender's goal in trumps is to have all trumps in the hand of the player who initially had more of them. In misère, the lowest card in the shortest suit is handed over. Upon completion of the card exchange, the opening lead is played by the defender to the left of the declarer.

## All-pass Misère in Kitty and No Kitty Games

In case all players pass in the first round of a kitty or no kitty game, all-pass misère ensues. In kitty games, the dealer distributes the kitty – one card, face down, to each player. When all hands have 13 cards, the dealer's partner and the left opponent hand over one card to their respective teammates who, in turn, return one card. The best (lowest) card in the shortest suit is handed over to the partner with exception that, if a player holds A2 or A3, the ace is held. In other instances, ace is handed over as the best card in the shortest suit.

Each trick won by the partnership yields one minus point. An ace in a trick provides minus points to the trick-winning side by the ordinal number of the trick. In view of this, it is of primary importance to help the partner in such a fashion that s/he is able to discard his/her aces to the opponents' tricks. This task is aided by holding entry cards at the beginning of the game and, subsequent to winning a trick, by leading the partner's shortest suit to a new trick. Should a player's hand include liable ace(s) in short/shortest suit(s), s/he could ask for help by leading a card in the shortest suit of his/her own or a card in a suit different from that handed over by the partner.

## No Kitty Games

As the name indicates, there is no kitty in these games. A six-level bid is required to open the bidding. Thus, a 6♦ final bid indicates that ♦ is the trump suit, and that the main players must

win at least 12 tricks to make the contract. Six misère, in turn, permits only one trick be won in a made contract. The rank of the playing types and suits (lowest first) is trumps (♠ – ♣ – ♦ – ♥) – misère – grand, that is, misère is now ranked second highest.

## Auction

See Concise Auction Instructions on page 58. Should a player consider bidding, s/he should have for trumps or grand a long, strong suit (at least a first round suit) and another good suit (*e.g.*, a second round suit) or otherwise high honors. Should the aim be a misère bid, holding two or three 2 spots and otherwise low cards plus possibly an ace in a long suit (ace at least fifth) is usually necessary. A pre-emptive misère bid may be made with a less good hand. Since the bidder is not aware of his/her partner's cards, the first bid should be at the lowest possible level, that is, 6♠. Subsequent exchange of cards is used to indicate the preferred trump suit or the misère option.

## Exchange of Cards and Final Bid

The declarer hands over four selected cards to his/her partner and received four cards back. The defenders are not permitted to exchange cards. The declarer's hand-over contains knowledge for the partner's information, with the following options.

- Two mixed suits indicate that both suits are voided; otherwise, only the lower suit is void
- Two suits in a booklet format or a single card second from top refer to continuity of both suits
- The lowest card of a long suit (or that of the lower suit in a two-suit hand-over) indicates the option to play misère
- The top card of a long suit (or that of the higher suit in a two suit hand-over) refers to the preferred trump suit. Should this card be highest, the preferred trump suit is highest-ranked of the remaining suits. If it lowest, then the preferred trump suit is the lowest-ranked of the remaining suits.

Upon receiving the information as above, the partner hands over all his/her trumps or, in the case of misère, all cards in his/her shortest/poorest suits. After this, the main players set the final contract. The player to the left of the declarer plays the opening lead.

## Scoring of Points

The table for scoring point is shown on page 51. The final score is calculated individually to each player. Every player partners in succession with each player of the foursome in a session comprising four kitty and four no kitty games. Thus, a completed play consists of three sessions, totaling 24 deals. The grand total from the three sessions forms a player's individual final score.

# Concise Auction Instructions

Beginners and less experienced players are recommended to copy these instructions and keep a copy available on the table while playing.

## Kitty Games

[The rank of the playing types and suits (lowest first): misère, trumps (♠–♣–♦–♥)–grand]

### First Round Bids

First round suit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Three honors, two spots and a side suit ace or two high honors</li><li>• Two honors, four spots and a side suit ace</li><li>• Stronger suit than above – a jump to one step higher</li></ul>
Three or four aces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Three aces: grand at lowest possible level (not usually a good bid)</li><li>• Four aces: one grand over the lowest possible</li></ul>
Strong hand without a first round sit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• About seven honors and unsuitable hand for misère – three in the best suit held</li><li>• If all suits are equal – three grand</li></ul>
Hand for misère	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Small cards (two or three 2 spots, some of these can be handed over to the partner) – six misère; in particular, when the opponents have bid</li><li>• Misère should not be bid, when the player holds a natural void in any suit</li></ul>
Pre-emptive bid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The aim is to make bidding by the opponents difficult. When the opponents have bid, the partner has passed and a player has nothing to bid</li><li>• Bidding: five or six misère</li></ul>

### Bids by Opener's Partner (Responder)

The opener had bid a suit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No side suit ace is needed in the responder's own first round suit</li></ul>
The opener has bid one grand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If holding the missing ace – two grand, unless a long suit in hand</li></ul>
Strong support to the opener	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Four or more cards including one honor – raise in the opener's suit, possibly directly to five or six</li></ul>

