

1. The Backstory

The sudden death of the archmage Grandlin, who ruled the Empire for many decades, has ignited a power struggle among his heirs, the Lords and Ladies of the realm, all vying to succeed him.

To identify the most competent successor, Grandlin hid the Empire's insignia of power (Crowns, Goblets and Orbs) throughout the realm and required that his successor be the first to discover a certain number of these treasures and to secure them in their own castle. Grandlin reasoned that such a test would ensure the stability of the Empire: Having secured their treasures against all would-be thieves, his successor would be competent enough to secure the throne.

The fight for supremacy can be dangerous, and the Lords and Ladies do not leave their castles. Instead each sends their most loyal Henchman to search for the insignia of power *by any means necessary*. Nevertheless the Lords and Ladies have influence throughout the Empire and can assist their Henchman through powerful spells or the gift of items or special services, once per day.

2. Overview

XXXX is a challenging strategy game for 2–4 players from age 10 upwards. The goal of the game is to discover treasures (Goblets, Orbs and Crowns) hidden throughout the board and to return them successfully to the player's castle. The numbers and types of treasures needed to win the game is decided by the players themselves, which lets them adjust the length and complexity of the game.

Each player takes the role of a Lord or Lady, who sends their loyal Henchman (a pawn) throughout the board, to find the hidden treasures and bring them safely back to their castle. The player can also cast spells or alter the terrain of the board to favor their own Henchman or to thwart others. As a result, the board becomes ever more complex in the course of the game; each game is unique.

The playing time 1–5 hours, depending on the conditions for winning decided by the players.

3. Who Wins? Choosing the conditions

Before starting the game, the players should agree on the number and types of treasures that the winning player must secure in their castle. A good choice for beginners and younger players would be: two treasures of any type (Crown, Goblet or Orb). The game is shorter and simpler then; the element of chance and surprises is higher and the role of strategy is reduced.

The game becomes ever deeper and more strategic as the number of players and treasures is increased. A good rule of thumb is to divide the number of treasure cards (12) by the number of players: 6 treasures to win for two players, 4 treasures for three players and 3 treasures for four players. Players are invited to experiment and find the winning conditions that suit them best!

An interesting variant is to define the *types* of treasures needed for winning. For example, the players might require that one treasure of each type (Crown, Goblet and Orb) be secured or three treasures of the same type (e.g., three Crowns).

4. Unpacking and Preparation

The first time you play THEGAMENAME requires a bit of extra preparation. But it should go easily; just follow the instructions below!

First, please check the game for completeness. You should have:

- the box it came in (you'll need both the bottom and the top for playing!);
- the playing board;
- two thick, grey cardboard strips (the "ridges");
- two thin, white cardboard sheets (10"x23") with 19 creases for fan-folding (with three slots);
- four meeples (pawns) and four dice, colored red, yellow, green and blue; and
- 18 white plastic flags.

The flags and the meeples (pawns) are each in a drawstring-bag for convenience.

The game should also include this manual, a sheet with examples of combat, and several types of cards of increasing size:

- 122 playing cards (with the running red knight on the back) plus 2 blank cards;
- 12 golden-brown treasure cards (4 Crowns, 4 Goblets, 4 Orbs);
- 4 status cards (with the red X and the -1) to track penalties during the game;
- 4 „cheatsheet“ cards, one for each player, with a short summary of the rules; and
- 4 cards for the City (Training, Healing, Smithy and Tavern).

Altogether there should be 148 cards, also in their own drawstring-bag.

Second, please attach the stickers for Health (green heart), Strength (red fist), Weapons (blue swords) and Money (bag of gold) to the white plastic flags. Please make sure that both sides of a flag have the same sticker!

Lastly, fan-fold the two long (10"x23"), white thin cardboard sheets along their 19 creases. These sheets will hold cards that are „hidden“ on the playing field.

