

TAM CÚC – GAME RULES

These are the rules proven by years of practice. There are also other versions you can find and adapt to your own liking.

Contents

32 cards for 2–4 players
64 cards for 4–8 players (2 decks)

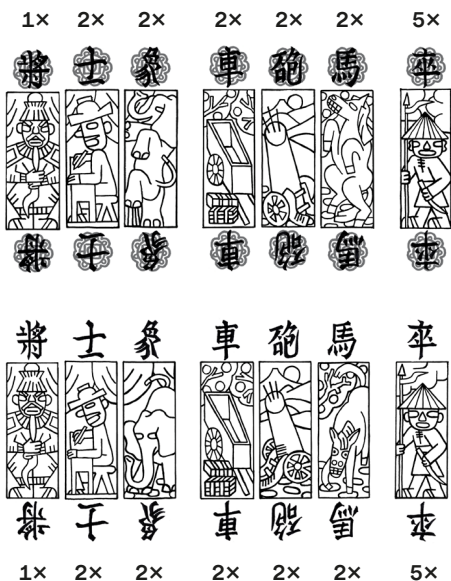
Hierarchy and Card Count

The figures are based on Chinese chess.
Each army contains:

EMPEROR	1×
OFFICER	2×
ELEPHANT	2×
CHARIOT	2×
CANNON	2×
HORSE	2×
SOLDIER	5×

Each set (32 cards) includes two armies – with a seal and without a seal.

Cards with a seal always outrank cards without a seal, and the two types cannot be mixed.



Game Setup

- Agree on the number of rounds (e.g. two full games).
- Prepare paper and pencil or a phone to record scores.
- Each player draws one card from the deck and the highest card determines the dealer.
- The dealer shuffles the cards and lets the player on their right cut the deck.

Determining the Starting Player

A random draw decides who starts the round. The player cuts the deck and, according to the hierarchy, counts around the table clockwise.

Counting Method

Instead of a counting rhyme, use the seven figures of the game: EMPEROR, OFFICER, ELEPHANT, CHARIOT, CANNON, HORSE, SOLDIER. The player who cut the deck draws a card and starts counting from themselves as the highest rank – the EMPEROR – continuing clockwise.

Examples

3 players – The drawn card is a CHARIOT. The cutter starts counting from themselves as the Emperor, then continues clockwise: Left neighbor = OFFICER, right neighbor = ELEPHANT. The CHARIOT falls on themselves → they start the round.
Place the cut portion of the deck on the table, then put the rest on top. The dealer deals an equal number of cards to all players.

5 players – The drawn card is a SOLDIER. The cutter counts: themselves = EMPEROR, next left = OFFICER, then ELEPHANT, CHARIOT, CANNON... The HORSE lands on them, the next player on the left is the SOLDIER → that player starts the round.

Dealing the Cards

For 2–4 players, use one deck (32 cards):
2 players – 12 cards each, the rest form a draw pile
3 players – 10 cards each
4 players – 8 cards each

For 5–8 players, use two decks (64 cards):
5 players – 12 cards each
6 players – 10 cards each
7 players – 9 cards each
8 players – 8 cards each

→ Players always keep the same number of cards in hand during the game.

Possible Combinations (32 cards)

- 1 card** – any single card
- 2 cards** – both must be the same figure and either both sealed or both unsealed
- 3 cards** – only these combinations are allowed:
“Golden Trio”: EMPEROR–OFFICER–ELEPHANT
“Silver Trio”: CHARIOT–CANNON–HORSE or 3 Soldiers
- 4 cards** – 4 Soldiers
- 5 cards** – 5 Soldiers

When playing with two decks (64 cards), identical trios or quartets can be formed, e.g. THREE OFFICERS without a seal or FOUR CHARIOTS with a seal.

→ Straight beats a trio.

Example: CHARIOT–CANNON–HORSE without seals beats THREE CHARIOTS without seals. But THREE CHARIOTS with seal beat the straight CHARIOT–CANNON–HORSE without seals.

Gameplay

Each player receives the same number of cards.
The game consists of a series of rounds.

One Round

- The starting player announces how many cards will be played.
- All players lay down the same number of cards face down.
- Cards are revealed simultaneously – the strongest card or combination wins.
- The winner collects their cards and places them face up in front of them.
- The losing cards go to the discard pile.
- The winner continues and announces the number of cards for the next round.

→ If a player cannot form a valid combination, they must discard the same number of cards (they pass).

→ In case of a tie, the starting player or the closest player clockwise wins.

End of Game

- The game ends when all players run out of cards.
- Each card won is worth 1 point, and scores are recorded.

Next Round

The next dealer (clockwise) shuffles and lets the player on their right cut the deck, who again determines the new starting player by draw.

Errors

- If a mistake occurs that prevents the game from continuing:
- wrong number of dealt cards
- dealer forgot to let the player on the right cut
- invalid combination was played and others discarded their cards

The game is annulled and redealt.
By agreement, the player who made the mistake may lose 2 points.