Castle – a card and dice game by David J Rodger

Castle

A Game of Strategy, Persistence & Nerve
By David J Rodger

It is a time of great unrest. Spies and assassins roam the lands looking to carry out their masters' commands. Small and large armies clash outside defensive walls or mass on the battlefields. Archers unleash death from afar. The Royal Families are warring for ultimate control. Anybody with the remotest claim against their authority must be wiped out. But the Royal Bloodlines are a tangled mess and not everybody will fight, and not everybody will love their brother. A dangerous time. A time for the brave to take and the weak to fall.

Summary

Up to four players (one deck of 52 playing cards and two six-sided dice) ◊ Each player has a Royal Family consisting of any Jack, Queen and King (3 cards) ◊ Players use other cards from the deck to build defences around the Royal Court, protecting their Royal Family ◊ Players win by attacking these defences and killing the opposing Royal Families ◊ The game ends for a Player when their King is dead.

Quick Rules

- The Royal Court is the bottom most row. Your 3 Royal family members can only go in here; there can never be more than 9 cards here in total. Although the Royal Court is immune to attack from Archers (ACES) it is vulnerable to attacks from the side and by Assassins (ACE+8). Opponents cannot attack from underneath.
- Remove any spare Jacks, Queens and Kings from the deck and leave them out of the game. Each player given Jack, Queen King (any mix of suits). Place these in any order to create the bottom row (Royal Court). Each player gets 5 cards from the deck. Place these anyway within or around the Royal Court. The Jack is always Face Up.
- Each turn, a player takes ONE card from the top of the deck and decides to either use it to attack or places within their defences. You CAN attack the SIDE cards of the bottom row (Royal Court).
- **Rally the Flag!** You can place any card the same suit as Jack in your reinforcements pool. Stops if Jack is dead.
- Any cards discarded after an attack sit in a discard pile. When the deck is empty, reshuffle the discard pile and this becomes the new deck.
- **Double Dice:** Then attack again regardless of win or lose; plus one extra card. Defenders roll two dice again & add.
- **Snake Eyes:** roll '1' & '1' on two dice opponent removes any UNEXPOSED card from other player's defence.
- Cards **1-10** have the value printed on the card. **Jack**, **Queen**, **King** have the value of 10.
- **Aces**: - Archers – place in defence or use to attack - two attacks against any exposed cards, but cannot attack inside Royal Court (4 dice + value of another card, pick two cards and check for combos). Successful attacks do not follow through. Aces defend with (2dice +1).
- **Eights**: Spy. Special ability before attack or defence. Turn over any card to reveal or hide it.
- **Ace COMBO** (+ Two): Battering ram. Use against Royal Court. Keep attacking in one direction until defeated. (four dice + 2)
- **Ace COMBO** (+ Eight): Assassin. Attack ANY card. (four dice + 8)
- **Queens:** reduce opponent attack / defence score by 4 for ANY card. Queens are hard to kill.
- **King**: defends with 3 dice (or only 2 if Queen is dead).
- **Royal Rules**: {Basic} Any card of the same suit (bloodline) cannot attack any **Royal** of the SAME SUIT. If this is discovered at moment of attack, the attack is called off and that turn is over!

Full Notes

WHAT, NO DICE?!

If you're stuck with a deck of cards but no dice, then just use the deck , picking a card to generate random values from 1 (Ace) to 10; with Jack =11, Queen =12 and King = "Double Six".

SETTING UP YOUR ROYAL COURT

This happens at the start of the game. You're given three cards, a Jack, Queen and King. Place them in any order, but they can ONLY go into the bottom row (their Royal Court). You can place any other cards beside, around or even in between the members of your Royal Family. Part of the fun of the early game is hunting down which cards are the Royals and exposing them (through attack or Spies). The **JACK** is always placed Face Up: this is so players know what suit is being used to **Rally the Flag!**

- **Max width:** You can never have more than 9 cards in your Royal Court (the very bottom row). 9 cards would mean you had three members of your Royal Family and three cards either side; or, it could mean you had only one Royal Family member left surrounded by eight other cards.
- **Max height:** You can never have more than four rows of cards. This would mean the Royal Court, plus three rows built on top as defence.
- **Mind the gap:** If you have an empty row or an empty vertical, you can use one turn to pull the cards down or across to seal this gap.

