

# Rochi

Open Beta Rules Version 1.2.1

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**Hello!** Welcome to the open beta for **Rochi**, a new card game from James Ernest and Sonia Lyris.

Rochi is a gambling game played with a 54-card deck called the **Roche** deck. The game will play a role in the sequel to Sonia Lyris' fantasy novel *The Seer*. This document contains the rules and background for the game. We are also working on two other games, **Roche** and **Rugen**, but this is the game that needs the most attention.



**The Roche Deck:** The deck is composed of six suits of different sizes, as follows:

Suit:	Mages	Realm	World	Valor	Kin	Commons
Qty:	4	6	8	10	12	14
Rank:	2	3	4	5	6	7

Note that the “rank” of the cards is equal to *half the size of the suit*. You can build this deck with cards from four poker decks, or two Pairs decks. You need four cards of rank 2, six cards of rank 3, and so on up to fourteen cards of rank 7. You can also buy a copy of our test deck for \$10 from **Drive Thru Cards**:

<http://www.drivethrucards.com/product/202575/Rochi-Beta-Test-Deck>

Our beta deck is a pure abstract design, as illustrated above, with just different card names on each card. But our goal is to produce a Tarot-style illustration for each card. Right now the game is being considered for publication by **Campaign Coins**, who will make some lovely tokens for the suit markers!

## Send us Your Feedback!

The point of this open beta test is to get fresh eyes and new feedback on the game, from the clarity of the rules to the playability and fun value of the mechanics.

If you've got questions, comments, or improvements for us, please let us know. You can find us on Twitter and Facebook, or shoot an email directly to James Ernest, who is [cheapassjames@gmail.com](mailto:cheapassjames@gmail.com).

If you'd like to learn more about the world of the game, check out *The Seer*, by Sonia Lyris, available at fine booksellers everywhere. We are sponsoring a feedback contest, including prize copies of *The Seer*. For details on the contest, visit the Rochi beta page at **cheapass.com**.

Thanks for your help as we make Rochi as fun as it can be!

# The Origins of Rochi and the Roche Deck

By Sonia Lyris

It is safe to say that the game of Rochi comes from Perripur, whose majestic mountains and lush green valleys sink their toes into the warm waters of the Mundaran Sea. It may not, however, be quite so safe to say where the Roche deck itself was born.

Prior to the Perripin Accord, the eleven states of Perripur were, variously, rival and allying sovereign kingdoms; the subsequent centuries of unity and peace have not eroded their multifariousness or their self-admiration, so disagreements understandably abound as to the deck's exact origins.

In many ways, the Perripin people are a model of harmonious diversity. They consider themselves the intellectual and cultural superiors of their neighbors to the north, where the Arunkel empire has for centuries held vast stretches of rich lands from the cold north seas to the borderlands of Perripur itself.

Perhaps the greatest difference between these two countries is how they engage with mages. The Perripin states welcome mages, often hiring them for their perspective and wisdom, as well as their magic. In Arunkel, however, these black-robed powers and their abilities are outlawed. Say the Perripin, one might as well outlaw the weather.

The game of Rochi is played with passion across both countries and beyond. While the full name is *Keuthen Rochi* —meaning “hidden labor” or “hidden pleasure,” depending on which Perripin state one believes is the origin —most simply call it “Rochi” and get on with the business of playing this fast, colorful, and sometimes lucrative game.

In Perripur, Rochi is played with the entire fifty-four card deck. Not so in Arunkel, at least not in the open. Traditionally, the Arunkel deck was made legal in a grove of red-branched *amardide*, by burning the Mages suit to ash, along with some sage, to clear the air of magic and its attendant ills. Perripur, quick on the uptake, began exporting north this fifty-card so-called “Red” deck, for which, of course, they charged twice as much.

As popular as Rochi is, it is unsurprising that every Perripin state claims to be its mother. Perripin scholars agree that Rochi was likely born in Southern Perripur —perhaps Atudaka, Venta, or even Timurung. (The Timuros use dried fruit as suit markers, but woe to the player who eats one, who may then be required to eat the coins in play as well. But the Timuros are like that.)

Who can truly claim credit for the Roche deck? Ask ten Perripin scholars and you'll get twenty answers. It seems likely that the stories, lessons, and histories that the deck's cards offer us come from all across Perripur, and possibly even northern lands as well, where the tribes once had a similar tradition of story-cards.

The one thing Perripin scholars agree on is this: Arunkel had nothing to do with it. Which, given the Arunkin's generally gloomy disposition, is probably for the best.

