

# LEVERAGE

## A Card Game of Power, Gold, and Betrayal

*Game of Thrones in 20 Minutes — using only a standard deck*

**Designed by Shaun Bartlett**

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**Players:** 4–5 (single deck) | 6–10 (two decks)

**Duration:** 15–30 minutes | **Age:** 12+

**Deck:** Standard 52-card deck + 2 Jokers

*Note for 6–10 players:* Remove all Kings and Aces from both decks. Assign the 5-player Jokers or discard as appropriate. Combine the remaining cards into one Realm deck.

The old King is dead. The Realm lies scattered and in chaos - wealth and power ripe for the taking. From the ashes, old and new banners will rise. But only one can rule.

## 🎯 OBJECTIVE

Use diplomacy, warfare, and betrayal to be the last King standing, the Wealthiest Individual, or a loyal Noble to the winning King.

## CORE MECHANICS

### Status & Treasury Limit

Your Status (Mercenary, Noble, King) defines your Treasury—the maximum number of cards you may hold. Your hand can never exceed your Treasury; discard down immediately if it does.

Status	Treasury	Description
Mercenary	3	You serve no King. Your Allegiance is your own.
Noble	5	A King holds your Allegiance.
King	7	You hold your own Allegiance and the loyalty of others.

### The Balance of Power

A throne cannot stand alone. Every King must have at least one Noble during the Political Phase; if none remain, the crown falls and the Kingdom dissolves.

### Battle Resolution

This universal mechanism applies to all conflicts: Challenges, Duels, and Wars.

- **Bid:** Both players place their bids face-down (at least 1 Gold card each).
- **Yield:** Before revealing, players have a brief window (about five seconds) to announce "Yield." A player who Yields concedes immediately but both players keep their unspent Gold. For simultaneous Yields, the battle continues.

- **Reveal:** All bids are revealed simultaneously. Highest total wins. Ties favour the Defender. In The War of Kings, all cards are discarded.
- **Resolve:** The Winner takes the single highest Gold card from the loser's pledge. All other pledged cards are discarded.

## SETUP

- **Assign Identities:** Remove the 4 Kings. Deal one face-up to each player. This is your Identity; it never leaves play.
- **Assign Allegiances:** Remove the 4 Aces. Give each player the Ace matching their King's suit. This is your Allegiance, placed face-up.
- **Create the Realm (44 cards):**
  - **Gold Cards (36):** All number cards 2-10.
  - **Leverage Cards (8):** All Queens and Jacks.
- **Shuffle** these to form the Realm deck.
- **Deal Starting Hands:** Each player draws 3 cards. You all begin as Mercenaries (Treasury 3).
- **Determine First Player:** The King of Hearts takes the first turn. Play proceeds clockwise.

(For 5 players, add both Jokers as the 5th Identity and Allegiance before setup.)

## THE CARDS

- **Gold Cards (2-10):** Value is face value. Used for bidding and scoring.
- **Jacks (J) - The Threat:** Challenge any King for their crown.
- **Red Queens (Q♥ Q♦) - Cunning:** Draw 4 cards. Discard down immediately.
- **Black Queens (Q♣ Q♠) - Blackmail:** Target player must give you their highest Gold card.

## HOW TO PLAY

### The Political Phase

This phase continues while the Realm deck has cards. On your turn, choose ONE Action:

1. **VENTURE** Draw 2 cards from the Realm. Discard down to your Treasury limit.
2. **LEVERAGE** Play one card from your hand, resolve its effect, and discard it.
  - **Red Queen (Cunning):** Draw 4 cards. Discard down.
  - **Black Queen (Blackmail):** Target player gives you their highest Gold card.
  - **Jack (The Challenge):** Initiate a Challenge against a King. Battle resolution applies.
    - **King's Fate (Yield):** Becomes a Noble to the victor and keeps their Gold.
    - **King's Fate (Lost the Battle):** Becomes a Mercenary.
    - **Noble's Choice:** If a new King is crowned, Nobles choose to take back their Allegiance card (become a Mercenary) or give their Allegiance to the new King (remain a Noble).
    - **Crown Collapse:** If the victor has no Nobles after this process (all refused), their new crown falls. They remain (or revert to) a Mercenary.
3. **INITIATE DUEL OF MERCENARIES** (Mercenaries Only - Requires no card.)
  - Challenge another Mercenary to a Duel. Battle resolution applies.
  - Winner becomes King (Treasury 7).
  - Loser / Yielder becomes Noble (Treasury 5) and hands Allegiance to the Winner.