Opener's bid of three in a suit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The responder's strongest suit; no first round suit needed</li> </ul>
Opener's bid of three grand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The responder's best suit; a four-level bid; the opener's response: the same suit at five-level and hand-over of all cards in this suit (a potential trump suit)</li> </ul>
The responder has three or four aces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grand – bid at the lowest level (three aces) or one step higher (four aces)</li> </ul>
Natural void or just one spot in the opener's suit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two misère</li> </ul>

## Bids in the Next Rounds

A second round suit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two honors and three spots or three honors and a spot</li> <li>• The opener's hand contains a first round suit – bid to one step higher</li> </ul>
Low cards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misère can be a second round bid – informs the partner</li> </ul>
Third round bid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showing aces: the lowest possible level of a suit with an ace</li> <li>• If the player's party has already bid three aces, the suit missing the ace is bid in the third round</li> <li>• Holding aces in all suits that the player's side has bid – grand</li> </ul>
Fourth round bid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued bids – aces and kings in a suit in which an ace is already bid</li> <li>• King without ace – bid after a pass</li> </ul>

## Kitty Bid

Highest bid to become declarer and take the kitty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In trump and grand, the highest bid is made by the opener's partner; the aim is to have all trumps/high cards in one hand</li> <li>• In misère, the highest bid is made by the player who first bid misère and who has low cards</li> </ul>
Encouragement bid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The opener wants the partner to make the kitty bid – a bid one step below the desired target (<i>e.g.</i>, 5♣ encourages to bid 5♦)</li> </ul>

## No Kitty Games

[The rank of the playing types and suits (lowest first): trumps (♠—♣—♦—♥)—misère—grand]

A general rule: bids at the lowest possible level, in order to leave room to choose the final contract after the exchange of cards. Should all players pass in the first action round, all-pass misère will be played.

Six spades (the lowest bid)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Super strong suit and a side suit ace</li><li>• A first round suit and a second round suit</li><li>• Seven honors, two of which are aces</li></ul>
Six clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One of the hands needed for bidding at six-level, as described above, but a natural void in one suit</li><li>• If the void suit is not spade, all spades handed over to the partner for him/her to deduce the void suit</li></ul>
Six spades → six clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Naturally void in one suit; not willing to hand over spades to the partner</li></ul>
Six diamonds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong hand, but naturally void in both spades and clubs</li></ul>
Six misère	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Low cards and two or three 2 spots of which two can preferably be handed over to the partner</li></ul>
The lowest possible suit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cards for one of the no kitty game bids described above when the opponent has bid and the partner has passed</li></ul>

## Skruuvi with Three Players (“The Bonehead”)

(The etymology of the Finnish term – the bonehead – is not known for sure. It may originate from the word “dummy” used in bridge and its informal – and in this context inappropriate – translation to Finnish that refers to a stupid person.)

It is possible to play skruuvi by three players only with an imaginary fourth player (the bonehead). The cards are dealt as usual, with the bonehead being the fourth player and the dealer’s partner. The deals in kitty and no kitty games are as usual.

Each player is permitted to see four of the bonehead’s cards (the dealer sees five cards in no kitty games), and the bonehead’s cards are thereafter placed face down and in rank order in rows corresponding to the ranks of the suits. Thus, each player is able to see the number of cards that the bonehead has in each suit. A player knows, however, only the numerical values of the four cards that s/he has seen.

The dealer bids first, with the two other players bidding in succession, as if each player were the bonehead’s partner. The bonehead passes in every instance. If needed, the bonehead’s cards are moved to face the declarer. The declarer can choose who takes the kitty – the bonehead or s/he. In no kitty games, the declarer can decide who is the first to hand over.

The cards of the bonehead will be turned face up when it is the bonehead’s turn to play. Should the declarer have selected the bonehead to take the kitty or hand over the cards first in a no kitty game, the bonehead’s cards will be exposed when it is the bonehead’s turn to play to the first trick. In case the declarer takes the kitty, the bonehead’s cards are exposed after the opening lead by a defender. It is advantageous for the bonehead to hand over first in a no kitty game to permit the declarer to see the bonehead’s cards.

Upon the exchange of cards, the declarer announces the final contract. The defenders are permitted to exchange one card in a kitty game as usual. The tricks are played as in regular skruuvi, and the points are scored pairwise as usual.

### Example of the Hands and Bids in a No Kitty Game Played with the Bonehead

Player A bids 6♠ in the first round,  
B passes, and C bids six misère.

Next bids depend on the cards of the  
bonehead that each player has seen.

If player A has seen ♥Q and ♠A, s/he can  
safely bid 7♠. With seeing only one of the  
two cards, the 7♠ bid is risky, but would  
result in one undertrick only.

Should player C have seen two ♦ spots,  
s/he can fairly safely bid seven misère  
in the event that player A has raised  
his/her bid to 7♠.

Taken together, both contracts – 7♠ and seven misère – are makeable with the above cards,  
providing that the cards are played in the right way.