# Rules for Rochi

**Summary:** Rochi is a gambling game for 3-6 players. (See the *Captain's Rules* below, for a good 2-player variant.) Players vie for control of the six suits, often buying them from each other many times, and trying to steer their chosen suits to victory. Each hand takes about five minutes to play.

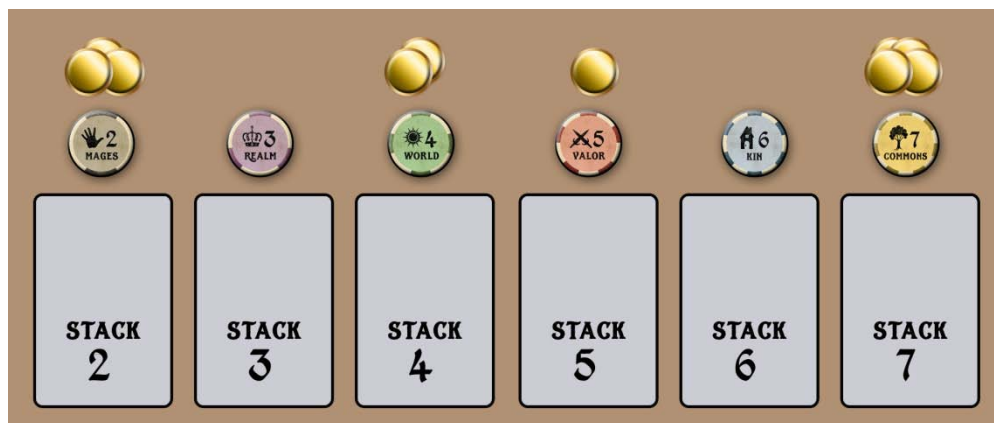
**Equipment:** The *Roche Deck* (described on Page 1), six *suit tokens* (shown below), one *leader button* (for designating who plays first), and money or chips for gambling. We suggest at least 100 coins per player, in denominations of 1, 5, and 25.

Images for six suit tokens are below. You might want to print these and affix them to heavy cardboard. There is a larger version of this graphic at the Rochi page at cheapass.com.



**Definition: Cutting.** In Rochi (and many related games), cards are exposed from the deck until exactly *half of one suit* is revealed. This is called “cutting” the suit. For example, if six cards of rank 6 are exposed before half of any other suit (remember that there are twelve 6s), then the 6s have “cut.” In Rochi, this means that the owner of the 6 suit token (Kin) wins the hand.

**Setup:** Arrange the suit tokens in a line in the center of the table, with space below each for a stack of cards, and space above for stacks of coins, or *pots*. These pots will often have coins left over from previous hands, but they start empty. A basic setup, including money in some of the pots, is shown below. Outside this area would be space for the deck itself and (if they happen) discarded cards.



Give the leader button to a random player. This button will pass to the left after every hand. Players can enter or leave the game after any hand, as described later.

**To Begin:** Shuffle the deck and deal a face-down hand of five cards to each player. Seed the stacks if necessary, as follows:

**Seeding the Stacks:** If there are fewer than six players, you must “seed the stacks” to jump-start the hand. Do this by dealing out two cards for every player below six.

For example, if there are three players, then three players are missing, so you will deal six cards into the middle. Sort these cards into the appropriate stacks.

Note that if a suit is cut by the seed cards, it does not win. Instead, the suit is *locked*. See more about locked suits below.

Play begins with the leader button, and proceeds to the left (clockwise) around the table.

**Each Turn:** On each turn, a player may *play* a card, *deal* a card, do *both* (in either order) or *fold*. Folding is automatic if you choose neither to play nor to deal.

**Play:** Play a card from your hand onto the table. This earns you the token of that suit. You may own several suit tokens at once.

The card you play goes into the stack of the matching suit *unless it would cut the suit*.

If it would cut the suit, it goes instead to the player from whom you took the token.

If the token is unclaimed, then the card goes to you.

Cards in front of players are “Shields,” described below.

After you play a card, you take ownership of the corresponding suit token, and *pay a price* for that token equal to the *number of cards now in that stack*. For example, if there are now 4 cards in that stack, the price is 4 coins. This is called “buying” the suit.

The payment goes to the owner of the suit, as follows:

**No Owner:** Pay the price into the pot next to that suit.

**Owned by a Player:** Pay the price to the player who owns it.

**Owned by You:** Pay nothing.

Cards played from players’ hands can *never cut a suit*.