4. **NEGOTIATE** Strike a deal. Offer Gold, cards, or Allegiances.
  - A Noble's Allegiance can only be traded with their consent.
  - If a deal involves an exchange (cards, Gold, or Allegiance), BOTH players involved may draw 1 card from the Realm.
  - **Key Use:** A Mercenary may offer or request Allegiance to form or join a Kingdom.
5. **RENOUNCE** (Nobles Only) Declare independence. Demand your Allegiance (Ace) back.
  - You immediately become a Mercenary (Treasury drops to 3).
  - **Consequence:** If this leaves your King without any Nobles, their crown falls, and they too become a Mercenary.
  - To become a King, you must now Negotiate or Initiate Conflict like any other Mercenary.

When the Realm deck is empty, the game does not immediately stop.

Players finish the current round of turns (ending with the player to the right of the King of Hearts).

During this final round, all political actions (Leverage, Initiate Conflict, Negotiate, Renounce) are still valid.

Once the round is complete, the War of Kings begins.

## The War of Kings

Phase Restrictions

- No Venturing, Leverage, Initiate Conflict, or Negotiating.
- Allegiances are Locked: A Noble cannot Renounce. An Allegiance can only be transferred to a new King within their own Kingdom as a result of a successful Succession.

The Final Battle Loop

While 2+ Kingdoms remain, they must battle. Repeat these steps:

1. **The King's Request (Optional):** Before bidding, each King may ask one of their own Nobles for aid (gold cards). Nobles publicly Accept or Reject. Accepted Gold is given to the King. There is no restriction on amount.
2. **The Battle Bid:** All Kings place their gold bids face down in front of them. Kings may Yield (withdrawing from the war, dissolving their kingdom, but keeping their head and their Gold).
3. **Resolve the Battle:** All non-yielded bids are revealed. The winner takes the highest Gold card from each loser. All other pledged cards are discarded.
4. **Death & Succession:** If a King has no Gold remaining after the battle, they die. Their Nobles immediately determine succession:
  - **One Noble:** Automatically inherits the crown. Continues the war even if there are no more Nobles.
  - **Multiple Nobles:** A Succession Crisis occurs.
    - **Peaceful resolution:** All but one Noble yields. No negotiation is allowed.
    - **Battle resolution:** Battle as normal. Winner takes the crown. Gold from ties is discarded. Battle again until there is a winner or all but one Yields. All non-winning or non-yielding Nobles remain Nobles to the new King.
  - **No Remaining Nobles:** The Kingdom is conquered.

## VICTORY

# Game End

The game ends in one of two ways:

- **Political Victory (Unification):** The game ends immediately during The Political Phase if one King comes to hold the Allegiance of all other players. The "War of Kings" is skipped.
- **War of Kings:** The game ends when only one Kingdom remains.

# Determining Victory

Once the game has ended, all players check the three victory conditions.

- **Winning King:** The final ruler crowned.
- **Wealthiest Individual:** ALL players reveal their final hands. The player with the most remaining Gold wins.
- **Status:** Be a Noble loyal to the Winning King when the game ends. This winning condition applies to fallen Kings of the winning Kingdom.

(Tiebreaker: King > Wealthiest > Noble > suit order ( $\spadesuit > \heartsuit > \diamondsuit > \clubsuit$ ).)

