

Zheng Shangyou

3-4 players

52 cards

Difficulty: Medium

Duration: Short

Be the first to empty your hand by playing higher combinations.

SETUP

- Use one standard 52-card deck.
- Deal all cards evenly among players.
- The player with the 3 of diamonds leads.

SCORING

- First out is Upstream, last out is Downstream.
- Lower-ranked players give best cards to higher-ranked players next round.

Tip: Save your strongest cards for the endgame to guarantee you finish first.

ON YOUR TURN

- Play a higher combination of the same type, or pass.
- Win the round when all others pass, then lead.
- Continue until you empty your hand.

Zheng Shangyou (Struggling Upstream) is a Chinese climbing card game where players compete to be the first to shed all their cards. Players must play higher combinations than the previous player, creating intense battles for card dominance.

Objective

Be the first player to get rid of all your cards by playing valid combinations that beat the previous play.

Setup

1. **Players:** 3-4 players.
2. **Deck:** One standard 52-card deck.
3. **Deal:** Deal the entire deck evenly among all players. With 3 players, remove one card so the deal is even.

Gameplay

1. **Step 1:** The player with a designated starting card (often the 3 of diamonds) leads the first trick with any valid combination.
2. **Step 2:** Play proceeds clockwise. Each player must play the same type of combination (single, pair, triple, or sequence) but of higher rank, or pass.
3. **Step 3:** When all other players pass, the last player who played wins the round and leads the next combination.
4. **Step 4:** Continue until one player empties their hand. That player wins, and remaining players are ranked by their finishing order.

Scoring

- The first player out earns the best rank (Upstream), the second is Middle, and the last is Downstream.
- In subsequent rounds, lower-ranked players must give their best card(s) to higher-ranked players, who return unwanted cards in exchange.

Variations

- **With Jokers:** Add two jokers as the highest-ranking cards, with the red joker outranking the black.
- **Team Play:** With four players, play in two partnerships sitting across from each other.

Tips and Strategies

- Hold your highest cards for later to maintain control of the lead.
- Use low pairs and sequences early to shed cards without wasting strong plays.
- Pay attention to which ranks have been played to know when your remaining cards are unbeatable.

Tips & Strategy

Manage your hand carefully by shedding weak cards early and saving powerful combinations to seize control at critical moments. Timing your strongest plays is essential.

The key tension in Zheng Shangyou is deciding when to play strong cards to seize the lead versus saving them for the endgame. Reading your opponents' remaining hand strength is critical.