#### Examples of Playing:

- Early in the game, Chance plays a 6 (Kin), while the 6 token is still unclaimed. There is already one 6 in that suit’s stack, so Chance’s 6 makes a total of 2 cards. Chance pays 2 coins into the pot beside the 6, and takes the 6 token.
- Next, Benedict plays a 6. This puts the third 6 in the stack, so the price is now 3. He pays 3 coins to Chance and takes the 6 token.
- Later, there are five cards in the 6 stack. Aubrey plays a 6 to steal the 6 token from Benedict. Since this card would cut the suit, it goes instead to Benedict, where it becomes a Shield. Aubrey pays Benedict 5 coins.
- If the turn came back to Aubrey and she played *another* 6, she would keep the card in front of herself, pay no one, and keep the 6 token.

**Deal:** Reveal the top card of the deck and put it into its proper stack.

- If this card cuts the suit, and a player owns that suit, then the game is over and the owner of the suit wins.
- If the suit is cut but no one owns it, then that suit is *locked* (described below).
- Otherwise this card has no immediate effect.

**Strategy:** The card that cuts a suit must always come from the deck. So, when you choose to deal, you are either trying to expose a card that cuts a suit that you own, or you are trying to add cards to a stack to push it closer to cutting.

**Locked Suits:** If a dealt card cuts an unclaimed suit, the suit does not win. Instead, that suit is *locked*, and can't win the hand. Any further cards played or dealt in that suit are irrelevant. Sometimes a suit is locked by seed cards, sometimes by a dealt card.

To show that the suit is locked, place the suit token directly on the stack.

In some circles, players are allowed to discard and replace cards from locked suits (you do this at the start of your turn).

**Fold:** If you neither deal a card nor play a card on your turn, you fold. If you take any other action on your turn, you may *not* fold.

Folded players discard their hands and pass suit tokens back to the center. They can neither win nor lose more money on this hand. If a folded player has a Shield, that is also discarded.

If players fold until there is only one player left, that player can only win if he owns a suit. If he owns exactly one suit, then that suit wins automatically. If he owns more than one suit, deal cards until one of them wins. If the last player owns no suits, then the hand is over and no one wins.

**Winning and Penalties:** When a suit cuts, the owner of that suit takes the pot associated with that suit. In addition, every player who is still in the hand pays a penalty to the winner, equal to the rank of the winning suit. For example if a player wins with the 6 suit, then all remaining players pay him 6 coins.

Folded players do not pay the penalty.

Any players who have *not yet taken a turn* are also considered out of the hand, and do not pay.

**Shields:** Any player with a Shield in the winning suit pays only *half the penalty, rounding up*. If a player has two or more shields in the winning suit, they pay *no penalty*.

All other pots remain on the table for the next hand.

After the hand, pass the leader button one seat to the left, and play the next hand.

**Entering and Leaving the Game:** When a new player enters a game in progress, the group may elect to charge her to join, as follows:

Add up the total number of coins in all pots, and divide it by the number of current players (not including the new player), rounding up. The new player must add that number of coins as she chooses, into any combination of pots, as her price to join the game.

Players may leave the game whenever they like, and they receive no consolation for doing so. However, if a player wishes to sit out and return, the group may grant him a "marker" computed as an equal share of the exiting pots, rounded down, as credit against rejoining the game. This process can get muddy if others come and leave, so most groups simply offer no consolation to the departing player.

Usually these rules are not enforced if a player simply leaves the table for a hand or two, unless that player is clearly doing so to gain some kind of advantage.

**Last Hand:** If the table can agree that the next hand will be the "Last Hand," then the game will break when that hand is over. The following extra rules apply to this final hand:

After the winner has been paid, all remaining pots are combined into a single pot and divided as evenly as possible among all the players (including those who folded).

Any coins that cannot be divided evenly will go to the winner of the final hand.

If any player refuses to agree to "Last Hand," then the game does not end. The other players may continue playing, or may leave without consolation. However, this type of holdout is unsportsmanlike and extremely rare. Such a player would find it difficult to find another game.

**Strategy:** To make money in this game, you want to own the winning suit. You can make some marginal gains buying and selling suit tokens, but your real goal is to own the token when the suit cuts.

Normally when you own a suit that is ready to cut (i.e., one card away), you want to deal cards from the deck in order to cut the suit before it is taken away from you. But don't get greedy on the first round, because there may still be players who have not had a turn, and who therefore will not owe you any money if you win!