Example
This player has been dealt a Jack of Spades, Queen of Hearts and King of Spades. They arrange them like this (normally only the Jack would be visible, all other cards start FACE DOWN to keep their value hidden). It might seem strange to place the King so outside of everything, but in the early game the King is strong – defending with (3 dice +10). Kill the Queen and you reduce the ability of the King to defend himself.
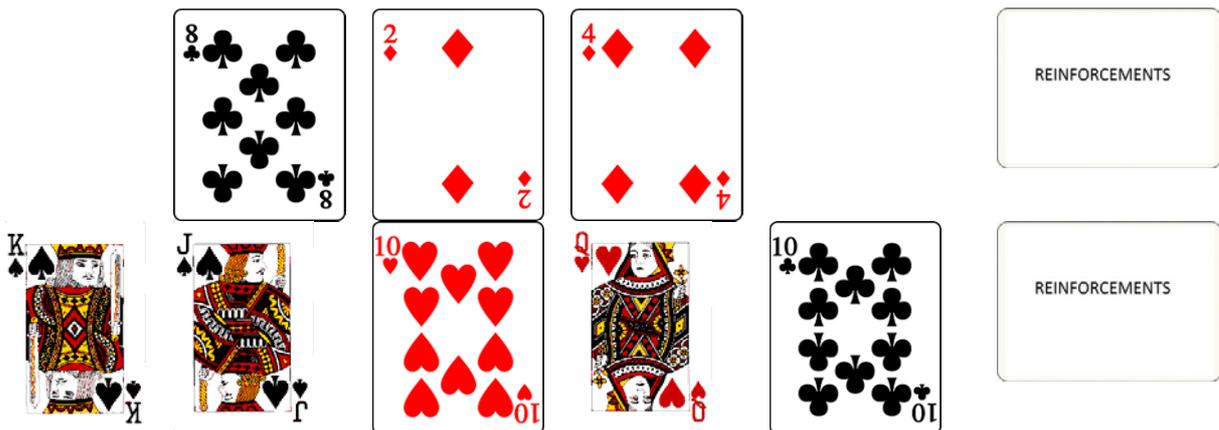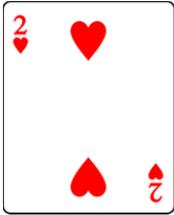
RESOLVING CONFLICT

In the above example, that is the Royal Family if Player A.

Player B takes a card from the top deck and it is a 2 of Hearts.

Not a great card on its own. Player B looks at Player A's board. Don't forget all of Player A's cards are face down at the moment so Player B has no idea what cards are what. He taps the top right hand card which Player A reveals to be the 4 of Diamonds.
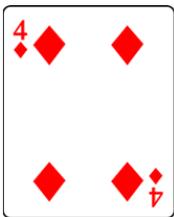
Bother players then roll dice six-sided dice and add their scores to the value of their respect cards.

PLAYER A: rolls a combined score of 7, he adds the 2 from his card, giving him 9.

PLATER B: rolls a combined score of 5, he adds the 4 from his card, also giving him 9. A stalemate. Player B needed to score MORE than player A to defeat him.

In this example, Player B throws the 2 of Hearts onto the discard pile and his turn is over. Player A's board remains the same.

WINNING AN ATTACK

However, for an alternative example, let's say player B did beat player A.

