

Uncle Louis

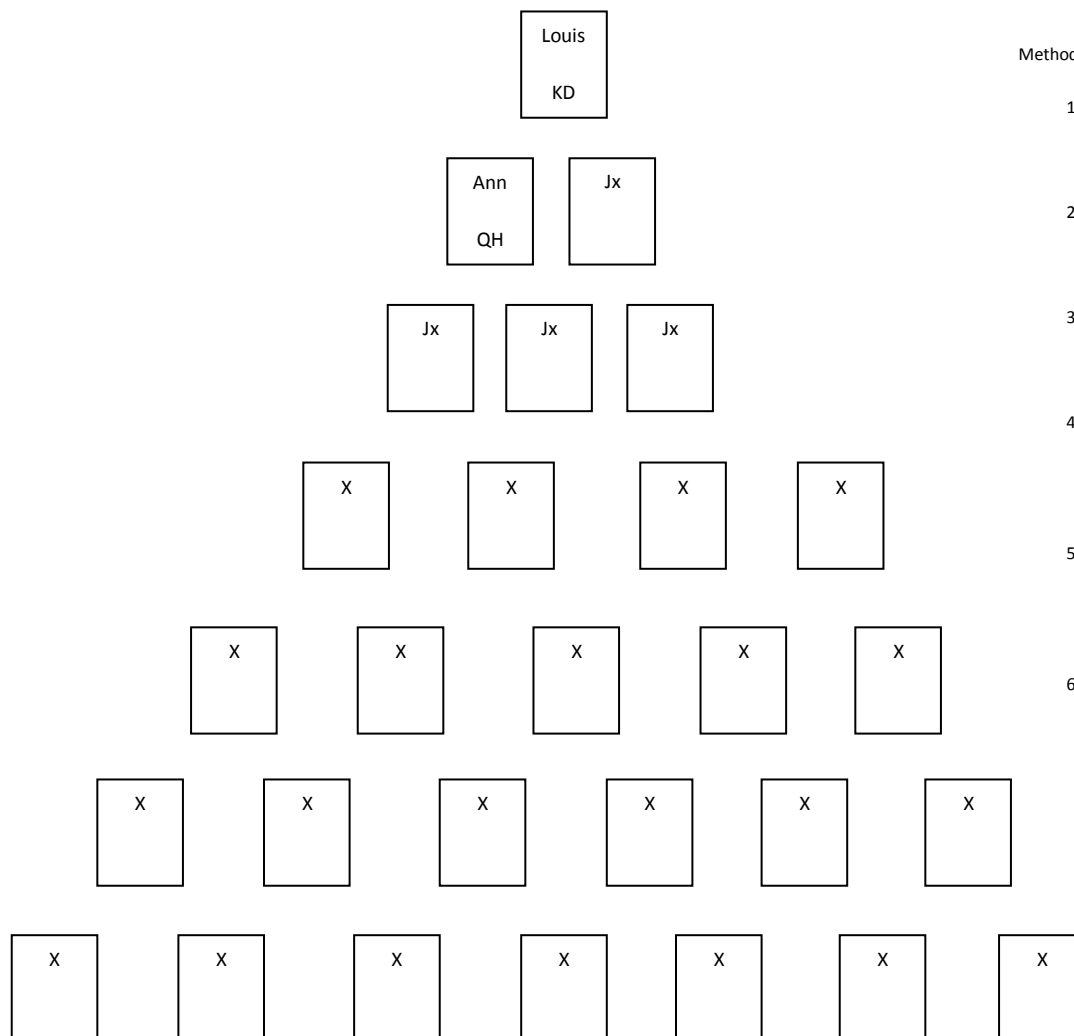
This is a game based on the court of Louis XVI, the last King of France, who was executed after the French revolution. His reputation is of a well meaning, but indecisive ruler who relied heavily on the effectiveness of his appointed advisors and was forever subject to the desires of the nobles who comprised his court. Any historical accuracy presented in this game is purely coincidental.

