

Pope Joan

3-8 players

52 cards

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: Medium

Empty your hand first and collect chips from bonus compartments.

SETUP

- Remove the 8 of Diamonds from a 52-card deck.
- Deal cards to all players and one dead hand; flip the last dead card for trumps.
- Dealer places chips into each compartment on the Pope Joan board.

SCORING

- First to empty their hand wins the Game compartment and one chip per opponent's remaining card.
- Unclaimed compartment chips carry over to the next round.

Tip: Track the dead hand to know which bonus cards can actually be played this round.

ON YOUR TURN

- Play the next card in an ascending sequence of the same suit.
- If the sequence stops, the last player starts a new one with their lowest card.
- Collect chips from the board when you play a designated bonus card.

Pope Joan is a traditional English stops game played with a special circular board divided into compartments. Players try to be the first to shed their cards while collecting chips from the board's compartments by playing designated cards.

Objective

Be the first player to play all of your cards and collect as many chips as possible from the Pope Joan board compartments by playing the designated bonus cards.

Setup

1. **Players:** 3-8 players.
2. **Deck:** Standard 52-card deck with the 8 of Diamonds removed (51 cards).
3. **Board:** A Pope Joan board (or substitute containers) with compartments labeled: Pope (9 of Diamonds), Matrimony (King and Queen of trumps), Intrigue (Queen and Jack of trumps), Ace, King, Queen, Jack, and Game.
4. **Deal:** The dealer places chips into each compartment according to a fixed schedule. Deal cards one at a time to each player and one extra hand (the 'dead' hand). The last card dealt to the dead hand is turned up to set the trump suit.

Gameplay

1. **Step 1:** The player to the left of the dealer starts by playing their lowest card of any suit. Cards are played face up and announced.
2. **Step 2:** Whoever holds the next card in ascending sequence of the same suit plays it. This continues until the sequence is stopped by a King, by the missing 8 of Diamonds, or because the next card is in the dead hand.
3. **Step 3:** When a sequence is stopped, the player who played the last card starts a new sequence with their lowest card of any suit.
4. **Step 4:** When a player plays the Ace, King, Queen, or Jack of the trump suit, they collect chips from the corresponding compartment on the board.
5. **Step 5:** Playing the 9 of Diamonds (Pope Joan) wins that compartment. Playing the King and Queen of trumps in sequence wins Matrimony. Playing the Queen and Jack of trumps in sequence wins Intrigue.

Scoring

- The first player to empty their hand wins the Game compartment and collects one chip per card remaining in each opponent's hand.
- Bonus chips are collected from board compartments when the corresponding cards are played.
- Unclaimed compartment chips carry over to the next round.

Variations

- **Simplified Pope Joan:** Remove the Matrimony and Intrigue compartments for a faster, simpler game.
- **Newmarket Style:** Combine Pope Joan with Newmarket-style boodle card betting for additional prize opportunities.
- **Variable Antes:** Allow the dealer to place different amounts in each compartment to change the strategic value of bonus cards.

Tips and Strategies

- If you hold the 9 of Diamonds, try to create opportunities to play it by working through diamond sequences.
- Keep track of which bonus cards are in the dead hand. If the Queen of trumps is dead, no one can win Matrimony or Intrigue.
- Start sequences in suits where you hold long runs to maintain control of play.

Tips & Strategy

Lead with suits where you hold long sequences to control the flow of play, and keep an eye on the dead hand to know which bonus compartments are actually winnable.

The dead hand is the hidden variable in Pope Joan. Skilled players track which cards are likely in the dead hand to judge whether bonus compartments can be won and to predict where sequences will be stopped.