2 of Hearts defeated 4 of Diamonds: In this alternative example player A would SET ASIDE the 4 of diamonds card and then Player B would continue to attack with their victorious 2 of Hearts. But, the attack strength is reduced by the accumulated value of defeated cards, these are the cards that have been SET ASIDE. Player B would attack with (2 dice + 2 minus 4). This is because as Player B wins and pushes through, their forces are weakened.   NOTE: these successive attacks MUST proceed forwards, left or right. It must be a logical progression; successive attacks with the same card cannot just jump to another part of the board – except for JACKS, which can always jump 2 cards if they wish.

ACES: the value of an ACE is always '1' after it has been defeated.

After the battle ends all defeated / set aside cards and placed in the discard pile.

In this alternative example, after the 2 of Hearts defeated the 4 of Diamonds, the player could attack the Queen of Hearts as she is now directly exposed. (See below). However, this would be an insane attack because Player B would attack with (2 dice + 2 minus 4 *and an additional minus 4 for attacking a Queen*). So although tempting, Player B decides to attack the 2 of Diamonds instead. If they win they could then attack the 8 of Clubs or the Jack, and so on.
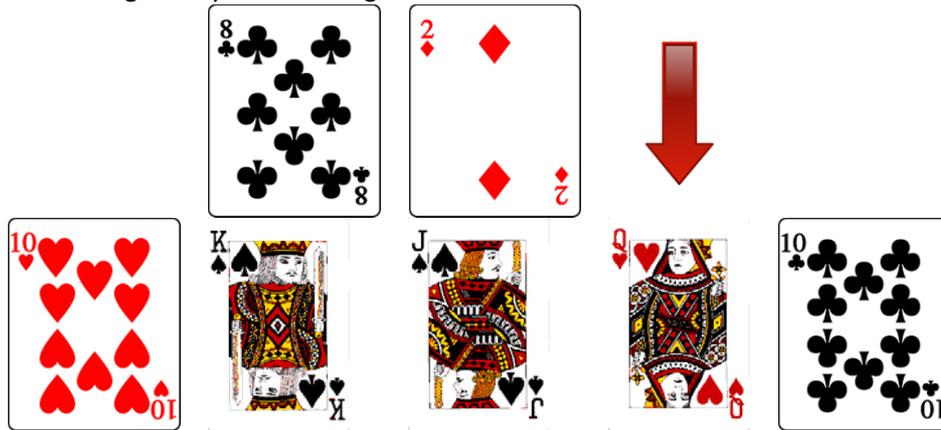
When the 8 of Clubs is revealed

In the above example, if Player B had opted to attack the top left card (8 of Clubs) then before the attack, Player A would have been able to perform the Eight's special action – to expose or conceal any card on the table. NOTE: the "8" CAN then attack a different card; it does not have to any card it has just exposed.

DOUBLE DICE

- **Reinforcements Arrive** -

WHEN ATTACKING: if you ever roll a double, you can attack again with same card regardless if your last attack was successful or not. Even better, you do it with the value of an extra card (pick one from the deck) as a bonus. This is an opportunity to take on any big cards blocking your advance. And if you roll another double again after this, pick up ANOTHER card, giving you a MASSIVE attack strength.

WHEN DEFENDING: if you roll a double, then your forces are bolstered by surprise reservists who join in at a critical moment; roll another TWO DICE and add their score to your defence - you may survive the attack yet!

SNAKE EYES

- **Drained Resources** -

ATTACKING & DEFENDING: Regardless of being an attacker or a defender, if you roll '1' and '1' when rolling two six-sided dice, your battle has required you to sacrifice resources from your defence - through additional reinforcements or failure to upkeep equipment of other units, etc. Either way, the OPPOSING player has the option to remove ANY _unexposed_ (facedown) card from your defence that is outside the Royal Court (not in the bottom row). This card is discarded. If there are no unexposed cards then remove one exposed card (but not from the Royal Court).

A double '1' does NOT give you the benefits of DOUBLE DICE as described above.

RALLY THE FLAG!

