

Written by Administrator  
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Phil Ivey. (Getty Images)What's the best way to win a game of chance? Turn it into a game of certainty.

That, a British casino is charging, is exactly what world-renowned poker player Phil Ivey did in winning £7.6 million — about \$11.9 million — in one spectacular run of punto banco, a baccarat game. Crockfords is [charging that Ivey observed tiny flaws in the game's cards](#) , and used that knowledge to give the house a severe thrashing. As a result, the casino is refusing to pay, and Ivey has filed suit to receive his withheld winnings.

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Basically speaking, the idea in punto banco is for the player to draw two or three cards with a sum total closer to nine than the dealer. At the game last August played at Crockfords' casino in Mayfair, London, Ivey and an unidentified woman were playing alone against the dealer, in full view of 10 casino cameras. Ivey started his betting at £50,000 (about \$77,000) per hand, and later raised that, with the casino's blessing, to £150,000 (about \$230,000) per hand. As in blackjack, punto banco hands can be over in less than a minute. It's a game that's supposed to be entirely based on the luck of the draw.

Over the course of three nights, Ivey and his companion dipped as low as £500,000 (\$770,000) in the red, but ended up with a substantial sum. The casino's theory: that Ivey had spotted tiny imperfections in the cards' designs, and used that knowledge to help identify when certain cards would be on the table, even when face-down.

Here, in [an illustration created by The Daily Mail](#) , is one possible way that the alleged scam could have unfolded:

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# 'Playing the turn' How the game might have unfolded

## 1 Casino unwittingly buys rogue cards

Standard card



'Full' diamond design - note the edges

Rogue card



Split diamonds at edges - so non-symmetrical

Typically, cards have a geometric diamond pattern and should be symmetrical (left) - and look identical when turned 180 degrees. If they are 'miscut' in the factory - by accident or design - they have uneven diamond patterns (below left) and will not look identical when turned 180 degrees - giving players with a trained eye an advantage.



## 2 The player spots them

Gamblers may be tipped off about rogue packs or simply recognise the flaws while playing.



## 3 Croupier deals rogue cards

Punto banco is the sister game of chemin de fer, the high-stakes game favoured by James Bond. It is played with several packs of cards, which are shuffled by a croupier and dealt from a 'shoe'. The croupier deals one card to him, one to herself, a second to him and the final card to the bank. All are dealt face down. The aim is to hold cards with a count of nine or closest to nine.

## 4 The player checks cards

Players do not touch the cards at any point. Phil Ivey is thought to have told the croupier to tilt each card to expose its value. He was looking for 8s and 9s.



## 5 Chinese companion tips croupier to 'turn the cards'

Mr Ivey's mystery companion is thought to have claimed he was suspicious of the cards and asked the dealer to turn them 180 degrees. On the face of it, this gave him no advantage whatsoever. The croupier acquiesces.

## 6 Gambler recognises the cards and places bets

The rotated cards are returned to the shoe and easily stand out from the rest. They are eventually re-dealt. It is at this point that the player moves in with a

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