

Uncle Louis v2

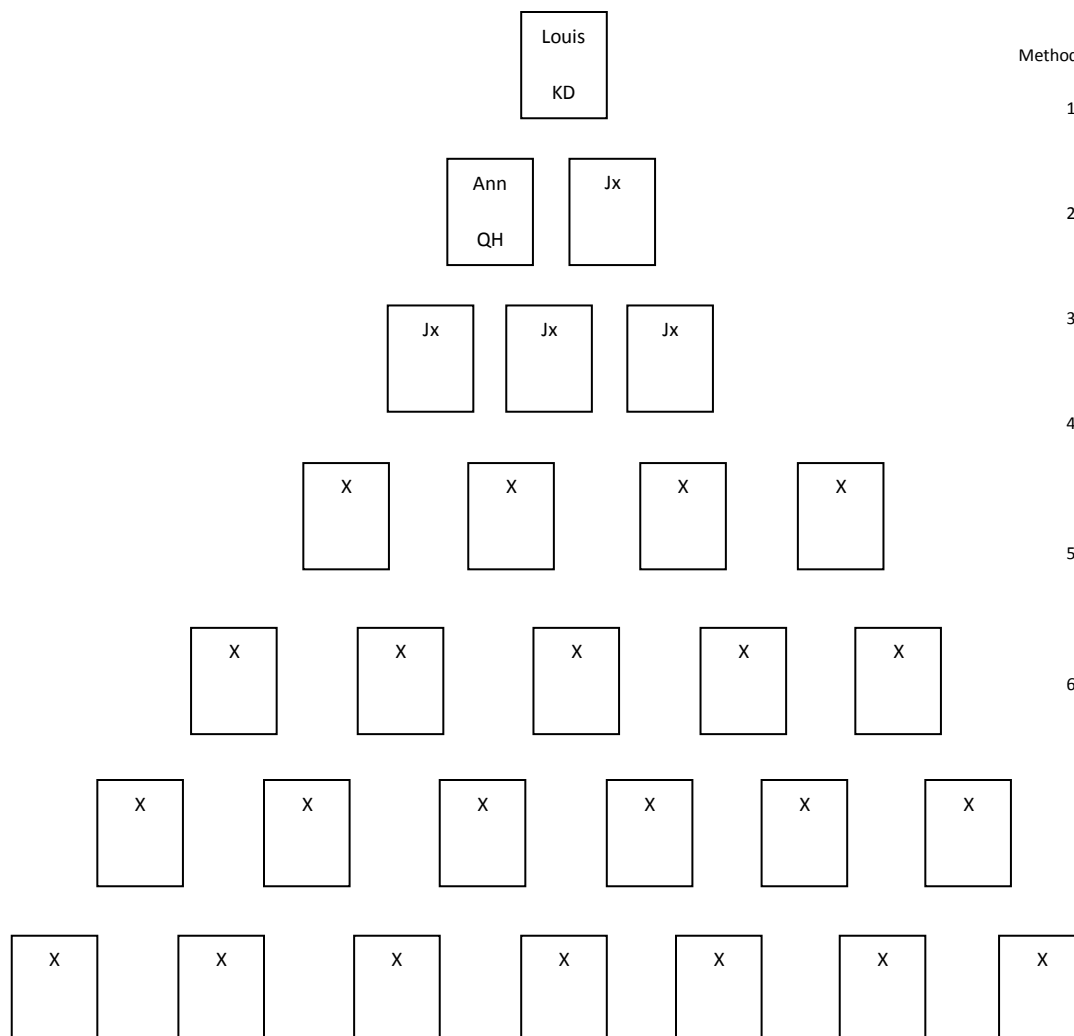
This is a game based on the court of Louis XVI, the last King of France, who was executed after the French revolution. His reputation is of a well meaning, but indecisive ruler who relied heavily on the effectiveness of his appointed advisors and was forever subject to the desires of the nobles who comprised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

The object of this game is to put yourself in the shoes of an ambitious, ruthless, manipulating French noble, resident at the court of King Louis in Versailles. 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/Queen installed on the French throne who is beholden to the player's character. 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 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 heir apparent.
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 inner circle of 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

The pyramid represents the currently in vogue inner circle of the court – characters who actually have access to the royal family on a semi-regular basis, solely due to being in the good graces with the King or Queen.

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 a direct measure of the characters influence with the King.

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: 7
 Rank 5: 5
 Ranks 6 & 7: 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 **gender**. By default, all noble positions are male. However, that is not to say that women do not have any part to play or power to wield in court. Influence with the King and Queen counts far more than nominal title, whether the title be Duc or Duchess, Baron or Baroness.

If the character's card number is 6 or more, that character is female. If a female character's resources are Social or Guile they are due to her own expertise, but if they are Martial or Economic, then her husband wields them under her direction.

Winning the game:

In order to win the game, you must successfully have either the heir apparent, or if there are no heirs left, the Queen, under your sway when King Louis is murdered.

