

TOTENTANZ RULES

Background

The game **Totentanz** (German for *Dance of Death*) is based on the woodcuts by *Hans Holbein the Younger* (c. 1497 - 1543). The woodcuts were produced in Basel between 1522 and 1526, in collaboration with *Hans Lützelburger*, a German blockcutter for woodcuts.

However, it was not until 1538 that the 41 woodcuts were collected into one book. The book was highly controversial during its time, partly because of its critique of the clergy, and it was for example banned by the French general inquisitor *Vidal de Bécanis*. In spite of the ban, the book was re-printed in many editions.

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Object of the Game

Since the day us humans acquired consciousness, existence has been a battleground between angels and devils, with the mortals own **Souls** as the prize.

In the game **Totentanz** the two players take the role of either a **Devil** or an **Angel**, with the mission to either corrupt or purify a **Soul**. Upon **Death**, depending on the result, one of them collects the **Soul**.

The first player to acquire three **Souls** can proudly return to either **Heaven** or **Hell** and proclaim themselves the winner.

Components

Totentanz includes the following cards:

- 34 soul cards
- 7 special events cards
- 5 quick reference rules cards

Soul Cards

The game has 34 soul cards (or 34 **Souls**), each one depicting a profession, position or person in the European renaissance society.

Each soul card has a so-called moral disposition, indicated

on the card by the number of red and blue skulls, in all no more than five skulls. The red skulls represent **Wickedness**, while the blue skulls represent **Innocence**.

The number of skulls and their color signifies how easy or hard a **Soul** is to either corrupt or purify.

Special Events Cards

These 7 special events cards contain unique actions, that can be used by both players to gain an edge in the battle over a **Soul**.

Each special event card can only be used once and then placed on the discard pile.

Quick Reference Rules Cards

A version of the rules found in this PDF, divided between 5 cards. Perfect for when travelling with your **Totentanz** deck.

Set Up

Decide who will play the **Devil** and the **Angel** respectively. Remove the quick reference rules cards and shuffle the rest of the cards. Place them face-down on the left side of the **Angel**.

This is the main draw deck. Each player then draws three cards from the main deck. This is the player's hand and should be kept secret from the other player(s). Next, draw a card from the main deck and place it face-up on the right side of the main deck (seen from **Angels** side). This place is named the first slot.

The soul card placed in this slot is the one the players are trying to collect. If this card happens not to be a **Soul**, put it back into the main deck randomly and draw a new one. Repeat until a soul card is drawn. In addition to the first slot there are four slots in successive order continuing to the right, that are yet to be filled.

These slots will be filled with other **Souls** or special events that will influence the contested **Soul**. On the right side of the last fifth slot we will later place the discard pile. The card setup with five slots is called **Life** and this is where most of the game of **Totentanz** is conducted.

How to Play

Totentanz is divided into **Turns** and **Rounds**. **Turns** are alternated between the players while a **Round** is finished when a **Soul** is collected. A **Round** always starts with the **Devils Turn**. The main goal for both players is to on their turn try to affect the entire moral disposition of a **Life**, towards **Wickedness** (for the **Devil**) or **Innocence** (for the **Angel**).

To speak clearly the **Devil** tries to increase the sum of red skulls while the **Angel** tries to boost the number of blue skulls among the cards in **Life**. On each **Turn** a player can do one (1) of the following:

- Pick up a card from the main deck to your hand. Each player can have a maximum of three cards on their hand. If there are no more cards in the main deck, shuffle the discard pile into a new main draw deck.
- Replace a card in your hand with one from the main deck. The rejected card is placed on the discard pile.
- Place a soul card in an empty slot. You cannot place a card in an empty slot until the previous slot has a card.
- Play a special event card. Bear in mind that if the special event card **Expulsion** is played on the soul card of the first slot, the next in line, the second slot, now becomes the contested **Soul**, as the new first slot.
- Replace a soul card in a slot, including the one of the first slot. To replace a soul card a played card has to have the opposite moral disposition of equal amount or higher. For example, a card with 3 in **Wickedness** can only be replaced by cards with 3 or higher in **Innocence**. The underlying card is placed on the discard pile.
- Filling the fifth slot with a card. This means that the contested **Soul** goes to the state of **Death**, and that a **Round** of **Totentanz** is over. When a player places a card in the fifth slot, the opponent can also retaliate with a card of their own - as a final action before finishing the **Round**. This is on the condition that the opponent has a relevant card and that it is placed on the last card in the fifth slot. Upon **Death** it is time to judge the **Soul**.

Winning the Game

Next, calculate the number of red and blue skulls, including all cards in **Life**. This is to discern the final moral disposition of the entire **Life** of a **Soul**.

If there are more red skulls than blue, the **Devil** wins this **Round** and **Soul**.

With a majority of blue skulls, it is instead the **Angel** that can claim victory.

With an unlikely stalemate the contested **Soul** is lost to limbo and collected by neither **Devil** nor **Angel**.

With a clear winner the contested **Soul** is removed from the game and placed beside the successful player.

Now, collect all other cards and shuffle them into a fresh main deck and start a new **Round**. The first player to collect three **Souls** wins the game.