Depending on your starting hand, you might want to deal before you play, or play before you deal. Dealing first gives you information, but it can also make your chosen suits more expensive to buy. Also, you may want to only play, or only deal. You will see examples of each situation as you play.

Most new players do not fold often enough. Folding is often the best option, especially when you can't see a clear path to winning. Again, experience will show you plenty of examples.

## Rochi Terms

Some slang related to the game of Rochi:

Rochi as a whole is referred to a "game" but a single iteration is more likely to be called a "hand" or a "round." A "round" can also be used to refer to a series of hands that includes one for each player, though of course this is not a perfect term when players enter and leave the game between hands.

Rochi is often referred to as "Playing the Stacks" or simply "Stacks." The stacks are sometimes called "stories," because of the narrative elements on the cards.

"Ripe" is a term meaning "ready to cut." This means that there are N-1 cards in the stack, where N is the number of cards required to cut the suit. Related terms, which are less specific, include "fresh" or "green" (a suit that is new or barely exposed); "rotten" (a suit is overexposed, meaning that many cards have been distributed as Shields); and "dead" which means that a suit is so exposed that it can no longer cut. "Dead" is not always used with precision; it is usually synonymous with "extremely overexposed," even in situations where not every card is yet accounted for.

"Mark:" Shields are commonly referred to as "marks" in the various suits. Mage's Mark, Commons' Mark, etc. This term implies that the player is absolved from paying the winner because of an association or endorsement, rather than the protection of a shield.

Poke: A common term for the pots accumulating on each suit.

Count: A common term for the forfeit that losing players pay to the winner. This is also a term referring to the number of cards in any given stack (the forfeit and the count are the same value when a penalty is paid). "What's the count?" is a reference to the number of cards currently in a suit's stack, and "paying the count" means spending a number of cards equal to the size of the stack.

"Buy": When you acquire a suit token, you are "buying" the suit.

Cut: Along with the defined term above, "the cut" is also a term referring to half of something. Most in-world Roche decks do not have numerals at all, since players learn the size of all the suits at an early age. So you might say "The cut of Mages is 2" or "The Commons cut at 7." (Players also use the word "cut" in the usual sense, meaning to cut the deck.)

# Captain's Rochi

A rules variant for 2 players

The Captain's Game is a more strategic continuous game. The game is based on standard Rochi, with the following differences.

**Continuity:** This game never completely resets, and there is no option to fold. Players continue until they agree to stop (and divide the pots), or until one player drops out completely. The deck does not reshuffle after every cut, so leave space for a discard pile beside the deck.

**Setting Up:** Deal a hand of 7 cards to each player. Each player puts an ante of 1 coin into each pot. Seed the board with an additional 8 cards. If a suit locks during setup, discard those cards immediately and don't deal replacements.

**First Move Exception:** The first player is not permitted to "Deal" on the first turn of the game. This ensures that no suit can cut before both players have had their first turn.

**Turn Options:** You may Play, Draw, do both, or *Pass* (there is no Fold). Play and Draw are the same as in normal Rochi, with one clarification, defined below. "Pass" is a replacement for folding.

**Clarification:** You Can't Play After a Cut. In normal Rochi, the game ends immediately when a suit cuts. In the Captain's Game, that's not true, but you are not allowed to play a card from your hand if your first action was to deal, and that card cut a suit. The cut ends your turn.

**Passing:** When you Pass, discard your hand. Shuffle the discard pile into the deck, and then draw both players' hands back up to 7 cards.

**When a Suit Cuts:** The following procedures happen each time a suit cuts.

- Return the Suit Token to the center.
- The loser pays the penalty to the winner (Shields are worth half, as described below.)
- The winner takes the pot for that suit, leaving a single coin behind as an ante
- The loser also antes one coin into the vacated pot
- Discard all cards of the cut suit (including Shields)
- Draw both players' hands back to seven cards.

**Shields:** Shields are worth half, as in normal Rochi, but rather than rounding up, players must place the odd coin into a pot. For example, suppose the 5's cut, and Player 1 has a single 5 Shield. His penalty is 2.5 coins, which is paid as follows: 2 coins to player 2, and one coin into a pot of Player 1's choice. Since the pots are considered "jointly owned," this amounts to an average penalty of one half coin.

**Reshuffling:** The deck is not shuffled after every cut. Instead, discarded cards accumulate in a discard pile until one of the following conditions forces a shuffle. Reshuffle immediately if:

- The deck is empty;
- A player Skips;
- A Suit is "dead on the table" (entirely exposed); discard these cards before shuffling.