5. Building the playing board

Much of the fun and strategy of the THEGAMENAME game lies in the cards hidden throughout the playing field. Cards can be hidden on every playing square, by dropping them through the slot on the playing square. To catch and hold the cards dropped through the slots, we need to build a structure *below* the playing board; for this purpose we use the box (in which the game arrived), the two fan-folded sheets and the two thick cardboard strips.

Here's how to set up the board for playing:

1. Place the top and bottom of the box, empty and open side up, next to each other on the gaming table. *You'll note that the box-top is slightly wider and longer than the box-bottom.*
2. Put the fan-folded cardboard sheets into the box-top and -bottom. *You'll notice that one sheet is slightly wider than the other; place the wider sheet into the box-top and the narrower sheet into the box-bottom, so that they both fit and are spread out evenly. The three slots in the sheets should *not* be nearer to the middle between the two boxes, but rather closer to the outside edges. The folds of the slots should point up.*
3. Insert the grey, thick cardboard strips (the ridges) vertically into the slots of the fanfolded sheets. *You'll note that one cardboard strip is slightly longer than the other; place the longer cardboard strip in the box-top and the shorter one in the box-bottom, so that the zigzag edge of the cardboard strip points down and matches the fan-folding. The opposite edge has two „pegs“ that should stick up; the playing board will lock onto these pegs.*

4. Unfold the playing board. *You'll notice four circular holes, each hole two playing squares away from a corner of the board.* Fit the playing board onto the two boxes, so that the pegs of the cardboard strips pass through the circular holes.

Your playing board should now be sturdy and ready for play!

6. Preparing the cards for play

If you haven't already, remove the two blank cards from the decks of playing cards (those with the running red knight on the back). The blank cards are for your own ideas to add to the game!

Shuffle the remaining 122 playing cards and place them upside-down as a draw-pile which all players can easily reach. Set aside a space for a discard pile as well.

Shuffle the 12 treasure cards (the Crowns, Orbs and Goblets) and place them as a separate deck upside-down on the table.

In the very center of the playing board is the City with four playing squares and four slots for hiding cards. Place the four City cards (Training, Healing, Smithy and Tavern). The four colors of the cards (red, yellow, green and blue) should match the four colors of the City towers. For example, the green card (Healing) should go into the slot next to the green City tower.

7. Starting the game

The board has 100 playing squares, labeled A–J along the long axis and 0–9 along the short axis. The four squares in the center (E–F,4–5) form the City, a kind of safe haven for all the Henchmen. The four corners of the playing board (A0, A9, J0 and J9) are the home castles of the players, whose towers are red, blue, green and yellow, respectively. If there are fewer than 4 players, some castles will remain unoccupied.

At the start of the game, each player chooses one of the four colors (red, blue, green and yellow) and places the meeple (pawn) of that color in their home castle. This pawn represents their Henchman, whom they will send around the board in search of the hidden treasures. The players also receive a six-sided die of the chosen color, as well as a „cheatsheet“ card and a status card (with the red X and –1).

Each player also receives four white plastic flags, which keep track of the four attributes of their loyal Henchman: Health (green), Gold (yellow), Strength (red) and Weaponry (blue). At the start of the game, your Henchman has full health (15 points), 5 gulden, 2 strength points and zero Weaponry. Place the four flags along the edges of your corner of the playing field. For example, the green Health flag should be placed at position 15 along the green scale next to your castle, the red Strength flag at 2 on the red scale next to your castle and so on for the yellow Money and blue Weaponry flags. Whenever an attribute changes due to combat, poison or other effects, please update the position of the corresponding flag.

Before starting the game, the players should agree on the conditions for winning. As mentioned above, a good choice for beginners and younger players would be: two treasures of any type (Crown, Goblet or Orb).

The players roll dice to determine who moves first. The play moves clockwise around the table, passing from each player to the player on their left.