## APPENDIX A

### [♥ ♦ ♣ ♠] Lore of the Four Banners

*Only four of the great ancient Houses remain, weakened by years of conflict but determined to rise again. In the chaos, even a charismatic peasant may claim the throne.*

♥ **House of Hearts** – Devoted to the old King. Loyalty, oaths, and a just cause are their creed. Unity and strength are what they believe the Realm needs — and that they alone can provide.

♦ **House of Diamonds** – For centuries they amassed immense wealth through trade. Their empire crumbled when the old King set the Realm ablaze, yet their creed endures: wealth is power, and the Realm must be rebuilt as a firm economic powerhouse — by their hand.

♣ **House of Clubs** – For generations they trained the warriors of legend. To them, stability demands strength: a disciplined army to crush rebellion and enforce peace. They alone, they claim, can forge the Realm's lasting security.

♠ **House of Spades** – The house of spies and assassins. They believe true power hides in knowledge, not armies. Their agents helped topple the old King before he consumed the Realm, though no proof remains. They alone can guard the world from unseen threats.



**The Joker: The Unbannered** – From the gutters rises a new power — a movement of peasants and radicals rallying against oppression. Will they settle for the lesser evil among the old banners, or rise to shatter them all and remake the Realm?

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**Now take your banner. The Realm waits.**

## APPENDIX B

### Paths to the Crown

How do I become a King during the Political Phase?

If you are a Mercenary:

You have three paths to the crown:

- The Diplomat (Action: NEGOTIATE)
  - Find another Mercenary.
  - Agree to form a Kingdom (one is King, one is Noble).
- The Duelist (Action: INITIATE CONFLICT)
  - Target another Mercenary.
  - Challenge them to a Duel and win the battle.
- The Usurper (Action: LEVERAGE)
  - Use a Jack to Challenge an existing King.
  - Win the battle (or have them Yield).
  - AND...
  - Convince at least one of the defeated King's Nobles to "bend the knee."

If you are a Noble:

- The Usurper (Action: LEVERAGE). You may attack any King, including your own.
- You must first RENOUNCE. This makes you a Mercenary, follow one of the three paths available.

## APPENDIX C



### The Undead King Variant – Rise of the Damned

(Will the Realm Fall to Darkness?)

*All your scheming, all your gold... what is it worth against an enemy that cannot lose, cannot die, and wants only to see the world freeze?*

This is not a game of thrones. This is a game of survival.

#### SETUP (5-Player)

In a 5-player game, shuffle the 4 Kings and the Red Joker; deal one to each player.

The player who receives the **Red Joker** is **The Undead King**.

- They have no Kingdom.
- They receive no Allegiance card.
- Their identity is revealed immediately.

The other four are "Living Kings". They set up as normal, receiving their matching Allegiances. But the game has changed. The Kingdom Warfare endgame is no longer an option; it is a requirement.

#### HOW PLAY CHANGES

##### For the Living Kings:

You are no longer just rivals. You are prey.

You must still plot, scheme, and battle for the Individual Victory, but you do so with a new, shared terror. You can form alliances, but you all know the true enemy.

##### For the Undead King:

You are the inevitable.

- Your Treasury is always 7.
- You cannot hold Allegiances... unless you take them with a Jack.
- You are excluded from the Individual Victory. Petty gold is beneath you.
- You win only by crushing all others in the final Kingdom Warfare.

#### CONQUEST – THE UNDEAD CHALLENGE

When the Undead King plays a Jack against a Living King, it is not a battle. It is a harvest.

**The Undead King must have at least 1 Gold to play a Jack.** However, Living Kings may challenge the Undead King even if the Undead King has no Gold.

- **If the Undead King wins:** They do not just take the highest gold. They seize all Allegiances held by the defeated King. All of that King's Nobles become **Turned Nobles**—their Allegiance is now bound to the shadow, and they lose the ability to Renounce. They are now supporting the Undead King to win.
- **If the Undead King loses:** The pledged gold is discarded. The Undead King keeps their throne.
- **If the Undead King has no Gold when challenged:** They automatically forfeit but keep their throne. The challenger gains nothing - the Jack is wasted.