Each player takes the role of one of the nobles in Louis's court, but their identity is kept secret from other players. The aim of the game is get a puppet King installed on the French throne who is beholden to the player's character for his position. Untold wealth and favors then ensure. The trouble is, all of the other players are also angling for the same outcome with their own man. And of course there is the pesky business of running the country itself, lest the peasants revolt and chop off everybody's head.

These unscrupulous, wannabe 'powers behind the throne' will stop at nothing to achieve their aims. Sex, scandal, blackmail, bribery, strong-arming, dueling and even murder are de rigueur.

Setup

- A. Use a deck of cards to construct the court of King Louis, as in the diagram below:



Method:

1. Use 4 sheets of paper underneath the area where you will build the card pyramid – so you can write names and notes next to character cards.
2. Place King of diamonds and Queen of hearts as shown – this is Louis and Antoinette. Remove other kings, queens & jokers from play.
3. Randomly place the four Jacks as shown. These are Heirs to the throne, with the single Jack in the 2nd rank being the current heir.
4. Now randomly select 22 cards from the deck and put the rest away for later. From those 22 cards randomly select 13. From that 13 randomly deal one card to each player, face down.
5. Each player makes a secret note of which card represents their character and those cards are then reshuffled into the stack of 13 from which they came.
6. Now randomly deal each of the 13 cards into the bottom two ranks of the pyramid, then deal the other 9 cards remaining from the 22 into the rest of the pyramid to complete the court of King Louis.

- B. Each player requires fifteen or so colored squares of paper or cardboard to as their own influence markers. Make them about 2cm square, one color per player.
- C. Each player requires a screen to *hide* their influence counters and notes from general view. A large book or similar should do.

Important concepts

Each rank (horizontal line of cards) indicates the **prestige** of the character within the court. The closer to King Louis the character is, the higher the prestige. Prestige is everything. The greater the characters prestige, the more influence they are able to exert over other characters and also the greater their own resistance to attempts to influence them.

Prestige is as follows:

Rank 1: King Louis: 7 (yes, Uncle Louis is a bit of a pushover)

Rank 2: Queen Antoinette and the Heir apparent 9

Rank 3: Heirs next in Line, 8

Rank 4: Dukes, 7

Rank 5: Counts, 5

Ranks 6 & 7: Barons 3

No Rank: 1 : retainers, courtiers, entourage (faceless peons)

The suit of each card represents the **resources** of each character. This is the a particular area that the character is able to exert influence to greatest effect. Attempts to exert other types of influence are possible, but at a -2 penalty. (Explained later)

Resources are as follows:

Clubs: Martial – military prowess, action

Hearts: Social – charisma, social graces and sex

Diamonds: Economic – money, money, money

Spades: Intrigue – connections, spies, cunning, etc...

The numerical value of the card represents the character's **SO influence**. That is, the influence that the character's significant other has on the nominal character. By default, all characters are male. However, that is not to say that women do not have any part to play or power to wield in court. The use of this value will be explained later.

For now, consider that if your own secret characters SO influence is 6 or more, then you are playing the SO, not the nominal character, which means your character is either female or a gay man. If you are female, if your resources are Social or Guile they are due to your own expertise, but if they are Martial or Economic, then your husband wields them under your direction.

How to play:

Starting with the eldest player and proceeding around the table, each player has their turn. The game ends after 30 turns, when everyone is executed, or whenever some player or their puppet is able to ascend to the throne.

At the start of a players turn, any unused influence markers from last turn are removed/recycled. The player then *secretly* puts D4 influence markers into a **general** influence pile, and another four influence markers into their character **specific** influence pile. These markers represent special attention or focus on behalf of their character – planning, attention to detail, willpower, etc... that improve the chances that an endeavor will have a satisfactory outcome.

The player can now make one espionage attempt or one influence attempt. To do this, the player announces that either she is secretly making the attempt herself, or a *specific character that he has an influence marker on* is performing the action, or one of his faceless retainers, courtiers or other entourage is doing it.