#### Bonehead

♥ (three cards)  
♦ (five cards)  
♣ (two cards)  
♠ (three cards)

#### Player B

♥J84  
♦AK53  
♣AJ4  
♠1096

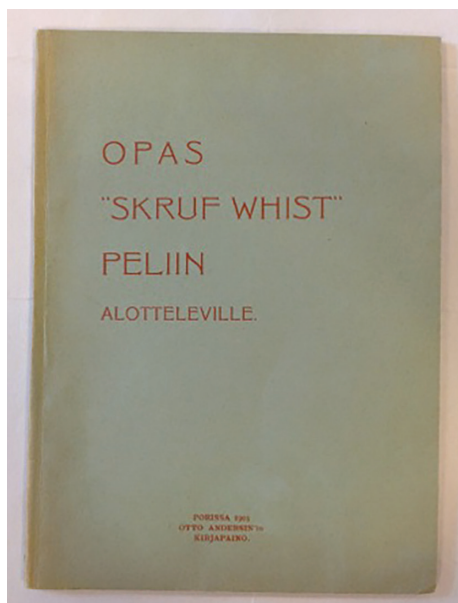


#### Player C

♥63  
♦Q8  
♣K108632  
♠432

#### Player A

♥AK1095  
♦107  
♣75  
♠KQJ8



*Title page of the first Finnish guidebook to skruuvi from 1903. Its author is unfortunately anonymous. The book is archived in the National Library of Finland.  
(Picture: The Helsinki Finnish Club)*



# Scoring Sheet

There are three sessions in a complete play

- Each session comprises four kitty and four no kitty deals
- The total number of deals in the play is 24 (= 8 x 3)

Player's name	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Final score

## Kitty games

	Session 1 Our side	Total	Session 2 Our side	Total	Session 3 Our side	Total
Deal 1						
Deal 2						
Deal 3						
Deal 4						

## No kitty games

	Session 1 Our side	Total	Session 2 Our side	Total	Session 3 Our side	Total
Deal 1						
Deal 2						
Deal 3						
Deal 4						
Grand total						

## Misère\*

	Our side	Our side	Our side	Our side	Our side	Our side	Our side	Our side	Our side	Our side	Our side
Ace 1											
Ace 2											
Ace 3											
Ace 4											
Tricks											
Total											

*\*An ace to our trick, minus points to our side; an ace to the opponents' trick, plus points to our side by the ordinal number of the trick. Doubling duplicates and redoubling triplicates only the trick points.*

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### **What Is Skruuvi?**

Skruuvi – the Finnish whist-bridge – is a fascinating trick-taking card game that has been played in Finland close to 150 years. Its origin is the same as that of bridge, the English whist. An intermediate between whist and skruuvi was the Russian vint that appears to be extinct.

### **How Is Skruuvi Played?**

Skruuvi is played as a four-person partnership with an ordinary deck of 52 cards. The players opposite to each other at the table are partners, the other two are their opponents. Of note, during the play comprising three sessions, a player teams up and opposes in succession with the other three. Thus, all players participate actively in each deal.

### **What Are the Principal Elements of Skruuvi?**

The regularly played forms of skruuvi in a session are the kitty and no kitty games. In the former, a four-card kitty is dealt on the table face down. Auction (bidding) includes multiple rounds, during which the players aim at finding most optimal contracts. There are four options to play: trumps, grand (no trump), misère, and all-pass misère. In misère, the aim is to avoid winning tricks. All-pass misère ensues when nobody bids in the first round. The minimum final contract must be at five-level (to win 11 tricks) in kitty and six-level (to win 12 tricks) in no kitty games. The points in different forms of playing are scored pairwise according to a preset table.

### **How Is Skruuvi Different from Bridge?**

There are indeed many significant differences between skruuvi and bridge. For example, skruuvi has rotating partners as opposed to fixed two-player partnership in bridge. Kitty and card exchange are not present in bridge. All players participate actively in skruuvi, that is, there is no dummy as in bridge. There are multiple forms of playing in skruuvi (misère, kitty games, bolshevik) that do not belong to bridge. Skruuvi is also more versatile than bridge, and its playing involves analysis and control of risks rather than mathematical counting.

### **How Do I Learn to Play Skruuvi?**

If you have played trick-taking games previously, you can also learn skruuvi with the help of this Handbook. In particular, its chapters “Skruuvi in a Nutshell” and “Concise Auction Instructions” describe fairly succinctly the game’s essential elements and help beginners to start playing skruuvi even without expert supervision. And after some experience, the rest of the Handbook will provide you more enticing insights into this fascinating game.

### **What Do I Gain from Playing Skruuvi?**

Skruuvi is a very social card game. You will find it enjoyable to play in good-humored camaraderie among the players. Skruuvi is also a very complex game with more alternatives than in other card games. The element of risk is always present in skruuvi, and undoubtedly, skruuvi teaches you to analyze and manage risks. When playing skruuvi, you have to concentrate, possess good memory and be observant – the faculties that are all improved by playing skruuvi.

**For additional information and comments, e-mail: [handbook-of-skruuvi@gmail.com](mailto:handbook-of-skruuvi@gmail.com)**