This is a benefit of your Jack, which is always placed Face Up at the start of the game. The Jack is the energetic royal who calls on others of his bloodline to come to his support, and in turn help support his King (you). Any time a player picks up a card from the deck that is the same SUIT as their jack, then they may – only if they want to – place this card in the reinforcements post. For example, the above player who has Jack of Spades picks up a 7 of Spades, and then later, a 9 of Spades. Both of these cards can be placed, on their side (to denote reinforcements) to the far right of the Castle.
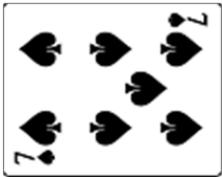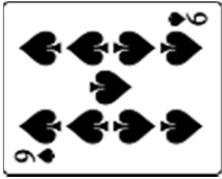
They must be placed FACE UP, exposed. They cannot be attacked by any conventional force but can be attacked, individually, by Archers or Assassins (see below).

USING REINFORCEMENTS

A player can pick up and use any or all of their reinforcement cards for any ATTACK or DEFENCE. However they must do this BEFORE any dice are rolled on either side. Once used, reinforcements are always discarded.

IF THE JACK IS KILLED

Then a player loses the ability to generate this kind of fervent support and can no longer place cards from the deck in their reinforcement post.

ACES – ARCHERS & ASSASSINS

Aces are powerful cards. When they're pulled from the deck, the player can choose to place it quietly amongst their defences or use it to attack.

WHEN ATTACKING: Pick another 2 cards from the deck and check for immediate ACE COMBOS [2], [8]. Anything that isn't a combo gives you an attack, using archers, against any exposed cards on the table (but you cannot attack any card in the Royal Court).

These attacks can be against different players. They can be against the same card. Successful attacks do not follow through; each attack is a one-off. Attack with (four dice + the value of the card).

WHEN DEFENDING: Quietly place the Ace amongst your defences. Do not pick up another card. Aces defend with (two dice + 1).

[ACE] + [TWO]: Battering Ram. Use this against the Royal Court (bottom row). Start from the outside and keep attacking in one direction until defeated. (four dice + 2). IMPORTANT: The attacking strength is NOT reduced by the value of previously defeated cards.

[ACE] + [EIGHT]: Assassin. Nasty combo. The player gets to expose any card on the table and attack it (or then decide to attack a.n.other card). But with access to anywhere and everywhere, and packing a massive four dice + 8 punch, this is a Royal Family killer.

EMPTY DECK?

If there is ever no more cards in the deck for players to pick, then ALL players must spend their next turn using a defence card to attack with. For the entire round, no player can add a card to their defences. They must attack with one of their own cards. This goes around the table so that each player is forced to do this and reload the deck a little.