8. Playing the game (one turn)

Each turn corresponds to one day and consists of two parts: first moving your Henchman and then exerting your influence as a Lord or Lady, altering the terrain of the playing field to favor your Henchman and to thwart the other Henchmen.

8.1 Moving your Henchman

Roll your die; the result gives the maximum number of squares you may move your Henchman on this turn. The Henchman cannot move diagonally, but can alternate between moving forward, backward, left and right. As his Lord or Lady, you may direct the Henchman to move less than the maximum distance given by the die roll or even to remain on his square, i.e. to not to move at all. However, your Henchman must immediately stop moving whenever he reaches a square occupied by another Henchman or a square where a card is inserted.

Wherever your Henchman ends his move: First uncover any playing cards inserted there, so that all players can see them. These cards may have an immediate effect or they may be added to your hand, depending on the type of card (see Section 9.1 below). After the cards have been resolved, your Henchman may pick up an ownerless treasure or may attack another Henchman on the same square (see Sections 10. and 12. below). These rules apply even if the Henchman didn't move at all; it is played as though he just arrived at the square.

To enter the City, the Henchman must end his move at one of the four gates to the City. He is allowed to enter the City on the following day (on the next turn). Once the Henchman is within the City, he may move freely, unhindered by cards or other Henchmen (see Section 11. below).

8.2 Exerting your influence as Lord or Lady

Once you have moved your Henchman and all has been resolved, you may exert your influence as Lord or Lady to shape the playing field to favor your Henchman and thwart other Henchmen.

Take a playing card from your hand and insert it into a playing square unoccupied by a Henchman or by another playing card, all the while hiding it from the other players (see Section 9.1 below). This card will be uncovered only when a Henchman lands there or possibly through spells and other special effects.

No cards may be inserted in the castle squares (A0, A9, J0 and J9) except for treasure cards (Crown, Goblet or Orb). The castle squares may hold multiple treasure cards. The other playing squares may hold *at most* one playing card (those with the running red knight on the back) and no other types of cards.

There are two special types of playing cards: spell-cards and map-cards. You can recognize them by the black symbol in the upper left corner. These cards *may* be inserted into a playing square, but take effect (immediately) only when played directly from your hand. A spell-card can be played even before or during your Henchman's move, to lend him special support. (see Section 9.1 below).

If you have more than four cards in your hand, you must play one, otherwise playing a card is voluntary. If you end your turn with fewer than four cards, you must draw from the draw-pile until you have four cards in your hand.

Special rules apply for treasure-cards (see Section 10. below).

The central rule for all cards is: **You may play only one card per turn and only on your turn!**

9. The Cards

THEGAMENAME has several types of cards, with different sizes and formats. In order of increasing size:

- 122 playing cards (with the running red knight on the back) plus 2 blank cards;
- 12 golden-brown treasure cards (4 Crowns, 4 Goblets, 4 Orbs);
- 4 status cards (with the red X and the -1) to track penalties during the game;
- 4 „cheatsheet“ cards, one for each player, with a short summary of the rules; and
- 4 cards for the City (Training, Healing, Smithy and Tavern).

9.1 Playing cards (with the running red knight on the back)

As a Lord or Lady, you exert a powerful influence throughout the Empire. In particular, you can insert cards into (empty) playing squares of your choosing, to assist your Henchman or to hinder other Henchmen. As described in Section 8.2, these cards are revealed as soon as a Henchman enters that playing square, and go into effect immediately, if applicable.

The effect of a card is determined by its type, which is found in the upper left corner of the card. There are two types of cards, those with symbols on a *white* background in the upper left corner and those with a *black* background. Those with a *black* background are either spell-cards or map-cards (cards revealing the position of a hidden treasure). These cards may be inserted into the playing squares but they take effect (immediately) only when played directly from your hand. The cards with a *white* background are inserted into the playing squares and take effect only when the square is visited by a Henchman and the card is revealed.