That Uncle Louis will be murdered is not in doubt. If the King is not murdered by a player-hatched scheme, after a certain period of play, the French resolution will happen and everybody will be guillotined. Then everybody loses.

At the court of King Louis:

Versailles was like a gilded cage for the ambitious nobility of France. Anyone who wished to *be* someone took up permanent residence there in an attempt to curry influence with the King. To be elsewhere in France at that time was to be completely shut out of political power. Even to be there, amongst the many hundreds of courtiers, was no guarantee that you would ever get to say a word to the royal family. Only the inner circle, who by some means had managed to curry favor with the King and Queen could even expect social contact on a regular basis.

As to be expected where there was such a concentration of the rich and powerful, with little else to do besides political scheming, life in Versailles consisted of an endless stream of diversions: balls, parties, performances, hunts, gaming, carousing and sex. There was an immense amount of protocol involved in daily life at the court. Etiquette and manners ruled everyone. However, remove the powder, frilly clothes and enormous wigs of the nobility, and they were just as unwashed and subject to the same base desires as everyone else.

How to play:

The players should arrive at the host's home collectively bearing at least one bottle of fine wine, or if they prefer, brandy or cognac. They should proceed to flatter their host unashamedly concerning the sharpness of their wit, the elegance of their furnishings, the smartness of their attire and above all, their immeasurable good taste in hosting a game of Uncle Louis.

The host should then respond: "But of course". And put aside the drinks to breath whilst setup is performed.

After setup, before general play commences, the players should offer a toast to their gracious host and everyone should finish with "Long live King Louis!". Now play can begin.

Starting with one player decided by the host, and proceeding around the table, each player has their turn. A round has been completed after every payer has had a turn. The game ends after 6 rounds, at which point everyone is executed, or whenever some player's 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 'DN' influence markers into a **general** influence pile, and another 'N' 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. **'N' is the number of players.** 'DN' is a dice roll based on the number of players. *i.e. if there are 3 players, it means roll a D3. (D6 divided by 2, rounded down). If there are 5 players, use a D10, divided by 2, rounded down.*

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 peons: retainers, rank-less courtiers or other entourage is doing it.

The character that the espionage or influence attempt is directed at is called the target. A particular character can only be the target of one such attempt per round.

When a character is targeted for the first time, the acting player gets to name that character – write it clearly next to the card. See the appendix on names.

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, it is kept secret until that player decides to act on it, at which point everybody knows about it. Until then, write the weakness on a small slip of paper and slip it under the character's card.

The player making the espionage attempt narrates the circumstances surrounding the uncovering of the weakness. See the section on narration for details.

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 – a murderous scheme.

You can never influence the royal family with force (martial resource specialty). However, they may be killed.

You can successfully perform influence attempts on the king and queen, however you don't get a permanent influence marker on the King – the character successfully making the attempt gains 1 point of prestige – move the card up to the next level.

Attempts to influence the King may backfire. On failure, there is a 2:6 chance that the King will act out of pique at your presumption. -2 prestige to the acting character. If the character's prestige falls below 3, their career has effectively been murdered – they leave the inner circle and a new character from the leftover pile is added to the lower rank.

Murderous schemes and their consequences:

Out and out murder was not commonplace at court, although there have been some recorded instances of poisonings and other such base activities. However, that is not to say that various fatal accidents and such did not occur. And there is always the duel, by pistol or sword to decided matters where honor demands.

If a non-royal character is killed, that card is removed from play and a new card from the leftover pile is added to the lower most ranks -- a new Lord and Lady have gained admittance to the inner circle, at the rank.

The heirs are in line to the throne in order of Heir apparent 1st, then those waiting in order from left to right.

If every member of the royal family dies before King Louis is murdered, an uncertain war of succession is the result --everybody loses.

A backfire means that if a murderous scheme fails, roll a D6. The chance of a martial-based scheme backfiring is: 1:6 for general influence, 2:6 for murderous schemes, and 3:6 for murderous schemes aimed at the royal family

i.e. not only is the target not killed, but either the target kills the acting character instead, or a character acting to assassinate someone is themselves killed in a melee or identified to the authorities, arrested and executed. Etc...

Performing an influence attempt:

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

Note that at least one player, the player to the acting players left, MUST play resistance to the attempt by adding one initial influence token.

The token used is a spare token – it doesn't come from that players two piles in-play.

Other players may optionally also add influence tokens to the resistance to make the attempt harder.

Possible modifiers:

- Acting characters prestige
- -2 if acting character not using their preferred resource (not counted for peons – already included by their prestige rank of '1')
- +1 per *general* influence markers added by acting player
- +1 per *specific* influence markers you add, if the target character is owned by acting player
- +2 if using target 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 (their own character in secret (don't let on which card is acting), or a specific character with their 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. The default resisting player places the first mandatory resistance token towards resisting the attempt. They narrate the form of the resistance that will possibly interfere or upset the acting characters plans.
- v. The acting player can then narrate how the acting character will attempt to overcome this resistance. Optionally at this time they can add more influence markers of their own to better their chances.
- vi. Other players may optionally also add a single resistance marker and narrate further resistance. This process may go back and forth. Players (even the same player, multiple times) can add a single resistance token and narrate further resistance, then the acting player can respond with how they intend to over that resistance, and optionally add more tokens to better their chances.
- vii. Finally, when all players are happy with the level of resistance they have offered, 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 the last player to offer a resistance token narrates the failure. If the action is of a type that might backfire, the backfire roll is made before the outcome narration so that it may be included in that narration.