CLOSING THE GAP

Any time a player feels they have too much empty space between their cards, they can miss a turn to bring them all closer together. Example: Player A suffers a few more defeats after losing their Jack of Spades. Resulting in the board looking like this:
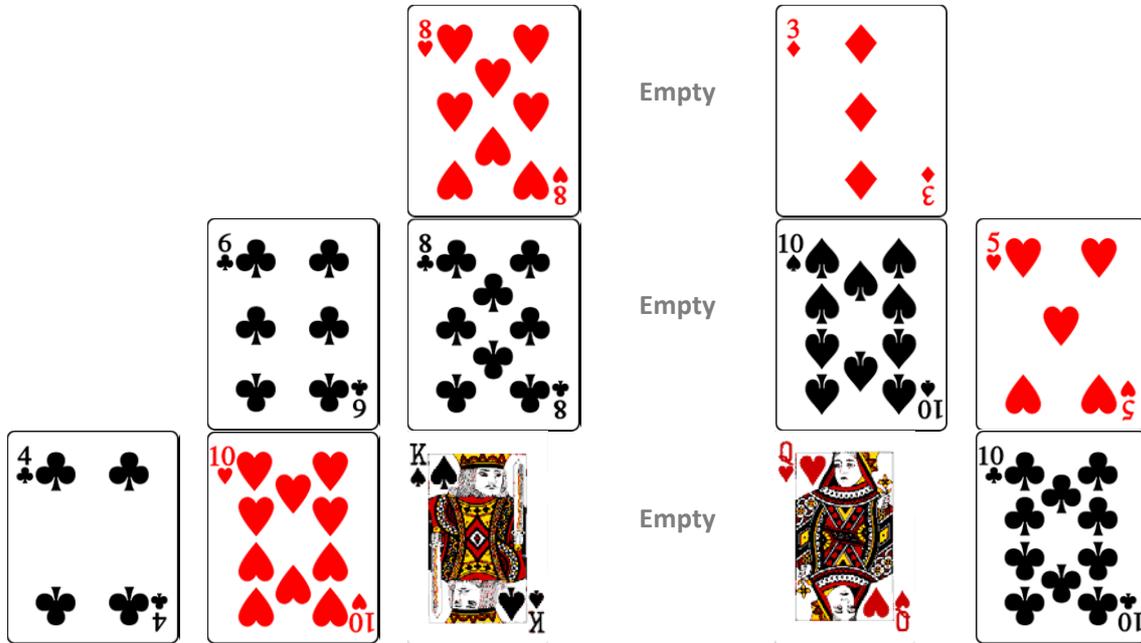
It means that any other player can attack either the King or Queen directly. Player A could start filling up the gap with fresh cards taken from the deck, but this would take time. The quickest and the best option is to "miss a turn" and use it to close the gap. Leaving Player A's board looking like this:
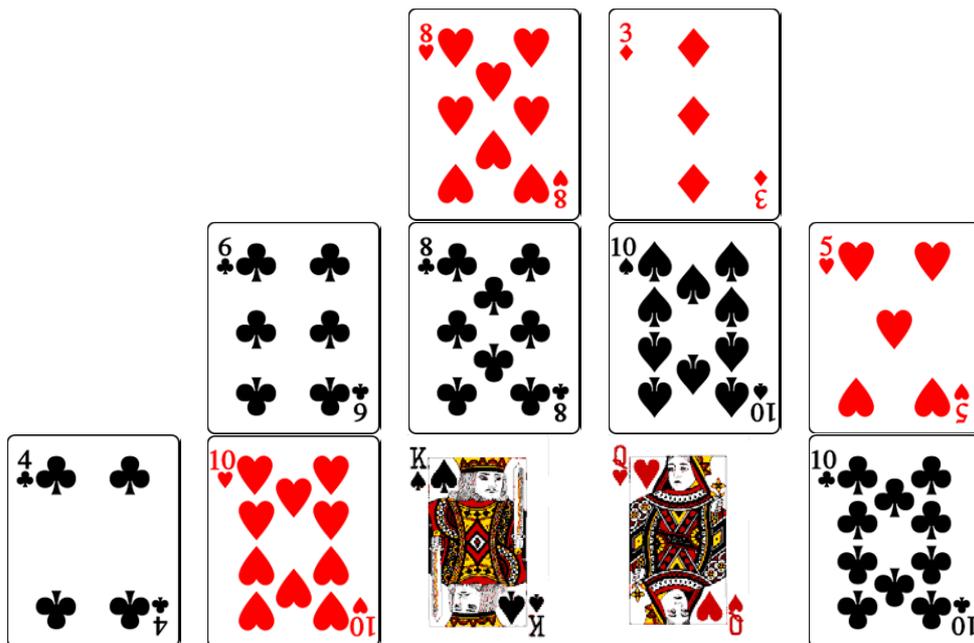
Advanced Rules

These are recommended for more serious gamers or for players who have mastered the basic rules above. Don't use them all at once. Choose one new rule to use at a time and see how it affects the game.