The possible negative effects of a card are listed on the *left* side of the card, below the type symbol. The possible positive effects of the card are listed on the *right* side of the card. These effects may raise your Henchman's attributes (Health, Gold, Strength and Weaponry), set them to a fixed value, reduce them or even divide them. However, the attributes cannot drop below 0 or rise above 15. A circular arrow around a symbol indicated that the effect takes place daily. For example, if your Henchman is poisoned, he loses Health every day until he is detoxified, e.g. by a Detox playing card. Please take a status-card as a reminder to deduct that Health from your Henchman every day.

As noted above, there are two kinds of playing cards of the *black-background type*: spell-cards and map cards.

	Type	Number	Effect
	Spell	14	As described on the card. You can play this card before, after or during your Henchman's move, even during combat. The spell goes into effect and the card goes to the discard pile.
	Map	12	If your henchman lands on the square given in card's symbol (upper left corner), he can dig up a treasure. Draw a treasure card and place it in your hand. The map-card then goes to the discard-pile. Once all 12 treasure-cards have been dug up and are in play, discard all map-cards (keeping them separate to remove them from further play) and take new cards from the draw-pile.

Your Henchman may land on a square with a *black-background type* card. After revealing it, you may simply add it to your hand; you need not play it immediately. However, if you have not yet played a card on your turn, you may play it on the same turn as it is uncovered.

There are five kinds of the playing cards of the *white-background type*:

	Type	Number	Effect
	Weapon	21	Immediately increases your Henchman's Weaponry attribute (blue flag) by the value given on the card. The card goes to the discard pile. The smallest weapon is the knife (1 point), the mightiest is the battle-axe (6 points).
	Potion	11	Takes effect immediately, as described on the card, even if not desired or not applicable. The card goes to the discard pile.
	Trap	16	Takes effect immediately, as described on the card. The card goes to the discard pile.
	Special	14	You can choose whether the card goes into effect. Unless otherwise noted on the card, it is not discarded remains in place, even after usage.
	Villain	34	A villain attacks relentlessly until your Henchman flees or until one of you dies. If your Henchman dies, the Villain takes all his treasures; insert all treasure-cards in your hand into the Villain's playing square. If instead the Villain dies, your Henchman takes his treasures (if any) and receives the reward given on the Villain-card, which then goes to the discard-pile. The Villain's power is given in the card's type symbol (upper left corner), ranging from two points (the weakest bandit) to 20 points (the fearsome War-Pig).

9.2 Treasure cards (with the running red knight on the back)

After your Henchman has found and dug up a hidden treasure, that treasure must then be transported to your castle and hidden there. While your Henchman is transporting the treasure to your castle, you hold the treasure-card as one of the four cards in your hand. The more treasure-cards you hold in your hand, the more limited are your options to influence the board, since you have fewer non-treasure cards.

9.3 Status-Cards (with the red X and the –1)

If your Henchman is poisoned, or if you lose your turn, please take a status-card as a reminder.

9.4 Cheatsheet-Cards (Summary of the Rules)

Each player receives a cheatsheet-card summarizing the rules of THEGAMENAME. It is also useful when inserting other cards into playing squares, to conceal them from other players. Cover the other card with your cheatsheet-card, slip them both into the slot on the playing square, and then withdraw the cheatsheet-card, leaving the other hidden in the playing square.

You may be allowed to peek at cards inserted in the board, without showing them to other players. In such situations, use your cheatsheet-card to cover a card while you extract it from its playing square, to hide it from other players.

9.5 City-Cards (Training, Healing, Smithy and Tavern)

These four cards are placed randomly in the city and remain in the same position throughout the game. Your henchman need not stop at any square in the City but can move freely. However, if your Henchman wants the benefits of training, healing, the smithy or the tavern, he ends his turn there (see Section 11. below).