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

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:

You are supposed to be playing your character, narrating everything that occurs from your own characters point of view – without revealing the identify of your character of course. Most of the time, you will be narrating your characters attempts to influence other characters to do his or her dirty work, however there may be times when you want to act directly through your character. When this occurs, certain aspects of your character will unavoidably be made public – the character's resource, if using their resource, and the characters sex if that is relevant to the activity being attempted. But you do not have to divulge exactly which card is your character by name, although the above information may make it easy to deduce – such are the dangers of direct action.

The main tension involved is the byplay of influence, which is usually a two stage process unless acting as yourself, or through a faceless peon. But the normal situation is, first a target character is influenced such that your character has a hold on the target – your influence marker can be placed on it. The next stage is to make use of that influence and call on the character to make good and perform some activity on your behalf – either extend your web of influence or instigate some murderous scheme.

At either stage, the character understandably will be reluctant to be beholden to you and your will. They will have to be cajoled, sweet-talked, intimidated etc... until they do your bidding if they are the acting character , or until they are under your sway if they are the target.

Most of the battle of an influence attempt is getting the acting character to go along with you, and that should be the focus of the narration between the acting player, and the player(s) who are offering narrative resistance.

At some point in the narration, for those influence attempts that result in the (reluctantly) agreeable acting character then performing an activity on your behalf – attempting to influence a target to add to your network, or performing a murderous scheme – the narrative and narrative resistance can transfer to describe the intent and resistance involved with that activity. This proceeds until all resistance has been accounted for and the die is rolled to decide the outcome.

When narrating, you must take into account:

- i. Who is acting (or acting secretly)
- ii. What you are trying to do
- iii. The method you are using
- iv. Any weakness you intend to exploit

- v. Any already established information

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.

Final Words:

You may talk in an outrageous French accent.

If the Host stands, everyone must stand.

Nobody may sit unless the Host sits first.

Remember, manners and etiquette are to be maintained at all times.

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!

Appendixes:

Names and Titles:

Whenever someone acts on a character card for the first time, that player may name the character by giving it a title. Character titles come from French regions eg: 'Duc d'Orléans' . It doesn't matter the official level of prestige associated with Duc->Count->Viscount->Count->Barron. It's the favor of King Louis that really decides who is powerful and who is not, so mix up the titles in the pyramid as you see fit.

Below are some regions you can use.

Noailles	La Vauguyon
Coislin	Praslin
Choiseul	ChoiseulAmboise
Aumont	Pompadour
La Ferté-Senneterre	Anjou
Montausier	Angoulême
hesseLa Vallière	Auvergne
Nemours	Mercoeur
Saint-Cloud	Alençon
Béthune-Charost	Clermont-Tonnerre
Damville	Berry
Montpensier	Châteauroux
Aumale	Aumale
Penthièvre	Gisors
Châteauvillain	Brunoy
Guise	Louvois
Boufflers	Aubigny
Villars	Amboise
Harcourt	Choiseul
Alençon	Coigny
Angoulême	Nevers
Fitz-James	Biron
Antin	Lévis
Rambouillet	La Vallière
Chaulnes	Mercoeur
Rohan-Rohan	Châtillon
Joyeuse	Fleury
Hostun	Gisors
Villars-Brancas	Duras
Roannais	Stainville
Valentinois	

Notes:

I haven't changed anything significantly from the contest entry – just fixed some broken details and added some more info to help/explain how the game should play, at least in my imagination. Having no GM, and a secret player identity, places certain constraints on how the game runs role-playing-wise, but I'm interested to see how that plays out at the table. And I'm interested to see Ron's comments on the game in basically the same state as I provided it, not a game that I have radically altered.

There is an indication that 'the pesky business of running the country' needs to be attended to. I have a few ideas to introduce a nice tension between players scheming on one hand, and actually staving off the revolution by actually attending to matters of state. But I think that introduces a complication that shouldn't be there until the broader design is nailed down.

I like to think that there is a perfect way to blend the Uncle Louis concepts into a one-session RPG, but I lack the intuitive understanding of RPGs to make it possible in a short time. What I don't want to end up with is an official GM asking the players 'You are in the court of King Louis, what do you do?' or something to that effect. I know the section on narration is woefully inadequate, but I lack the experience and play testing resources at this point to say exactly how it should go in great detail – I simply don't know at this stage beyond a vague vibe I am going for.

If anyone with that intuitive-level understanding wants to partner up with me on Uncle Louis, great!