- **Joker –** court jester: when this card is pulled from the deck all players can roll ONE DICE to determine who wins it. If they wish, they can add any of their reinforcements to increase the value. The player who wins gets to keep the card (to one side). It provides +1 to every attack and defence through good morale. It cannot be attacked by conventional forces but is vulnerable to assassins (ACE +8).
- **2 Jokers:** as above, but when the 2nd Joker comes into play the current owner must win it or have theirs discarded. If they win then they have +2 to all attacks and defence.
- **Double '6' -** Berserker – this highlights a moment in a battle when the forces went absolutely berserk, hacking, slashing and killing way beyond their normal extend. A "double" means they get to go again with an extra card, but the double '6' gives them TWO extra cards instead of just one. The attacking player now has the special option to include more than one enemy card in the next attack (once only). This includes unrevealed cards, so there is a gamble here (may reveal a powerful card). The attacking player states which cards they're going after; the defender totals the value of these cards and adds the score of two dice – if they lose, they lose ALL those cards. The attacking player can then continue forward as normal – but bear in mind the total value of defeated cards coming off their score now.
- **Same Number:** WHEN ATTACKING: If you attack a card with same value and lose, suffer immediate counter strike from militia / 5th columnists within your defences. This is a one-off attack of (2 dice +5), it does not carry through. WHEN DEFENDING: If you have defending cards with same number beside each other (exposed / face up), then you can <u>combine their total value</u> against any attacks.
- **Same Suit:** if you attack a card with the same SUIT then suffer a penalty of -1 from the trauma caused by people of the same bloodline trying to kill each other
- **THREE**: Saboteur. Defends with 3 dice + 9 when first revealed, or 3 dice + 3 thereafter; attacks w/3 dice.
- **SIX:** a player can choose to place any SIX, above the current top row of the enemies defences to create barricade that must be removed before the enemy player can expand their defences there. Make sure you place the SIX card on its side to denote this. The player can also place it like this at the end of any row, including the bottom row (The Royal Court), and this stops an enemy building defences in that direction until the barricade is removed.

THREE's

The Saboteur.
WHEN ATTACKING: Threes come with specialist knowledge in dirty tricks and knowing how to undermine enemy defences. They attack with (3 dice + 3).
WHEN DEFENDING: An excellent card to place amongst your defences. When first exposed during an attack it defends with (3 dice + 9) due to the layers of traps and tricks it has built up around itself; once exposed it defends with (3 dice + 3).

Questions?

If you have any questions about the game then please feel to contact the author via his contact form:
http://davidjrodger.wordpress.com/about/contact-david-j-rodger/

PLAY TESTERS

Thanks go to Chris "Mr Dark" Halliday, Jeremy "Model T-Virus" Ford, Hagen "GBH" Landsem, Adam "Disco" Lee, Jason "jQuery" Ashdown, Simon "House" Pollard, Stuart "Holmes" Knox and Anthony "The Other Jeremy" Wilcox; Nick "My Attorney" Wragg.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David J. Rodger is a British author of science fiction dark fantasy. He is also the creator of Yellow Dawn - The Age of Hastur, an RPG that blends Cthulhu Mythos and Cyberpunk themes into a post-apocalyptic setting. His books are often described as intense, character driven, near-future thrillers. Compared to Ian Rankin / Colin Dexter with a dose of Stephen King darkness, Rodger's work crosses many boundaries to deliver a new and exciting fusion of ideas and genres. You never quite know what waits around the next corner. All his books are stand-alone but support each other as part of a consistent shared universe allowing you to build a deeper knowledge with every story. A few of his books are set after a Mythos-inspired cataclysm (Yellow Dawn) devastates the world and form his post-apocalyptic body of work. Fans of David J Rodger typically enjoy the following themes: strong characters, gritty realism, new technology, the occult, corporate warfare and dirty tricks, political corruption, cyberpunk, Cthulhu Mythos. You can find out more at his website: www.davidjrodger.com