Espionage:

This means finding out more about a particular character or characters SO. Specifically, you are looking for weaknesses to exploit. This may involve spying, gossiping, bribery or intimidation of servants or associates or simply spending social time with the target character – whatever makes sense. Espionage always works. Roll a D20 on the following table to find out the target characters weakness.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------|----|-----------|----|-----------|----|----------|
| 1 | Men | 7 | Pride | 13 | guilt | 19 | hedonism |
| 2 | Women | 8 | love | 14 | shame | 20 | religion |
| 3 | Very young men | 9 | debt | 15 | jealousy | | |
| 4 | Very young women | 10 | trust | 16 | Addiction | | |
| 5 | greed | 11 | cowardice | 17 | Ambition | | |
| 6 | revenge | 12 | hubris | 18 | virtue | | |

Once one player has uncovered a character’s weakness, everybody knows about it.

Once the mechanics is out of the way, the player making the espionage attempt narrates the circumstances surrounding the uncovering of the weakness. How was it found out? What is the exact nature of the weakness? How did that manifest? Was it told directly by the target character or someone else, or was it inferred from personal or third party observation? Is the weakness a general weakness or is it associated with a particular character? If so, also relate which character the weakness is associated with: would work for revenge, love, trust, jealousy, and maybe others. Be inventive.

When narrating, put yourself in your characters shoes. If it is your character acting, say “I did this” or “My character saw that”, etc... If it is another character or faceless peon acting on your behalf, narrate yourself delivering the orders and receiving the eventual results second hand. Don’t tip your hand as to your identify however.

Influence:

Influencing other characters is harder than general espionage. The outcome is uncertain and it can backfire.

The aim of influencing another character is to place an influence marker permanently on that character to indicate that you have them 'in your pocket', OR to kill a character, or somehow arrange for another character to be killed.

The ultimate aim is either to be the next king, or have the next king in your pocket – i.e. to have the heir apparent or the queen under your influence and King Louis dead. Multiple players can win.

You can successfully perform influence attempts on the king and queen, however you don't get a permanent influence marker on the King – you get to ask for one royal boon, which can be a promotion or the current favor of the King.

You can never influence the royal family with force (martial resource specialty)

Promotion – a character you specify moves up one rank. Take it from the rank it is in and add it to the next rank above. No character can be promoted to heir status or above.

Favor – a character (not a faceless peon) you specify is seen to be good graces with the King, which grants that character only a +4 bonus on their next influence attempt.

Performing an influence attempt:

Basically, you roll a D6 and add your modifiers against the targeted characters resistance, plus any resistance added by other players. If you equal or exceed , you are successful.

Possible modifiers:

- Acting characters prestige
- -2 penalty for faceless peon acting, or specified character not using their preferred resource.
- +1 per *general* influence markers you add
- +1 per *specific* influence markers you add, +1 per marker, if the target character is your own
- +2 if using a characters known weakness as leverage

Target resistance:

- Target character's prestige
- +2 if the target has the same resource that you are using against it.
- +1 per general influence marker added to resist
- +1 per specific character influence marker added to resist, if the target character is your own

Thus if someone is attempting to influence your very own character, rather than be limited to your general influence markers if you wish the influence attempt to fail, you can also use your pile of character specific markers to interfere. However, using too many may blow your cover.

Also, for reasons of secrecy, you may wish to influence your own character so that you can use your character in further influence attempts. Obviously you want such attempts to succeed, so you can use specific influence markers to better the chances.

