

Panguingue (Pan): Luck of the Draw

by Larry Pang

The mucker deals out ten cards to each player after they put up their tops. Player one throws her pisser away; player two has a bong, plays, and hopes he doesn't get peckered; player three tosses his hand into the muck; player four has three pairs for no pay and throws her hand in also; player five has a two pay, a pair of valle cards, and another non-valle pair and plays; player six has a pay in fours and two pairs, both non-komokers; and player seven is an automatic with a chip, a pair, and a chair.

Pan or Panguingue is a card game going the way of Faro. Not many casinos offer it anymore. Those that do, don't have a large following. In Las Vegas, only the Plaza and Sahara offer it. It was very popular in California in the days of Lowball and Draw Poker only. Today, only the Bicycle, Commerce, and the Hustler offer it in the Los Angeles area. With the proliferation of table games and slot/video games, hardly anyone wants to spend the time to learn the game and its strategy. It actually is a game designed for social settings. Not a lot of attention is required to play, and it doesn't have to be played for a lot of money. Six to eight persons can play around dinner or conversation and enjoy an evening out with friends.

When it was popular, chips were made especially for Pan. Often they were non-denominational. In smaller venues, it wasn't uncommon for a game to be a rainbow game. Colors were introduced to represent konditions, and the kondition was agreed upon by the players. Each player pays and gets paid in their own kondition, requiring different chips as in roulette.

For the most part, the chips were plain hot stamps. For the chip collector, older molds are represented, like the HCE, large and small crown, squares and rectangles, diamonds and rectangles, and the old workhorse hat and cane. They represent many closed clubs and casinos, like Harolds in Reno and the Rainbow in Gardena, California, the former Poker Capital of the World. Within the next couple of generations, gamblers and collectors will only know Pan as a game of the past.

Historically speaking, the origins of the game are not well documented. Some believe that it started in the deep south, possibly New Orleans created to pass time by persons in the "oldest profession" while waiting for customers. Slang used in the game such as pisser, pecker, muck, and the french word valle, meaning value,

point towards this possibility. Others believe it started during the Alaskan Gold Rush, where Klondike is the same game, but each player must play their hand out regardless of how bad the possibilities of winning are.

The game of pan is very similar to most rummy games but is unique in that it has its own special deck of cards and slang. The pan deck consists of 320 cards, eight regular decks of cards with the 8's, 9's, 10's, and jokers removed. The game is best played with six to eight players. The objective of the game is to meld eleven cards into valid conditions.

A meld, or a spread, consists of a minimum of three cards in sequence or of equal rank.

If the cards are in **sequence (rope)** a minimum of three cards must be used of the same suit. Additional cards may be added to the sequence, but must follow the sequence and be of the same suit. For example, the sequence of 5, 6, 7 may add the 4 or the Jack. Note that the 8, 9, and 10's are removed from the deck, therefore, the Jack follows the 7. No card preceeds the Ace, as in A, 2, 3, 4 ... or follows the King, as in ...7, J, Q, K.

If the cards are of **equal rank (set)** a minimum of three cards must be used, and must be either of the same suit or of all different suits. Additional cards can be added of any suit, but must be of the same rank.

To begin the game, the **mucker (dealer) mucks (shuffles)** the

front of the deck and deals ten cards, five at a time, to each player who puts up a **top (ante)**, starting with the previous winner. The dealer then collects the antes and places them on top of the block, characterizing the name of “tops”. The block is a semi rectangle, semi triangle, on which the tops are placed and the deck is placed against, face down.

Each player in turn, starting with the previous winner declares to play or discards their hand into the **muck (discards)**. Note that muck is a verb and a noun. If the player declares play, s/he must continue to play until a winner has **panned the hand (successfully melds eleven cards)**. In other words, the player may not surrender the hand in the middle of play as in poker. The decision to play or muck depends on the number of cards in the hand that can be melded, the number of discards, and the number of potential pays the hand can make.

Once each player declares to play or is **on top (out of the hand and forfeits their ante to the tops)**, the first player to declare play **plucks (draws)** a card from the front of the deck. S/he must decide to meld the card or discard it to the muck. The card may not be placed in the hand, if it is, the hand is fouled and forfeited. The hand must be discarded to the muck, and the player must continue to pay all konditions and outs. If the card can be used to create a valid meld or add to a valid meld, the meld must be placed on the board (table) for all live players to see. If the plucked card is thrown to the muck, the next player may use it to create or add to a valid meld.

The exception is the first pluck. The first player, has the option to pluck two cards. If the first pluck is thrown, it is not available to the next player, unless they are **heads up (only two players)**. Then the second player has option on the

thrown card. If the second player cannot meld the thrown card, s/he plucks a second card and continues as described above.

If the plucked or thrown card is used in a meld, the player must discard a card, and only one card. At no time must any player have more than a total of ten cards in their hand and on the board, except on the **outs (winning and ending the game)**, where there are eleven properly melded cards.

