

# Loo

The modern player may be forgiven for mistaking the meaning of the name which has been attached to this game! In fact it is a truncation of the now obsolete 'lanterloo', from the French *lanturlu*, a word best translated by our word 'fiddlesticks'. There are several variations of the game, of which Three-card Loo, Five-card Loo and Irish Loo are described here.

## Number of players

Loo is suitable for any number of players, though the best number is six or seven.

## Cards

The standard 52-card pack is used, with the cards ranking from Ace (high) to 2 (low), except in Five-card Loo, in which the ♣J is the highest ranking card (see Five-card Loo on page 138).

The first player to deal puts into a pool an agreed number of units. It may be any number divisible by three. Three cards are then dealt, one card at a time, to each player, and to an extra hand that is known as 'miss'. The top card of the remainder of the pack is turned up to denote the trump suit.

## How to play

The dealer offers the player on his immediate left the choice of refusing to play, playing with the cards dealt to him, or exchanging his cards for 'miss' and playing with those. In turn, each player is offered the same choice, though, of course, once a player has chosen to

exchange his hand for miss, a subsequent player is reduced to choosing between playing with the cards dealt to him or not playing the hand. Once a player has made a decision he must stand by it, and if he has chosen not to play he throws his cards face downwards to the centre of the table, and waits for the next round of play.

The player who first chooses to play leads to the first trick. Thereafter, the usual rules apply whereby the player who wins a trick leads to the next. The play is governed by the following rules:

- A player must follow suit if he can, and must head the trick if he can.
- If a player cannot follow suit he must trump if he can, and if the trick has already been trumped he must overtrump if he can.
- If the player on lead holds the Ace of trumps (or the King if the Ace has been turned up) he must lead it.
- If the player on lead holds two or more trumps he must lead one of them, and if there are only two players in the game he must lead the highest.

- A player who fails to comply with any of these rules, when able to do so, is deemed to have revoked; the pool is divided among the non-offenders, and the offender pays the full amount back to the pool.
- When the hand has been played those who have won tricks divide the pool between them: one-third of the amount in it to the winner of each trick.
- Those who have not won a trick are looted, and must put into the pool as many units as there were in it at the beginning of the deal. Unlimited loo, however, can come very expensive, and in practice it is essential for the players to agree upon limiting the losses of looted players.
- If no player is looted, the next dealer replenishes the pool as at the beginning of the game.
- If every player refuses to play, the dealer takes the entire pool and the next dealer replenishes it.
- If only one player chooses to play the dealer must come into the game against him, but if he holds a weak hand, he may protect himself against loss by announcing that he will play for the pool. In this event he is not looted if he fails to win a trick, and, in return for the concession, he leaves in the pool any amount to which he may be entitled by reason of his having won tricks.

## FIVE-CARD LOO

This is a variation of the parent game that differs from it in the following ways:

- Every player is dealt five cards, and as there are five tricks to be won the number of units paid into the pool must be divisible by five.
- There is no miss.
- A player may exchange cards by drawing them from the stock. He may exchange any number of cards that he chooses, and once he has exchanged a card he must enter the game.
- The highest card in the pack is the ♣J. It is known as Pam. It ranks as a trump and takes precedence even over the Ace; if, however, a player leads the Ace of trumps and announces 'Pam be civil' the holder of Pam is debarred from playing it to the trick.
- If a player holds five cards of a suit, or four cards of a suit and Pam, he is said to hold a flush and must expose his hand at once. He wins the pool and all the other players, except those who may hold flushes or Pam, are looted.
- If one or more players hold flushes, one in the trump suit wins over one in a plain suit, and between two or more in a plain suit, the one with the highest card is the winner. If two or more in plain suits are exactly equal the pool is divided.

## IRISH LOO

This game is a combination of the three-card and five-card games, and is considered by competent players to be the best of the several variations.

Every player is dealt three cards, there is no Pam and no miss, but a player is allowed to exchange cards by drawing from the stock. The game is played in the same way as the parent game, with the novelty that if clubs are trumps everyone must enter the game. It is known as Club Law and makes it imperative that the penalty for being loosed must be limited to a reasonable amount.

### Strategy

Loo, in all its variations, is so bound up by hard and fast rules of play, already mentioned, that there is very little to be said about the play of the cards. At best one can only say that the most successful player is not he who knows how to play, but he who knows when to elect and when to refuse to play.

The most important point to note is that, apart from Pam at Five-card Loo, there are only three certain tricks, i.e. the Ace, the King-Queen combination and the Queen-Jack-10 combination of trumps. Usually the player who holds the Queen, Jack and 9 of trumps will win a trick, but it is not certain, and he may be loosed if in an unfavourable position at the table. It is the same if a player holds the King and 3 of the trump suit. He will certainly win a trick if the suit is led and

he is the last to play, but if he is not, he may not win a trick, because if the 4 is played he is compelled to play the King and a later player may win with the Ace. It leaves him only with the remote possibility of winning a trick with the lone 3 of trumps.

Perhaps in practice the picture is not so depressing as it appears in theory, because, even if there are seven players in the game, a large number of cards remain in the stock. Some of the high cards, therefore, may not be active and a combination such as a Jack and 10 of trumps, or even a Jack, 10 and a card in a plain suit, may win a trick.

In general a player is advised not to be too cautious about electing to play if he holds a weak hand, but he is advised to be careful. In practice he should keep a close watch on the number of units in the pool and weigh up the possible loss against the possible gain. If, for example, there are 15 units in the pool at Five-card Loo and the cost of being loosed is 10 units it is not worth entering the play with a weak hand because, look at it which way you like, the cost of being loosed is three times more than the possible gain that will accrue by winning one trick. It is not a good bet.