The procedure is as follows:

- i. The player specifies who is acting (specific character with influence marker on it, or faceless peon)
- ii. They specify how many initial influence markers they are spending towards the attempt.
- iii. **They narrate the circumstances around the attempt so that everybody knows who is trying to do what, and how, including any weakness being exploited in the attempt.**
- iv. At this stage, if no other players interfere, the acting player can roll the dice and narrate the outcome of the influence or murder/duel attempt contest according to the result.
- v. However, before that happens any other player can place one or more of their general influence markers (or specific character influence markers if they own the character) towards resisting the attempt. They narrate the form of the resistance that will possibly interfere or upset the acting characters plans.
- vi. The acting player can then add more influence markers as well, and narrate how the acting character will attempt to overcome this new resistance. This process may go back and forth.
- vii. Finally, the player rolls and the outcome is known.
- viii. If the outcome is a success, the acting player narrates the success. If it is a failure and someone acted to resist the attempt, then that player narrates the failure, otherwise the acting player can narrate their own failure.

When making an influence attempt, a player can target the SO instead of the nominal male character. The SO has the same prestige and resource as the nominal character, but probably has a different weakness. If the initial influence attempt is successful, a further quick mechanical test is made to see if successfully influencing the SO results in successfully influencing the nominal character, by rolling D6 equal to or under the SO influence value with no modifiers (SO= 6+ always succeeds). Optionally, this can also be narrated.

Types of influence:

The method used in the influence attempt or murderous scheme must belong to one of the four resource types – martial, social, economic or intrigue. This is regardless of whether the acting character actually has that resource as a specialty. This must be accounted for in the narration.

Any weakness can be used if you are inventive enough to narrate it convincingly, but some are more natural fits than others.

Only Martial may be used for murderous schemes.

Martial – military prowess, action, etc... this can be used for assassination, challenging someone to a duel, torture, kidnapping, physical intimidation etc.... ideal weaknesses: cowardice, hubris, pride, love, trust

Note that when using martial to achieve your aims, on failure there is a 1:6 chance of it backfiring badly on the perpetrator. i.e. not only is the target not killed in a duel, but the target kills the acting character, or a character acting to assassinate someone is themselves killed in a melee or identified to the authorities, arrested and executed. Etc...

Replace any murdered character who is not a member of the royal family with a random card.

Social – charisma, social graces and sex. Gossiping, seduction, fashion, repartee, popularity, etc... ideal weaknesses: men, women, love, jealousy, virtue, trust, shame, hedonism, religion

Economic – money, money, money. Bribery, loans, business ventures, pork barreling, gifts, parties, etc... Ideal weaknesses: greed, addiction, debt, hedonism, ambition

Intrigue – connections, spies, cunning, etc... blackmail, politics, nepotism, pacts, conspiracy, manipulation. Ideal weaknesses: revenge, guilt, shame, trust, ambition, religion

Narration:

When narrating, put yourself in your characters shoes. If it is your character acting, say “I did this” or “My character saw that”, etc... If it is another character or faceless peon acting on your behalf, narrate yourself delivering the orders and receiving the eventual results second hand. Don’t tip your hand as to your identify however.

When narrating, you must take into account:

- i. Any already established information
- ii. What you are trying to do
- iii. The method you are using
- iv. Any weakness you intend to exploit

The challenge is to build up an entire fiction based around a believable influence attempt or murderous scheme. Imagine the emotions of the participating characters. What are the events going on surrounding the attempt? A ball, a banquet, a meeting in private chambers, a hunt, strolling on the lawns of Versailles, etc...

Can you mix in details that others have narrated previously to give a sense of continuity to the fiction?

When narrating the outcome of attempts, you can also be inventive – perhaps the intention was for a crack shot to goad a simpering Count into a duel and then kill him? Failure doesn't mean simply that the shot missed – it may simply mean that the target resisted attempts to be goaded. It depends on the nature of any weakness employed and take into account other factors such as interfering player statements and potential backfires.

i.e. if the weakness employed was pride or hubris, then in all probability the target was goaded into a duel. So a failure probably means the target survived the duel. Particularly if a backfire happened which indicates a martial attempt gone horribly wrong.

Lastly, this game is not meant to be taken terribly seriously. Be delightfully cruel, amusingly ruthless and brazenly lewd. Let them eat cake and then shove their faces in it!