10. The Treasures

To win the game, you direct your Henchman to find and dig up Grandlin's hidden treasures (the insignia of power: Crowns, Goblets and Orbs). But these treasures must still be transported back to your castle and hidden there. While transporting the treasures, your Henchman becomes a target for the other Henchmen; he'll have to fight his way back to the castle. If your Henchman dies while transporting the treasures, you lose the treasures to the Villain or Henchman who killed him; if your Henchman dies alone (for example, by poison), the treasures being transported are simply inserted into the square on which he died.

If your Henchman returns safely to your castle, you can hide the treasures there, by inserting one treasure card per turn into the slot of your castle. Note, however, that you can play only one card on a turn; you can't hide a treasure in your castle if you've played any other card on that turn.

Your henchman can obtain Grandlin's treasures

11. The City

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12. Combat

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13. In case your Henchman dies...

If your henchman's health drops to zero — which can well happen, due to combat or poison — he immediately draws his last breath and expires on his current playing square. If another player's Henchman slew yours, that player gets not only all your treasure-cards but also all your money. Otherwise insert all the treasure-cards in your hand into the square of your now deceased henchman. If a Villain slew your Henchman, he takes possession of those treasures.

Discard all other cards in your hand and draw four new cards. Place the meeple (pawn) of your next loyal Henchman back in your castle. Set the flags of the new Henchman to the normal starting values: 15 Health, 5 gulden, 2 Strength and 0 Weaponry (see Section 7. above). Your new Henchman will continue his predecessor's mission on the following turn.

14. Quick Summary of the Most Important Rules

14.1 Play only one card per turn.

Casting a spell-card, or using a map-card to dig up a treasure, or hiding a treasure in your castle — all of these count as playing a card. You can't use or insert any other card on the same turn.

14.2 You should have only four cards in your hand at the end of your turn.

The treasure-cards in your hand count towards the four. The status cards (with the red X and -1) do not count, however, since they are just reminders. If you have fewer than four at the end of your turn, you must draw from the draw-pile until you have four. If you have more than four, you must play one card per turn until you reach four (see 14.1 above).

14.3 When the draw-pile is empty...

...shuffle the discard-pile and place it upside-down as a new draw-pile.

14.4 Once all 12 treasures have been dug up and are in play...

...discard all map-cards in your hand and draw new cards to replace them. Keep the discarded map-cards separate from the discard-pile, so that they do not recur in the game.

14.5 Players may not take notes during the game.

On the other hand, verbal consultations and agreements among the players are encouraged.

14.6 The Portal

The Portal is a special card, by which your Henchman may travel far and fast, although it comes with a risk of dying. It works differently than the spell „Teleportation“. Choose the destination and roll a die. A roll of 1 means that your Henchman is instantly vaporized (see Section 13. Death of your Henchman). A roll of 6 means that your Henchman can move to any square within the Empire. A roll of 2–5 means that your Henchman can move to any square within the quadrant of the corresponding color (2=red, 3=blue, 4=yellow, 5=green). If the travel is successful and the Henchman lands on a square containing a card, that card is uncovered and processed as usual (see Section 8.1 above).

15. Game Variants

Try out these additional rules for more variety!

15.1 Dropping treasures

Instead of securing a treasure in your castle, you may insert a treasure-card from your hand into the playing-square occupied by your Henchman.

15.2 Looting another player's castle

If your Henchman manages to invade the castle of another player, he may comb through the rooms to find treasures hidden there. On your turn, roll a die. If the result is smaller or equal to the number of days the Henchman has spent searching (in a row), take a treasure card from the castle and put it into your hand. The search then starts over, so to find another treasure, you need to roll a 1 on your next turn.

15.3 Grandlin's Great Catharsis

When the draw-pile is empty, a cleansing wave passes through the Empire. Every player discards one card of their choice from the playing squares (City cards and treasure cards may not be discarded, of course). This occurs three times. After these three rounds of purging, shuffle the discard pile and make it the new draw-pile, as described above in Section 14.3.