*You cannot take a throne that is not real. You cannot kill what is already dead.*

### THE LAST STAND (ENDGAME)

When the Realm is empty, the final war begins.

#### Kingdom Warfare:

- **For the living Kingdoms:** Nobles funding and succession works as normal.
- **For the Undead Kingdom:** Turned nobles cannot refuse the call to support their King with Gold.
- **If all Kingdoms fall to the Undead King:** Mercenaries may continue the fight, making a last stand for the living. If they win, they claim, or form the winning Kingdom.

**If the Undead Kingdom wins the war, the Individual Victory (Wealthiest Individual) is nullified. There are no survivors.**

All wealth, titles... it turns to ash. It meant nothing.

*The Realm freezes in ruin.*

**Asymmetric by design. Mortal ambition against inevitable decay.**

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## FAQ

*Whispers from the Court*

Whispers from the Court

**Q:** Can Kings trade Nobles without consent? **A:** No. A Noble's loyalty is theirs to give—or sell.

**Q:** Can Kings transfer their crown peacefully? **A:** Yes. A King may yield their crown to another in exchange for Gold, cards, or promises. No Jack required. The receiver becomes the new King; the old one serves as their Noble. If both were Kings, the Kingdoms merge under one banner.

**Q:** Can Kings Renounce? **A:** No. A King cannot renounce themself. They may only lose or trade their throne.

**Q:** Can I Blackmail a King? **A:** Yes. Everyone bleeds.

**Q:** When can a Noble Renounce? **A:** Only during the Political Phase, on their turn. During the War of Kings, Allegiances are locked. Treason must be declared before the final war begins.

**Q:** What if players tie for the most Gold? **A:** Status decides — King > Noble > Mercenary. If still tied, suit order breaks it ( $\spadesuit > \heartsuit > \diamondsuit > \clubsuit$ ).

**Q:** Can Kingdoms merge? **A:** Yes, through negotiation or battle during the Political Phase. But once the War of Kings begins, every Kingdom stands alone.

**Q:** Are Allegiances (Aces) visible? **A:** Always. Loyalty is public, even when motives aren't.

**Q:** Can I play multiple Leverage cards in one turn? **A:** No. One Leverage action per turn.

**Q:** What happens if both players Yield in a battle? **A:** The battle continues. Simultaneous Yields are ignored.

**Q:** What happens to a defeated King's Gold in a Challenge? **A:** The victor takes the single highest pledged Gold card. The rest is discarded.

**Q:** In the War of Kings, what if a King has Nobles but chooses not to ask them for Gold? **A:** That's their choice. The King's Request is optional. They may choose to fight alone to showcase, or bluff strength.

**Q:** Can a Noble who refuses to "bend the knee" after a Challenge still compete for victories? **A:** Yes. They become a Mercenary and can compete for Wealthiest Individual. They can also attempt to become King again through Duels, Negotiation, or future Challenges.

**Q:** What happens if the Undead King has no Gold when challenged? **A:** They automatically forfeit but keep their throne. The challenger gains nothing—the Jack is wasted. You cannot kill what is already dead, until the War of Kings, where heroes rise or fall.

**Q:** Can the Undead King win the Wealthiest Individual victory? **A:** No. The dead do not care for gold. They win only by conquest.

**Q:** When do I discard to my Treasury limit? **A:** Immediately, whenever your hand exceeds your Treasury. No exceptions.

**Q:** Which cards go to the discard pile? **A:** All played Leverage cards, discarded battle pledges (except the highest Gold card taken by the winner), and excess Treasury discards.

**Q:** Can a fallen King (who died in War of Kings) still win the Status victory? **A:** Yes, if they were part of the eventual Winning King at the start of the War of Kings phase. History favours the dead on the winning side.

**House Rule:** If a Negotiation deal dispute erupts, flip a coin — let chaos decide.