A unique rule of the game is the player’s option to rearrange valid melds on board to create new melds by adding cards. No cards may be taken away and put back into the hand or discarded when borrowing or rearranging cards.

For example, a meld with four 3’s, two are clubs, and one each of hearts and diamonds can create a new meld of A, 2, 3 of clubs by borrowing the 3 of clubs and adding an Ace and 2 of clubs. The 3’s of club, heart, and diamond remaining is still a valid meld.

A second example uses a meld of J, Q, K of diamonds and a another meld of J, Q, K of spades. By adding the J of clubs, Q of hearts, and K of diamonds, the player creates three new melds consisting of three J’s, Q’s, and K’s. Notice the Kings have only two suits represented. **Kings and Aces are called non-comoquers**. Their sets aren’t required to have three different suits.



What may be considered cheating, is acceptable as long as the player has not fouled (caught breaking a rule) by another live player. For example, a meld on board of three cards of the same rank that has only two different suits is valid if no live player points it out. Once a live player points it out to the other players, the invalid meld must be corrected or the hand is fouled. Interestingly enough, the spread may be made valid if the player plucks a card that makes it valid and adds to it before being detected.

Another common foul is for a hand to have too many cards, usually the player was dealt too many to begin with or forgetting to discard after melding a card; or too little cards, because the player wasn't paying attention and discarded twice in one turn. To assure starting with the correct number of cards, the player should count his cards before declaring play. If more or less than ten cards are dealt, the player informs the dealer to correct the hand by adding or removing the appropriate number of cards. Note the reduction of excess of cards can be obtained by discarding twice, which is a foul, only if the other active players catch the act before the player plucks again.

It is considered bad form for a player on top to make comments during live play of a hand, especially to point out a foul to the active players. It is also bad form to throw away or hide cards off the table.

It is possible a player may not want to use a card from the pluck or discard that can be added to a meld on board. The other active players may force the card (the card must be added to the meld on board and the player must discard a card from the hand). Strategy dictates when to force a card or not. If the player may appear to be **dropping out (ready to win needing one more card)** the other players can break the hand by causing the player to discard. If it appears that the player just missed the card, the other players may not want to add to the melds on board, reducing the number of discards the player is holding.

Certain melds (**konditions**) are **worth chips**. The value of each chip is determined by the kondition playing for. Home games can be for two for a nickle or in some casinos as high as \$100. Most commonly dealt games in California and Nevada are \$1, \$2, or \$5 per kondition.

All ropes of A, 2, 3 or J, Q, K are worth one, if the suit is spades, they are worth two. If the rope has not collected one yet, all cards added to a rope that create the above can collect one.

All sets of the same suit are worth one, spades are worth two. If the set has not collected one yet, any card added to a set that creates three of the same suit can collect one, two for spades. Each additional card of the same suit beyond three may collect one, two for spades.

Valle sets, ranks of 3's, 5's, or 7's, of different suits are worth one, same suits are worth two, and all spades are worth four, the spades are also known as a **bong**. Each additional card of the same suit beyond three may collect one, two for spades. The bong is second only to the outs in excitement due to the large number of chips collected. A player can still come out ahead in chips and still not **put the hand out (win the hand)**.

If the player does not ask the other player for the konditions due prior to discarding a card the other players are not required to pay. However, on the next card melded, and only when the player is able to meld a card, s/he may ask for any unpaid konditions. This could be disheartening if the player is unable to meld another card before someone goes out; not only did they not win, but also have to pay the winner without collecting any chips.

The winner, the person who melds eleven cards, is awarded the tops, and is entitled to collect from each live player, two chips for outs (winning) plus each kondition must be paid again. If a kondition is created on the outs, the winner may collect double the value of the new kondition. Its doubly exciting for a player to "go out on a bong", that is win the hand with a bong as the last condition made.

Usually the game is played for table stakes. As in poker, no money (chips) may be added to a players stack after the game has started, unless previously declared

to all players. A player cannot collect more than the number of chips in front of them. For example, if a player has only three chips and melds a bong, he can collect only three from each player, but can collect the additional one when s/he melds his/her next card. Once a player runs out of chips, the hand must be discarded and their top is forfeited.

It is very important to evaluate a hand not only for the ease of melding eleven cards but also the potential of collecting konditions.

If no possible **pays (konditions)** are in the hand, it may not be worth playing. Although the winner collects two chips on the outs, without collecting for any konditions, the winner may have paid out more than collected during the course of the hand.

The attraction to the game is that a player can collect more than double their starting chips and compound upon the amount collected during the hand. It's possible to collect 38 chips from each player starting with only a couple

chips. The ultimate optimist receives added excitement, because s/he knows the best hand doesn't always win. Its possible for a total **pisser (a bad hand with very little possibility of winning)** to go out with the right plucks and discards.

The player's skill comes from knowing when to go on top or when to play. This is a true gambling game, because of the number of possible combinations of hands and melds, the winner is truly dependent on the luck of the draw. ♦