♥ HEARTS ♥

players and cards

HEARTS IS COMMONLY a four-person game, with no formal partnerships among players. The following rules apply to a four-person game.

THE GAME CALLS FOR a standard 52-card deck. The cards in each suit rank from ace (high) to two (low). There is no trump suit.

EACH HEART IS WORTH one penalty point and the queen of spades is worth 13 penalty points. The other cards have no value.

object of the game

THE GOAL IS to score as few points as possible or, alternatively, to score all the points. The game concludes when one player's score reaches 100; the player with the lowest score wins.

the deal

ONE PLAYER deals the entire deck clockwise, one card at a time, facedown. (On subsequent hands, the person seated to the dealer's left deals, and so on in clockwise rotation.) Everyone should have 13 cards.

the pass

AFTER THE FIRST DEAL, each player looks at her hand and passes three cards facedown to the player seated to the left. Players must pass their cards before looking at the newly received ones. On the second hand, each player passes to the right. On the third hand, each player passes to the player seated opposite. On the fourth hand, according to a popular variation, no cards are passed at all (the "hold" hand). The cycle then repeats until the end of the game.

the play of the hand

THE PLAYER WHO holds the 2 of clubs after the pass leads this card to start the play of the hand. (All cards are played faceup.) In clockwise rotation, the other players play a card of the same suit. If a player is void of the suit led, a card of any suit may be played. (Two exceptions: Hearts and the queen of spades may not be discarded on the first trick.) The person who played the highest card in the suit led wins the trick, sweeps the cards facedown to her side of the table, and leads the next trick.

PLAYING THE FIRST HEART of the game—this happens when a player has no cards in the suit led—is called "breaking hearts." (In a variation, the queen of spades also breaks hearts.) Until hearts have been broken, a player may not lead with a heart, unless her hand contains nothing but hearts.

THE PLAYERS CONTINUE until all the cards have been played. At that point, each player's score is recorded, and the next dealer shuffles the deck and deals the next hand.

scoring

AT THE END OF A HAND, players' scores are recorded on a single score sheet, with a separate column for each player. (The table's combined score for each hand should always equal 26.)

A PLAYER'S SCORE depends on the number of penalty cards in the tricks that she has won. Each heart scores one point, and the queen of spades scores 13 points. However, if a player manages to take all the penalty cards (known as "shooting the moon"), no points are added to her score; instead, 26 points are added to all the other players' scores. (If one player's score is 74 or higher, the person who has shot the moon may instead opt to lower his or her own score by 26 points.)

WHEN ONE PLAYER reaches 100 points, the game is over and the person with the lowest score wins.

enjoy!